

**British Columbia Women's Institute
in the Early Years: Time to
Remember**
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In British Columbia in the early 1900's most women rarely participated in public affairs. Accepted activities of men and women were widely separated.¹ Into this milieu the British Columbia Women's Institute was born. The B.C.W.I. became one of the pioneer organizations supporting women's social and educational advancement. Along with the other early women's organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Local Councils of Women, the British Columbia Political Equality League and the University Women's Club of British Columbia, it helped to lay the foundation for present day broadened concepts of the role of women in British Columbia society.

Because the founding objective of the Women's Institutes was to promote household science, many women assume that W.I. interests ended there. However, modern women taking "time to remember"² and to examine the work of the B.C.W.I. from 1909 to 1930 will find an organization as much concerned with social service as with the domestic arts.

The history of the British Columbia Women's Institutes is a story of women helping women. This theme of women helping women both in the home and in the community is evident throughout Institute history; it is illustrated by Institute objectives and programs; it is seen in the lives of outstanding women who use their talents to build the Women's Institutes.

The British Columbia Women's Institute has its roots in Ontario. Farmer's Institutes were formed in Ontario in 1884 to enable farmers to learn of husbandry methods that would result in improved livestock and crop production. It was Adelaide Hoodless who, after losing her eighteen-month old son because of an impure milk supply, realized that human children, as well as livestock and crops, could benefit from informed care.³ Largely through her efforts, the world's first Women's Institute was formed in Stoney Creek, Ontario in 1897, with the purpose of raising the standard of homemaking. At the first meeting, Mrs. Hoodless said:

Why should we not meet together...to improve our
knowledge and skills and also to enjoy each other's
friendship.⁴

The one hundred and one rural women present at that initial meeting heard in Mrs. Hoodless' words the expression of their own need for the company and support of other women and their need for information and education in their roles as homemakers and citizens. At the outset, Women's Institute work in rural and isolated areas had financial support from the Ontario government, a tradition which has been continued in varying degrees through the years by provincial as well as federal governments.

The Institute movement spread rapidly in Ontario, and reached B.C. in 1909. British Columbia was the second province to organize Women's Institutes. In 1909, British Columbia was in a booming state of feverish expansion. A rush of settlers into isolated areas meant primitive living conditions and sheer loneliness for women. Observing the stabilizing effects of the Women's Institutes on rural life in Ontario, the

Department of Agriculture took the initial steps to bring the Women's Institutes to B.C.⁵ It hired Miss Laura Rose, Dairy Instructor for the Province of Ontario, as the organizer of Women's Institutes in B.C. In an early report she stated that:

B.C. is going to be among the foremost provinces in developing this work. The Institute is exactly what is needed here. The country is young; its interests need cementing together. The Institutes will be the means of bringing together under one banner...the rich and poor, the old and young, and those of all religions to receive and give valuable and practical knowledge....⁶

Under the guidance of Laura Rose, the British Columbia Women's Institute began with the formation of the first fifteen institutes in 1909 from Gordon Head on Vancouver Island to Cranbrook in the Kootenays. Born and raised in Ontario, Laura Rose was a school teacher and had experienced pioneer farm life while keeping house on her brother's farm in North Dakota. She was an honours graduate and then lecturer at the Farm Dairy School of the Ontario Agriculture College. Shortly after the formation of the first Institute, the Ontario Department of Agriculture engaged her as lecturer and organizer of Women's Institutes. Before coming to B.C., she conducted a "travelling dairy" in Nova Scotia and participated as judge of butter, bread, jam, fruit and fancy work at many rural fairs. She wrote and edited articles for farm publications. Her three hundred page book *Farm Dairying* was used as a text in agricultural colleges. Her report to the B.C. Farmers' Institutes in 1910 indicates that her duties for the department had been to tour the province explaining to the women the aims and benefits of Institute association and then to help them with initial organization and election of officers.⁷ She returned to the Ontario Department of Agriculture in that year, and by 1913 had become Mrs. F.W. Stephen.

