

**Projects and Procedures of  
The Kalamalka Women's Institute,  
The Winfield Jr. and Sr. Women's Institutes,  
And the Okanagan Centre Women's Institute**

CHALLENGE GRANT RESEARCH PROJECT, 1999  
Danielle Slivinski

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I would like to acknowledge the help of a number of people who made this project succeed. Without their efforts, very little could have been accomplished. I wish to thank Mrs. Pat McCoubrey of Winfield for the use of her BC Women's Institute Centennial Cookbook.

Ms. Jennifer Mohan and Ms. Jane Barnes of the BC Provincial Archives  
Mrs. Dorothy Allingham of Oyama for a vivid account of the KWI,  
Mrs. Lillian Hillaby of Winfield for her information regarding the WWI,  
Mrs. Mary Came of Nelson for her clippings and her answers to all my questions regarding the Jr. WWI,  
and Mrs. Anne Land, Mrs. Ellen Baldwin, and Mrs. Doris Phillips for their memories regarding the OCWI.

I wish to also thank Mr. Peter Short for his guidance and encouragement, and the Lake Country Historical and Cultural Society for its support.

Please note that his paper examines only the major projects of the Women's Institutes, as well as their impact on the community. Further information regarding the names of board members and Institute executives at different times during the Institutes' histories can be researched to some degree at the Lake Country Museum.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Turning from her breadmaking, Adelaide Hoodless sighed in exasperation as she wiped her hands on her apron. Her baby was crying again, and she was at a loss to know what to do. He had been fed his bottle of milk just two hours ago, his diaper was dry, and he had more than enough toys to keep him happily occupied. Why was he making so much fuss?

Adelaide picked up her child from his crib and cradled him over her shoulder, gently patting his back and crooning in his ear. Her baby suddenly broke off his cries, and promptly vomited down the back of Adelaide's dress. He took up his crying once again. Adelaide was startled; her child had been drinking from a bottle for quite some time already, and had never been sick. She soon dismissed the incident and carefully put down her boy and went to change her dress. When she returned to check on her crying baby, she was shocked to find that he had vomited again on his blanket. Torn, she glanced at her rising bread, and hurriedly put on her heavy coat and winter hat. She bundled up her small son and slipped out into the brisk February winter of Ontario.

The Stoney Creek physician greeted her warmly as he ushered her quickly into his home. Concern showed plainly in his face as Adelaide explained her son's sickness and recounted all she could remember of his day. With the mention of his meal, the doctor stopped her with an upheld hand. "What kind of milk did you give him, Mrs. Hoodless?" the doctor questioned intently.

Adelaide replied that it was milk she had gotten from a dairy on her way back from visiting her sister some miles out of town. It was not the usual dairy she went to every week, but was convenient to her journey that day.

The doctor explained that her son's sickness was probably the result of the milk, which was most likely unpasteurized. Adelaide looked at him in consternation. The doctor patiently explained the dangers of unpasteurized milk, and finished with the question, "Has no-one ever told you this before?" Adelaide shook her head slowly as an idea began to take shape in her head.

Thanking the doctor, and taking the medication he offered her, she and her son quickly returned home through the cold of the late winter.

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order, the president of the Farmers' Institute invited Adelaide to speak. Mrs. Hoodless stood up and told of her recent trip to the doctor. She ended by saying, "Why are we, mothers and wives, not educated in the very things that we work with everyday? How is it that we do not know of the modern practices of things like pasteurization of milk? We are helpless in our ignorance, subjecting our children and husbands to the unknown dangers of home making! Do we not, ladies, have a responsibility, for home and country, to be knowledgeable in our humble duties? Let us join together and take it upon ourselves to learn about the latest practices in cooking, gardening, canning and other chores, so that we may conquer ignorance and protect our loved ones!"

And so began the Women's Institute movement in Canada, one that would spread throughout the provinces of the nation. It would spark the involvement of British women, and that would prompt the formation of an International organization.

Mrs. Laura Rose, the Dairy Instructor of Ontario at the time, was a part of that inaugural meeting of the first Women's Institute in Stoney Creek. She was given the responsibility of encouraging and organizing additional Women's Institutes throughout the province.<sup>1</sup> Through the efforts of the Farmers' Institutes across the country, the Department of Agriculture sent Mrs. Rose to the western provinces of Canada, and in 1909 many of BC's Women's Institutes were



Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless—1858-1910

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foundling Women's Institutes of BC.<sup>3</sup> From that meeting there evolved the motto and colors of the BC Women's Institutes. "For Home and Country" was decided upon, the phrase coined by Adelaide Hoodless in February of 1897. The colors were equally appropriate. Green symbolized the evergreen nature of the Province – and the ever growing, ever living work of the Institutes. White symbolized the majestic snow-capped mountains visible on every horizon throughout the Province – and the pure and inspiring work of the Institutes. Gold symbolized the hidden riches lying in the rocks and riverbeds of BC – and the faith and courage of those who worked as the Institute members, protecting the treasures of the home, which was the golden heart of the nation.<sup>4</sup>

In 1913, Mrs. Watt, secretary of the BC Provincial Advisory board, visited Britain. With the outbreak of the First World War, Britain was isolated by submarines off the coast and subsequently experienced a shortage of food. Mrs. Watt saw an opportunity to present the principles behind the Women's Institutes so successful in Canada. The newly formed British WIs eventually succeeded in increasing the food supply on the island from 35% to 60% of requirements.<sup>5</sup> So began the spread of the Women's Institutes throughout the world. In 1919, the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada was established, and 1933 saw the foundation of the International Women's Institutes of the World.<sup>6</sup>

Women's Institutes became a vital part of any rural community, and each took on the responsibility of meeting the different needs of their community. The formation of the Women's Institutes in the central Okanagan began in Oyama in 1914, under the name of Kalamalka Women's Institute.

