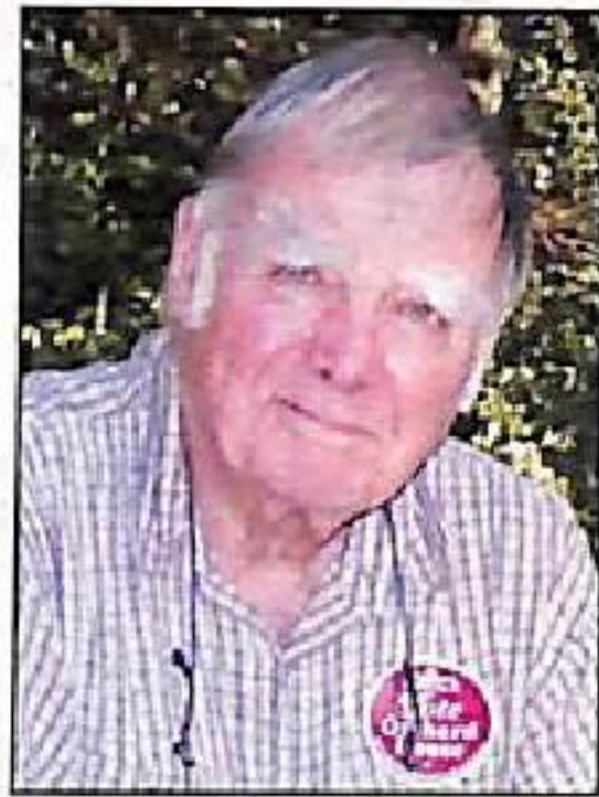


Lady Tweedsmuir loved Canadian history

Around Muskoka Lakes

By Jack Hutton

Lady Tweedsmuir, the wife of Canada's 15th Governor-General was 55 when she may have posed for one of Canada's finest magazine illustrators. The *Canadian Home*



Journal devoted the entire front cover of its September, 1937, issue to that elegant portrait over the name of Lady Tweedsmuir.

The portrait is in direct contrast to a frumpish photo of Lady Tweedsmuir on most Canadian government websites, so take your pick. Personally, I vote for the magazine cover.

If you own a library card, you already know who Lady Tweedsmuir was. Not long after she and her husband came to Canada in 1935, she urged Women's Institutes (WI) across the country to start documenting local histories.

Starting in 1940, every WI group across Canada began compiling what became known as Tweedsmuir Histories. Today, you will find one in every Muskoka library. The Windermere Women's Institute has gone one step further with a web page that brings the history alive.

Lord and Lady Tweedsmuir were two of the most gifted people to occupy the governor general's official residence in Ottawa.

Before coming to Canada, Tweedsmuir was a successful novelist under his real name, John Buchan.

In 1935, the same year that Tweedsmuir became Governor General for Canada, Alfred Hitchcock based

one of his best movies, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, upon a spy thriller novel written by Buchan in 1915. It is one of Hitchcock's best movies.

Lady Tweedsmuir, not as famous as her husband, was a prolific writer of children's stories and other novels under the name of Susan Tweedsmuir. Both continued to write and publish during their time in Ottawa.

Literacy was a main priority for both, but especially Lady Tweedsmuir. She collected books in eastern Canada for the impoverished west, creating libraries all across the prairies with railway carloads.

Both were much loved by the time he died in February, 1940, months before his term was to end. He had a stroke while shaving and died from head wounds caused by the fall. She returned to England, dying there in 1977.

Thanks to Lady Tweedsmuir, historical artifacts including clippings, letters and personal memories have been saved for posterity by WI groups in Muskoka for decades. We have an excellent one at the Bala Library. A similar Tweedsmuir History has been maintained for many years by the Glen Orchard Women's Institute, which will go out of existence at the end of this month. Its Tweedsmuir History will go to the Port Carling Library.

The last WI group in all Muskoka is now the Windermere Women's Institute, which meets the third Tuesday of every month at the historic Windermere Community Centre. Founded in 1911, the Windermere group is very active with 40-plus members. Its Tweedsmuir History project at present is to collect, preserve and make available the history of not only Windermere, but its surrounding area. The archive is located in the bottom floor of the community centre with a computer, scanner and its own files.

The web site is www.windermerearea.ca. Here you will see an online library that was funded five years ago by a Trillium grant. Pioneers from the 1880s smile at you from the computer screen. Early settlers tell you through their letters what it was like to brave 40-below temperatures.

Susan Goltz, a vice president of the WI group, says the Tweedsmuir archival group meets each Wednesday between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

"We will eventually be telling the story of all our surrounding communities, including Raymond, Ullswater, Bent River and Brackenrig," she says. "That sounds like a life sentence, but we love it."

Somewhere, the Tweedsmuirs are both applauding.



Photograph: Courtesy of Jack Hutton

Lady Tweedsmuir persuaded Women's Institutes all across Canada to compile local histories.