For the first one and a half years the work of the Institutes was carried on through the office of the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Wm. Scott, who acted as superintendent of the Women's Institute. However, by 1911, as a result of the increasing number of institutes, a paid advisory board of four women, representing four districts of the province, was appointed by the government to assist the superintendent. Mrs. M.V. Davies of Chilliwack was appointed president; Madge Robertson (Mrs. Alfred Watt) of Metchosin was Secretary; Mrs. R.L. Lipsett of Summerland and Mrs. J.F. Kelby of Nelson were Directors. These women were to confer with and advise the Department of Agriculture on Institute work and women in agriculture and to carry out departmental policy as directed by the superintendent in these areas.⁸

The women of the first advisory board performed a monumental task in providing a provincial focal point for the educational work of Women's Institutes. They gathered information concerning domestic science from sister organizations, colleges and universities across the continent. They set up a circulating news bulletin as well as an exchange system of papers prepared by W.I. members; they purchased instructional pamphlets for distribution to the Institutes; they sent news releases to newspapers, and arranged for the "Vancouver Chronicle" to be sent each week to each Institute; they started an advisory board library of standard works, periodicals and newspapers and prepared a list of speakers and demonstrators available for the Institutes.⁹ All this was accomplished at a time when distances were great, travelling difficult, communication

limited and the women themselves hampered by cumbersome clothing. Mrs. Watt, the secretary, wrote an average of one hundred letters per month, in the year 1912 1913, without the aid of a typewriter or other office equipment.

The board performed its task well. The number of W.I.'s was increased and the organization was transformed from several isolated groups into a provincially integrated network of rural women. At a June 5th (1913) conference in Victoria Mr. W.E. Scott complimented the work of the secretary:

The old 'Rules and Regulations' were compiled by a man, and therefore were not perfect, and I think you will find that what has been prepared now is a great improvement.¹⁰

Earlier in the same speech he explained the reason for having created an advisory board in the following words, "You cannot expect men to manage women's affairs to best advantage...."¹¹

Prior to 1911, the institutes existed and were supported by the provincial government but they were not legally incorporated. In that year, the Department of Agriculture had an amendment passed to the Agricultural Associations Act enabling the Women's Institute to have legal status¹² and the guidance of a superintendent. The 1911 amendment listed the Women's Institute as one of the agricultural associations to come within the provisions of this act,¹³ and stated:

The formation of women's institutes for the purpose of disseminating information in regard to agriculture and of improving domestic life shall be permitted under this act....¹⁴

This made the W.I.'s eligible for the same grant as Farmers' Institutes:

The Legislative Assembly may each year set apart a certain sum of money for aiding Farmer's Institutes...to each institute whose membership is shown to amount to from fifteen to one hundred, a sum of fifty cents for each paid up member and twenty-five cents for each paid up member over one hundred.¹⁵

Additional financial support from the Department of Agriculture was provided in the form of salaries and travelling expenses of lecturers and advisory board members. The Department stimulated participation in the Fall fairs and flower shows by providing prize money.

The British Columbia Women's Institute came into being at a time ripe for its success. Women's self-awareness was awakening and women were looking for ways to control their own lives and those of their children. The Institutes presented the opportunity for rural women to develop their individual talents and to become better informed citizens.

The 1913 *B.C. Handbook of Women's Institutes* lists their aims and objectives as follows:

The aims and objectives of the Institute are to improve conditions of rural life, so that settlement may

be permanent and prosperous in the farming communities

(a) By study of home economics, child welfare, prevention of disease, local neighbourhood needs, of industrial and social conditions and laws affecting women and their work;

(b) By making the Institutes a social and educational centre and a means of welcoming new settlers;

(c) By encouragement of agriculture and other local and home industries for women.¹⁶

Behind these objectives can be felt the need of lonely, isolated women to band together for self-development. Accordingly, programs with these goals in mind were carried out. To comply with the first objective, pamphlets or lectures on such topics as Cookery, Gardening, Procedures and Conduct of Meetings, A Woman's Poultry and Fruit Farm, Extermination of Flies and Mosquitoes, Laws of B.C. Relating to Women, Dressmaking and Women on School Boards were made available to the Institutes.¹⁷

Examples of the caliber of information circulated to the members of the W.I. are found in the publications of Alice Ravenhill: "The Place and Purpose of Family Life", "The Preparation of Food", "Some Labour-Saving Devices in the Home", "Food and Diet" and "The Care of Children".¹⁸

When Alice Ravenhill came to Victoria in 1910, she found "ruts inches deep in the unpaved streets"¹⁹ and the road to her home was a track winding its way through thick bush. She and her sister came from England to keep house for their "menfolk", a brother and his son, who had preceded them in order to homestead at Shawnigan Lake.

Now Alice Ravenhill is perhaps best known for her publication in aid of preserving native Indian culture in British Columbia. However, within the annals of the B.C.W.I., she is remembered as one of their vital founding members.²⁰ Before coming to B.C., Miss Ravenhill had gained conspicuous success as a pioneer in preventative medicine, public health, home economics, sanitation and hygiene in Great Britain. She was the first woman Fellow of the Royal Sanitary Institute of London. Her hope that her experience in these matters would be placed in the service of her new country was never fully realized.²¹ However, the B.C. Department of Agriculture hired her from 1911 to 1917 to organize Women's Institutes and write bulletins for their use. Soon after her arrival in British Columbia, an early issue of "The Chronicle: A Weekly Newspaper for Women" (Vancouver, Friday, November 10th, 1911) featured a full length photograph of Miss Alice Ravenhill on its front page and directed its readers to an interview with "An Authority on Child Study, Domestic Science and Education". The writer summed up Alice Ravenhill's expertise in the following words.

