

W.I. Women Write Well Editorially

Bride Broder in the Toronto
Globe and Mail 1939

Alive as perhaps few townsmen are to the value of that great rural society, the Women's Institutes, the editor of the Bowmanville Statesman - a paper continuously in the front rank of the weeklies - turned over the editorial page of a recent issue to the nine branches of the W. I. in Durham County. Under the leadership of the district president, Mrs. Johnson Thickson, Bowmanville, every institute contributed at least one editorial, and, as Mr. James, the Statesman's editor, says, "Came to town in a big way as to quality and quantity, with copy clearly written and on time, further proof of the thorough and businesslike way these women go about any job they tackle."

One writer described the founding of the W. I. in 1897 by Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless and Mr. Erland Lee - man and woman uniting in the effort for good; another - Mrs. O. W. Rolph, Orono, points out that the W. I., while expanding to meet the times, still bases its work on the broad lines laid down by the founders - Education, Health, Child Welfare, Agriculture, Legislation and so on; a third contributor - Mrs. Cecil Ferguson, president of Victorian Institute, Blackstock, give a gentle but inspiring touch with her sentence, "The test of true neighborliness which the searching light of need supplies, is the test of the charm of the Women's Institutes - it not only supplies quilts to the cold, but warmth for cold hearts, food for hungry minds, and clothing for the despairing soul."

Mrs. Roy Langmaid of Solina touches on the loyalty and endurance of W. I. members. There is a roll of about fifty in her branch and some members come five miles to meetings, and a clerical comment on the kindness is quoted—there had never been a community to his knowledge where the sick were so well remembered and the cleric gave the credit to the W. I.

And so the story goes on, with tales of help given town hospitals, relief works aided, literature, music and art brought to the community, strangers made to feel at home, newcomers brought into the community life, and, the writers might have added, many a pure-bred herd established, many a school board jacked up, many a local reproach removed because rural women, who do their own thinking and then act upon it courageously, had set themselves to these tasks.

We should like to congratulate Mr. James on his master stroke.

Our Accomplishments and Opportunities

During the past forty-two years the Women's Institutes have accomplished so much along so many varied lines that it is difficult to select any one achievement as outstanding. However, one very significant and outstanding fact has been established and that is that it is possible for women of many varying classes, of many different creeds, of many shades of politics, and of many varying opinions and trends of thought to unite in one common effort toward the betterment of conditions in community life.

The value of these efforts is apparent, not only throughout our own Province and Dominion but in countries all over the world where the inspiration of our work has been felt and example followed.

But the fact that a great deal has been done does not preclude the equal fact that a great deal still remains to be done. In paying homages to our predecessors to whose efforts much of the credit must be given for the undoubted raising which has taken place in the standards of rural community life - not only by instituting needed reforms but by arousing public opinion to the need for such reforms - we must not lose sight of the fact that we, in our turn, are now the torch bearers and the responsibility is ours to carry on in such manner that we be worthy of our predecessors and measure up as worthily as possible in the judgment of our successors in the days to come.

Another fact which doubtless every one of us has experienced is the knowledge that in helping others, we have helped ourselves. Our horizons have been broadened, our visions have been made clearer and our knowledge increased.

Discussions of current events and kindred topics have increased our interest in events of importance - not only to ourselves but to the world at large. The speakers who have come to us and the papers prepared by our own members have given us food for thought and material to digest on wide ranges of interesting subjects.

Services of inestimable value rendered by the Department of Agriculture have provided us with knowledge which has helped us to practise as well as preach improved methods of sanitation, diet, clothing and housing.

And we have found in all our work, that the common binding cord of humanity running through all our efforts brings out the realization that in genuine and true co-operation there is not only value but beauty.

—Mrs. Johnson Thickson, Bowmanville,
President West Durham District.

Girls' Home-making Clubs

"Every girl is worth just as much as the things she is interested in."