#### **THE KALAMALKA WOMEN'S INSTITUTE (1914 – 1996)**

##### **BEGINNINGS**

The Kalamalka Women's Institute (KWI) was founded in 1914, under the presidency of Mrs. Trask of Oyama. Mrs. Hooper, an equally involved citizen, researched the establishment of a Women's Institute (WI) in the area, but it is unclear whether that research was prompted by the efforts of one such as Ms. Laura Rose. Regardless of the nature of the instituting, Oyama was home to one of the strongest and liveliest WIs of the Okanagan. Mrs. Trask is reputed to have been a very clever woman, and is credited with the organization of many worthwhile projects.

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A typical meeting was very businesslike. The meetings were held once a month from September to June, since many of the members worked in the packinghouses or picked in the orchards in July and August. The President, Secretary, Treasurer, and other board members were all sure to attend the meeting, and a specific agenda was always followed. Generally the minutes of the most recent meeting were passed and new issues of business were brought up and voted upon. District and Provincial conferences were held annually and every three years, respectively. At these meetings, delegates from each WI would present resolutions formed by their respective Institutes, and these were voted on and it was determined whether they would be presented to legislation. In many ways, the Women's Institutes were the non-partisan political voice of rural womenfolk, complimenting the efforts of the Farmer's Institutes\* of the day. It was not uncommon for the ladies of the Institutes to correspond with newspapers, as well. The members of an Institute would come across some case of injustice or unfairness, and these issues were always addressed during meetings. Often, the secretary would be commissioned to write a letter to the party involved, express the dissatisfaction of the members, and inevitably offer their help to remedy the situation.

The early years of the KWI were ones of many struggles, to be sure, but those years were also learning years, and the community profited from a local library, founded and operated by Institute members. In addition to the library, the KWI was paramount in the establishment of a local Health Care Nurse to see to the needs of the sick of the community.

A number of prominent projects were faithfully supported by the KWI, and at its strongest time, around 1945, the Institute helped many people, both near and far. One of the most prominent of these projects was that of the Unitarian Services Committee (USC).

#### THE USC

Dr. Hitchmanova was a sensible, down to earth, and ordinary woman. She was, however, a very remarkable woman, with a generous heart. After the Second World War, Dr. Hitchmanova settled in Ottawa and founded the USC, an organization helping the children of the world, especially those facing the hardships of the lack of the basic necessities.

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DR. LOTTA HITSCHMANOVA

Every Monday, the KWI members met in the Oyama packinghouse lunchroom. They scrounged fabric to make baby quilts, and stuffed them with old blankets. The front and back



A K.W.I. shipment of layettes and good used clothing were sent to the U.S.C. in Vancouver. Above are some of those institute members; Ruby Somerset, Dorothy Allingham, Lou Taylor, Fern Reese, Carolynne Trewihitt, Marie Ayotte, Judith Simmons and Gladys Trewihitt.

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were then tied together and the quilts were used to wrap layettes. The layettes consisted of a number of standard items, mostly handmade, which included 4 diapers, 2 shirts, 2 nighties, a bar of soap, a towel and a face cloth. The layettes were then sent to the Vancouver branch of the USC, which controlled the distribution of the layettes. The KWI often sent 100 layettes per year! The members chose which item of the layette they were to make. The ladies who made the nighties were eventually designated nightie makers, just as the shirt makers became specialized to their task. The packing of the layettes was often an onerous job, but was accomplished with much enthusiasm and cooperation. The making of the layettes was always a social event, tinged with the business of the Institute. Often a donation of approximately \$300 accompanied the layettes.

Mrs. Neville Allingham of Oyama, a member of the KWI from the early '40s until the Institute's end in 1996, remembers the KWI as being a rich part of her life. In particular, she remembers that the soap for the layettes was initially bought to meet the requirements. Eventually however, the KWI ran into the increasing cost of such an expenditure. Her husband, Neville, suggested to her one day that the women make their own soap using the fat from the meat lockers the Allinghams operated. And so it began that the KWI made 100 bars of soap annually for their layettes. Mrs. Allingham remembers one soap-making occasion in particular, one where the soap supply for that year was literally nearly shot down. Mrs. Allingham had spent hours already separating the crackle from the fat, and her crackle can and jars of fat were lined neatly along the floor of her covered garage. That evening the Allinghams were awakened to the sound of their dog barking wildly. Mr. Allingham went to check the yard and reported back to his wife that there was a cougar in the crackle can. He fetched his gun to dispatch the wild cat, but was brought up sharply by his wife, exclaiming, "Don't shoot, you'll destroy all my fat jars!" The dog was subsequently brought into the safety of the house, and the Allinghams returned to bed, leaving the cat to the crackle can!

In addition to the layettes made for the USC, the KWI supported third-world children. The USC sponsored a program for the adoption of a child in a third-world country, and the KWI, as an Institute, adopted a number of these children. Adoption of the children involved sending a sum of money every month or year in order to provide food, clothing, or education for the youngster. The USC was responsible for sending the institute a picture and history of the child. The KWI corresponded in writing to the children, and at one time the members

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were supporting 6 children! It was not uncommon however, to have individual members adopt a child of their own, which became then a personal issue. The USC now sponsors the adoption of families, and the foster parents of the children correspond regularly with those that adopt them.

#### OTHER PROJECTS

Aside from the USC, the KWI was involved in a number of other projects, which included an annual plant sale in the spring, May days, garden parties throughout the spring and fall, as well as bake sales and bazaars. Any proceeds from these events funded the KWI. This included monetary donations to the USC, the World Organization of the WIs, and the George Elliot High School Bursary. Donations were also made to the Solarium on Vancouver Island and the Crippled Children's Hospital in Vancouver, both projects started and funded by BCWIs.

#### KWI funds

The funds raised from plant sales, luncheons, teas, and bazaars went to the KWI funds. These allowed both donations to chosen charities as well as such things as sponsoring members to attend delegate meetings. These meetings were held every year, either in the form of District, Provincial, National, or World conferences. One year the KWI sent 9 members and a few husbands to Ireland for a conference of the Associated Countrywomen of the World. The party traveled a week early, rented a car, and toured the island before the conference. Such opportunities were precious, but for such a successful WI as the KWI, it was not a first.

#### The Solarium and The Crippled Children's Hospital

Donations from the KWI funds often went to a number of charities and organizations, which were patronized consistently by the KWI. Two such organizations were the Solarium on Vancouver Island and the Crippled Children's Hospital in Vancouver. A young crippled girl, Othoa Scott, spurred the foundation of both institutions, and through the efforts of the WIs of Hornby Island and Central Park, the Crippled Children's Hospital was opened in 1927. The Crippled Children's Hospital was initially housed in a 3 story building in Marpole, bearing the name of the Women's Institute Hospital Association for Crippled Children. Since that time, the building has been renovated and renewed. In 1932, the name

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was changed to the Crippled Children's Hospital, and later the name was changed again to the Children's Hospital, catering to the needs of children with disabilities of every type<sup>8</sup>.

1927 saw also the establishment of the Solarium through the efforts of the Vancouver Island WIs. Rallying behind Dr. Wace and the BCWI superintendent Mrs. MacLachlan, these women were paramount in founding a special clinic where the healing rays of the sun could comfort and help children with infantile paralysis and other maladies<sup>9</sup>. Othoa Scott was one of the first 4 patients to be admitted to the Solarium.

The KWI received monthly reports from their representative for the district on the Provincial board, regarding the affairs of the Solarium and the Crippled Children's Hospital. The KWI in turn responded to their needs by supplying cash donations, toys and blankets, especially at Christmas so that the children could all receive some kind of gift.

#### **The Red Cross**

The KWI members were ever concerned with the welfare of children especially, but also for those less fortunate. Every year, the KWI canvassed for the Red Cross foundation, and any money raised from that endeavor helped to ease some of the discomfiture of those with sicknesses.

#### **Pennies for Friendship and the Birthday Box**

Other collections of money were often carried out at the monthly meetings of the KWI. The Pennies for Friendship was such a case, as was the Birthday Box. The Pennies for Friendship was a donation box into which the members would deposit any spare change, pennies for many of the ladies who took the campaign name rather literally. The box was emptied every December, and the proceeds went to the Associated Countrywomen of the World. Because the World organization of the WIs was a rather nebulous group, and the members of that board were members of smaller WIs around the world, the association had no source of income or fund-raising opportunities. It was the responsibility of each of the distinct WIs to contribute every year whatever they could to ensure that the World association was provided for.

The Birthday Box served a similar purpose. At each meeting, the members who were to celebrate a birthday in that month contributed one cent for each of their living years. The proceeds from this box went directly to the KWI funds, and helped to finance the many projects of the Institute.

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1927 saw also the establishment of the Solarium through the efforts of the Vancouver Island WIs. Rallying behind Dr. Wace and the BCWI superintendent Mrs. MacLachlan, these women were paramount in founding a special clinic where the healing rays of the sun could comfort and help children with infantile paralysis and other maladies<sup>9</sup>. Othoa Scott was one of the first 4 patients to be admitted to the Solarium.

The KWI received monthly reports from their representative for the district on the Provincial board, regarding the affairs of the Solarium and the Crippled Children's hospital. The KWI in turn responded to their needs by supplying cash donations, toys and blankets, especially at Christmas so that the children could all receive some kind of gift.

#### **The Red Cross**

The KWI members were ever concerned with the welfare of children especially, but also for those less fortunate. Every year, the KWI canvassed for the Red Cross foundation, and any money raised from that endeavour helped to ease some of the discomfiture of those with sicknesses.

#### **Pennies for Friendship and the Birthday Box**

Other collections of money were often carried out at the monthly meetings of the KWI. The Pennies for Friendship was such a case, as was the Birthday Box. The Pennies for Friendship was a donation box into which the members would deposit any spare change, pennies for many of the ladies who took the campaign name rather literally. The box was emptied every December, and the proceeds went to the Associated Countrywomen of the World. Because the World organization of the WIs was a rather nebulous group, and the members of that board were members of smaller WIs around the world, the association had no source of income or fund-raising opportunities. It was the responsibility of each of the distinct WIs to contribute every year whatever they could to ensure that the World association was provided for.

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#### Catering

Another service offered by the KWI was that of catering. Begun in the '40s, the KWI offered this service for ten or fifteen years before the ladies were too busy to continue. The KWI often catered for weddings, anniversaries and other celebrations, and such jobs were organized by a catering committee. Mrs. Allingham remembers that there was always someone who knew how to do things right, and that the other members were always ready to learn from that teacher. To that end, there was a KWI member who always knew how to cater properly, and she would have headed the committee, or would have taught those on the committee. Proceeds from the catering jobs also helped the KWI to make their donations. However, as the ladies became busier with personal travel and other opportunities, the catering service was discontinued.

#### Other Projects

The KWI was very active in the community. Although the KWI was not, per se, a Welcome Wagon, it was not unusual for members of the KWI to be active members in other groups and to administer to these needs. KWI members were encouraged to bring the newcomers to the meetings, partly in order to welcome these ladies to the community, and partly in hopes of gaining a new member for the growing Institute.

With the newcomers, there inevitably came the barrier of language. After the Second World War, many foreigners came to Canada, and Oyama saw its share of immigrants. The KWI recognized that many of these newcomers had some difficulty with the English language and took steps to ensure that any that wished to learn the language had the opportunity to do so. One evening a week, selected members of the Institute would teach English literacy to the new citizens of their community. The program had a start and end date, and the teaching was done free of charge. The program was remembered to have been extremely popular with both men and women, and most likely very successful, too.

Other programs sponsored by the KWI included a swimming program for children in the summer. The KWI organized the times, dates and locations of the lessons, and secured a responsible and qualified instructor, while the government provided wages for the employee. The program was highly successful, and eventually became a community program, no longer organized by the KWI.

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#### PRESENTATIONS

In addition to any projects the Institute members undertook, there were usually presentations or demonstrations at the monthly meetings. Usually, these presentations were procured as a result of one of the members. Someone might suggest a topic of interest, or might mention that someone was presenting in the area. Demonstrations covered topics on home economics and involved things like icing cakes, arranging flowers, or making a craft of some kind. The presentations were educational as well, and many women learned valuable information from representatives of lawyers, brokerage firms, and other professionals. There were also tutorials of a sort on things such as income tax. Anything that was of interest of the members was addressed and the meetings were often highly educational - a trait that was the focus of the first institute procured by Adelaide Hoodless.

Arising from these presentations there were usually contests to test their knowledge and skill. For many years there were contests, sometimes organized at the Provincial level, for such things as the best houseplant or the best farm house plan. The KWI won the contest for the best farm house plan, and was subsequently awarded a sum of money. The KWI, ever conscientious and generous, donated the prize money to the Fraser Valley flood victims of that year.

The KWI was only as involved as the members belonging to it. The ladies of the Institute were always interested in the workings of the community, and the state of affairs of the world and its children. Their involvement in worthwhile projects often attracted young women with a mind to do good for others.

#### THE INSTITUTE - MEETINGS, ETC.

The gathering of new members into the Institute was an informal procedure, and often arose from the attendance of visitors at meetings. The members were always encouraged to bring a guest to the monthly meetings, and these visitors then had a chance to see the Institute in action. After attending a few meetings, some of the newcomers were sometimes encouraged to become more involved. Mrs. Allingham remembers attending only 3 or 4 meetings with her mother-in-law before being asked to act as Treasurer, and with that began her extensive 52 year involvement with the KWI. Many of those years were spent in various board positions - Mrs. Allingham was president of the KWI for 8 years! The institute

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attracted many women in their early to late twenties, women full of energy, enthusiasm, and ideas.

Contact with other Institutes was limited to District and Provincial conferences twice a year. The Institute member of the Central Okanagan were often guests of the "girls from the south" as they were commonly called. The meetings in Oliver and Osoyoos were enjoyed by nearly all the members, and some former members of the KWI still correspond with the ladies from the south. The meetings in the spring were strictly business, with the District president in attendance. The meetings in the fall were generally social visits and gave the Institute members a chance to catch up on projects and discuss new ideas.

#### THE END OF AN ERA

As the years went by, it became harder and harder for the KWI to enlist the help of younger women, and membership declined gradually. Leadership was dwindling within the group, and the older members were hard pressed to find a younger member who would volunteer to act as a Board member. This, however, might well have been overcome had it not been for some unfortunate circumstances.

The unraveling of the KWI began innocuously enough with the folding of the Winfield Women's Institute (WWI) in 1976. Upon the end of their organization, the WWI donated \$350 to act as their share of the George Elliot Bursary for the next few years. The KWI subsequently put the donation into the bank, where it remained for the next several years. The KWI also donated their share of KWI funds to the Bursary fund and the account grew. Any extra KWI funds left after the donations had been made in December were also contributed to the Bursary fund. After a number of years, the KWI had gained a significant amount of money in this fund, and since bank rates were poor at the time, the fund was withdrawn and the Institute was faced with the decision of what to do with the surplus. Many of the older members of the KWI had subsequently passed on, and the younger members of the Institute knew little of the fund. As such, when the issue came up, there was significant debate as to the fate of the money.

