

Women's Institute branches record village history across Canada in their Tweedsmuir Books

South Macaulay Women's Institute was established in 1900 just three years after Adelaide Hoodless began this remarkable program for women at Stoney Creek. It still flourishes, and the proof of its vitality is to be discovered in the Tweedsmuir History that the curators, May Sterritt and Mabel Peacock, displayed last Wednesday at a special Institute Open House.

This challenging project, of compiling and maintaining "village histories" was given to the Canadian Women's Institutes by the late Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor-General of Canada. He died in office in 1940 and his memory is fittingly honored and his name perpetuated in the Branch "Tweedsmuir Histories" across Canada. His pride in the country which became his by adoption, as well as his prestige as a writer (before his peerage, he was known to readers everywhere simply as John Buchan) make this a notable project.

Lady Tweedsmuir, in requesting the women who were the Institute members in 1940 commence this task, said it would be a satisfaction, as well as a duty, for them to record the story of the people and events of their own community, so that "nothing of value should be lost or forgotten."

In the intervening years the Institute Branches have had practical help, sometimes workshops, in the maintenance of their history books, to assure that the record should be kept as fully and in as good condition as possible. This included suggestions on the material that might be included, on the best type of materials to use, even the best paste. The instructions also provide that, if any Branch is discontinued, the History goes to W.I. archives.

But, while helpful directions are available, the style and content of the book is individually that of the branch. In this way the Tweedsmuir History is not only a compilation of facts and pictures, but a reflection on the life style of the community it records. In this way there is being gathered for posterity a unique and valuable compendium of the history which may not make it to the big books, but is of vital importance to the story of Canada during the 20th century, and perhaps beyond.

So it is that the South Macaulay Tweedsmuir History, examined with interest at the home of Curator Mabel Sterritt by Institute members from that and other branches, by Macaulay friends, and others who share an interest in local history, told the visitors something of that community, its pioneer families and outstanding personalities, its community buildings and gathered groups, its celebrations and its tragedies. It also carries a subtle but clear message of a rural community, not specified as a municipal or geographical unit, yet bound together in a shared inheritance. It is one that has been a leader in Muskoka development—witness the first Women's Institute Branch in 1900, and the first event to open its History to the public in 1976. Close to Bracebridge through the years, and now a part of the Area Municipality, it has not lost its identity, and the Tweedsmuir History proves this.

Included in the book are the written stories of the families who were early settlers (along with pictures) and the story of the beginning and the progress of the Women's Institute.

There are records of the schools, with their classes and teachers shown in pictures, and the Township school which was opened in 1960. There are the names of municipal figures, reeves, councillors and trustees through the years. The names

of those who lost their lives in the wars are remembered. There are newspaper clippings of special events, golden weddings to show the happy times and celebrate good lives; accidents that recall tragic events and mourn lost members.

The unique blend of personal and historical facts is a happy reflection of the life-style of Macaulay south—doubtless this image is portrayed, with individual variations, everywhere in rural Canada. It is a beautiful tribute to the dedicated and careful work of the women who have undertaken to be curators, and to the co-operation of other members in the project.

It is not surprising that the South Macaulay History has had to go into two volumes. The first is in a maple leaf adorned scrap book; but the second, following as information from headquarters suggesting more technical improvements, is in itself an interesting piece of local craftsmanship. The strong wooden covers, put together to allow for convenient insertion of loose leaf pages, and for easy handling in examination, are the work of a local man, Carl Whalen and the painting that decorates the cover, including the W.I. crest, is by another, Laurel Hough.

The Macaulay women like many others have shown how valuable can be a local record and how, once started, the W.I. can produce a truly professional looking volume. The country acknowledges their labour of love with gratitude.



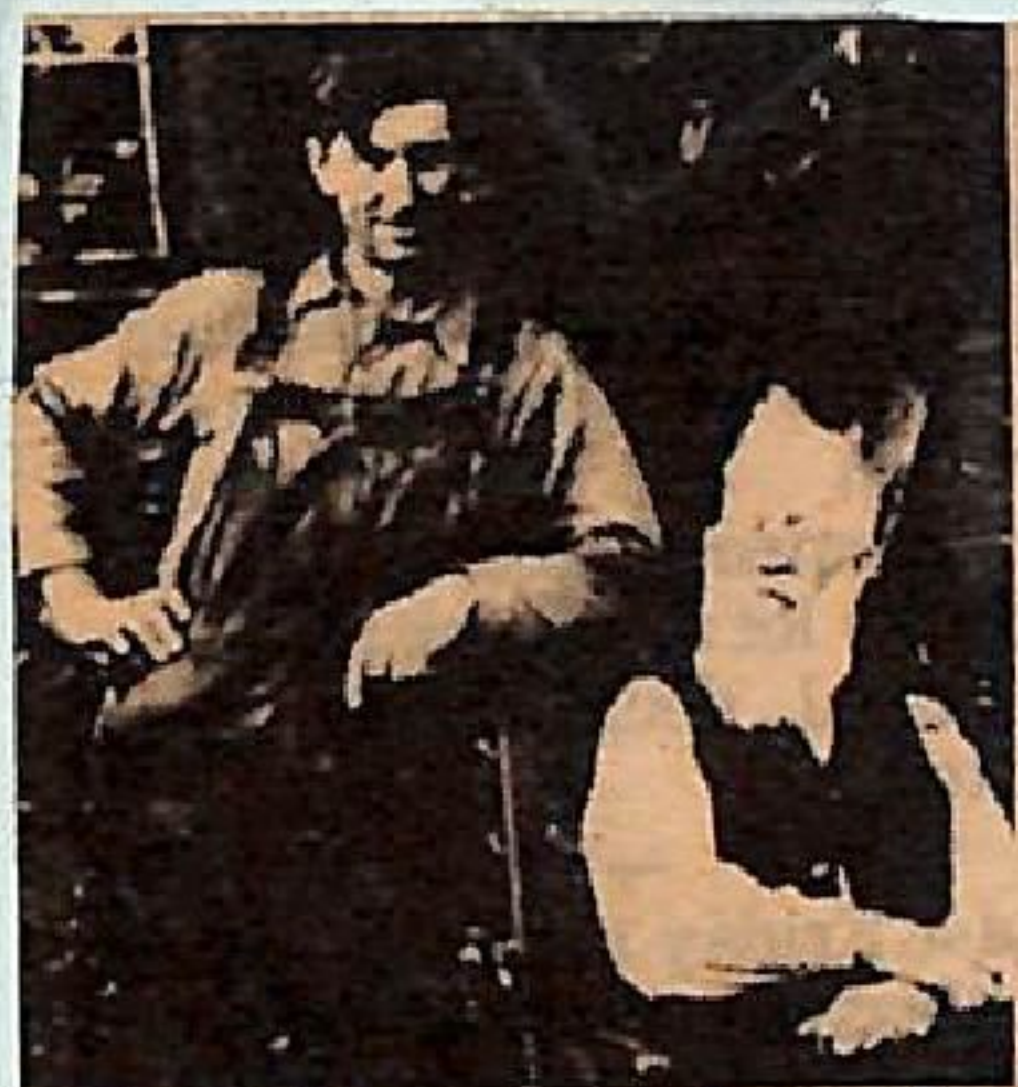
Mr. and Mrs. T. B. Rosewarne were 50 years married in 1936.



Richard Zimmerman was Councillor or Reeve of Macaulay for 45 years.



Edward Zimmerman was born in Macaulay, member of a family which came here in 1870.



Members of the Nicholson family first settled near The Pines in 1869.



James Clark was postmaster at Monsell and a Macaulay Councillor.