



Women's Institute

Institution/Organization Name:

Women's Institute, currently Federated Women's Institutes of Canada;
and internationally, the Associated Country Women of the World

Location(s): Canada and Worldwide

Dates of Operation: 1897 - Present

Origin & Purpose

The Women's Institute is a uniquely Canadian contribution to adult education. Rooted in its humble beginnings in rural Ontario, it now has over nine million members in over 70 countries. The Women's Institute's objectives and organizational structure have proven to be of lasting benefit.

"A nation cannot rise above the level of its homes, we women must work and study together to raise our homes to the highest level possible."

Adelaide Hoodless

Built upon this premise, the Women's Institute was founded in 1897, in Stony Creek, Ontario by Mrs. Hoodless. It was originally formed as a method of educating rural women with the purpose of improving their lives through studying domestic science. In an early speech, Mrs. Hoodless suggested that "a better understanding of the economic and hygienic value of food and a more scientific care of children with a view to raising the general standard of life of farm people is needed" (Witter, 1979).

The Women's Institute (WI) grew dramatically; rural women in Ontario readily welcomed the Women's Institute. By 1903 there were 12 institutes with 1500 active members. In 1904 the Ontario Department of Agriculture began funding seven full-time staff to help promote and organize the institutes in the communities throughout the province. By 1908 the Ontario Women's Institute had grown to 24 institutes and 4500 members.

Not long after, Women's Institutes were formed in other provinces across Canada. In 1909 BC and Alberta organized their first WIs, followed by Manitoba