

NIAGARA PENINSULA WEEKLY

Thursday, July 15, 1965

ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO
P.O. BOX 101, PORT COLBORNE, ONT.

Four (4) Pages



THE MOTHER INSTITUTE
STONEY CREEK 1897

The Niagara Peninsula Weekly appears as a supplement each week in The Fonthill Herald, The Niagara Advance, The Port Colborne News and The News of Stoney Creek & Saltfleet.

W.I. hope to preserve founder's home in Stoney Creek

Stoney Creek has two events of historical interest to its credit — the first being the decisive battle fought here during the War of 1812-14, when American soldiers were defeated by the British, aided by local settlers of the surrounding area. Much has been done in commemoration of this historic event, and to this day anniversary activities are carried out annually.

The second event which grows in importance year by year to thousands of women all over the world was the founding of the first Women's Institute in Squires Hall, Stoney Creek, over sixty-eight years ago on February 19th, 1897.

Mr. Erland Lee, a well known fruit grower living near Stoney Creek on Ridge Road while attending an assembly of the Farmer's Institute in Guelph in the autumn of 1896 heard an address given by Mrs. John Hoodless. Impressed by her address Mr. Lee invited Mrs. Hoodless to speak at a planned "Ladies Night" program of the local Farmer's Institute. Mrs. Hoodless accepted the invitation and at that meeting suggested that the women form a similar society of their own. Mr. Lee asked the ladies present how many of them would attend an organizational meeting. Thirty-five ladies agreed to attend.

At this time Mr. Lee was secretary of the South Wentworth Farmer's Institute, a post he held for many years. The Ladies Night program was an annual affair, but seemingly the only concession was to have a little music, a vocal solo and a piano instrumental.

The Agricultural Department of the Ontario Government supplied male speakers on request, but of course only on agricultural subjects. Mr. Lee had been asked to look after the meeting, he and Mrs. Lee bundled in fur and blankets and with heated bricks at their feet drove to neighbouring homes in a cutter, (there were no telephones at that time), for this was in the dead of winter, and extended invitations. Through their efforts one hundred ladies attended that first meeting to hear Mrs. Hoodless speak.

At the turn of the century no man was in favor of women organizing. The most charitable commented "Oh, well, let them start, it won't last long without a man to run it." But they had not foreseen the

need felt by women to improve their standard of living, nor their determination to do something about it. One of the objections of husbands was that the Women's Institute would cost money. Mrs. Lee suggested that the fee be set at twenty-five cents yearly. Still another gentleman objected saying "let them try — women fight and it will break up". Mrs. Lee had an answer for this as well, she said "we'll start with the Lord's Prayer — that should put us in a good frame of mind."

They applied to the Department of Agriculture for a charter and Mr. and Mrs. Lee worked at writing the Constitution. There ideas have stood almost unchanged to this day. Mr. E. D. Smith, M.P., and Mr. F. M. Carpenter, M.P.P. were consulted on parliamentary forms but aside from that the constitution was drawn up by Mr. and Mrs. Erland Lee.

At the first organization meeting called, Mr. Lee acted as Chairman and conducted the election of officers. Other officers elected were President Mrs. E. D. Smith, first vice president Mrs. S. Melson, Secretary Miss Maggie Nash, Treasurer Mrs. John McNeilly, Directors Mrs. F. Carpenter, Mrs. Erland Lee, and Mrs. C. Dewitt. Mrs. Hoodless continued to take a great interest in the Women's Institute, responding to invitations to speak to them.

On one occasion the new pins with the motto "For Home and Country" had just been acquired and Mr. and Mrs. Hoodless were asked to be present. Mrs. Lee as Second President handed the first pin to Mr. Hoodless asking him to pin it on Mrs. Hoodless as a mark of their esteem for the women who gave the for the woman who gave the spear in public.

All his life Mr. Erland Lee was consulted by officers of the Women's Institute and many of his ideas and plans were carried out. He never made any effort to have his work acknowledged, but Mrs. Lee felt that it should be known that without her husband, and his untiring efforts, there would have been no Women's Institute.

The history of the Lee family in this district goes back to the United Empire Loyalist days, and is a most interesting one. James Lee, the Great Grandfather of Erland Lee was a British soldier and served under General Cornwallis in the revolutionary war, being discharged from the army in 1781. Following this he settled for some time in Maryland where he married Hannah Corman, a Hessian woman. The Hessians were soldiers under General Cornwallis. James and his wife revisited England, but decided to return to America, and history has it that John Lee was born on board a "British Man of War" on the Lee's return voyage from England.

In 1792 the James Lee family came north to Canada during the United Empire Loyalist movement making their way through the virgin forests and settled on a tract (about 400 acres) of crown land in Saltfleet which is now lot 21, Concession 4.

Furniture and plants brought here by James Lee from Maryland are still in the possession of the Lee family. Frank Lee (great, great grandson of James Lee) and his wife are living in the old homestead at present.

A very gracious lady, the present Mrs. Lee quite often shows visitors through the house, although it is not open to the public. A representative of the NEWS was privileged to have such a tour, and was further privileged to be

accompanied by Miss Marjorie Lee, the eldest daughter of Erland Lee.

Situated close to the brow of the escarpment a point where the old Lee road (once an Indian trail — now called Dewitt road) bisects Ridge Road, the house is ideally situated in that it affords a panoramic view of the lake and surrounding district. James Lee constructed a log cabin on a site just west of the present driveway in 1792 when he homesteaded here.

To-day, one hundred and seventy three years later, shrubs and flowers brought here by him still flourish and bloom. A very large snow ball bush planted by the door of the original log cabin was in full bloom in early June, and close by was a bed of Tiger Lilies, Myrtle and Sweet Mary, all dating back to the year of James Lee's immigration.