A younger member of the institute suggested that the money be put forth by the KWI as a donation to the Kelowna Cancer Clinic. Although it was a worthwhile project, the Cancer Clinic in Kelowna had never been an Institute project. The older members of the

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KWI, who had been earning the money since the 1960s felt that the surplus should be donated to the poor African children of the USC, an organization long patronized by the KWI. In a vote of the KWI members, it was determined by the younger majority that the money be donated to the Cancer clinic, and many older members came away that night with feelings of bitterness, anger, and disappointment. Such a division seriously depleted the morale of the Institute. When the time came to elect a new board, there were few volunteers from the younger members, and the older members were faced with another year heading an Institute in which they could no longer believe. It was decided then that the KWI would end the last chapter in the story of such a glorious and valuable organization.

Memories of a strong Institute are recalled fondly by the older members of the KWI, who still gather occasionally for lunch. Such memories are always accompanied with a feeling of pride and camaraderie; the memories are of an Institute that was strongest when it really worked hard for something in which it believed, of an Institute full of wonderful women working together, for others. It is often said by former members that one could not have been a member of any Institute if one could not think beyond oneself.



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#### WOOD'S LAKE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

The Wood's Lake WI was founded in 1916, just two years after the Kalamalka women established the KWI. Although both Institutes were subject to similar rules and regulations, the Wood's Lake WI was involved in some markedly different projects.

The Wood's Lake WI consisted at first of ladies from both Winfield and Okanagan Centre. These ladies would meet monthly to discuss Institute business and to learn new and interesting information. There was significant interest in the WI and many of the women from both communities joined. By 1921, membership for the Wood's Lake WI had soared, and there was an agreement to divide the Institute such that Okanagan Centre could boast its own Institute. Okanagan Centre Women's Institute (OCWI) was incorporated in that year. The Winfield branch maintained the name of Wood's Lake Women's Institute until 1926, when they gathered under the name of Winfield Women's Institute (WWI). The WWI founded a number of projects in the Winfield area, and the community prospered under such enthusiasm.

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### THE WINFIELD WOMEN'S INSTITUTE (1916-1976)

The WWI was involved in many things concerning the community, including health and welfare, citizenship, and education.

For the community, the WWI purchased a piano for the hall, which was, reputedly, very much needed. The hall was also supplied with curtains, an oil stove for picnics, dishes, pans and a kettle. Picnics were held for the local children, and the Girl Guides and the Boy Scouts were aided financially with the purchase of uniforms.<sup>10</sup> A youth club was founded by the Anglican Church, and since many of the youth from the United Church were interested as well, the group became non-denominational, and was sponsored for a time by the WWI until the Foresters took it over. Teen Town, as it was called, held many social events for the youth of the 1950s, and many dances and talent shows were enjoyed by all. Swimming lessons were organized and sponsored by the WWI as well, until a special community committee was formed to take over.

Baby clinics were a much-needed aspect of community life, and the WWI was always available to volunteer for the health and welfare of the most vulnerable citizens of the community. Members often helped by registering the babies and by aiding the nurses in the procedure of inoculation. The WWI members often served in a similar capacity for the blood donor clinics, which would visit the area periodically. Eventually, when the walk-in clinic was established, their services were no longer required. The welfare of the citizens of Winfield was also of great concern to the WWI. The members would frequently provide relief for needy families of the district, by providing layettes, cod liver oil, food hampers and blankets.<sup>11</sup> The Kelowna hospital was also supported by the members of the Institute, and many of the furnishings and decorative additions were supplied by the WWI. The Red Cross Loan Cupboard in the Winfield Memorial Hall was started and aided by the Institute as well, and many items were available to the public at a low cost.

The education of the community, too, was an ever-demanding project for the Institute. The WWI purchased an organ for the Elementary School and held music lessons for the children, with a prize given to the top student for the year. Books and sewing material were donated to the school for the library and home economics classes, and sports equipment was bought for the students to use. A flagpole, complete with a concrete base, ropes and pulleys, was even set up at the school.<sup>12</sup>

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The members were also careful to update their own knowledge, and several talks on topics of home economics as well as topics on many other subjects were enjoyed by the WWI ladies. Demonstrations on canning, preserving meats and fruits, dressmaking, and churning butter would often be followed by lectures on such topics as laws for women and children.

#### **OTHER PROJECTS**

In addition to caring for their community, the WWI members were always concerned for citizens of underdeveloped or war-torn countries. The WWI supported such institutes as the USC, UNESCO, the Save the Children Fund, the Vancouver Crippled Children's Hospital, the Solarium, Pennies for Friendship, and many other special circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

##### **USC**

The USC was an organization helped by nearly all the WIs of the Province, though each Institute contributed in a different way. The WWI supported the USC through donations of over 1000lbs of new and used clothing, and the members made and sent nearly the same amount of homemade soap. The Institute adopted six European children through the USC, and members corresponded and financially aided them. Ladies from the community often helped the WWI members to knit or sew for the USC, using materials supplied to them through the Institute.

##### **The British Effort**

During the Second World War the ladies of the Institute added to their list of duties a number of projects. The Winfield men serving overseas were often sent packages containing socks, razors, cigarettes and other items.

The British WIs were helped through donations of quilts, made from old coats and lined with flannelette. The bombed out Brits were also sent several pounds of jam and hundreds of jars of canned fruits and vegetables.