Miss Ravenhill is looked on by the leading school medical officers in England as one of the best authorities on Hygiene. She is on the councils of the chief societies connected with education, sanitation and childhood.²²

In 1911, chauffeured by a driver with a rig and a team of horses, Miss Ravenhill and two companions, one of whom was Mrs. Watt, made a two week tour of Fraser Valley and southern Vancouver Island giving two lectures a day. They were paid four

dollars a day plus travelling expenses. At one of their hotel stops, the beds were changed only once a week and, as Miss Ravenhill recounted, they did not arrive on that "favoured" night.²³

By 1915, she was appointed to the advisory board and in the capacity headed a deputation for the establishment of a Chair of Home Economics at the University of British Columbia. While this was an established feature at eastern universities, it was to take many more years for it to become a reality at U.B.C. She left the services of the Department of Agriculture in 1917 to become Director of Home Economics, Utah State College. After her return to Victoria in 1919, she resumed her W.I. interests and in 1925 joined the Queen Alexandra Solarium Committee which was responsible for selecting and submitting for approval estimates for hospital equipment. As a result of the W.I.'s request for her guidance in adapting native designs for hooked rugs, her interest in the arts and crafts of the B.C. Indians was stimulated. In the thirties she became a local authority on this subject.²⁴ By the time the University of British Columbia conferred upon her an honorary Doctorate of Science in 1948, she had contributed to the life of the province in a variety of ways.

While each Institute came under the umbrella of the Provincial Board they were nevertheless completely independent and carried out projects to serve the needs of their individual community, whether it was building a community hall, having rural mail delivery instituted or ensuring that the local school had proper toilets. However, while local self-help projects claimed increasing amounts of time, the Provincial Advisory Board was also concerned with education in spheres other than hygiene, needlework, and fruit farming. By August 1912, lecturers recommended by the Advisory Board included "Mrs. H.E. MacGill", more familiarly known to us now as Helen Gregory MacGill, and Margaret Jenkins. The former is associated with the topics of "Procedure and Conduct of Meetings, Women's Organizations in Vancouver" and the latter with "Women on School Boards, Women's Organizations in Victoria".²⁵ The members of the Women's Institute became familiar with the ideas of most public personalities of the political equality movement despite the fact that in the early days of British Columbia "domestic duty constituted the one correct sphere for women".²⁶ A report on laws prepared by Mrs. Cecilia Spofford, an outstanding leader in the B.C. feminist movement, was recommended reading.²⁷ In 1913, Mrs. Gordon Grant, another outstanding British Columbia feminist, addressed a Vancouver Island Women's Institute Conference on the topic of "The Legal Status of Women in British Columbia". She pointed out the nature of legal discrimination against women and children.²⁸ Later, at a 1922 conference, Judge Helen MacGill, the author of *Daughters, Wives and Mothers in British Columbia* (1913), was still reviewing laws affecting women and children.²⁹ Because of this information, the subject of legislation was given a place at W.I. meetings and conferences. A typical resolution was passed appealing to local legislative representatives to review the laws of B.C. relating to women and children with a view to their betterment.³⁰

Despite an obvious interest in laws affecting women and children there is little evidence of active participation of Women's Institutes in the women's suffrage movement. The well-known claim to being non-partisan and non-sectarian was interpreted by Superintendent Scott to mean that the franchise itself was not an acceptable Institute project. "While it was right to study laws affecting women, he considered it best to leave alone the question of women's suffrage."³¹ Nevertheless,

individual W.I. members were certainly interested in suffrage for women. Elizabeth Roberts MacDonald, of the Nelson W.I., delivered to a W.I. conference a lengthy and impassioned plea for individual support of suffrage which was reprinted in the official handbook covering the year's events. In her introductory remarks she said:

I wonder if the funny side of our being denied the vote has ever struck any of you? One half of the human race has calmly arrogated to itself a right which belongs in equal measure to the other half - and the other half...has submitted!³²

Evangeline "Vangie" Shaw (Mrs. James MacLachlan), who would later be the first woman superintendent of the Institute, campaigned for women suffrage on Vancouver Island.³³ Speaking in 1915 to a Women's Institute Conference, Mrs. Fosberry, of the Summerland W.I., said that women had passed through the stage of slavery and in the 20th century were going to take an "intelligent interest" in marking their ballot.³⁴ After the franchise, at a 1925 conference Miss Lottie Bowren said "a vote was women's way to liberty"³⁵ and local Institute records show that voting for women was considered to be both a privilege and a duty. In the interests of child welfare, W.I. members were encouraged to offer themselves as school trustees³⁶ and many Institutes reported members working on School Boards.

