

WI Tweedsmuir Histories Recommended for Schools

By MARY E. JAMES

Recognition being given by the Ontario Department of Education to the Tweedsmuir History Books is a feather in the cap of the Women's Institutes.

These histories of rural areas throughout Canada are compiled as a joint effort of members of local institute branches. The idea was the brainchild of Lady Tweedsmuir. In her travels with the Governor-General while here, she recognized the possibility of preserving rural Canadian history through this medium.

The project was a great success. In Ontario alone 1,100 of the 1,453 institutes have these histories as a continuing effort.

The Tweedsmuir histories are now being recommended by the Department of Education as valuable source material in the curriculum of the new course in history for intermediate grades of Ontario schools.

"The work of the Women's Institutes in the field of local community history is highly regarded," stated M. B. Parnall, assistant superintendent of curriculum. "It is hoped that as a result of their being the histories will encourage teachers and students in a study of their local community; also that students will come to appreciate the work of the Women's Institutes as an example of good citizenship that they may decide to emulate."

Although not circulated outside the community concerned, the bound books, prized possession of the local WI branch, are available to

interested teachers and students.

"The fact that the department is recognizing Tweedsmuir histories has given new impetus to our branches to compile these books for the sake of preserving their local history rather than for competition purposes," said Mrs. R. C. Walker of St. George, provincial curator of the project. She referred to the fact that competitions have recently been discontinued in Ontario.

The project has also recently received national recognition. The Canadian Historical Association has awarded the Federation of Women's Institutes of Canada a certificate of merit for their "outstanding contribution to local history in Canada." A similar honor came to the FWIC from the American Association of Local and State History in 1949.

The Tweedsmuir histories go back to the cradle days of the community, and keeping them up to date is a time-consuming effort.

Anyone in the community can, and is urged to write articles, especially about their own farms and families. These are edited and checked by the local committee.

Into the history goes the story of the community since its beginnings — farm histories, personalities, industry, schools, churches, libraries, war work, family trees, clubs and organizations, and anything else pertaining to the development of the community.

Mrs. Walker is well qualified for her post as provincial curator. She served three years as provincial convener of historical research for the Ontario WI, and when it was realized that women required more guidance is the preparation of the Tweedsmuir books she personally conducted workshops in 109 districts of the province, in 1957-8.

"The local registry is a big help," she said. "The press is most co-operative with both data and pictures, and sometimes in providing source material. But a great deal depends on the memory of those who have lived through events recorded."

The books are assembled and bound with attractive covers of leather, wood, or whatever material the women choose. They are profusely illustrated with original sketches, drawings, paintings and maps, showing comparative periods of development of the area.

Some branches have outgrown their original book, several additional volumes have become necessary. Such a book is that of Glenmorris Institute, now in its fourth volume. The original volume, begun in 1949, won a Dominion competition trophy, in 1953, received the Ontario award in 1951, again in 1953, and came second in the Dominion event in 1951.

Some branches have centres

of historical interest in their areas, and concentrate on these. Such is the Blue Lake and Auburn WI of which Mrs. John A. Charlton of Paris is curator. Within its territory is the Adelaide Hoodless Homestead, birthplace of the WI founder, near St. George.

The two-story clapboard house is now owned by the FWIC, and is being refurbished and preserved as a memorial to Mrs. Hoodless. She founded the first Women's Institute at Stoney Creek, from which has sprung the Associated Country Women of the World. The Blue Lake and Auburn WI has devoted a complete volume of its Tweedsmuir history to the Homestead, now a tourist attraction for all Canada.

That Lady Tweedsmuir is still vitally interested in the project she inspired is evident from a recent message sent to Helen Mc Kercher, director of the Home Economics Branch, Ontario Department of Agriculture. Acknowledging receipt of the new manual which has just been set up to help WI members prepare the histories, Lady Tweedsmuir said: "I was thrilled to see the very high standard they (the manuals), set for the village histories which will mean so much to future historians of Canada."

These manuals are now available, free, to curators of Tweedsmuir History Books through Ontario, from the Department of Agriculture Extension Branch, 20 Spadina Rd., Toronto.

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—Dennis Rider, Feature Four.

Mrs. R. C. Walker, provincial curator Tweedsmuir History project, and president of the Glenmorris WI, scans prize-winning book. Right is Mrs. John A. Charlton, curator, Blue Lake and Auburn WI, also a member of the Adelaide Hoodless Homestead Committee of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada.