

A TAPESTRY OF CHANGE

Throughout the past 100 years, Women's Institute members have strived and ultimately succeeded in changing the lot of Canadian families. They have fought for recognition, taught leadership skills, lobbied for political change and led the feminist movement, while adhering to their motto "For Home and Country".

Instrumental in bringing about change within the family unit, the W.I. members also paraded the new fashions of the decades. Innovative women whose attire was as diverse as the changing terrain across Canada, asserted their independence and moved through patterns of fabric and ornament, while keeping a sense of humour.

Humour has been an integral part of Women's Institute. Laughing at ourselves for the fashion boo-boo's of yesterday, joking about the "in" fashion trends of today, chuckling and whispering about tomorrow's styles and smiling in satisfaction when the recycled craze of wearing apparel took hold.

Just as fashion modes changed with each passing decade, so did the W.I. movement. The members grasped new ideas and forged ahead - teaching the techniques essential to maintaining their underlying motto of "putting one's best foot forward".

From the homespun fashion industry of the 1900's, we have come full circle. Using the natural fibres, wools and pelts, the clothing trends of the 1990's are crinkled, wrinkled and crushed to meet the needs of the busy woman. Rushing from one appointment to another - at the workplace for eight hours, making last minute arrangements for the children, hastening preparations for the evening meal, attending social functions and/or updating her education - can sabotage any woman's confidence. But, the wardrobe of fashions available to her are endless - from carefree cottons and wrinkled rayons to luxurious satins and natural silks.

Has the iron and ironing board disappeared like the apron worn (faithfully) during the first half of this century?

Fashion modes are determined by family dynamics of the decade through personality traits, economic circumstance, competitiveness and independent choice. Members of the W.I. have knitted and crocheted items of apparel, and through the short courses offered women were instructed in the art of glove making and slipper construction, as well as the creation of fashion millinery.

Economics and environmental concerns shape the fashion industry. Remember the furor of the 1980's over the killing of the baby seals and the protest that followed. Fur garments were out. In came the hi-tech synthetic furs. Have you noticed the skirt and dress length changes that occurred during this century? When times are tough, the hemlines lengthen and when times are good, the hemlines shorten.

Hats are again back in fashion. There is a millinery renaissance with an ever-increasing number of young people wearing hats purchased at rummage sales, second-hand shops and newly opened boutiques.

The 90's is the decade of the retro fashion. A return of past styles is in vogue. So, Women's Institute members had better keep an eye on their closets! Grandchildren are busy hunting up the bias-cut dresses of the 30's, the drop-waisted little print dresses of the 40's and the embroidered blouses and crinolines of the 50's. Lock up your wrap dress of the 70's with the jersey prints and all those skinny belts, sweater sets and patent leather shoes and boots. The youth are looking and want to spruce up their current wardrobes with retro fashions of the past.