The First World War (1914-1918) affected the work of the Women's Institute. Every Women's Institute in British Columbia threw itself into war work. In addition to sewing, knitting and raising money for patriotic purposes, they were called upon to work the farms, increase agricultural production,³⁷ conserve food, eat less and spend less.³⁸ This was not the first time that Institute women had been seen as an integral part of agriculture. The earliest *British Columbia Handbook of Women's Institutes* (1913) had listed one of its three objectives as "the encouragement of agriculture...for women."

Agriculture for women was a usual topic for discussion at meetings and conferences. With considerable enthusiasm, Mrs. Watt, secretary of the first Advisory Board, made herself familiar with the needs of would-be women farmers (chiefly from England) who were interested in settling in British Columbia. She proposed that part of the Federal Grant available to the Department of Agriculture be used to establish some form of Farm Settlement "where women farmers could learn local conditions before starting on farms on their own, and where they could stay while they were looking out for land."³⁹ The final Board recommendations of August 1912 to the Minister looked to the Colonial Intelligence League of London, England to "furnish, equip and maintain the settlement" although "the province would own the land and permanent buildings".⁴⁰ In the same recommendation it was provided that "women and girls from British Columbia or other Provinces of Canada would be able...to participate in the benefits of such a settlement".⁴¹

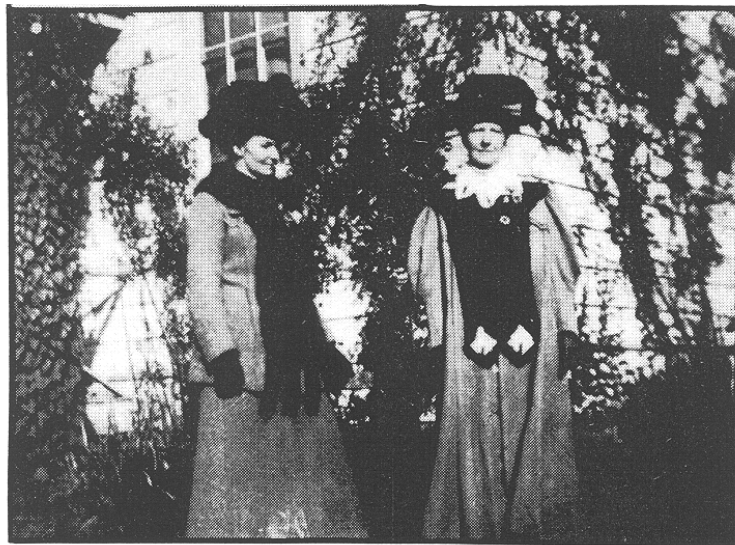


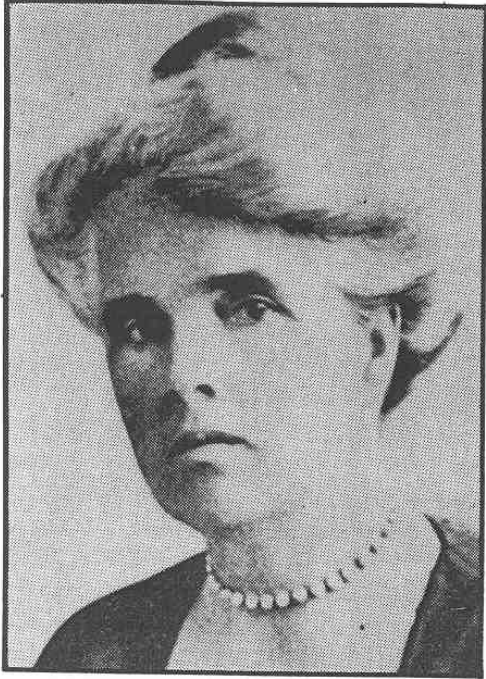
Visit to the Saanich Memorial Health Centre by delegates of the Provincial and Federated Women's Institutes. June, 1925.



