

# Province lauds community historians

By **FRANCES L. DENNEY**  
Record Women's Editor

It's taken 32 years, but Ontario government professional historical researchers have finally recognized the efforts of the amateurs — the hundreds of Women's Institute community history curators.

Wednesday, at the 31st annual Ontario WI Officers Conference at the University of Waterloo, the organization was invited to form a working committee to work with the Heritage Administration branch of the ministry of culture and recreation.

David Roberts, research coordinator with the branch, told the 600 conference delegates that he, as a professional historian, believes very strongly that the WI Tweedsmuir community histories provide an excellent, if not the best, means for recording local histories.

The WI effort, which began in 1947 at the urging of Lady Susan Tweedsmuir, wife of novelist-historian John Buchan who was Canada's governor-general from 1935 to 1940, is one of the longest running historical projects in Ontario.

It was in 1936 that Lady Tweedsmuir, herself a member and county president of the WI in Oxfordshire, England, first recognized the need for preserving the history of a nation. She especially believed that the history of each local community should be preserved through comprehensive, factual collection of data.

She was aware that there was a need to pass on one generation's knowledge and perspectives to the next, and because the community WI was an acknowledged steady-influence, she believed its members would be able to

provide future historians with an accurate picture of rural life through its compilation of histories. The Federated WI of Ontario took up the project in 1947 to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the WI.

Roberts, a native of Westport, a small village north of Kingston, said he found a Tweedsmuir history there, and while it was incomplete and somewhat inaccurate, it still stimulated his interest in becoming a professional historian.

After the Second World War, he said, there was stimulus to preserve the past of communities, and the more recent and rapid rise in "local historical root" is nothing new. It had its roots in WI preservation of community histories.

He recalled that the WI in Clinton lamented in 1950 the absence of first-hand informa-

tion about that community, and its history — one of the first publications of WI-gathered histories — it pointed out that its dates were copied from early data that may not necessarily have been accurate.

In the past year, Roberts said, there has been "a tremendous upsurge in work by historical societies, architectural conservationists, museums, and genealogy groups," and among it the work by WI community history curators will become increasingly recognized.

The quality of the WI community histories may vary greatly, he said, keeping in mind the difficulties inherent in obtaining information, interpreting it and assessing its value.

He said he was in no sense advocating standards which would intimidate WI members

who have a sincere interest in their communities' unique histories, but he was pleased that the organization had produced in 1973 a manual for compiling Tweedsmuir histories.

His proposal that the WI form a working committee to work with the Heritage Administration branch, dealing solely with the Tweedsmuir histories, brought loud applause from the conference delegates. The branch would assist the WI in defining standards of research among other things, he said.

The provincial government has assisted the WI curators by microfilming material, and the Archives of Ontario now has 68 microfilm reels containing several hundred local histories.

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## Thirty-First Annual OFFICERS' CONFERENCE

Federated Women's Institutes  
of Ontario

MAY 1, 2, and 3, 1979

AT

THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO  
WATERLOO, ONTARIO

THEME:

"Each generation makes its own accounting  
to its children". (Robert F. Kennedy)



OFFICERS' CONFERENCE:

A Provincial get-together  
providing leadership and inspiration  
to specific Officers of our Organization  
(one per Branch, District, or Area)  
by discussion, pooling of suggestions,  
and informed speakers.

BRANCH  
Tweedsmuir History Curators  
or  
Members-at-large

DISTRICT  
Tweedsmuir History Curators

AREA  
Tweedsmuir History Curators