##### **Dances and Fundraisers**

In order to compensate for the added cost of further projects, and to offset the cost of running and Institute, the WWI held a number of fundraisers. During the War, the Institute often organized and hosted dances, pie socials, bake sales and lunch auctions. Each of these events was open to the public, and the money raised through them was for WWI funds. The Institute funds, in turn, supported the many projects of the Institute for their community and

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for other communities of the world. 1951 saw the undertaking of the WWI's most prominent fundraising project, and as a result all other fundraisers fell to the wayside, to be picked up by various church groups and other community organizations.

#### The Calendar

The idea of a calendar of events was hatched by two enthusiastic and involved members of the WWI in 1951. Mrs. Jessie Shaw and Mrs. Ida Duggan decided that it would be appropriate and helpful for the Institute to print and distribute a monthly calendar to describe the date, place and time for meetings and events held by all the organizations of Winfield. The calendar would also provide a means of advertisement for many of the local businesses, and the cost of printing and distributing the Calendar, as it came to be called, was covered by the fees to advertise in the little flyer. The Calendar was distributed to nearly every household in Winfield, three to four hundred at that time, at no cost to the people. The idea was so popular, however, that soon the cost of printing so many copies of the Calendar was so expensive that it nearly exceeded the revenue brought in by advertisers. At that point, in 1965, the WWI decided to purchase a hand-cranked printing machine, the Gestetner. Many of the women helped to operate the machine, and a Calendar Committee was formed to organize and execute the initial typing of the Calendar, and to staple and fold the now many paged newspaper. Okanagan Centre was soon added to the mailing list, and by 1973 the number of Calendars sent out had soared to over 900!<sup>14</sup>

The Calendar Committee began as just a small group of members, who gathered advertisements, collected announcements, compiled the publication, and sent it to be printed by the Capital News. One typewriter was borrowed for the job. With the purchase of the Gestetner and a second typewriter, the ladies on the Committee were responsible for the added duty of cutting stencils. All the women took turns stapling and folding the issue, and sometimes they were aided by the Girl Guides. In 1969, a Gestafax was purchased to make the stencils mechanically. Later on, when the mailing list had climbed to the 800s, an electric Gestetner was purchased by the Institute to spare the ladies the hard work of hand-cranking the copies. The printing of 12-14 pages of the Calendar often took 2 to 3 evenings since many of the women worked during the day.

By 1973, the WWI had begun the sad spiral into disbanding, and it was decided by the members to sell the Calendar. The Hospital Auxiliary took up the operation of the Calendar,

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with proceeds going to Kelowna General Hospital. After a few years, the ladies at the Hospital Auxiliary decided that the Calendar should be sold again, and Jack McCarthy purchased it in the late '70s or early '80s. Since then, the local paper has become a weekly publication, with over 3000 subscribers.

#### MEETINGS

Meetings of the WWI were conducted in much the same manner as those of the KWI, although there is special mention of variations on the process of roll call. The members of the WWI were often asked for some creative input upon the calling of their name. If the meeting was the first after the summer break, the members were asked to give an account of their summer; if it was the December meeting, the members drew the name of another member to whom they would give an anonymous gift or card for special occasions throughout the coming year, such as wedding anniversaries, birthdays, and Christmas. Sometimes the members would be asked to share recipes, household hints, or embarrassing moments. After Institute business was covered and minutes were passed, the members often enjoyed tea and a rousing time of games and singsongs. The games sometimes involved guessing a tune, or guessing answers to riddles or word problems. Quilting for fundraising or for other projects was often done in private homes and in a more social setting. With such opportunities, members of the Institute were made to feel as part of a strong group of ladies, bound together in friendship and hard work.

Camaraderie was indeed a great part of the Women's Institutes. District conventions allowed friendships to be made throughout the valley, and a special program called "Hands Across the Border" gave the Canadian and American country women a chance to meet and help each other. District meetings held in Summerland were especially enjoyed, located in such a beautiful setting. Unfortunately, even the strong friendships forged by the WWI members could not prevent the damages of changing times.

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with proceeds going to Kelowna General hospital. After a few years, the ladies at the Hospital Auxiliary decided that the Calendar should be sold again, and Jack McCarthy purchased it in the late '70s or early '80s. Since then, the local paper has become a weekly publication, with over 3000 subscribers.

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By 1973, the Calendar had been sold and the WWI was left almost exclusively with the George Elliot Bursary Fund and a few other projects. That fund was handed over in trust to the KWI, and the members of the WWI decided to fold. At a district meeting, however, the few remaining ladies were encouraged to operate in abeyance until the WWI funds were exhausted. As such, the WWI held meetings only two or three times a year and made their donations in accordance with the remaining funds. The surplus funds lasted only 3 years, and in 1976, the WWI was officially disbanded.

#### THE WINFIELD JUNIOR WOMEN'S INSTITUTE (1943-19--)

In addition to a local branch of a Women's Institute, Winfield was host to the first Junior Women's Institute in the Province. The Jr. WWI contributed to their community in a number of facets, and was especially noted for the dances held several times a year.