(left) Mrs. Alice Ravenhill, 1917

(below) Mrs. Laura Stephen Rose (standing on left): Milne's Landing, B.C., Circa 1909





*(left) Mrs. Alfred Watt, M.A., M.B.E.
(below) Mrs. V.S. MacLachlan, B.C.
Women's Institute Superintendent
1926 - 1946.*



Horticulture and the lighter phases of farming (poultry raising, bee keeping, flower growing, and small fruits) were commonly women's work. The Summerland W.I. organized in 1915 a fruit shipping department.⁴² It began with the exchange of butter and cheese products with prairie Homemakers Clubs. Then fresh fruit began to be called for on a cash basis. Price lists were printed and a secretary-manager appointed. The operation lasted until 1923 when B.C. Tree Fruits were organized. One member of Hatzic W.I., at the request of the fruit growers, organized and supervised entertainment for berry pickers two nights a week during the fruit season.⁴³ Children's interest in agriculture was stimulated by children's flower and vegetable competitions at local fairs.

As a result of Women's Institute objectives, the lives of rural women in B.C. were changing. As one unidentified W.I. member said:

We do not live in homes anymore; we eat and sleep
and work there, but we live in communities.⁴⁴

The Institute became a social and educational centre. Mrs. Stella Welch, B.C.W.I. superintendent (1946 - 1958), feels that the reason Women's Institutes became such a vital part of the lives of rural women was because they did achieve this function.⁴⁵ In a time when farms were far apart and radio and television were non-existent, the W.I. meeting provided a wonderful way for country women to feel closer together. Educational opportunities for them were scarce⁴⁶ and they seized upon these W.I. meetings as a place to satisfy their desire for knowledge. The impact of the W.I. in their lives is recorded in the stories of women who would walk ten miles through snow, heat or mosquitoes to get to their meetings. Others, dependent for transportation on horses that refused to stop, were willing to risk a running hop into the wagon and timed rolling off into a snowbank.

Changing interests and activities of the early boards reflect the developing social consciousness in the women of that time. Flower show, Fall fairs, handicrafts, lectures on domestic and agricultural subjects remained an integral part of the W.I.'s programs. However, board proposals included more forward looking topics: eugenics; sex hygiene; cooperation between producer and consumer; business methods for women; public health; recreation for young people and public service opportunities for women. In keeping with the post-war climate, the substantive work of the Women's Institutes centred upon health care. After the war (1919), Evangeline Shaw (Mrs. James MacLachlan), a prominent W.I. member, was appointed secretary to the Advisory Board. In 1926, she became the first woman superintendent, a post she did not relinquish until 1946. Her pre-war interest in health and nursing found fuller expression in the following decades so that the Women's Institute, and "Mrs. Mac" became synonymous with the field of public health services. No wonder she has been described as "quite a martinet".⁴⁷

Keenly interested in the welfare of women and children she launched a "Well Bay Clinic" in Royal Oak in 1909, and the South Saanich Anti-Tuberculosis Society. She helped establish the first Victorian Order of Nurses in Greater Vancouver. When she travelled to all the Institute districts, the first superintendent to do so, she encouraged women of the Institutes to campaign for public health services and dental clinics. Due to the active promotion of Mrs. MacLachlan and W.I. members, a public health building was erected as a war memorial at Royal Oak, Southern Vancouver Island in 1920. Other outstanding public health achievements of the Women's Institute were the Otho

Scott Fund, the Children's Hospital (Vancouver), and the Queen Alexandra Solarium (Victoria).⁴⁸

The Othoa Scott Fund began in aid of Othoa, a little girl with a tubercular spine. From this beginning the "Fund for Crippled Children of B.C." was set up in 1923 for the use of destitute crippled children and for those families who could contribute only partly to their children's medical expenses. The next year the decision was made to set aside a sum of money to establish a building fund for a Hospital for Crippled Children in Vancouver. Concurrently a Vancouver Island fund for a solarium was established in Victoria. Consequently, in 1927 the sixteen bed Crippled Children's Hospital in Vancouver and the thirty-bed Queen Alexandra Solarium in Victoria were opened.

The Othoa Scott Fund is still available to crippled children in need. The Children's Hospital, as it is now called, is presently in a state of transition with a new three story hospital being projected to be in operation by January 1981. The Queen Alexandra Solarium rapidly outgrew its original facilities and has been functioning at a new and large site since 1958.

Because provincial statistics in the twenties showed rural people to be in a poorer state of health than city people, the B.C. Department of Health undertook to establish health centres throughout the province.⁴⁹ It requested the support of the B.C.W.I.'s as the best means of reaching the people of B.C. By 1930, 132 public health nurses had been appointed as a result of W.I. representation.⁵⁰

On the whole, the dealings between the Women's Institutes and the Department of Agriculture appear to have been harmonious. However, from its inception the nature of the Advisory Board was a topic of concern. Mrs. Watt, in her first report as appointed paid secretary of the appointed paid four-woman Advisory Board (1912), wrote:

