

CURATOR'S MANDATE

During the spring of 1993, each WI in Ontario received a survey to be filled in by the curator and returned to Dr. Linda Ambrose, who was granted the tremendous job of collecting history to be eventually published in our 100th year Centennial History Book.

Dr. Ambrose as of August 1993 had accepted a position in the History Department of Laurentian University at Sudbury, as Assistant Professor.

From Rednersville WI we included in our survey that a good contact person would be Miss Audra Brickman, who at 90 could recall many important dates in WI history in Prince Edward County. However, with her many commitments Dr. Ambrose was not able to meet with Audra.

She is indeed, qualified to commence her task, and the project will be completed by our Centennial Year -1997.

Profile:

# Grassroots Approach to Historical Research

By Janine Roelens-Grant

When I first met Linda Ambrose in 1986, she was working on her M.A. in History from the University of Waterloo. She was also expecting her first child. When our paths crossed again in 1992, she had two daughters and her Ph.D. in History from Waterloo. Now it takes a special kind of person to undertake a family and a post-graduate education at the same time. Indeed, those who have met Linda in her capacity as Researcher/Writer of the FWIO Centennial History Book have experienced first-hand her infectious enthusiasm and passion for her work.

Linda recently relayed a few interesting facts about the research so far:

- over 100 hours of taped interviews have been collected;
- well over 600 Branches replied to the questionnaire - that's enough to fill six bankers' boxes!;
- and, for the first time ever, a complete list of all the WI Branches that have ever existed in Ontario is being compiled - it contains over 2,000 Branches!!



Dr. Linda Ambrose is pictured above poring over research documents held at the Museum in Callander in the Parry Sound North District.

*“I am grateful for the experience and will do my best to reflect the diversity of your organization and the grassroots approach in the book...”*

“Many, many, many women, including Board members, Tweedsmuir Curators, District Officers and Branch members have co-operated with my requests,” she added. “[They have] rolled out the red carpet, given me bed and breakfast, read more old minute books than they care to remember, rushed off to get photocopies for me, and just generally kept my enthusiasm levels very high. I appreciate each and every one of them.”

In the past year Linda has undertaken an intense schedule of travel and research. “It has been very rewarding,” she said, “and has given me a wonderful re-education on the geography and local history of so many different parts of Ontario. I want to thank the FWIO for sponsoring my travel to these destinations. It has really been the experience of a lifetime to travel so extensively and research so intensively. This is not something which an independent researcher could ever do because it depended upon the efforts and enthusiasm of the Board, Area, District and Branch members.”

From the time she began her contract with the FWIO in January 1993, Linda systematically set out to research the history of a century of Women's Institutes activities in Ontario. After spending a year as a postdoctoral fellow in the History Department at the University of Guelph, her research is now complete. The following list outlines the scope of some of her activities to date:

- drafting a projected table of contents for the book;
- exploring and organizing the historical sources and photographs housed at the FWIO office;
- arranging for those records to go to the University of Guelph Archives for safekeeping;
- contacting Branches via the questionnaire sent out in February 1993;
- creating a database of Branch organization and disbandment for a proposed appendix to the book;
- researching the Ontario Government sessional papers and Reports of the Minister of Agriculture;
- exploring numerous Tweedsmuir Collections;
- examining records at the Provincial Archives in Toronto and the National Archives in Ottawa;
- consulting with rural historians;
- conducting interviews and local research throughout Ontario;
- and, of course, continued reading and notetaking from collected sources and incoming correspondence.

Now that the research is completed, Linda will take a much lower profile among the membership of the Women's Institutes; she will be preoccupied with the process of writing the manuscript. “I am grateful for the experience,” she said, “and will do my best to reflect the diversity of your organization and the grassroots approach in the book I will write for you.” Linda also reported that she will be doing this from her new home in Sudbury, where she and her family have recently moved from Waterloo.

Linda's report to the August Board confirmed that she had accepted a position in the History Department at Laurentian University as Assistant Professor. “This is a tenure track job,” she explained, “meaning that rather than scooting around from one contract job to the next, I will be here at Laurentian for many years to come. I will be teaching Canadian History, Women's History and Ontario History. So as you can see, this is a job which brings my research interests together very nicely.”

And when she's not engrossed in her historical research Linda spends her spare time exploring the lakes and hiking trails in and around Sudbury, knitting sweaters for her girls, and planning next year's organic garden with her husband, Rob.

## A Heartfelt Thanks!

By Linda Ambrose

To everyone who helped fill out the history survey, a sincere thank you! At the end of June, I had received about 431 completed questionnaires from WI Branches. That is enough mail to fill six filing drawers or 'bankers boxes.' This is a tremendous response!

Time does not permit me to write a note to each Branch, but I would like to thank everyone who spent time reading old minute books, searching your Tweedsmuir history books and photocopying for me. You have made my job much easier. It was a real treat to open your letters and parcels and read about your history. I was very excited about the number of individual women who provided me with their own personal experiences. This will truly make the book a 'grassroots' account of the WI.

Over the next several months, I will be busy processing the information and mapping out an itinerary of travel and interviewing. So, you may be hearing from me some time during the next year about a visit to your community. When the book is completed, the materials you have sent to me will be filed and stored for future reference; so rest assured, your work will be preserved. If your Branch has not completed the survey yet, please do so and send it to me as soon as possible. My address is Dr. Linda Ambrose, 309B Mayview Cres., Waterloo, Ontario, N2V 1P6.