

## WEST ELGIN DISTRICT WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

West Elgin Women's Institutes began in Dutton on February 10th, 1905, through the interest and enthusiasm of Mr. Archie MacColl, Secretary of the Farmer's Institute, a flourishing provincial organization at that time. From then on, for three years, meetings were held regularly, with ladies from West Elgin being invited to attend. Mrs. James Poole, Miss Florence McLean, Miss Effie Graham, (Mrs. Garfield Ross) Mrs. Don. Graham, and Miss Minnie Gow, were the first officers during those early years.

From the very first meeting the women were interested in the matters pertaining to Home-making, food, clothing, health, sanitation in schools, etc., and sought help from the Dept. of Agriculture who even then sent out Home Economists to help the Institutes. As the Institute members increased they sought for medical inspection in schools, and for Health Nurses, etc.,

The first District Annual was held in Dutton on June 12th, 1908, and this was really the birthday of West Elgin as a District organization. Mrs. E. V. Docker, of Wallacetown, presided, and Miss Minnie Gow, then of Wallacetown, was Secretary Treasurer, an office she held for the next ten years. There were fifty present for this first Annual Meeting.

The next year, 1909, Iona Branch sent delegates and Dutton and Rodney were represented. Mrs. B. Graham of Rodney, succeeded Mrs. Docker, and Mrs. Duncan Brown, Shedden, followed Mrs. Graham as District Presidents.

Wallacetown had now organized and sent delegates to the 1912 convention at Dutton, presided over by Mrs. C.A. Wray of Rodney. West Lorne, Fingal, and Shedden became branches of the Institute in 1913.

Miss Mary McPherson of Fingal presided for the 1913 District Annual at Dutton, only eight members were present. The Secretary's salary was raised from \$10 to \$20.

Mrs. Sims of West Lorne was president and Miss M. Gow the secretary-treasurer for 1914. Clachan Branch was organized that year.

West Elgin was organized and ready for action during the war years of 1915 to 1918 and accomplished a great deal during that time. Mrs. Trestain, Clachan; Miss L. Sells, Shedden; Mrs. Whiting, and Mrs. Wray of Rodney were District Presidents during these years, with Miss M. Gow as Secretary-Treasurer.

At the 1917 District Meeting seven branches reported raising \$3,384.00, and the war effort of West Elgin during these years was magnificent. In 1918 the branches reported \$5,693.00 raised for Red Cross work, 3,847 pairs of socks knitted, besides other sewing.

Mrs. G.A. McLevey of Rodney succeeded Miss Gow as Sec.-Treasurer for the District. The seven branches had raised \$218.00 for help in maintenance of a ward at Byron Sanitarium for returned soldiers. Then Mrs. M. McKillop, West Lorne; Mrs. J.C. McMillan, Crinan; Mrs. J.H. Sells, Shedden; Mrs. L.H. Brown, Iona; and Mrs. H.C. McKillop, West Lorne; (later Mrs. Walter Becker) guided the destiny of the District for a time.

At the 1919 Convention eight branches reported that in all they had raised \$5,044.00 in cash for the Red Cross and had knitted 2,167 pairs of socks.



At this time a committee was appointed to look into Medical Inspection of schools. The women also voted to give liberally of their funds to help with the new Memorial Hospital project in St. Thomas. As early as 1919 the Women's Institute went on record as deploring the increase in cigarette smoking.

Resolutions pertaining to the use of liquor, legal rights for women, and granting citizenship to foreigners only after learning to speak English, were brought to the 1920 Annual held in Iona. Mrs. Luke Brown was elected the first Federated Representative for West Elgin.

Mrs. George Edwards, Provincial President, visited the District at the Shedden District Annual in 1924.

Miss Ethel Chapman spoke on Vital Things in Institute Work at the 1935 Annual. Dutton came back as a re-organized branch in 1925, and Cowal organized a branch that year, also in May.

Mr. Putnam, Supt. of Institutes for some years, spoke to the Institute on getting co-operation in projects from other organizations concerned, as well as the committees themselves.

Talbotville and Payne's Mills were organized as a branch in 1927. This year West Elgin said farewell to a much respected Agricultural Representative, Mr. C. W. Buchanan, who left for Kenora District. Our District W.I.'s were happy to contribute to a parting gift for Mr. Buchanan.

One of the pleasant features of the District affairs had its beginning when the first Winter Picnic was held at Alma College McLachlan Hall - Miss Emily Guest was the speaker.

Iona Station W.I. was organized in October of 1928 by Mrs. H. McKillop and Miss Eva Morrison. Others from the District who helped were Mrs. J.C. McMillan, Crinan, and Mrs. Frank Silcox of Iona.

The Institutes had been interested in having music taught in the schools and at the 1929 District meeting a prize was voted to be given for the best ungraded school choir in the Festival.