There is no precedent to guide in the formation and organization of a Board, at once advisory to the Department, executive in its capacity, and with functions such as acquiring and disseminating information.⁵¹

and

It was necessary also to get in touch with the Institutes and here all caution had to be observed since there might be thought to be interference with individual Institutes.⁵²

and

The members are new to their position; to acquire the special official viewpoint, to give sympathetic attention to the diverse problems suggested, and yet not in any way to exceed their duties, but in every way to fulfill their responsibilities was not an easy task for women occupying for the first time, positions of this nature.⁵³

This was not to be the last time Mrs. Watt identified the difficulty of representing the Women's Institutes to her government employer. When she was President of the advisory board in 1920, she again said that "it was difficult for members to act both in an executive capacity for the Women's Institute and as a departmental representative".⁵⁴ On that occasion, she was reminded of the obligation to carry out departmental policies.

There were other times of dissension. In 1920, Mrs. McLaughlin was locked out of an advisory board meeting by the other members. These five women then approached the Minister, protesting Mrs. MacLachlan's appointment as secretary, but were reminded their role was to advise, not to instruct the Minister.⁵⁵ The year 1927 showed conflicting emotions within the W.I.'s. One newspaper reports W.I. resentment of official supervision⁵⁶ while another records a desire on the part of one Women's Institute for government intervention.⁵⁷ Also, there were accusations and denials in the House of political partisanship in both Mrs. MacLachlan's appointment and within the Women's Institute itself.⁵⁸

Given the original dependent structure, it is instructive to note the changes which led to increased independence of the Women's Institute. The early appointed advisory boards began to urge provincial conventions as early as 1914 and continued to do so until the first one took place in 1924 in Vancouver. While this conference had delegates from all four districts, not until the Provincial Conference in the following year in Victoria was the old appointed Advisory Board obsolete. With the 1925 meeting the first elected Provincial Board was formed. In 1926, Mrs. MacLachlan became the first woman superintendent. Until 1958, an elected provincial board and woman departmental superintendent continued to guide the work of the B.C. Women's Institute. When Stella Dynes (Mrs. J. Welch) retired as superintendent (1958) she was not replaced. At that time, the British Columbia Women's Institute became autonomous except for the fact that the Provincial Ministry of Agriculture continues to provide for a provincial office and now makes an annual grant.

While it was due to the foresight of the B.C. Department of Agriculture that the Women's Institute was brought to British Columbia, it developed to independence with the direction of capable women who were interested in helping other women. Laura Rose Stephen, Alice Ravenhill, and Vangie MacLachlan are a representative few of the outstanding women who organized, administered and encouraged women to unite for their own advancement. However, in the work of Mrs. Alfred Watt we see the concept of rural women working collectively carried to the national and international level. If the Women's Institute of Ontario was the inspiration for Adelaide Hoodless, then the Federation of Women's Institutes of Canada (Winnipeg, 1919)⁵⁹ and the Associated Country Women of the World (Stockholm, 1933)⁶⁰ were the inspiration for Mrs. Alfred Watt.

After graduating with an M.A. from the University of Toronto and after working a year in newspaper work in New York, she married Dr. Watt and came to William Head, B.C., at the turn of the century. In the early years when she lived on the Island, her interest in education for women was very conspicuous. Her volunteer work began in 1910 with the Metchosin Women's Institute, where she learned and participated in food production, conservation and economics. She assisted in organizing Women's Institutes and was appointed paid secretary on the first advisory board in 1911. In 1912, she represented the City of Victoria on the University Commission. In the same year, she was elected President of the University Women's Club of Vancouver Island and the President of the Vancouver Island's Press Association.

As early as her 1912 Annual Report of the Advisory Board she writes of "trying to work up the idea of cooperation between the Provinces of Canada" like "official publications, a Central Council, an Official Organ and so forth".⁶¹ In her first efforts she

urged that the Ontario Women's Institute badge and motto be the choice of all other provinces. While not all the provinces had Women's Institutes, those which did followed her suggestion. One of the 1912 resolutions was "That the idea of a Dominion Council be considered later, when there were Women's Institutes in other provinces."⁶² Seemingly undaunted by the lack of dominion and provincial annual conferences. Mrs. Watt urged individual Institutes to send delegates to the Second International Convention of Farm Women (1912) in Lethbridge. She attended as British Columbia's official representative and was elected Second Vice-President of the Congress.

On the death of her husband in 1913, she took her two sons to England for their education. With the advent of World War I, Mrs. Watt recognized the need for the formation of Women's Institutes in Great Britain. The Agriculture Organization Society whom she had interested in her project asked her to promote the formation of Women's Institutes. As Chief Organizer of Women's Institutes under the Board of Agriculture, she founded one hundred branches. According to Lady Isabel Margesson, an interested supporter of the W.I. movement,

She had not only to rouse interest, she had to inspire belief in the hitherto unbelievable fact that Government looked to home-tied women for valuable help and actually was prepared to meet their efforts by substantial support.⁶³

Under Mrs. Watt's guidance in Britain, the Women's Institutes organized a food production campaign in which the food supply was increased.⁶⁴ The significance of this to the wartime survival of Great Britain was acknowledged when Mrs. Watt was honoured by the king as a "Member of the British Empire".

