



## The Women's Institute and the "Tweedsmuir"

Sue Lisk looks at a valuable resource for genealogists with Canadian roots

**W**HEN I FIRST HEARD MY COUSINS IN ARNPRIOR, ONTARIO discussing what sounded like "tweedsmirs", I figured a "tweedsmir" might be some kind of warm Canadian sweater, perhaps one with a Scottish connection. After all, I'd met quite a few people of Scottish or Irish descent here in the Ottawa Valley. I'd been thinking that I should compile my own small dictionary of terms and phrases typical of the region, and here was yet another word I could include.



In 1947, Lady Tweedsmuir officially approved the naming of the Tweedsmuir Community History Books of the Women's Institutes after her deceased husband. Governor General of Canada, Lord Tweedsmuir, and his wife, Lady Tweedsmuir, visiting President Roosevelt and his wife in Washington, DC in 1937. (Library of Congress)

But as the conversation continued, it became clear that a "tweedsmir" wasn't an item of clothing, but rather some kind of record connected with "WI". I was sure that didn't stand for "Wisconsin".

I learned that, in fact, WI stood for "Women's Institute", a women's

organization established in Stoney Creek, Ontario at the turn of the twentieth century. The organization has done much good over the years, and has given a special gift to genealogists with Canadian connections: the "Tweedsmuir Community History Books".

### The Beginning

Adelaide Hoodless, with the assistance of Erland and Janet Lee, founded the first "Women's Institute" in 1897. A number of years earlier, Adelaide's youngest child died after having ingested contaminated milk. Partly as a result of this experience, Adelaide wished to educate women in practical household skills to better enable them to care for their families and themselves.

She began to travel, speaking at various venues in Ontario. Erland Lee was so inspired by one of her speeches that he invited her to speak at his Farmers' Institute. Farmers' Institutes provided their members with educational opportunities related to farming and agriculture.

Adelaide agreed and spoke about her desire to create a group for women modelled after the Farmers' Institutes. The notion