

## History of the Paisley Womens' Institute

By Eva McKelvey and Marian Parker

The Paisley branch of the Womens' Institute was first organized in 1901, just four years after the W.I. had been first introduced into Ontario. The first President was Mrs. Donald McIntyre, the first Secretary, Mrs. Conn. Meetings were held in the members' homes once a month. Following business procedures, the members made quilts, or sewed clothes for the needy. One member donated a hospital bed, to be loaned free of charge to families with sickness in their homes. Over the years this bed has been lost.

By 1930, the membership had grown too large for home meetings. So an arrangement was made with the Balmoral Hotel to meet in a room which was situated above what was then Mr. Cruickshank's Tailor Shop. Later we moved to the Odd-fellows' Hall. In 1950 we moved to the Arena where the Institute held monthly meetings until 1992.

In 1920 a Junior Institute was formed. In 1927 the fees were 25 cents per member,

Remembering our motto, "For Home and Country", we have always been ready to co-operate with worthwhile local projects, by giving both time and money. We have sponsored the 4-H clubs each year, often having two clubs. At the end of the 4-H season, the girls usually have had a display of their projects, and entertain the W.I. members at a nice luncheon.

From 1948 to 1969 the W.I. provided two helpers to the Well-Baby Clinic held each month by the Bruce County Health Unit. We also provided staff for the T.B. clinics. In 1967, Canada's centennial year, the W.I. provided a name plaque for Paisley's new Public Library. In 1974, Paisley's centennial year, we assisted in the publication of a cook book of local recipes. In June, 1969, a plaque was presented to an outstanding Grade 8 student, as a good citizenship award. This established a custom which has been carried out every year since.

In 1948 a Tweedsmuir scrapbook was started by Marian Parker, and in 1967 a Tweedsmuir History Book was begun. Mrs. Norman Dryden did a great deal of work on this project, and it has been kept up to date to the present time by Mrs. Ruby Hammond. Volume 1 has been microfilmed, and is stored in the Town Hall. The other volumes are in a locked glass case at the public library. They can be inspected at the library, but cannot be removed from the building.

Short courses, senior training schools, and food forums have been sponsored for women, whether members or not. A highlight of 1981 was our 80th birthday. That year was also the International Year of the Disabled. We held a come-and-go tea in the Arena, and had a fashion show of styles of the past 80 years. The guest book was signed by 272 persons. We gave the proceeds towards making town sidewalks, washrooms in town hall and arena accessible to wheel chairs.

We have had a display each year at the Paisley Fall Fair, and give a donation each year to the Fair Board. We also have sponsored the Canada quilt display, and for the past several years have donated a quilt to Participation Lodge.

In 1992 we realized that we were all getting older. There were steps to climb at the arena. The lives of housewives have been dramatically changed since 1901, with refrigeration, electricity, and many other conveniences. Perhaps our helping hands are not as badly needed as in early years. So, with last President, Miss Pearl Rolston in the chair, in November, 1992, we voted to disband.

Unfortunately, some of our earliest Minute Books have been lost. But we include here, some items from the past, which will illustrate the vast changes which have occurred over the years.