

Interview of Mrs. D. Murray by Georgina Garrett
~~--on Women's Institutes~~

A: ...my father and Mr. Cooper were friends, and I knew she was an Institute lady, and that was, I felt, part of their project. There was an Institute in Pearson, but they weren't getting, I mean, they were going along befriending everybody, but again there was no money for the, you know, with them, or for them. No way of raising money, because nobody had any. So I told, wrote to Mrs. Cooper and I told her that I had a family, or two, with children in it and so on and they were lacking this and that and the other. Could they help, because often kids outgrow things. You know how it is still today. So, by golly, they had a shower shall we call it and boxes of stuff I had my present, my husband now, he is at present but at that time he wasn't, pick up the stuff and brought it out, and so we were able to help a number of the families that way. Well then another time, a couple of families were really hard up for food. Really, you'd think living on a farm there was food, but the crops were poor and so they had potatoes and that was about all. So I wrote to her again. I said "We need some help, can you help us?" So, they did. Then jars of fruit, cans of beans, cans--anything and everything, boxes of stuff. _____ I married my husband and we came into town. So east Fort William by that time--and then I was a, had joined the Institute out there. Their Secretary-Treasurer, well, just quit in the middle of a year, so who was going to take it? And I used to go to

the meetings when I could, after school. So, I said, "Well I can't meet with you people at two or two-thirty, 'cause school's on. But what we could do, I saw the Inspector, and he said 'well, if the senior girls want to go to the meetings, where they could have them in the school, teach through the noon hour or give them fifteen minutes for lunch'". So that's what we did, and then the senior girls came, we had it in the school from then on. So that, and then so I took the Secretary-Treasurer for them, and finished out that year, and then as I say, we were married, and I came into town. Eastfort, Westfort were both pulling me. Westfort was easier, I could walk down Brown Street to the homes; the other way was a longer walk. The younger group in Westfort, my own age. But I felt, well, Eastfort has done so much for me, I just said "Can you help", and help came. So that's how I got into Eastfort.

Q: What year was that?

A: Nineteen fourty-one.

A: practically the same, I would say. Oh sure, each community's going to have something different, or something, but as a whole

2: But you want to get an overall picture, too. It's actually their likeness that comes across, but then that's a good thing too, because it's women united.

A: That's right.

2: ...Which is really.....

A: Which is right, yeah...

Q: It's the similarities that stand out more than the differences.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: I know, yesterday in Dorion, where I was talking to Mrs. Atkinson. She was mentioning that the Women's Institute, the women were very close despite racial differences, ethnic background, whatever. So, I would sort of like to find out, is that true of the Thunder Bay rural woman? I don't really know. How close were, lets say, Finnish women farmers to people from the British Isles, or were they, did the women have to be self-sufficient.

A: Well, there again, I'd say, I taught in a, first taught in a Finnish community. There were no English people in that community.

Q: In Pearson?

A: No, no. In Chabaqua..

Q: Oh yeah.

A: You see, there again, I would say, now at Chabaqua, they didn't have an Institute. They stayed more or less to themselves.....

Q: Well we're not just doing Institutes, you know.

A: No. And there in that area the Finnish people stayed more or less to themselves. Oh there were, down at the station, the section people were Ukrainian descent, talked Ukrainian at home, Finnish _____. And when I was out there, there was only one lady, really, that talked

Englishe, and she had gone to school there, and taught, and not taught but, she married, and they had a store, and so I, that was my companion. You see, I boarded with her mother. The children spoke Finnish, as soon as they--Finn or Finnish, whatever you want-- as soon as they left the school and home. And some of the parents realized that wasn't good and they said to me "Make them talk English all the time. You see, the parents couldn't, a good many of the parents, some of the men could and the odd woman, but they were afraid of putting their subject or their verb, you know, mixing it up. They were afraid of that, and so they were very hesitant about talking English to anyone, not just to me, but to anybody. And ahm,--that could talk English.

We Well, you can't follow every child home. In the schoolyard, I did insist after I them in Finnish, but even in the schoolyard, see, they would talk Finn. Well, naturally, that's their language.

2: Sure, it would come easiest.

A: So I insisted after that, in the schoolyard, that they did. I said, "You might, as well. You're here to learn, you might as well learn." You know we got along well; I loved them. I was out there three years, and it was just one big happy family. They were very good to me, those people, very good. Well, then when I went into Pearson, well then you had a mixture, well mostly English...