The Jr. WWI began simply as a Girls' Club in the fall of 1942, led by Mrs. Jessie Shaw, an active WWI member. Girls from the ages of 12-18 were welcomed, and they gathered weekly to sew, sing songs and play games. They often enjoyed tea after their meetings in the Hockey Club skating clubhouse, which was very kindly loaned to them by the Hockey Club committee during the summer months. At other times during the year, the girls would meet at their homes or at the home of Mrs. Phillips. Mrs. Phillips was an active citizen and acted as Superintendent and teacher of Sunday school at the United Church, and was no doubt a part of the parish Ladies' Aid as well. As an active member of the WWI, Mrs. Phillips was interested in encouraging the young girls to be an active and helpful group, and it was she who researched the possibility of incorporating the group into a Junior WI. As a

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result of her efforts, the Girls' Club merged into a Junior Women's Institute - the first of it's kind in BC - in June of 1943.

The first meeting of the Jr. WWI occurred in the fall of 1943, and Officer elections took place. Miss Mary White acted as President for that year, and for a number of years after. Other Office members for that inaugural year are as follows: Miss Nancy White, Vice-President; Nomand Cook, Secretary; Margaret McCarthy, Treasurer; Margaret Mitchell and Doris Williams, Directors. Mrs. Phillips, or Mrs. Jessie Shaw, would often attend or host meetings, and several other Sr. WWI members took an interest in their Jr. counterparts. The Jr. WWI members were always sure to help the Sr. members with fundraisers, teas and concerts. The girls even sent delegates to local WI rallies and Provincial WI conventions, where reports of their activities were always received with pleasure and pride. The Jr. and Sr. WWI members often met socially as well, and enjoyed many picnics, luncheons and teas.

The Jr. WWI was not all pleasure, however. The girls often had a number of projects on the go, though they did not have main projects, as did the Sr. branches of the BCWIs. The girls held fundraisers, usually in the form of dances, luncheons, picnics and other events. The proceeds from the events were put towards the Jr. WWI fund and the members decided collectively where the money should go, which was generally anywhere where there was the greatest need. Donations often went to the Sr. WWI for their projects, to the Kinsmen group for their Milk for Britain fund, or to the Jam for Britain fund. The Institute members also devoted time to the creation of ditty bags for the sailors of the war effort. Each ditty bag contained gum, candy, shaving cream, razor blades, and cigarettes, and the cloth bag and its contents were sent to and distributed by the Navy League.

The Jr. WWI dances were always well attended, and were probably the greatest source of income for the members. Some dances were exclusively for teens, both local and from the surrounding communities. Admission was charged at the door to cover expenses and supply revenue for the Institute funds. The girls would make sandwiches in the afternoon, which were served at midnight with coffee or tea, and would make a cake if enough sugar could be found to do so. Sigh Kobayashi often brought his records and sound system to provide music for the event, and was well known throughout the valley for his talents. One dance in the mid-'40s netted 64 dollars!

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The goal of each fundraiser, of course, was to enable the Jr. WWI to donate to good causes. One such cause, especially in the early 1940s, was the war effort. The Canadian government conceived a plan in order to generate badly needed funds to cover the cost of waging war. This plan involved the sale of War Savings Stamps, which could be purchased for 25cents. Each stamp could be collected in a small stamp-book, which, when filled to the amount of \$50 could be traded for a Victory Bond. The Bond could also be purchased outright. In this manner, the government received an immediate flow of money, while the purchaser benefited by earning interest on his Bond. The Jr. WI members acted frequently as "Miss Canada" girls, wearing a special smock to identify them as such, and sold War Savings Stamps on street corners and in front of shops for the drive. The girls also used some of their own funds to purchase two \$50 Victory Bonds, lending their own hands to the cause. The Jr. WWI held true to the spirit of the BCWI, always lending help to those in need. The Sr. WWI was assuredly proud of their Jr. counterparts, and it was hoped that the girls involved in this enthusiastic group would one day join the Sr. Institute.

Many of the Jr. members might well have continued on with the Sr. Institute, however, the changing times and the opportunities available to young women at the time claimed a goodly number of them. Miss Mary White, first president of the Jr. WWI left the club in 1945 in order to pursue a degree at a Kelowna business college. Other girls found similar opportunities for higher education, and still others simply found work. The Jr. WWI was, however, just as successful and as appreciated as the Sr. Institute.

It is unclear as to the exact date of disbanding of the Jr. WWI. Mrs. Phillips passed away in 1951, and as such, the Jr. Institute that depended so much on her may have folded not long after. The books, money and bonds are not to be found, though the money and bonds may have quite possibly been turned over to the Sr. Institute. What is certain, however, is that in the disbanding of the Jr. WWI, the community lost the valuable asset of youthful enthusiasm.

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### THE OKANAGAN CENTRE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE (1921-1969)

Information on the Okanagan Centre Women's Institute (OCWI) is unfortunately almost nearly as difficult to obtain as the Jr. WWI records<sup>1</sup>. Having disbanded 20 years ago, few, if any ladies that were members still remain.

