

Women's Institute Are Putting Christ Back Into Christmas

More and more the Women's Institutes seem to recognize the meaning of Christmas in their programs and their activities at this season. In common with other organizations they have a good deal of carol singing at their December meetings and demonstrations of gift wrapping and Christmas decorations. Several branches have reported the reading of "The Christmas Carol" and at Jubilee Institute the members acted "The Christmas Carol". Often there is an upsurge of friendliness at this time. The December meeting may take the form of a party to which all the women of the community are invited. Frequently there is special entertainment for children.

But the Institutes' observance of the season goes deeper than this. In reports of last year's December meeting we find such items as these: Bernie had a talk on the motto "Let's Not Leave Christ Out of Christmas" and a paper on the Christmas story. At South River a clergyman spoke on "Putting Christ Back Into Christmas". Several programs included the reading of Van Dyke's story "The Other Wise Man".

The Salem Nilestown women felt that the Christmas season was a good time to have a Salvation Army officer tell them about his work with delinquents, and their own responsibility for the unfortunate. And the Lakefield report says: "For our December meet-

ing one member from each Church denomination was asked to contribute a number to the program. This consisted of solos, readings and the Christmas story. The denominations taking part were Anglican, United Church, Presbyterian, Baptist, Roman Catholic and Gospel Hall. Everyone came away feeling that unity was an essential part of the Christmas spirit".

Women's Institutes have varied ways of creating what we call "the Christmas spirit". Willoughby reports: "We each bring something to put in boxes for the needy in the community and something for a soldier in hospital. It brings out the Christmas spirit and we usually have a good turnout". Rockwood says: "We packed a seventy-five pound box for a needy family who had recently lost their mother. In contrast to other meetings which were mostly for our own entertainment we felt that we were expressing the true aims of the Institute". Harvie Settlement secretary wrote: "Our Christmas party for the members' families did a lot for all of us because our children were a part of it". Cowal entertained pre-school children and the attendance of mothers was much larger than usual. Often the Institute joins with other groups in providing a Christmas tree for the children of the community. The South Mountain women made a Santa Claus outfit for com-

munity use. So sociability and friendliness have a special place in the Institutes' observance of Christmas.

Friendliness is expressed in very tangible ways, too. In many Institutes the members answer the roll call by bringing gifts for children, to be distributed at Children's shelters and hospitals or through a family welfare agency. This practice is followed, too, with gifts for the residents of old people's Homes. A number of branches take a Christmas party to their county Home for the Aged; others bring the residents of the Home to the Institute's party. Hespeler, last year, packed ninety-six Christmas Cheer baskets for the sick, the aged and the shut-in of the community. Institutes in the neighborhood of hospitals and sanitariums usually try to remember the friendless or needy patients at Christmas time.

Occasionally an Institute reports having a special Christmas meeting just for its own members, but from such meetings a donation usually goes to some outside need. For example, at Shirley's December meeting last year the women had a party for themselves and their own children and others. A member told the Christmas story, the children were given balloons and candy; then the members measured their waists and gave a penny for each inch to provide a treat for the children in the Shelter. They report that they had quite a sizeable contribution.

From:

Ethel Chapman,
Women's Institute Branch,
1207 Bay St., Toronto.

Nestleton: A large gathering of Women's Institute members from Port Perry, Blackstock and Nestleton gathered in the United Church basement to enjoy a speaker service lecture, "Treasures in Your Attic". Nestleton Institute President Mrs. Malcolm Emerson welcomed the visitors and expressed disappointment that Janetville ladies were unable to attend. She introduced the speaker, Mrs. Richard Neil of Thornhill, who lives in a log house filled with treasures, primitive hand-made farm implements, antiques of wood, copper, brass and tin; hand-made, hand-carved furniture, and hand-woven and home-dyed materials, to which she is always adding.

As a child the speaker recalled rainy day visits to the attic where strong odors of cedar and drying winter pears were accompanied by the patter of rain on the roof. Having a French mother whose attic trunks contained trousseau clothes, plumes, trains, long dresses and French heels there were plenty of dress-up costumes for little girls and the old furniture, carpets, lamps, dishes etc., afforded much make-believe housekeeping material.

Mrs. Neil spoke of the archaeologists who are paid to dig in Indian dumps for treasures and bits of early pottery and implements. She stressed the necessity of preaching conservation to us, the value of old furniture, farm tools and household necessities all hand-made by our early ancestors. Farmers are experiencing a period of prosperity as never before known and are tearing down old sheds, barns, garages and back kitchens to build new ones, thus much of value is destroyed, burned or taken to the dump. She went on to say that Americans are coming to Canada, buying these treasures and taking them home to put in their wonderful American mu-

seums, and we do very little to preserve them for ourselves!

We were shown hand-made butter ladles, shabby, to impress upon us the value of these things, hand-woven quilts, spreads and table covers, carpets made from rags—all dyes procured from herbs and grasses—and a grain sack made from flax grown on the farm. Interesting stories of rescuing a spread used as a horse blanket, two small hearts in a hand-woven rug from a bonfire, and one piece from a beautiful hand-made spread being cut up from used in a sick room. These Mrs. Neil took home, washed and had on display as she talked. She impressed upon us the love and pride in their work displayed by the early settlers, intricate hand-carving, beautiful colorings, well whittled wooden-ware and religious motifs woven into all hand-work by the Pennsylvania Dutch from whom she obtained many treasures.

A list of articles to preserve for a County Museum which she hopes each community will begin included, tinware candle-molds, stencilled trays, tin-scones, glassware, pottery, iron-stone china, copper, brass and tinware, woodenware which has been whittled out, old clocks, silhouettes, daguerreotypes powder horns, crockery, old books, recipes, handmade boxes, bowls, sabbuckets, spiles or yokes—all handwork—no machines.

Treasures in Your Attic Subject of Joint 1955 Nestleton W. I. Meet

During the last part of her lecture Mrs. Neil showed coloured slides taken in Sharon Temple, the York County Historical Museum, and many in her own home, showing treasures collected through the years and displayed in her renovated log home which is indeed a museum. Mrs. Neil told of a picnic and open house to be held at Sharon Temple on June 17th at which she will have several tableaux depicting pioneer life. She also made arrangements for a bus load of members to visit her home in the fall to see and ask questions about any article she has.

Mrs. Sam Cawker of Port Perry, Mrs. George Wolfe of Blackstock and Mrs. M. Emerson of Nestleton voiced the appreciation of the ladies for the wonderful lecture and illustrations. All hope a County Museum will be a reality in every locality and trust we will be able to avail ourselves of the pleasure of accepting Mrs. Neil's kind invitation to her home. An enjoyable lunch was served by the Nestleton ladies and a happy social hour concluded one of the most interesting Speaker Service afternoons ever to be provided by the Department for Nestleton Women's Institute ladies and their visitors. M. R. T.