Q: Some were Scandinavian.

A: ...--Anglo-Saxon. Uhm?

Q: Some were Scandinavian, the Olsen's?

A: Yes, the Olsen's were Scandinavian, but, but, what will I say, as much or more Anglo-Saxon as the Anglo-Saxon. You know what I mean. There was no distinction there. There was one or two Finnish families, but they were, they were accepted, and they carried on with all the rest of us. Maybe a little bit different ^{right} there, I don't know what it was. But as a whole, they all got along together and worked together, and when there was something on, well they all worked, you know, they all carried on. Like I know, through the school end of it, you know, the concerts and things like that. So the families naturally were more eager to help or something.

Q: Do you think the women co-operated a great deal, and helped each other out alot?

A: Oh, I think so. Oh, yes.

Q: In what ways?

Q: Well, when there was sickness, they would help out, ayh, go and help people. Now, in Chabaqua, the lady I stayed with, as I say, it was all, mostly Finnish settlement, she had no nursing training, but whenever there was somebody sick or a baby on the way, there was an English-- an Anglo-Saxon lady, young couple, what, three or four miles down the road going to have a baby, so they came with the hand car rail, ^{you know,} they borrowed one of those somehow and got her to go there. So it was the same thing in Pearson, although they went into town to have

babies, but at the same time, when there was illness or something, they co-operated. When somebody got burned or-- burnt out or something, they all co-operated. It was a happy situation. Oh, yes, they would co-operate. Ah, yes. Well, I don't know, maybe half a mile, a mile away from somebody, that's your neighbour. You don't care what they are, as long as _____ you go and talk or you have a cup of tea or something like that, ayh. You know what I mean, it, it's.....

2: Yeah. yet probably people would integrate an awful lot better, simply because of circumstances.

A: That's right, yeah, yeah.

Q: Do you think farm women were treated, on the whole, as equals to the men, or were they treated sort of somewhat subserviant, next to the animals or something?

A: I can only talk for two areas. Chabaqua, I would even think the women were the boss, the head of the household. They sort of told, tell them what they were going to do. No, they weren't treated as animals or, or...

Q: Not as animals, but what I mean is....

A: No, no, I know, but I mean No, no. So far as I know, they're, and in many cases, I'm just thinking back to, oh, four or five definite families in the area, you know, where the woman was sort of the boss of the house, sort of thing. And in Pearson, I think they were equals. They would talk, any house I was in, they would talk about what they were goinna do or something, you know, and a crop had to be done, or this had to be

done. Women helped; they had to. You know, out in the fields and that, because there wasn't always enough help. Not all women, but some of them. But there was none of this ah, no. Not like you used to think. 'Course, I think these ahm, the father and then the mother down in the house were years and years ago. Before _____ out in the rural areas. And certain types of people, too. Certain races.

Q: So do you think the work of women was always valued as highly as that of men. Of course, I suppose the work was somewhat the same.

A: Well, I think, like they knew that the--I think it was valued, because the woman did her work in the house, which was necessary to keep the man going, ayh, And if the haying time, and she was needed, I think the father or the husband appreciated the fact that the mother went out and helped to _____, or whatever had to be done. In any of the communities I were in, yes. Now in the, in the Pearson section where I was, the man would get the potatoes and so on. The women would go out and help. I often used to go after four. Out in Chabaqua, another rural area, Finnish area, the women did that sort of work. That was women's work rather than men's work, and yet the man didn't look down on woman because she did that sort of thing, you know.

Q: What did the women do with the children when they did farm work?

A: Took them with them if they could, or there'd be

somebody else to look after them, like in the older children. I don't ever remember any child being left alone in the house. And then again, as I say, and some of those times I was there when the children were not tiny little ones. There was a few families that had little ones, but then there always bigger ones to look after the little ones if mother was out in the field or so.

Q: Did you ever get the impression that maybe the women were a little disappointed with the circumstances, some of them coming from cities in Britian, or Scandinavia, and then being plunked in the middle of Northwestern Ontario bush?

