

in 1910. New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Quebec and Prince Edward Island began forming institutes in 1911. In 1913 Nova Scotia formed its first institute.

In 1915 an institute member, Mrs. Watt from Vancouver Island, introduced the Women's Institute concept to the British Isles and helped form Britain's first WI in Anglesey, Wales. Soon after Queen Mary asked Mrs. Watt to explain the concept to her. This resulted in the formation of the Sandringham Women's Institute with Queen Mary and succeeding queens serving as president. As a result, Douglas (1958) reports that during the First World War, the efforts of British Countrywomen increased the food supply 35% - 60%. According to Douglas, the WI became known as Canada's gift to the Motherland.

The idea of forming a Canadian national group was raised in 1912 but postponed due the First World War. When the war ended, the superintendent of the Alberta Women's Institute, Miss Mary MacIssac, revived the idea. In 1919 a representative from each provincial WI met in Winnipeg, Manitoba and the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada (FWIC) was formed.

Educational Methods and Subjects of Study

In the early years, courses were held in cooking, sewing, home nutrition, childcare and handicrafts. The format was a lecture with a demonstration, followed by a question period. Because each WI operated at the community level, each was able to quickly adapt to fulfill the specific local needs. For example, in 1919, after Alberta had been struck by the Spanish Influenza epidemic, the Women's Institute began teaching women methods of home nursing and first aid. In excess of 3400 Alberta women undertook this particular course between 1920 and 1923.

In 1924 the first annual Women's Institute Short course was held. The course was a month long and branch members throughout Canada were asked to send a representative. These representatives returned to their respective communities to teach what they had learned. This turned out to be an effective format which remains in use. Subjects expanded to include agricultural topics, such as: dairying, beekeeping and poultry raising. Later banking and business skills became part of the standard course.

Another educational method used by WIs was the publication of pamphlets. These were referred to as "loan papers" and were kept on file at provincial Department of Agriculture offices. WI members could borrow these papers for two-week periods. Pamphlet titles included topics such as: Stocking Winter Gardens; Care of the Sickroom; Household Sanitation; Little Economics; Harmful Weeds; How to Get More Eggs; Hay-box Cooking and Labour Saving Devices.

The Depression years brought a new interest in civic responsibility. WIs began studying laws relating to women and children, the Old Age Pension Act, The Mother's Allowance Act, The Minimum Wage Act for Women and Girls, and the Devolution of the Estate Act. WIs became active in recommending legislative change to the Federal Government.

Study circles were utilized as a method of education and socializing. In the early 1940s, with the inclusion of the National Farm Radio Forum and Citizen's Forum content in the study circles, a deeper and richer exchange of ideas improved the educational experience.

In recent years, the WIs have adopted some of the emerging information