



Inducted: 2005

An educator and mentor for young women, Emily Jane Guest did much for families in rural Ontario and overseas. At a time when few farm children, and especially very few young women, received higher education, Miss Guest was a scholar of note. Achieving post-graduate degrees, she became a popular teacher in Parkhill and Belleville. During World War I, Miss Guest established Women's Institutes across Great Britain, achieving the goal of food conservation, which was a wartime emergency. Upon her return to Canada when the war ended, she travelled across the province, including remote areas of Ontario, helping establish Women's Institutes, by lecturing, teaching and writing. As her death approached, she was gladdened to see the second generation of young women taking part in Women's Institutes.

**EMILY JANE GUEST
1871 – 1936**

As one of the pioneers in the Women's Institute movement, Emily Jane Guest gave much back to her rural community. According to the Birr Women's Institute's Tweedsmuir History, she possessed great optimism and a delightful sense of humour.

Born on a farm, located on what is now known as highway #4, just south of Elginfield, Miss Guest grew up in a family of six children, all of whom became well-educated and achieved success in their various careers. Her parents were of Irish descent. Emily's father, John Guest, had an apple orchard and organized the Ilderton Apple Association. The family was active in Birr Methodist Church

Young Emily caught the 8:00 a.m. Lucan-to-London stagecoach each day to attend public school in Birr. Because of the transportation difficulties, she did not attend secondary school in Lucan, but instead took lessons in oil painting and music, and read books on every subject she could. Eventually her parents allowed her to take the buggy to high school and she continued her education, later enrolling at the London University (now the University of Western Ontario). She earned her B.A. and M.A. at the Toronto University, then moving on to study at Oxford University in England and Columbia University in New York – an amazing education for anyone, let alone a woman, in 1901.

Miss Guest taught at Parkhill Collegiate Institute in North Middlesex, and established the Parkhill Women's Institute. She moved on to Belleville Collegiate Institute and was appointed head of the History & English Department in 1912.

When she returned to her parents' home for holidays, neighbourhood children were always delighted to visit with her. She was a great mentor, listening to the concerns of the young, and encouraging them in their reading.

She became preoccupied with concern for young people who had enlisted to fight in World War I, particularly her sister Dr. Edna Guest who had gone to the front in 1915. Miss Guest asked for a leave from her teaching position in order to serve in Britain in August 1916. She was appointed to the British Red Cross to look after the needs of wounded Canadians. As the food shortage became acute in Great Britain in 1917, she took a position with the British government. She organized Women's Institutes throughout Scotland, Wales and England, concentrating on food conservation.

When she left Britain at the war's end, she was presented with a beautiful jeweled brooch-pin, designed with the crest of the Women's Institute, and a maple leaf honouring Canada at one end and the Rose of Britain on the other, all inset with pearls. After Miss Guest's death in 1936, this pin was given to the Birr Women's Institute to be worn in turn by each president.

After a tour of the poppy-covered graves of young soldiers in Belgium and France, Miss Guest returned to Canada in November 1919. She accepted a position with the Administration Department with the Ontario government in Toronto. She traveled to Women's Institutes across Ontario, lecturing and writing. Her work took her to isolated areas in Northern Ontario. She continued with her interest in young people, establishing programs for Junior Institute groups. She conducted contests that resulted in prizes sponsored by the Ontario Department of Agriculture being awarded each year at the Canadian National Exhibition. Frequently, she accompanied the winners on trips to places such as Chicago.

Her writing skills led her to becoming a member of the Toronto Women's Press Club, and she had many articles published promoting the welfare of Canadian country life. Just prior to her death on May 12, 1936, she wrote, "Goodbye to the Women's Institutes that have done so much for a beautiful Canada – it has been a privilege to live and see the second generation carry on. I leave them now, myself joyous and confident."

As a tribute to her leadership and mentoring ability, Emily Jane Guest has been nominated by the Birr Women's Institute and is today inducted into the Middlesex County Agricultural Hall of Fame.