

TWEEDSMUIR HISTORIES

During Lord Tweedsmuir's term as Governor-General of Canada, Lady Tweedsmuir travelled with him a great deal. She realized that Canada was still a young country as she listened to tales of the trials and tribulations of the pioneers as told by their descendants. It disturbed her that many small communities were being swallowed up as cities and towns extended their borders and nothing was being done to preserve an important part of Canadian history.

Lady Tweedsmuir was a devoted Women's Institute member in England and so she naturally turned to the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada with the challenge to do something to preserve local history. This was in 1936. Already the Provincial convener of Historical Research and Current Events in Ontario had asked the branches to collect and save the history of farms, buildings and places of interest in their communities and many scrapbooks had been started.

The challenge was accepted and by 1945 a list of "Suggestions for Compiling Tweedsmuir Village Histories" was circulated as a guide to branches in the Federation of Women's Institutes of Ontario magazine. In 1947 a Provincial Curator of Tweedsmuir Histories was appointed and she began to travel through Ontario conducting workshops. Branch committees and their curators were encouraged and instructed in more efficient methods of collecting and preserving data.

At the present time, locally, many branches are starting their second and third volumes. These histories are wonderful resource books for students and others interested in history. Before material is entered in the book it has been thoroughly researched and many valuable pictures have been preserved depicting the life of the pioneers. When the histories get to the stage where they become difficult to handle they are microfilmed so that the contents are preserved in case the original volume is destroyed through fire or other cause. One branch had an extra copy of the microfilm made and presented it to the public library in Orillia.

Although the Women's Institute is an educational rather than a money-making organization each branch considers its Tweedsmuir Histories to be a "priceless possession." It is community history provided by the people, of the people and for the people of the locality. It is kept in the home of the curator and can be viewed there at any time.

Many Women's Institute members possess a House Log or House and Farm Log. A log is the story of the house from the time it was built and it remains in the house as long as it stands. It tells what material went into the house, its occupants through the years, its builder and any alterations made.

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