

WI has come a long way

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Next year more than 54,000 women in Canada will celebrate the 80th anniversary of an organization that has done more than any other group to improve rural life.

That is now the scope of the Women's Institute, founded in 1897 by Adelaide Hunter Hoodless and Erland Lee. And it is still growing. Next year, also, some of those 54,000 women will travel to Nairobi, Kenya, for the 15th triennial meeting of the Associated-Countrywomen of the World.

In 1897 not many farm wives in Canada were thinking about travelling to Africa for an international conference. The weekly shopping trip to town was about as far as many of them could expect to travel in their lives.

Mrs. Hoodless lost a son and felt that he might have lived had she known more about nutrition and child care. She turned to Erland Lee, then head of the United Farmers of Ontario, for help and together they started the Women's Institute.

The idea caught on and now there are some 2,680 branches in all provinces and territories. It has spread from the farms into the towns and cities, but the goal is still the same — to teach women to be better homemakers to build a better country.

At the recent Eastern Ontario area convention of the WI in Ottawa, the 350 delegates from 147 branches watched a play, *The Witch of Plum Hollow*, written by Mrs. Dorothy Morgan of Osnabrock Centre.

If writing plays seems a bit divorced from better nutrition and

dressmaking, it is an indication of the advance in living standards and educational levels of rural women.

The importance of home crafts has not been ignored. But while sewing, cooking and handicrafts are still a big part of the WI program, there is an increased emphasis on leadership training.

Branch meetings are themselves leadership training courses for the members. Seminars are conducted on a district, provincial and national level. The WI provides scholarships for students showing leadership potential. In Eastern Ontario the scholarship goes to the young person who has received the highest marks in the six 4-H courses or projects.

The play writing contest was more than a demonstration of literary skill. The theme of the play had to be from Canadian folklore. That is indicative of the role of the WI in preserving local history, an idea promoted by Lady Tweedsmuir during her husband's term as Governor General.

Each branch undertakes to record local events and delve into the area's past to collect artifacts and interesting bits of information. Last year the North Lanark WI put on a *Tweedsmuir Night* in the Carleton Place High School which proved so successful it may become an annual event.

The ladies demonstrated spinning, butter making, quilting and other pioneer activities; put on a fashion show with costumes of years gone by; held an old fashioned spelling bee and spiced it all up with lots of old time country music.

On the national level, the homes of

Adelaide Hoodless in St. George, Ont., and Erland Lee in Stoney Creek have been made historic sites. The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario have purchased the 1820 Sheridan Methodist Church and will move it to the site of the Ontario Agricultural Museum at Milton.

The 156 year old building, one of the earliest rural churches in Ontario, will ensure the Women's Institutes a suitable place in the museum.

The Ontario government soon saw the Women's Institutes as the ideal vehicle for extension work through the farm homes and has provided financial assistance to the organization. The provincial home economists find the WI one of the best ways to teach nutrition and good homemaking in rural areas.

Helen McKecher, recently retired as director of the Home Economics Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, is Honorary President of the Women's Institutes in Ontario. And the ministry publishes *Home and Country*, the FWIQ quarterly magazine.

Eastern Ontario has three members on the Provincial board of directors: Mrs. John Schultz of Ingleside, Mrs. D. H. Davidson of Manotick and Mrs. Peggy Hampel of Cobden.

Mrs. Wallace Krause, who farms with her husband near Pembroke, was elected president of the Eastern Ontario Area at the recent Ottawa convention.

Mrs. Krause said she welcomed the expansion of the institute from the farm into the urban communities. She said the training in leader-

ship and good citizenship as well as the courses on home economics are valuable for all women.

Her predecessor, Mrs. Hugh McMillan, moved straight from the Eastern Ontario presidency into the one full-time position of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada. She is now the secretary-treasurer in the national office in

Ottawa, succeeding Mrs. Ruth Jamieson, who retires after 13 years at the post.

Mrs. McMillan is a widow. Her husband was for many years reeve of Williamsburg Township. Her son now has the family farm and she is free to travel, which she does extensively, both as an official of the WI and as an old-time fiddler.

rural living