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Women's Institutes of Western Ontario Mark Silver Jubilee

ORGANIZED IN GREY CO., 1900
Scores of Thousands of Women in Canada, Great Britain and Europe Now Upheld Standard of W. I. First Raised at Stoney Creek, Wentworth County, Ont., in February, 1897.

The year 1925 marks the silver Jubilee of the founding of the Women's Institutes in Western Ontario, since in 1900 a branch was organized at Kemble, in Grey County, with Mrs. Jas. Gardner as president, and Mrs. Wm. McGregor as secretary.

Three years prior to that date the W. I. came into existence in Ontario, and, for that matter, in Canada and the British Empire itself. At Stoney Creek, Wentworth County, on Feb. 19th, 1897, the first Women's Institute was formed (then called Saltfleet), part of an organization that was to reach out to all part of Canada, England, and Scotland, to be a great and beneficent factor in the life of the rural women of the British Empire.

The late Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless of Hamilton, was the prime mover, doing much to secure recognition for home interests in the educational institutions of the province. Household matters were practically the sole topic for discussion at the institute in these earlier days, but the real feminine public spirit was soon to be shown by a developing interest in community problems.

Following Ontario's example, the other provinces of the Dominion soon organized; the good work spread to England, where Miss Emily J. Guest, of the institutes of Canada, was given the honor of organizing under the auspices of the British Government during the war years, and today Women's Institutes flourish in Scotland, France, Belgium and elsewhere.

Of all these the Stoney Creek W. I. was the mother.

The connection of the Women's Institutes with the Provincial Government gives the organization rather an interesting and unusual status. In Ontario the members have a habit of saying that the Hon. J. S. Martin, minister of agriculture is their chief. The Women's Institute department is a sub-department of the provincial department of agriculture, and it is indeed a personal interest Mr. Martin lends to the work of the W. I. evidenced by his readiness to speak at W. I. conventions and the efficiency of the W. I. Government activities. G. A. Putman is the superintendent of Women's Institutes under the Ontario Legislature, and Miss Ethel Chapman is his assistant.

The W. I. motto is "For Home and Country." As a visitor from overseas

was heard to remark, after an examination of the methods of the rural women in conducting their organization: "These Canadians know the right place to begin; without homes there is no country worth talking about."

Another Story. All of which is still, more or less, the practical story of the Women's Institutes. There is another story, more interesting to write, but so big that no paper could contain it and so fine that a pen (or a typewriter) must needs be dipped in golden ink to make the letters splendid enough. This is the real story of the W. I. which the past 25 years have been telling in Canada, and in the province, and in Western Ontario.

Divide it into chapters and the story would contain hundreds of them. Chapters on home-making and gardening, and chicken farming and co-operative marketing and short courses and dressmaking and millinery and home hygiene. Paint it in pictures and you would have portraits of little red schoolhouses with the romance left in, but many of the unhygienic qualities left out. You would have new pictures of country graveyards. The poets and the romancers have liked to tell of these "quiet God's Acres," under the trees, but it remained for the Women's Institutes in hundreds of cases to bring order and quietness and real beauty to what was only theoretically beautiful.

You would have chapters on war work, chapters occupied with the emergency meetings of thousands of women all over Canada, sewing, knitting—and again sewing and knitting. You would read of them packing

great hampers of made-up garments, bandages, surgical supplies; of their prompt and intelligent support of the Red Cross, of contributions in material, work and money that during the war years reached up to millions. And pictures of women, in dimly lighted farm kitchens, far into the night, making up the dainties that had been the special favorites of one bright-eyed boy, making up packages of goodies for the boys overseas for the sake of that one boy.

Books and Debates. More pictures—of village libraries provided through institute funds and institute efforts; of community halls that have become the meeting place alike of old and young; of reading circles where country folk might dip into the lore of the ages; of debating societies, where the young people tested their skill in argument and the retort courteous, practicing, some of them, for a future day in the legislative halls of Canada.

Chapters on playgrounds for the children, and something for them to play with; chapters on special courses in botany, by which the farm people learned things about their flower and tree friends they never guessed at before; chapters on short courses for girls in the gentle art of home-making and the equally important art of dress and manners.

"Better education and better schools" has been one of the slogans of the W. I. The results are legion. Medical inspection has been established in many rural communities; school nurses are installed, often at the expense of the institutes themselves; music teachers are engaged; school buildings, if not entirely rebuilt, are renovated and decorated; lighting is taken heed to; desks are made of the correct height, and good water supply is assured.

Hospitals—? The Women's Institutes have backed every known means of providing medical care in rural communities. The provincial department of health at Toronto, will tell you that the W. I. can ask more questions to the square inch than most of the other organizations of the province put together. But they are sensible questions, with a p. int, and the department likes to answer them. The Western Ontario Institutes contributed very largely to the War Memorial Hospital in London.

And all this is the W. I. in general. In particular, thousands of individuals (and these not women only) benefit from the policy of the institutes. Not a rural woman who has not felt her life restricted; who has not seen her day as an endless round of chores and housework and cooking and gardening; who has not envied the city woman her leisure and her opportunities.

The Farm Home.

So the W. I. stepped in. Husbands were made to see, by very gentle means, of course, and by concentrated representations, that labor-saving devices are as essential indoors as out, on a farm. Housework became easier; electric appliances began to make their way into the homes. Madame Farmer learned that there is more money in eggs and chickens if they are raised (though possibly you don't "raise" eggs) scientifically. The little flivver in the driving shed made trips to town more frequently. Some times she and John could take in a concert or a lecture or a show. They could always get to the debating society, anyhow. She heard papers on gardening by people who knew how to do it, and she turned the old storm windows into hot boxes and specialized, maybe, in lettuce.

And, best of all, she learned the value of human intercourse. And the fact that the view from her kitchen window, of a slope of green meadow and three gnarled trees, was as lovely and as restful as a Corot that people have spent many hundreds of dollars to possess.

And lastly (as the preachers have it!) the Women's Institutes have reached out welcoming hands to the new Canadians and to the old Canadians, too, since very interesting branches have been formed on the Indian Reserves.

Twenty-five years of service to home and country; twenty-five years of up-holding the banner of progress through the fields and the orchards, the farms and the villages, and along the white crossroads of Western Ontario. A silver jubilee worthy of the name.

The Ferguson Government may give more financial assistance to put hydro on Ontario farms, and in this step they will have the support of all. If there is one place where Ontario should direct its energies to improve conditions it is on the Ontario farms. Apart from the use of power to run barn machinery, the farm home must be considered. Electric appliances for washing, ironing and lighting have made a great change in the city homes, and the rural districts should have the same advantages.

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The Poets Corner

HOPE AND ASSURANCE

What is your hope, dear brothers, On which your heart is set There's hope; I can discover In every soul I've met.

We have it from creation But whether bright or sad, Depends on our relation To what is good or bad.

I think it was Saint Peter 1 Peter 3.15 And he knew how to live He gauged it by the meter Of reasons we can give.

And so it is assurance To know our chart is right

That steadfast, faith, endurance That fills us with delight.

Experience the cable That holds against the gale And hope the anchor! able— To reach within the veil. Heb 6.19

Then have we got good reasons Our anchors holding tight, When comes the darkest seasons That everything is right.

Why should we doubt, or worry With such a golden hope, The universe don't hurry, And Providence don't stop.

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