After the war, having returned from England, Mrs. Watt, along with Judge Emily Murphy and Laura Rose Stephen, met in Winnipeg in February, 1919. There, "representatives from each of the provinces" met "to discuss the idea so dear to the hear of Mrs. Watt"⁶⁵ - a national organization. So the Federation of Women's Institutes of Canada became a fact and more women looked to each other for strength. While superintendents sat on the Federated Board they were not given the voting powers allotted to members from each province.⁶⁶

Mrs. Watt envisioned a world-wide association of Women's Institutes that would promote general friendliness and good will. She began promotion for this with the Support of Emily Murphy in 1923 and her efforts were realized in 1933. The Associated Country Women of the World was formed in Stockholm in that year, with Mrs. Watt as president.

The British Columbia Women's Institutes, in gratitude for Mrs. Watt's pioneer work on their behalf, have placed two memorials in Beacon Hill Park, Victoria. An Almey crabtree was planted in 1964 and in 1967 a granite and bronze plaque was erected.⁶⁷ There can be little doubt that Mrs. Watt looked to provincial, national and international organizations of country women as a way of gaining autonomy for the Women's Institute - over its own programs and over the communities in which they thrived.

The British Columbia Women's Institute arose in answer to the needs of isolated rural women. Their work together has contributed much to British Columbia society.

Members of the institute have been too reticent about this contribution. As Stanley Burke, editor of the Nanaimo Times wrote,

We have too much taken you for granted...People
don't know enough about the wonderful work you
have done. Stand up and shout.⁶⁸

Footnotes

¹ Alice Ravenhill, *Memories of an Educational Pioneer* (Toronto and Vancouver: J.M. Dent and Sons [Canada] Ltd., 1951), p. 180

² Margaret Bedford, "A Pause to Remember", *The Daily Colonist* (Victoria), July 13, 1975, p. 10. (Sunday section)

³ *Handbook of B.C.W.I.*, B.C. Department of Agriculture. B.C.I.W. office, Victoria, B.C.

⁴ Adelaide Hoodless, Margaret Bedford, *op. cit.*, p. 10

⁵ Jill Douglas, ed., *Modern Pioneers, 1909 - 1959*. British Columbia Women's Institute (Evergreen Press Ltd.), p. 14 (n.d.).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷ *Handbook of British Columbia Women's Institutes*. Province of B.C., Department of Agriculture (Victoria, B.C.: Don McDarmid Printer to the King's Most excellent Majesty, 1949), pp. 43 - 47.

⁸ B.C. Department of Agriculture (Women's Institute). Bulletin No. 54. *Handbook of Women's Institutes with Report of Advisory Board* (Victoria, B.C. Printed by Authority of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 1913), p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 9

¹³ B.C. Legislature, *An Act Respecting Agricultural Association* [1st March, 1911.] Second Session of the Twelfth Parliament of British Columbia (Victoria, B.C.: Richard Wolfenden I.S.O., V.D. Printer to the King's Most excellent Majesty, 1911). Ch. 2.S.4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Ch. 2.S.35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Ch. 2.S.31.

¹⁶ B.C. Department of Agriculture (Women's Institute) Bulletin No. 54, *op. cit.*, p. 4

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 161 - 162.

¹⁸ Province of British Columbia Department of Agriculture, Bulletin No. 52, *Annual Report of Advisory Board of Women's Institute*, August 1911 to August 1912 (Victoria, B.C.: Wm. H. Cullin, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1913), p. 55.

¹⁹ Ravenhill, *op. cit.*, p. 176

²⁰ She was paid secretary to the Advisory Board in 1915 - 1916.

²¹ Ravenhill, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

²² "A Noted Educationalist: Alice Ravenhill", *The Chronicle: A Weekly Newspaper for Women*, Vol. 1, no. 11 (November 11, 1911), p. 15.

²³ Ravenhill, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

²⁴ Alice Ravenhill, *The Native Tribes of British Columbia* (Victoria, 1938).

²⁵ Bulletin No. 52, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁶ Ravenhill, *op. cit.* p. 180

²⁷ Mrs. M.M. Henderson, "Laws for Women and Children", *Women's Institute of B.C. Year Book, 1923 - 24* (Vancouver. B.C.: McBeath Spedding Ltd.), p. 36.