A: Well, there weren't too many--there were some that had come from, whose husbands had good jobs in town, and went out to the farm, because the farm was the thing to do, make a living, get the kids out on the farm, you know, out of trouble, and they'd had lovely homes and so on in town, But I never heard any complaints. They sort of accepted it. It was the kids they were coming out for, and they accepted it. It was harder work than in town, because you had a well to get water from and so on, and especially Anita (?) , I don't remember. Now again in Pearson it's different now. They have taps and they turn them on. But when I was out there it was well water or you hauled your water from the _____. But there was always a youngster to do that, you know, mother didn't have to do that. But most of them accepted their lot.

One lady, of Norwegian descent I think it was, her husband was a housepainter in town. He got the idea the country was the only place, so he went out to Pardee, which is further on than Pearson. And not knowing anything about building a house, he built a house down at the bottom of the hill. Well, in the spring, the water used to leak right through the house. Now, I did hear her complain, but who wouldn't. Not complain, but say "Why did we ever leave?" They came down, they had to come down the river, in the spring when they came there, in a canoe, in a boat, so they paddled their way down. And then, she didn't know anymore about where to build a house than he did, and so as I say. But never again did I hear her say, "Oh, I'm going to leave", like today you hear, "Gee, I'm not puttin' up with it, I'm gettin' out, and if you don't come, I'll go on my own". 'Course, the women didn't do that then, what thirty years ago, thirty-five, forty years ago. Thirty-seven years, anyway. But yet, every year the same thing happened, until finally they did build another place. But this went on for on years and years. No, I can't really ever say that I, maybe because the people that I came into contact with hadn't had moeny or an affluent life in the country they'd come from. I know a lady that came out, her husband went out to Scobol, and she had been well-to-do. Well she accepted it. They didn't stay there long, because I don't, I, well, a few years. She was, when my baby

was born, she was the nurse in the hospital. She was a nurse, and she'd had, they'd had a good living, in England, and came out, and then he got this crazy, you know, I shouldn't say crazy, but the idea your going to live on a farm. He got this piece of land in Scobol where nobody could raise anything. But after a few years they went back to town. Again, I never heard her say, "What the dickens did we do that"--she did say, "Coming from London to here", you know, but never did I hear her grumble about it. I think there's more grumbling today. I don't know.

Q: Were the daughters of the families treated as valuably as the boys? I know that sometimes that's _____.

A: Well, agian I say, from what I gathered, yes. I think when you think of that idea, you're going back before my day in the country. Maybe eighteen ninety's or something, or nineteen hundred's, where they wanted boys so they could work on the farm, ayh? But in many cases, where there were no boys, the girls helped the father. So, I mean, they were, they perhaps couldn't work as hard as the boys, but still they did the job, too. In fact, one family out in Pearson, there were four or five boys and three girls, and the ~~one~~ one girl, she didn't like to work in, so she worked as hard as the boys did outside. She loved that, and so she was treated as an equal by her brothers as well as by the father. The mother often used to say she shouldn't be working like that, she should be in the house doing things. But she

she wanted to stay outside. Any that I have contact with, yeah.

Q: How did you feel as a woman teacher out in the bush?

A: In the bush. And Chabaqua was bush then, because they were just building the highway out through there.

Actually, I liked it very--at first, it was a, sort of a frightening experience, because I went in where no one was talked to. You see, where I boarded, the lady could say "Eat, now" or "oppetaja", that's the Finnish word for teacher. But after the first month, I was very homesick the first month, I didn't want to eat or anything. But after that, I just loved the place.

Q: How old were you when you went out?

A: Twenty. Through normal school, I didn't go to University, I took University sometime after. And I came home once a month. Department of Highways was working out there, or Ministry of Highways, it's not a Department. They had a truck, and I'd get a ride with them Friday nights and go back Sunday night with one of the men that were going back to the camp. The road was passable.

Q: I read that, especially among the Finns, ^{the} women teachers were really highly respected.

