

## **Treasured Ontario Rural Histories to be Formatted for Online Access**

Guelph, Ontario / 2009 Nov 19

Joy Trimble, President of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario and Don Hinchley, President of the Ontario Genealogical Society, today signed an agreement to digitize and place on line the rural histories known as the Tweedsmuir Histories.

Since 1920 the Ontario Branches of the Women's Institute have been gathering local history and preserving it in book form. Because the WI is largely a rural organization, these are histories of small communities. There are about a thousand of them, comprising an estimated half million pages of local Ontario history. They are one-of-a-kind and only a few have been photocopied or digitized. Many are in delicate condition and so are at-risk documents.

The project will take at least three years. As they are prepared, the digitized Histories will be placed in the OGS e-Library where anyone can borrow and read them. There will be a small borrowing fee; the money will go to the maintenance of the original Histories and to the operation of the lending system. The project will identify, conserve, preserve, and digitize all available Ontario Tweedsmuir Histories.

### **Tweedsmuir Histories**

The Women's Institute has been interested in local history since 1920. In the late 1940s, Lady Tweedsmuir (wife of a former Governor-General of Canada and an active participant in the WI) encouraged the creation of local histories by each WI Branch. Of the then 1 500 WI Branches, 989 are known to have created a local history of their area. The books include a history of the local settlers in the area, the agricultural practices and industries that formed the basis of the local economy, the social institutions such as churches, schools and community centres, and local personalities. For many tiny communities, the Tweedsmuir History is the only history created. Copyright to the Tweedsmuir Histories is owned by the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.

### **Women's Institute**

The first Women's Institute was established in Stoney Creek, Ontario in 1897 and has grown to be an international organization. The provincial body for the WI Branches is the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO), a not-for-profit charitable organization with affiliations around the world, working with and for women in rural and small-town Ontario. Through the network of Branches, they offer educational programming and community support; advocate for social, environmental and economic change; and work towards the personal growth of all women, for home and country. Originally set up to provide training and education to women and to address concerns in rural communities, the WI now offers women a mutual support structure as well as an opportunity to advocate on important issues close to its members' hearts. The WI has become a fundamental part of many women's lives throughout the world. It is committed to developing women's talents and today has links with over 8 million women in some 60 countries. The FWIO has about 6 000 Members in Ontario.

### **Ontario Genealogical Society**

The Ontario Genealogical Society (OGS) is a registered charity, founded in 1961 with the mandate "To encourage, assist and bring together all those interested in the pursuit of family

history”. It has slightly less than 5 000 Members, most living in Ontario although a significant number live elsewhere. The OGS has 30 Branches in all parts of Ontario and two Special Interest Groups.

The OGS operates a scanning project named “Keeping and Valuing Ontario’s Heritage” which enables it, in partnership with Ontario's heritage organizations such as archives, museums and libraries, to digitize and place on the OGS website considerable quantities of material of genealogical value. The project has been underway for six months and is still in the data-gathering stage. The Tweedsmuir Histories will be a significant component of this project. The project has received core funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Cultural Strategic Investment Fund of the Ontario Ministry of Culture, and the Jackman Foundation.

Additional funding is being sought for the conservation and preservation of the Tweedsmuir Histories and to fund the salaries of interns to help train future professionals in the conservation, preservation, and digitization of paper documents.

-30-

**For more information, contact:**

FWIO: Lynn Ruigrok, Executive Director 519-836-3078

OGS: Dr Fraser Dunford, Executive Director 416-489-0734

**Helpful Links:**

Tweedsmuir Histories

<http://www.fwio.on.ca/Contribute/tweedsmuir/tweedsmuir.asp>

Federated Women’s Institutes of Ontario

<http://www.fwio.on.ca/Contribute/about/about.asp>

Ontario Genealogical Society

<http://www.ogs.on.ca/>

Background: OGS Scanning Project – Keeping and Valuing Ontario’s Heritage

<http://www.ogs.on.ca/home/news.php#trillium>