



# The New Dundee Women's Institute Tweedsmuir Story

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**By Marilyn A. Sararus**

In 2007 the New Dundee Women's Institute celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. To mark this very special occasion they have created a legacy gift to the community. They have digitized the Tweedsmuir Village History Books and put them on line where they can be used and enjoyed by anyone interested in the history of Wilmot Township. Not only the New Dundee WI branch of books – but also the Tweedsmuir Collection of the Haysville and the New Hamburg Women's Institutes, as their organizations are no longer functioning. This has been a huge undertaking for a group of sixty women.

The very first Women's Institute was organized in 1897 in Wentworth County. The object of the first organization was to promote better homemaking and good citizenship among rural women. This organization has grown to be the largest rural organization for women in the world. The focus now is for personal growth through education and community action.

In the mid 1930's, Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor General of Canada, and his wife, Lady Tweedsmuir took a great interest in the Women's Institutes in this country. They stressed the need for preserving the history of the Canadian people and suggested that Ontario Women's Institute Branches keep local history books. In 1940 Lady Tweedsmuir approved these histories and named them after her husband, the Governor-General. So originated "The Tweedsmuir Village History Books."

Tweedsmuir History Books capture, record and preserve local community history in a very unique way. They vary in form from a simple scrapbook to an elaborate leather bound volume secured with a key. They are comprised of a wide variety of information which includes the history of the local Women's Institute, earliest settlers in the area, agricultural practices, the history of family farms, history of businesses and industries that form the basis of the local community, history of local churches, schools, community centres etc. They record local personalities and events, records of war veterans and support of our troops and much, much more.

Now, the Institutes in this area took this mandate very seriously. In the 1930's and 1940's they began compiling their own local history books. Presently, the Wilmot Township collection contains over 30 albums and records and over 175 years of history. The first ones were hand written and give many details of pioneers in our area. They contain many photographs and newspaper articles, as well. The scrapbooks chronicle life in New Dundee, Roseville, Rosebank and Mannheim, Haysville, Southwest Wilmot and New Hamburg and area.

Many local women spent much time compiling these records. If it had not been for the passion, vision and commitment of these Institute women, this valuable resource would not have been preserved to this day.

Until this time, the scrapbooks have been stored in cupboards and closets and have been available to members for teas and functions, upon request. Some of the newspaper articles and handwritten pages are deteriorating and becoming very fragile. Now Haysville and New Hamburg Branches of the WI have disbanded so the location of some of these books was unknown.

The New Dundee Tweedsmuir committee had been evaluating and realizing the immensity of this treasure, and felt that it was important for this information to be made available to the public. Many people, including genealogists, historians, archivists, librarians, educators, students and persons interested in their family and community history would benefit from being able to scan these books.

So the members of the New Dundee Institute unanimously agreed to undertake this project as their 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary legacy gift to the community. However, this task was too big to achieve alone. As a result they partnered with The Township of Wilmot, Heritage Wilmot and Our Ontario - a division of Knowledge Ontario, a government organization, which provides free assistance to Heritage Organizations seeking to get historical content online. In October 2008 they hired a Project Manager for the task, Corey Everett, from Cambridge, Ontario. Corey is a graduate from Western Ontario with a Masters Degree in Public History and an area of expertise in digital history.

Corey scanned the images from the pages, created a website and has put them on this site. All of the pages have also been microfilmed which preserves them for up to 500 years. The host for the website will be the Township of Wilmot with a link under Heritage Wilmot. They are also on the "Our Ontario" website. The website will allow visitors to browse through all of the Tweedsmuir History books online; they can be searched by name, subject, and place.

Corey also began the creation of exciting educational programming to accompany the website. This will appeal to the Grade Two and Grade Three curriculum and the Grade Ten Academics and Applied History course.

This has been a very big undertaking for our Institute. As we were able to fund only a portion of this project, we applied for grants, and financial support from individuals and organizations to complete this project. We set a budget for \$25,000 to complete this task. The New Dundee WI supported it with seed money for the project. We have received generous support, both financial and in-kind from the Township of Wilmot and Heritage Wilmot, the New Dundee Optimists and the New Dundee Board of Trade and the Waterloo Regional Heritage Foundation, as well as have many individuals in this area.

### Project Outcome

With the funds that we were able to raise, the New Dundee Women's Institute purchased a large format scanner that has been donated to the Sir Adam Beck Archives at Wilmot Township in appreciation for the use of their facilities for the duration of this project. The Tweedsmuir books are safely in the possession of the Archives and are no longer housed in closets, drawers and basements.

In return Corey has:

- Scanned all of the more than 30 Tweedsmuir books of the Institutes of New Dundee, Haysville and New Hamburg. She used Adobe Photoshop to edit the images scanned.
- Placed a watermark on each page for copyright purposes.
- Converted all of the images into microfilm, which includes an archival silver copy that can last up to 500 years, and a working copy that can be viewed on the Microfilm reader in the Ralph Shantz Reading Room at the Township Office.
- Partnered with 'Our Ontario', a website service through the Ontario Government. This allowed Corey to develop our own website which is hosted by 'Our Ontario.' All of the books have been loaded onto this website at <http://images.ourontario.ca/wilmot/>. In time there will be a link under Heritage Wilmot, on the Wilmot Township website entitled "Tweedsmuir."
- Used an external program called "Zoomify Express" which allows website visitors to rotate images 360 degrees.
- Used Abby FineReader, which is an Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software which will help to make the books completely searchable by name and location.
- Hired students who typed out all of the words that were printed or handwritten, which allowed OCR, so that all books online are completely and fully searchable.
- Created exciting educational programming to accompany the website, which appeals to the Grade Two, Three and Ten curriculum.
- Completed extensive research into making of historically accurate podcasts which are dramatic audio files that accompany the educational programming, which is also available online.
- Used Our Ontario software to create photo essays – available online.
- Gathered wedding photos of members of the Women's Institute to give as a power-point presentation at their fundraiser "A Century of Bridal Fashions." And made into CD's for sale as a result.

This has been a very big undertaking for our organization. We were thrilled to work with Corey and with the quantity and quality of work that she has completed. She was a delight to work with and very, very capable and knowledgeable in the field of local public history and digitization. She was a 'perfect fit' for this project.

However, now that we have completed this phase of the project, we know there is still a lot more to accomplish. More Tweedsmuir books have come our way. We are now positioned to take our Educational programs into Wilmot Township schools and into the Regional Libraries. We have hired a part-time University student, Alysha Hunsberger, to continue what Corey has begun. So our fund-raising efforts are continuing. We have been able to stick to our budget, and exceed our project plan progress. Take a peek at our website at <http://images.ourontario.ca/wilmot/> to see what has been accomplished.