Mrs. E.V. Docker, Mrs. G.A. McLevey, Miss M. K. Lyle, Miss M. Gow, and Mrs. N. Nickelson presided over the District Annuals from 1930 to 1940. Miss McArthur (Mrs. H. Sloan) Wallacetown, succeeded Miss Eva Morrison who had been Sec.-Treas. for thirteen years - from 1923 to 1936.

The District was twenty-five years of age at the 1933 District Annual held at Crinan. Mrs. G.A. McLevey presided and Mrs. E.V. Docker read the history of the West Elgin District. Mr. Putnam introduced the Institute paper, "Home and Country".

Interest of the Institutes was still on Home Economics and at the 1935 meeting at Clachan Mrs. Lloyd Smith gave a talk and demonstration on the making of bread. Miss Bessie McDermand spoke on program planning. The Institutes had a little earlier sponsored Public Speaking in the public schools - providing judges and prizes and carrying out the project. First winners were Raymond Downs of Iona Station and Donald Galbraith, Dutton.

The speaker from the Home Economics Dept. introduced the Home Economics program at the District Meeting in Iona in 1936.



Miss M. K. Lyle of Middlemarch was president. The Home Economist, Miss E. Collins introduced the training school and the project was "renovating of clothing."

Mrs. J.R. Futcher had been elected Federated Representative, and she, together with the following: Mrs. Annie McKellar, St. Thomas, Mrs. Harvey Miller, Rodney, Mrs. Geo. Silcox, Shedden, and Mrs. Russell Kerr, of Iona Station, presided over the District Meetings from 1940 to 1950. Boxall branch was organized in 1941.

In 1944 the war was over, and the boys who returned were accorded a banquet and reception in the Memorial Hall at Dutton. The Institutes of the District assisted in this undertaking.

Iona Station was hostess for the District Annual in 1945 when 143 were present with Mrs. Harvey Miller presiding. Mrs. J. R. Futcher, as our Provincial Board Member, presented the idea of the Tweedsmuir Village History under the project "citizenship."

Talbotville displayed the first Tweedsmuir History Book at Clachan in 1946. The next year Mrs. John McCormack of St. Thomas, whose mother started the Kensington Club at Lawrence Station, was Convener of the Talbotville Tweedsmuir History.

Mrs. George Silcox of Shedden was in office during 1947-49. Household Accounting was the project of the Home Economics program. Each branch sent \$3 for the District fee. A day's care in the sick room was a project for study.

Mrs. Hugh Carroll succeeded Mrs. Blewett as Sec-Treas., - an office she held for six years.

In 1947 at the Winter Picnic in Dutton, the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Institute at Stoney Creek was celebrated. There were 200 in attendance. Mrs. J. R. Futcher reviewed the history of the Institutes briefly. A fashion parade of old time costumes was a feature.

Many of the members of the District Branches attended the great Rally in Guelph on June 18th 1947.

Mrs. Russell Kerr presided over the 1949-51 District Meetings. It was at this time that interest was aroused in Home Economics Scholarships for girls. A resolution was sent to the Minister of Agriculture requesting that a four-year course be established for girls, and if this was not possible, then the two-year course be re-established.

The District sent a delegate, Mrs. Duncan Galbraith, Iona Station, as their representative to the Federation of Agriculture Meeting in Toronto in February, 1947. A report of the meeting was given to the District, and since then delegates have been sent to sit in at the Federation of Agriculture Meetings.

The District was very proud to have one of its members, Mrs. J. R. Futcher, serve as Provincial President and a fitting tribute was paid her by the County. Five hundred Institute members, their families and friends attended a banquet in her honour at the Masonic Temple, St. Thomas, in March of 1948. Miss Ethel Chapman and Miss Scott were there from Toronto. Mrs. Geo. Silcox, Shedden, was President of the District and was in charge of the ceremonies. Mrs. Cyril Williams, East Elgin District President presented Mrs. Futcher with a silver tea service from the county's 32 branches.



The idea of a County Museum had been mentioned and Historical Research Conveners were thinking about it.

Many of the members from West Elgin attended the Canada Day of the Associated Country Women of the World Convention held in Toronto on August 21st, 1953 at Maple Leaf Gardens - Canada's history was given in Pageant.

In 1951, the District, with Mrs. M. G. Graham as its President, held its meeting at Cowal. At this meeting Mrs. J. R. Futcher, past F.W.I.O. President, suggested that a Centennial Scholarship be set up to commemorate Elgin County's 100 years. Between East and West Elgin \$2,000 was raised by Teas, Bake Sales, etc. A Pageant was put on in St. Thomas - antique quilts were displayed at Anderson's Store in St. Thomas; all monies raised going to the Centennial Scholarship Fund. Other counties sponsored scholarships but Elgin was first to complete its fund. The money was invested and the interest given to a girl with the highest achievement in her final 4H Club year.