Many a mother and young girl in rural communities deplore the fact that it is the privilege of their city cousins to attend Technical Schools or Colleges and learn some of the arts and skills which are covered by the subject "Home Economics." Yet such a programme, not as elaborate or extensive, but stressing many of the fundamental principles is available to every rural girl between the ages of twelve and twenty-six years of age and sponsored by the extension service of the Women's Institute Branch of the Provincial Department of Agriculture.

Since 1935 this programme has been carried on in the form of projects in local communities. For the organization and support, we owe a great deal of credit to the local Women's Institutes for taking a keen interest in their local young girls. Girls' work is directed by local leaders through clubs in nutrition, clothing, house furnishing, gardening and canning. The projects have such interesting titles as: "Supper Club," "The Milky Way," "Dressing Up Home Grown Vegetables," "Cottons May Be Smart," "Being Well Dressed and Well Groomed," "Cotton Accessories for Bedroom" and "Clothes Closets Up-to-Date," etc. The local leaders in a county meet in a central place for a two or three day leaders' training school under the direction of the Home Economics instructor of the Department where they receive subject matter and teaching methods. Under this leadership the girls hold meetings, complete work required, keep record books and attend the annual county Achievement Day. Here they exhibit their work, exchange ideas with other clubs, and plan a programme for the next year.

We have now from ten to one hundred girls carrying on one of these clubs in each county and district in the Province and fifty Achievement Days are held each year. In 1938-39 there were 2,155 clubs in the Province. After a girl has completed two projects she is given a diploma, and after six projects receives county honors, and after twelve will be considered to have completed work required to give her Provincial Honors. The Dominion Government has been offering very substantial prizes for supervised club work at Grade A and B Fairs, and the competition at the Canadian National Exhibition. A programme for these fairs is drafted in line with Home-making Clubs in each district.

Besides, the Women's Institute Branch co-operates with the Agricultural Representative Branch to bring to boys and girls one or three month courses in Elementary Agriculture and Home Economics, during the winter months.

To evaluate the results of this work would be impossible. Maybe these following sentences written by a girl in Northumberland County, who is now

completing her fourth project, expresses the appreciation of many:

"I am glad that I live in the country. I love its beauty and its spirit. I rejoice in the things I have learned in the Home-making projects. By studying the best way to do my every day work and make my own clothes I can find joy in common tasks done well. Through simple demonstrations I have given at club meetings and the Institute I have learned to meet the public and the knowledge and experience I have gained will reach out in service to that larger home we call our neighborhood. To our local leaders and the Department of Agriculture I offer my humble but most sincere thanks for the educational advantages in Home Economics that the girls in my community have been able to appreciate."

—Greta Pollard, Bowmanville,
Women's Institute Branch, Department of
Agriculture, Toronto.

THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE ANSWERS

As I take my knitting, and sit in the sun,
I count o'er my blessings one by one,
And the best of all without dispute,
Is being a member of the Institute.
When as a bride I first settled here
Life for the woman seemed cold and drear,
I'd like to hear any mere man refute
The boon that came with the Institute.
Oh! how I hated the daily grind
Dreading to stop lest I get behind,
So over-wrought that I wanted to hoot,
When they talked of forming an Institute.
But the coldness melted, it did me good
To meet other women as I should,
And my heart warmed up; this was the fruit
Of that cup of tea at the Institute.
Then they made me President and I learned
To love the women that I had spurned,
The lovely things that constitute
The hearts of the women at the Institute.

At first I felt my knees grow weak
And I dreaded to get up and speak,
But with a heart that was resolute
I gained new poise in the Institute.
Now if the men sometimes make a fuss,
It's only because they envy us;
For they have nothing of such repute
To compare with the Women's Institute.
And John soon saw that our home meant more
And we were happier than before;
When I come home you can hear him toot,
"Well, what's the news from the Institute."
So I sit here in the sun and knit
And my eyes fill up at the thought of it,
How commonplace things have come to suit
When faced in the spirit of the Institute.
God bless the woman whose thought it was,
To do this thing for the woman's cause;
The good of which we can ne'er compute,
When she gave to the world the Institute.
—Mrs. Roy Langmaid,
Sec'y.-Treas. Solina W.I. and Past President
West Durham District.