

#### LAKE COWICHAN WOMEN'S AUXILIARY

This <sup>are</sup> is a composite tape with former members of the Lake Cowichan Women's Auxiliary: Eva Wilson, Lori Belin, Lil Godfrey, June Olsen and Mary Greenwell, who were active in the Women's Auxiliary of the IWA at Lake Cowichan during the 1930's and 1940's. In the tape the women tell of their family and work <sup>histories</sup> ~~backgrounds~~ and their subsequent involvement with the Union Auxiliary. The women come out of very different <sup>experiences</sup> ~~backgrounds~~: some <sup>from</sup> with strong trade union families (Nanaimo miners) and others from anti-union <sup>to</sup> ~~backgrounds~~. Most came to "The Lake" as young women ~~who~~ married loggers. June Olsen, however, came as a teenager, grew up in Lake Cowichan and joined her friends in the Auxiliary. Conditions in the 1930's were primitive: couples lived in shacks without plumbing or electricity, the hospital was in Chemainus and the road was terrible. The Women's Auxiliary was pulled together in the 1930's by Edna Brown with the help of some of the organizers for the union. It helped to cut across the isolation which many of the young wives experienced and to draw them into the struggle to organize the woods. The organizers went from home to home <sup>and</sup> to isolated logging camps organizing the auxiliary. Women were concerned with safety, logging was (and is) an extremely dangerous business, getting a better road to the hospital, protecting and providing funds and cover for the union organizers. As the auxiliary developed its functions expanded and it became the central instrument in creating a community at Lake Cowichan: providing social events, education, political involvement, establishing the P.T.A., Red Cross, swimming lessons, <sup>a</sup> theatre group, doing War support work, getting fresh milk into the town, organizing a children's parade, Dominion Day and Labour Day events, a Lady of the Lake contest, and coordinating with other women's groups, as well as supporting the union's activities. The members attended conventions of the union and federated auxiliary in Vancouver and Eugene and were instrumental in forming auxiliary policy across the IWA because of the large numbers and success of their organization. In 1946, during the <sup>strike</sup> ~~march~~ to Victoria during the ~~strike~~, the Lake Cowichan women marched in the front of the trekkers. In Victoria, they organized food and lodgings with other auxiliaries. In 1948, the Lake Cowichan Auxiliary split, the majority of its members <sup>going</sup> ~~went~~ with the WIUC. These years saw some violent confrontations, for example at Iron River, where the IWA crossed WIUC picket lines. The women <sup>and their husbands</sup> were excluded ~~as were their husbands~~ from the new IWA auxiliary at the Lake after the WIUC collapsed and some of them became involved in the CO-OP, while others later did support work for the IWA when their husbands re-entered the IWA.

#### VERNA LEDGER

Mrs. Ledger worked in a bank until 1953, when she moved to a job at Canadian Forest Products as a dryer feeder in the plywood mill, to better support her two children. There were 900 - 1,000