

# Women's Institutes Give Valuable Service in Compiling Local History

Canadian Statesman

If Durham County ever has a County Museum it will be established by the seven branches of the Women's Institute in this county.

Said to be a valuable contribution to Canadian history is the compilation of the Tweedsmuir History Books by local branches of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada. About 850 institutes are now compiling these local histories of their communities since the project began in 1940, endorsed and encouraged by Lady Tweedsmuir, who was keenly interested in institute work, as well as in literary movements.

Institute members prepare the histories. Some are handwritten, some typed. The community story gives historical data, the geography of the district, the origin and derivation of names of towns, villages and settlements.

It tells about local industries, old families and present residents, about the local churches, schools, post offices, newspapers, libraries and organizations. Included often are collections of individual diaries, church records, minutes of school meetings, old deeds, cemetery data and maps of the area. And almost invariably are the stories of pioneer settlers in the district or Indian lore if there happens to be this colorful background. All these stories are authentic, historical records.

A section of the history is reserved for current events. Another contains valuable information on the First and Second World Wars and the men and women of the community who served in the armed forces during these conflicts.

There is also the history of the women's part in these wars — the local W.I. and Red Cross work, the munition plant and war industries of the district.

Included are honour rolls of casualties, awards and decorations, peace celebrations that followed wars, the parties and presentations.

Added to these stories are the illustrative pictures and photographs. The books are prefaced by pictures of Lord and Lady Tweedsmuir, and of Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless of Stoney Creek, founder of the Ontario movement which has since spread to all parts of the world.

How best to make sure that these precious records of local community life so carefully garnered will be safely preserved for posterity and at the same time made available as source material to historians and others interested is a question being pondered by Institute people and by others obviously not W.I. members.

"What is being done to guarantee that the folklore and authentic items of local history in the Tweedsmuir books will be preserved?" asked Alex D. Bruce of Unionville.

"Official archivists, national and provincial, can collect Acts of Parliament, official documents, memoirs and correspondence of prominent men," he writes. "But without a picture of the doings of the common man and woman, official records are but dry bones, the skeleton of our history."

"The Tweedsmuir History Books can furnish the sinews and the flesh wherewith to cover the bones. Given this covering, the gifted historian can make dead men live again or transport us into the past that we may relive and understand history. And understanding it we should be inspired for

action in the present."

"The Tweedsmuir History Books, or mimeographed copies, should be collected in suitable buildings, where they would be available to the public, under charge of competent librarians," suggests Mr. Bruce. "If some action is not taken as the years pass much of the material that has been collected by local historians will be lost forever."

"As far as I know the Tweedsmuir History Books are kept by some one in the W.I. branches," says Mrs. Sandford Aikins, Creemore, who was for six years convener of historical research preceding the present convener, Mrs. Robert Walker, St. George.

"The local branches would not part with their histories, which have meant years of careful work." But it might be a good idea to have mimeographed or printed copies of such material as would be reproduced, she agreed.

"There is always a danger of something happening these history books," she said. "So a second copy for future history books would be fine. The present generation should be recording history for our children in the next generation," she said. "If it is not, how will the schools in years to come receive their social study material?"

Now that so many institutes are taking the lead in establishing county museums these would seem to be the natural place to keep the local history books.

In such a museum they would always be available to historians, who are already making extensive use of the Tweedsmuir History Books as source material.

## Rural Women Are Outstanding In Efforts With Women's Institute

The growing importance and enthusiasm of the Women's Institutes impresses so greatly upon us, their value to Ontario and more particularly to our own community, that we should endeavour to know, understand, and appreciate more fully this valuable rural service.

The contribution of the Women's Institutes in raising the general standards of health and morale of the rural population was recognized years ago by the Ontario government to be of such importance that it assigned a branch of the Department of Agriculture to assist the Women's Institutes in their work of social education. This branch is now known as the Women's Institute Branch and Home Economics Service. This close association of the Institutes with the Department of Agriculture has always worked out harmoniously, and has gone a long way in making rural living more profitable and attractive to legions of people.

The first Women's Institute in the world was organized in 1897 in Saltfleet Township, Wenworth County, by Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless. This remarkable woman felt that rural women needed some kind of association in which they could work and study together to raise the standard of homemaking. The response of rural women was immediate, and six years after the birth of the movement there were some fifty similar groups in Ontario. Today they number over 1400 with a membership of nearly 50,000 women. The movement has now

Canadian Statesman Editorial

spread to the other provinces and to many countries of the world.

Early in their history, education in homemaking became a vital issue with them. In 1910 they formulated an education program for women and girls of rural Ontario and outlined a program of short courses which was given strong support by the Minister of Agriculture. This still is one of the main projects of the Institute, and the object of these courses is to help women to acquire sound and approved practices for greater home efficiency. It is also to discover and train leadership, to develop a more abundant life in rural communities, and a deeper appreciation of things at hand, and in so doing, to develop better, happier and more useful citizens. Their meetings and activities therefore cover a great variety of subjects like clothing, household management, food and nutrition, home furnishings and other subjects like citizenship, health education, housing and psychology for the homemaker.

The completeness of their study and education of their chosen subjects is remarkable. Clothing for instance, is not limited to instruction in sewing, but includes study of colour and design, quality and characteristics of fabrics, clothing budgets and care of clothing. It educates homemakers to select garments that will contribute to the health, comfort and efficiency of the family and to give each member of it a sense of ease and assurance in all their family and

social relationships. In proof of this, the reader need only to mentally refer to the Institute clothing and homecraft exhibits at the Norfolk County Fair, which is one of the fair's outstanding exhibits.

In foods and nutrition its aim is to arouse interest, study and the application of knowledge to problems of the family diet, with the selection, preparation, and serving of food for its most nutritious composition and relation to health.

The Women's Institute housing program deals with the restoration of old furniture to a condition of beauty and usefulness and to assist in purchasing house furnishings with good judgment and satisfaction.

Health Education aims to help homemakers gain a better understanding of how to acquire and maintain good health for themselves and families, the school and the community. Their interest in psychology is of particular interest in the field of child training and of living together in a family unit.

Their studies, woven together, form a well-integrated and complete program for rural women of Ontario. The Women's Institutes are a service of great usefulness to rural communities, and we are enriched by their presence, admire their work and wish them unlimited success in the future. Since "Durham County Farm News" has been a feature in The Statesman we have come to realize the importance and usefulness of Women's Institutes in our rural communities and feel privileged to support them wherever possible and commend the Women's Institutes unreservedly to all. It is a valuable rural service.