A: Oh, yes. I was. I didn't want to say that, but oh, yes. And through this girl whose husband had the store, through Laura, she told me that the people, oh, the Inspector told me too. He said that they didn't know anything

about the system of education or any--you know, things like that. So they left it up to me, and they knew it would be all right. And I was very highly respected. And very, very well treated. Gifts at Christmas--now, again, they were hard up, too, and so it wasn't gifts of stockings, or things like that, but jars of fruit to bring home to my mother. You see, not only through me, but through my mother. Chickens and beef, and stuff like that, where in those days we didn't have a fridge, and so it was just the same, that stuff. Oh, no. And yet when I left--and they left the system of education up to me, and I did, I honestly did my best. Because of their trust, too. But then I was, I'm not meaning to boast, but I wanted to do the best I could. When I went out to Pearson, it was different. We had one family in there--it was the system, writing. At first the children printed. Well then the new system, Mr. Mustard the new Minister of Education said they must learn to write. Well it's harder for a child to write than it is to print, so I used to teach so much printing at the start and then write. And I got ever so many letters from pare--from this one particular family, about them writing. You know, (garbled). I guess they'd read the paper, and knew there was going to be writing instead of printing, and so on, in letters. Well, I didn't get any, never got a--'course they couldn't write in English at Chabaqua, but at the same time, they left it to you. For the best results.

Q: Yeah. Ahm. Oh. When did you leave teaching? Did you retire in town?

A: No. I taught three years at Chabaqua, five years at Pearson, and then I got married, and that was it.

Q: Were you not allowed to teach as a married woman? I know that that was the case earlier.

A: Well, it was to a certain extent. Well, I didn't want to, my husband was, it was war time, and my husband was wanting to get in the Air Force. Well they turned him down. So he tried to get in the army, and they turned him down, because his heart. And I had, they had wanted me to come to town, like when I got married, to teach, but at that time, if he'd gone away, I was gonna go too. And that was my, you know, my , what we were going to do. So I didn't get into town right away. And then I felt, well, I had enough to do. I was interested in making his home, and I belonged to the Institute, and you get into other things through the Women's Institute. Well then we had a daughter and then when,--I would never go to work, I said, while she was young, so when she went to kindergarten. And it wasn't 'til she was grade five that I went back to supply teaching. But only ^{to} two or three schools. I'd be home when she was home. Now I know today, the system was different, altogether. That isn't the thing to do. You go and you get a babysitter. But I didn't believe in that. And then I supplied at _____
_____ three or four years ago. I could have gone on

teaching, but I didn't want to.

Q: Do you think work outside the home is important for women? You were a teacher.

A: That's hard to answer. I think that's up to the individual, why? You know, like myself,--well, I have these other interests outside the home. There's no money with it. Depends too, on what, whether the woman's working for money to get something, or what. It's up to the individual.

Q: Why did you want to be a teacher?

A: Uhm?

Q: Why did you want to be a teacher?

A: Oh, because when I was going to highschool, the depression was on, and there were three places you worked, in a store, or a nurse, or a teacher. You couldn't be--and there was no air hostesses or anything like that, you know. No. And so, I just happened, I went into teaching. I liked children, I liked teaching. We also, every summer used to play school when we were kids, and I was always the teacher. So the kids knew their multiplication tables when they went back to school. Oh no, I enjoyed it. Maybe if there'd been, if it was today I wouldn't have. There's so many opportunities, I might have flitted from job to job, because there's so many things that I would have loved to have been in. Public relations, journalist and so on. My daughter has the life, had the life until she got married what I would have enjoyed. She went through journalism, then she worked for the

government, was up on the hill, you know, _____ oh,
boy, and travelled the country. But. . . .

Q: ?

A: ?

Q: So you think things are better for women now?

A: Well again, I--yeah, I---they have more opportunities,
don't they?

Q: Uhm uhm.

A: Because of more opportunities, though, do they take
life--well, maybe we took it too seriously. I think
anybody that was raised during the depression, they
used to--ah, you people weren't?

2: ?

A: No.

2: ?

A: No, I know you don't. But I mean, those who went
through Depression find, we took life too seriously,
and I think we still have that tendency to compare
today all this money back to when you had nothing, or
when you had maybe had one pair of shoes; the sole
wore out. As I heard the other night on the radio,
_____just stick cardboard in your shoe. Now I'm
not meaning that that happened with everybody and so
on, but ahm, oh, opportunities ^{today} are greater

And again, if a woman feels that she wants to be
outside the home, I think that's between the--if she's
married, between her and her husband, jor something. j
It's hard to make a yes or no out of that, because

there are different circumstances, different.....You hear women saying, "Well, I have the brains, why shouldn't I do this if I can still have children and get the babysitter, in?" Well, when they get married, if they both think that way, well....

Q: It's hard to make a (end of tape)

This has been Georgina Garrett talking to Mrs. Doreen Murray, June 21st, 1978, in Thunder Bay South.