Mrs. Stanley Lyle of Middlemarch followed Mrs. Graham as District President. The Centennial Committee set up at Talbotville District Annual was; Mrs. Stanley Lyle, Southwold; Mrs. R. H. McNeil Dunwich; and Mrs. W.B. McMillan, Aldborough. The forming of the scholarship made it necessary to have a County Executive to look after the scholarship and any affairs such as the Museum, which pertained to both Districts. Mrs. Stanley Lyle was the first County Chairman and Mrs. Herbert Jackson, who had succeeded Mrs. Hugh Carroll, was Secretary.

It was in 1954 that the Elgin County Museum began in earnest. Mrs. Futcher had pointed out many of the advantages and the necessity of having a Museum to keep in safety the antique articles and things used by our pioneer ancestors in their way of life and in their homes. Working with the Historical Research Conveners of East and West Elgin, 32 in all, and as Convener over all, Mrs. Futcher began. The historical Doctor Duncombe house was purchased for \$10,000 and the money was raised by canvassing St. Thomas and the rural areas, donations by individuals and food sales in branches. Branches prepared rolls of rags which were later made into a rag carpet for the parlour floor of the Museum. By means of work bees the house was painted and made ready. A committee was set up to receive antiques and to arrange them, and a Curator was hired.

Mrs. R. H. McNeil was elected President of the District and presided over the 1955 Annual at Dutton. Mrs. Herbert Jackson was Sec.-Treas. The District presented Elgin Manor with an air purifier for the TV Room. The first Elgin County W.I. Centennial Scholarship winner was Miss Isabel Campbell of Shedden.

Mrs. R. N. McLellan was the second member of the West Elgin Institutes to become a Provincial Board member, following Mrs. Futcher; She had a bright, happy personality and enlivened the meetings with her wit and humour.

Mrs. Chas. Cooper of West Lorne followed Mrs. R.H. McNeil as President and Mrs. J.D. Galbraith followed Mrs. Cooper. These officers assisted the County Museum project and saw its final completion and opening.

East and West Elgin met at the County Rallies. The first two were held in Union United Church.



Mrs. R. H. McNeil succeeded Mrs. Stanley Lyle as County Chairman. The third Rally was held in Knox Presbyterian Church, St. Thomas on Oct. 4th, 1961 when Mrs. J. D. Galbraith presided and Mrs. Harvey Wales showed her pictures and told of the Federated W.I. Convention held in British Columbia. Prizes for farm safety posters were awarded. The fourth Rally was held in Grace United Church, St. Thomas, with Mrs. Gowan Young as Rally Chairman. Mrs. L. Lymburner of Port Colborne, past Prov. President, showed her pictures and told of the A.C.W.W. Convention in Australia.

Mrs. E. Down of Shedden succeeded Mrs. J. D. Galbraith as President of the District. A broadened outlook in the District was noted during these years with the branches assisting in many ways at special events of the times. West Elgin took its place at the ploughing match Institute Tent, serving tea and featuring a bake sale; some of its members assisted in the Hydro Tent. We had a display of hats and fancy work in the tea tent, and lent assistance to the Museum display.

At Wallacetown Centennial they had a pioneer kitchen, living room and bedroom set up with those in charge dressed in costumes of that time.

In 1961 and 1962, with East Elgin, the branches assisted with the celebration of the Talbot Settlement when Mr. John Ker, owner of Malahide House, the home of Colonel Talbot, allowed the public to go through the historic house. The money raised was given to the Museum Treasury.

The Institutes of West Elgin reach out a helping hand to the Mental Health Association, giving gifts to the patients at Christmas time and helping at the Hospital Carnival in July. The District President, Mrs. Vermont Pow, 1964, is a past president of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Through the conveners of Health in the branches, the District has helped in raising money for the Cancer Gift Cupboard. This has been done by teas, food sales, etc. The Institutes also assist with the Friendship School for Retarded children. The Institutes at this time are carrying on in all of these interesting phases of work. The Girls 4H Club work is one of the most important with the Institute supplying Club leaders and giving encouragement. In 1963 Mrs. Gowan Young of St. Thomas was chairman of the County Rally organization, with Mrs. Vermont Pow as 1st vice-chairman, and Mrs. Ed. Down as Secretary Treasurer. Following is a list of Centennial Scholarship Winners:

- 1953 - Miss Donna Rae Prong, Aylmer
- 1954 - Miss Marianne Summers, Aylmer
- 1955 - Miss Doris McIvor, Port Burwell
- 1956 - Miss Isobel Campbell, Shedden
- 1957 - Miss Eileen Jewell, Dutton
- 1958 - Miss Margaret Campbell, Iona Station
- 1959 - Miss Patricia Gillard, St. Thomas
- 1960 - Miss Annie Boak, Union
- 1961 - Miss Elaine Pearce, Wallacetown
- 1962 - Miss Sharon Carroll, Melbourne
- 1963 - Miss Elaine McGregor, St. Thomas, R.R. 2