²⁸ Bulletin No. 54, *op. cit.* p. 50.

²⁹ "Finds B.C. Laws for Women Good", *Victoria Times*, October 12, 1922, p. 1.

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- ³¹ *Advisory Board of Women's Institute of British Columbia*, 2nd copy of Minutes of the semi-annual meeting of W.I.'s for B.C., 1914, Vol. 1, p. 6.
- ³² Elizabeth Roberts MacDonald, B.C. Department of Agriculture (Women's Institute) Bulletin No. 54, "Women's Suffrage", *op. cit.* pp. 171 -174.
- ³³ *Modern Pioneers: 1909 - 1959*, p. 24.
- ³⁴ Mrs. Fosberry, "Opportunities for Women in the 20th Century", Province of British Columbia, *Annual Report of Women's Institutes, 1915*, *op. cit.* p. 73.
- ³⁵ "Women Offer Reasons Why do not Run for Office," *The Daily Colonist* (Victoria), October 9, 1925, p. 5.
- ³⁶ Mrs. V.S. MacLachlan, Report of Secretary of B.C. Women's Institute, 1920, *Reports of Women's Institute Work in B.C. from 1910*. Taken from the Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture (Victoria, B.C.: B.C.W.I. office) p. Q111.
- ³⁷ Virginia H. Johnston, *The Agricultural Journal*, Victoria, B.C.: Published monthly by the Department of Agriculture, June 1917, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 70.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, August, 1917, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 121.
- ³⁹ Bulletin No. 52., *op. cit.*, p. 26.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- ⁴² "Summerland W.I. Conference", *The Penticton Herald*. May 2, 1960, p. 7.
- ⁴³ Mrs. M.E. Lyne, "Advisory Board Member Report", *Women's Institute of B.C. Year Book, 1923 - 24.*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
- ⁴⁴ Mrs. Howard Fergusson, "Canada - How Women's Institutes Enliven Rural Life" in *What the Country Women of the World are Doing.*, ed. Shoto Watt (Keighley, Eng.: Wadsworth and Co., The Rydal Press, 1933), p. 32.
- ⁴⁵ Mrs. Stella Welch, private interview held at her home in West Vancouver, B.C., June 9, 1980.
- ⁴⁶ Susan R. Witter, "An Historical Study of Adult Education in Two Canadian Women's Organizations: The Federated Women's Institutes of Canada and the Young Women's Christian Association of Canada, 1870 - 1978". (Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, 1979), p. 9.
- ⁴⁷ Mrs. E.G. Woodward, Past President, B.C. Provincial Board, B.C.W.I., telephone interview, May 22, 1980.
- ⁴⁸ *Modern Pioneers*, p. 24.
- ⁴⁹ *Reports of Women's Institute Work in B.C. from 1910* (B.C.W.I.: Victoria office), p. PQ110.
- ⁵⁰ *Modern Pioneers*, *op. cit.* p. 17.
- ⁵¹ Bulletin No. 52, *op. cit.*, p. 7
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 8
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 9
- ⁵⁴ Mrs. Alfred Watt, as Chairman, Meeting of Advisory Board of W.I. for B.C. August 24 & 25, 1920, *Advisory Board of Women's Institute of British Columbia*, Vol. 1, p. 181.
- ⁵⁵ "Lawmakers Find the Gentle Sex Interesting Topic", *The Victoria Daily Times*, March 11, 1920, p. 1.
- ⁵⁶ "W.I.'s Object to Supervision by B.C. Government", *The Vancouver Daily Province*, February 17, 1929, p. 28.
- ⁵⁷ "Politics in W.I.'s", *The Victoria Daily Times*, February 28, 1928, p. 6
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ⁵⁹ *Modern Pioneers*, *op. cit.*, p. 27. The contributor says, "She was godmother",. See also the private papers of Mrs. H.J. Welch, still in her possession - uncatalogued.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8
- ⁶¹ Bulletin No. 52, p. 16.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 31
- ⁶³ Lady Isabel Margesson, "In Appreciation of Mrs. Watt", *The First Women's Institute School (Sussex, 1918)*. Compiled by Mrs. Alfred Watt and Miss Nest Lloyd. Edited and published by the Executive Committee of the Sussex Federation of Women's Institutes, 1918.

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- ⁶⁵ *Modern Pioneers, op. cit.*, p. 7.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8
- ⁶⁷ Mrs. Dorothy Freeston, Secretary, South Vancouver Island District, 1980, telephone interview, May 23, 1980.
- ⁶⁸ Stanley Burke, "Do You Know Who Proposed B.C.'s Dogwood Emblem?" *The Nanaimo Times*, April 22, 1980, p. 1

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