As was mentioned earlier, the OCWI separated from the WWI in 1921 due to a healthy membership. The OCWI spent very little time adjusting, and were immediately involved in a number of projects for the then booming township of Okanagan Centre. In the minutes of the 1921 Annual Meeting of the OCWI a number of projects are mentioned, including the formation of a committee for visiting members and new members. The ladies were also involved in setting up a library, starting a piano fund for the much-needed addition to the local Hall, and for "Child Welfare" work. It is not clear as to the true nature or extent of Child Welfare work, however, it is clear that not all members were involved in the project. A tarmac sidewalk was laid in Okanagan Centre from the Elementary School (where the museum is now) to just past the store, about 2 city blocks. Other projects included annual Christmas concerts, where the school children would put on some short play, or sing carols. The OCWI ladies would then host Santa Clause (usually one of the husbands) and oversee the distribution of gifts. Every child was provided for, and each child, from Kindergarten to Grade 8, was given a gift chosen especially for him. Other events included skits or short plays put on for the Institute members or for the general public. These were almost certainly under the direction of Mrs. Macfarlane, a highly active WI member, and especially fond of drama. Many plays were enjoyed by the residents of Okanagan Centre through the hard work and enthusiasm of the WI members. These events were planned well in advance, and were important business at any given meeting.

Meetings were held for a number of years in the Westbury Hotel, until the Okanagan Centre Hall was fit for use sometime in the mid-'20s. Meetings were sometimes held in private homes as well. Most of the ladies in Okanagan Centre were members of the Institute, and nearly all of them walked to the meetings, some from as far away as the Rainbow Ranche,

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annual meeting included the making of lint removers, ribbon roses, and nylon pot scrapers. Some residents of Okanagan Centre remember their mothers making such things as pine needle baskets and washable leather gloves. The demonstrations were often accompanied by informative lectures on current issues involving women and children, and helped the ladies to raise a unified voice to the government in respect to those issues.

The voice of the OCWI began to waver noticeably in the mid-'60s however, though many ladies believe that the Institute experienced weak support as early as the '50s. The final annual report of the OCWI from 1969 alludes to a few of the issues the members faced,

"Mrs. Palmer came to see me and did her best to encourage us to keep together but having struggled to do so for the past two years we find it impossible...."

At our June meeting we lost our very able secretary due to ill health. It was most difficult to get anyone to fill in for her 'till the end of the year in spite of the fact that we would hold only 3 more meetings as in our area many of the members work in the packing house and find that with the canning they do after work in July, August and September they cannot attend meetings - it must be remembered that as our children attend the local school and 2 others in Winfield, the parents are obliged to attend or drive their children to attend the different evening programs and this takes many evenings all year round as well as sports activities during the holidays.

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And so it was that with the coming of summer of 1969 to the valley, Okanagan Centre faced the loss of a valuable and vocal group of ladies with a mind to do good for everyone.

#### CONCLUSION

The monumental meeting of 101 country women in the small rural town of Stoney Creek, Ontario on February 19, 1897 changed the way of life of innumerable people. Not only did it change the lives of the women involved with Women's Institutes throughout the world, but it also changed the lives of starving and suffering children, soldiers far from home, and other men and women and children in need throughout the world. Without the involvement of the Farmers' Institute of South Wentworth, quite possibly nothing may have come to pass of a sick baby and an angry mother. Though the Farmers' Institute was paramount in providing an opportunity for Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless to speak, Mrs. Hoodless herself still retains the honor as founder of one of the largest and most successful organizations of the world. What began as a simple venture to educate country women in their daily responsibilities became a vital part of rural life in communities throughout the world.

The early years of life in the Okanagan Valley were filled with the unmistakable enthusiasm and hard work of pioneers and early settlers. These were the people who helped to mould our communities into what they have become. Those early years were filled with hardships and uncertainties, but they were also filled with enormous opportunities. The settlement of the valley bred the cooperation of all those involved, since it was learned very early that there was strength in numbers. Such were the days when neighbors helped neighbors, and the welfare of one was a concern for all. Indeed, the formation of many Institutes was common. The farmers united in their common purpose; the fruit growers joined forces to ensure their fair treatment and survival; the country women, united under the inspiring efforts of Adelaide Hoodless, joined not only their voices, but also their hands and minds and hearts. What resulted was a wonderful period in our community history, rich with triumphs and the ever sought after goals of knowledge and progress.

The movement of WIs across the Country and throughout the world is still strong. Many Institutes have survived the march of time and the ever-changing needs of society. They have done so by supporting those things that are constant in every community - the

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need to help one another, especially those who have no one to help them. In a world where so very rarely a stranger will help another, the Women's Institutes still alive throughout the world continue to prove to be a wonderful blessing. Unfortunately, the Women's Institutes of the Central Okanagan are no longer at work. The inexorable march towards extinction of the three WIs of the Okanagan was a sad and unfortunate event. 1969 saw the end of the Okanagan Centre WI. Winfield faced the loss of their WI not long after Okanagan Centre, and 1976 saw the disbanding of their Institute. Oyama held on with resolve, and managed to remain active and relatively strong even into the '90s, but it too finally resigned in 1996, ending a lively chapter of Lake Country History. The loss of the KWI, WWI, and OCWI were indeed keenly felt by those helped and supported by them, both within and outside of their respective communities. That loss, however, is perhaps most keenly felt by those who were members until their disbanding. These ladies remember a time in their life when they were united with other women, sharing knowledge, hard work, and friendship. It can be truly said that not one of these ladies could have been a part of the Women's Institute had they not been able to step outside of themselves to live for others - men, women and children of their community, Province, Country, and world.

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- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- <sup>9</sup> Winfield Women's Institute, Subject File SP-998-30, Lake Country Museum Archives.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- <sup>10</sup> Winfield Women's Institute, Subject File SP998-30, Lake Country Museum Archives.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*