

# Grace Patterson, former missionary, living her life one day at a time

TOWN CRIER 13-5-81

BY MARGARET BOYD

Grace Patterson was greeted by streams of well wishers at her 90th birthday party, held at Westminster United Church Hall by the United Church Women and Grace Patterson Women's Institute, on Saturday.

A commemorative plaque from the Ontario government as well as messages from the Prime Minister added to the celebrations of the former missionary and teacher.

Miss Patterson spent 37 years in India, teaching teachers and conducting agricultural experiments for the Institute of Plant Industry. Prior to her missionary work she taught in Embro. Upon her return to Canada and her hometown of Thamesford, Miss Patterson retired and became active in the women's institute named after her.

As well as the congratulatory messages from the government, Miss Patterson received many "lovely birthday cards."

"One of the cards had a verse which said each birthday is a gift," she said. "That is the way I look at it too, each birthday is a gift, of course to be used in the best way possible."

Miss Patterson worked in India from 1917 to 1954, although she returned home in 1923, 1931, 1947 and 1949. The trips to India were made by boat by way of England twice and by way of the Pacific twice.

"I liked travelling; I was a good sailor," she said of the trips which took approximately three weeks at a time.

Miss Patterson said her chief work in India was teaching teachers to teach. The first year she was in India was spent learning the Hindi language. Emphasis was placed on teaching in Indian children to read and write, not on teaching high standards. Education in India has improved greatly since the beginning of her missionary work, she said.

She was principal of a school which had Indian men and women teaching in training, then she went into rural work.

It had "a greater opportunity of teaching village teachers who could in turn operate primary schools in the villages," she said.

She was in charge of schools in four villages, and at a central school she taught students from other stations, who in turn went back to their villages to teach.



Grace Patterson, right, is greeted by Mrs. George Mitchell during birthday celebrations for Miss Patterson at Westminster United Church Hall Saturday. The 90-year-old former missionary and teacher received well wishers all afternoon. Dr. and Mrs. Halliday were among the well wishers.

"If we could get children to do reading and writing that would be something," she recalled.

Her next stint of missionary work was in the field of agriculture, conducting experiments in cotton, peanuts, chick peas, wheat, corn, soya beans and sugar cane.

The purpose of the experiments was "to find out the best kind of seed for that particular kind of soil," Miss Patterson said. They were carried out in a wide area of the province and were an ongoing thing throughout the growing season.

Missionaries usually arrived in India in October and worked until April or May, the hot months, Miss Patterson said.

During the hot months they would take holidays and a favorite holidaying spot of Miss Patterson's was Kashmir.

Missionary work in India is now carried out under the Indian Church and is much less than it used to be. Miss

Patterson said. Christianity is growing in numbers though.

One of the most thrilling moments at the birthday celebrations was having "one of the Indian girls there," Miss Patterson said. A young Indian girl who now lives in Canada but who was brought up by the missionaries in India attended.

Miss Patterson feels she is fortunate to have retired to her own hometown, surrounded by "the fellowship of the families and people with whom I have been brought up."

"It has been a wonderful thing, to live among your own people and work among your own people and to value your own fellowship", she said.

The Grace Patterson Women's Institute, founded in 1945, was the amalgamation of the Grace Country Club, a group of Sunday School girls and a women's institute. The group of Sunday School girls, formed when Miss Patterson left for India, was growing up and there were a

number of women "keenly interested in a women's institute," Miss Patterson said.

The women's institute continues to support one child's schooling in India each year. The club motto is For Home and Country.

"The women's institute is doing tremendous work," Miss Patterson said.

Enrolment in the club has fallen off during the past 10 years but the present membership is still 47 strong. The group supports 4-H girls and the Oxford North District.

"I can hardly find words to express my appreciation for what the women's institute is doing for women and girls of the community and the country and the world," Miss Patterson said.

She does not attend meetings any longer nor does she get out much, owing to an arthritic leg and hip but Miss Patterson does have one secret for longevity. "I just live one day at a time," she said.