

Durham Women's Institute

Pack Sweets

(Family Herald & Weekly Star,
By Norma E. Hooley, Burketon)

Almost as certain as house-cleaning, jam making comes on the summer schedule of the members of the Women's Institutes. If you had been able to visit any one of the nine branches in West Durham (Ontario) during the spring, you would have heard earnest discussions of how, where and when this work would take place.

At one of the spring meetings, the members nominate a committee to be in charge of that important phase of Institute work, making of jam for overseas in co-operation with the Canadian Red Cross, and a few days later the Committee Head phones her workers, finds a date acceptable to each; and at once, plans are underway for jam making. With willing helpers, it does not take long for the fruit to be prepared and eventually ready for the containers—and at the end of the afternoon, Mrs. Scott's good baking and a cup of tea never fail to refresh the committee members.

Profitable and Pleasant

These meetings on summer afternoons are pleasant, and the conversation need not necessarily be confined to the matter at hand. It may be as diverse as it pleases, for in the country every family is well acquainted with its fellows and if Bud Morris is home on embarkation leave, what time is more opportune than that moment to decide upon the gift that will remind him of the folks back home? Indeed, many questions of importance have been discussed and courses of action decided upon at these gatherings.

Mrs. Roy Langmaid of Solina informed me that her group completed two cases of gooseberry jam, and great hopes were laid for the making of raspberry jam. Just as the raspberries were in their prime, a devastating hail storm swept across the central part of the county, stripping the leaves and berries from the canes, completely ruining the crops and causing thousands of dollars loss to apple orchards. Nothing daunted, the Solina Women's Institute, Mrs. Langmaid reports, still hopes that plums will fill the gap and if not, more honey will be supplied. Mrs. Norman Woodley writes that here at Tyrone where the storm also left destruction in its wake, 60 pounds of gooseberry jam have been forwarded to local headquarters, and the remainder of the quota will be completed using honey.

Honey is indeed a popular choice in the majority of localities. Although West Durham is a county of fine apple orchards; plums, cherries, berries, and the smaller fruits are not extensively grown. Scarcity of help is a real factor in making this condition prevalent, and where they are grown, the local demand quite outweighs the supply. Fruit is expensive and obtainable in only small quantities.

Speaking to the heads of the committees in the Women's Institutes of West Durham, I found that the following branches — Newtonville, Orono, Bowmanville, Kendal, Hampton, Victorian and Nestleton all plan to fill their quota by utilizing the excellent honey supplies of neighboring apiaries.

Nestleton and the Victorian Women's Institutes send their donations of honey through the local Red Cross Society at Blackstock, while all other County donations of jam and honey are brought to Mrs. J. Thickson of Bowmanville, head of the Jam Committee of West Durham District. Mrs. Thickson forwards the cases to headquarters, and here is her own story of the history of jam making in West Durham:

"In the spring of 1940, a request came to all Women's Institutes in West Durham District, from Miss Mary A. Clarke, Superintendent of Women's Institutes in Ontario, that the Women's Institutes in co-operation with local Red Cross Branches process and pack jam for the use of civilian victims of war in Britain, Canadian troops in hospitals and camps overseas, military hospitals in Canada or wherever the need might be greatest. This project was to be a voluntary contribution of surplus fruit, of which a considerable quantity had spoiled and wasted during the previous season.

Bowmanville Women's Institute pioneered by making strawberry jam at the home of the President, Mrs. J. Thickson. It was with much anxiety and trepidation that recipes and directions were studied and followed and the first results were tested. None of this group were graduate dietitians. All were just average housewives anxious to co-operate and do their bit in wartime, so when their first strawberry jam tested 68 per cent sugar content—a high average, there was a feeling that this achievement had been worthwhile and the hazards and worries of jam making were quickly forgotten. The other eight Women's Institutes comprising West Durham District became interested and with the assistance and supervision of the President, Mrs. Thickson, all co-operated in making jam using the late fruits.

for Overseas

Since that time, 2,496 pounds have been donated from this district each season since, and it has been of a consistent high quality. This jam was made entirely by groups of Institute members working in their own kitchens. Some fruit and sugar were donated by interested friends and organizations but the greater part of the finances were from Institute funds. This last two years fruit has been much higher in price and there has been no surplus. So all fruits are now purchased locally at prevailing prices. Sugar is obtained on permits supplied by the Canadian Red Cross Society.

Honey to Fill Quota

Plans have been completed for continuing the jam making project this season and should there be a shortage of fruit, all tins unfilled at the close of the fruit season will be filled with honey, in order that our quota will go forward to the Red Cross Society in Toronto, for shipment to where jam and honey are almost unobtainable.

To Mrs. Thickson, too, we are indebted for the snapshot of her helpers who have been busily engaged, as the picture adequately proves. There is more than a possibility that the contents of these tins may be well received by servicemen overseas whose homes are in or near Durham County. A young local medical officer, Capt. Jack Hare of Newcastle, writes that after a weary day of attending to robot bomb victims near London, his delight and incidentally, his appetite knew no bounds when a tin of honey with the familiar Bowmanville W.I. label was placed before him.

Mrs. W. Jones of Newtonville is West Durham's very capable President for 1944. Membership in many branches has been depleted by girls leaving to work in other centres and to enter the Services; and in other cases, the older women find that it takes a great deal of planning of home duties before they can make Women's Institute afternoon a reality. Whether the branches are large or small the spirit of selflessness abounds. Many of these women have already experienced the anguish of loss and the loneliness of separation, yet in the homey rite of jam making, of providing honey for another's use, there is for them a quiet joy that comes with service unselfishly performed.

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