From a diary written by Abram D. Lee, the grandson

The Women's Institute, Districts of North and South Wentworth have sent a recommendation to the Federal Women's Institutes of Ontario to purchase the Lee home on Ridge Road in Stoney Creek, presently occupied by the son of Erland Lee, Mr. Frank Lee. It is hoped that this may be only the beginning of a unique historical attraction in Stoney Creek, Saltfleet area. The Niagara Scenic Driveway will be constructed to the south of the building giving rise to the hope that it will not be necessary to move the home.

The home and property do indeed merit preservation with such an historical background. With so many old homes being torn down in the name of progress, it would seem the time is ripe to curb such activity, in view of the forthcoming Centennial.

The Lee home is in exceptionally good condition and is beautifully kept. Furnishings throughout the home date back to 1792 and even earlier. Much of the furniture is hand made and has been lovingly cared for by the Lee women for generations. China, glass, and silver heirlooms grace the home commodiously. Truly Canadiana such as one might dream of but seldom encounter in reality, is this pioneer homestead, and its priceless furnishings.

It would be a pity to allow this fine old home to slip into yesteryear and become only a memory in the minds of a few, when it could quite conceivably become an historical site to be shared by thousands for generations to come.

New CBC-TV series to feature "Seaway"

Canadian actor Austin Willis has been cast as Commodore Fox in the new television drama series, "Seaway" due to start on the CBC in September. The series will be filmed up and down the St. Lawrence where Commodore Fox, serving the government department of transport, looks after the co-ordination of locks, ships and allied sea and land services.

Shooting of the series began in Montreal Harbor last week. The other major role, a young adventurer called Nicky, is being played by Stephen Levy. These two characters will appear through the series with guest stars for each hour-long episode. Star of the first one is Di-

anna van der Vlis, Canadian actress who has been in New York for some time in both theatre and television. Another in the first cast is Cec Linder formerly of Timmins, Ont. who has appeared in numerous films, including "Goldfinger" and many television shows. He used to be an announcer on CKTB in St. Catharines.

Daniel Petrie, New York director who was born in Nova Scotia, will direct the first two episodes. He is now one of the best-known directors in New York, for both plays and TV shows.

Name of the first show is "A Shipment From Marseille", dealing with narcotics shipments.

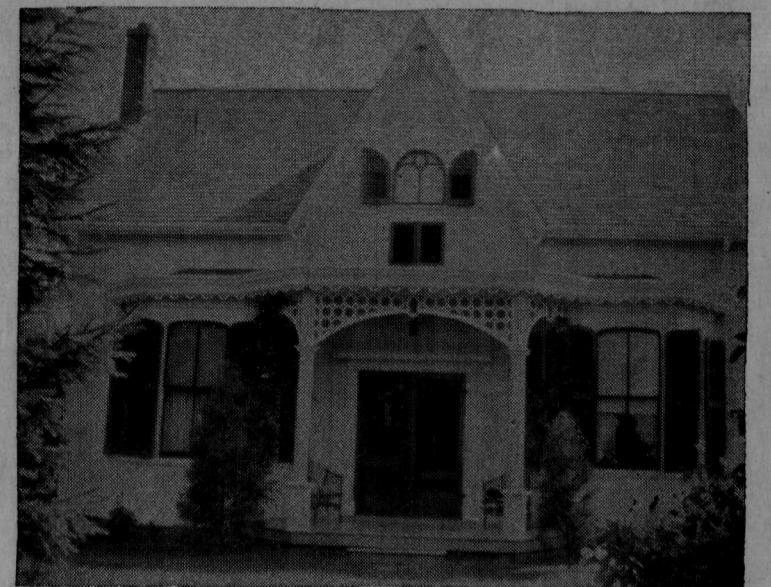
John Lee later to become a Colonel married Mary Moore, the daughter of Enoch Moore who owned a farm next to the Lee property. The back of the house as it stands today was built in 1801.

In the war of 1812 and subsequent battle fought in Stoney Creek, June 6, 1813, John was one of the men granted permission by his commanding officer to visit his family living in the district. Early in the morning his wife Mary went to the spring to get water for the early morning meal. She was somewhat taken aback to discover an American soldier standing at the spring. He had been frightened by the Indian like war whoops of the British soldiers and had fled through the woods, becoming lost. Following the trail to the Lee home he surrendered to Mary Lee at the spring. At that time the fresh water spring bubbled up from beneath the roots of a large maple tree. In later years the tree was struck by lightning and although it still lived for some time, each year it deteriorated until it finally died. With this event the spring mysteriously disappeared.

During the war John Lee served under General Brock and was one of the men who carried the wounded General from the field. Acting as pallbearer the young soldier was later given a small segment of wood from the coffin, of the great man who gave his life in the battle.

This was the first time that the remains of General Brock were moved. Miss Marjorie Lee recalls seeing the fragment which was kept in a drawer of a cupboard in the Lee home until it finally disintegrated and Mrs. Erland Lee, according to her daughter, threw out the dust which was all that remained.

When General Brock's coffin was moved to its present burial place at Queenston Heights, John Lee was invited to again act as pallbearer, but he was ill with malaria and could not attend. At that time malaria was described as fever and ague.



The Lee home erected in 1873 was built of virgin pine hewn from trees cut down on the property. The scroll work running along the eaves was hand carved at the site by a 14 year-old carpenter's apprentice.

In the absence of John Lee another man filled in at the ceremony and John Lee's name was not inscribed on the plaque.

The back part of the Lee home was built during the lifetime of John Lee. Virgin pine was cut from the forest on the property and the building and some of the furniture was made from this pine.

Abram Lee, the son of John and Mary Lee married Jemimah Pew. They were the parents of Erland Lee.

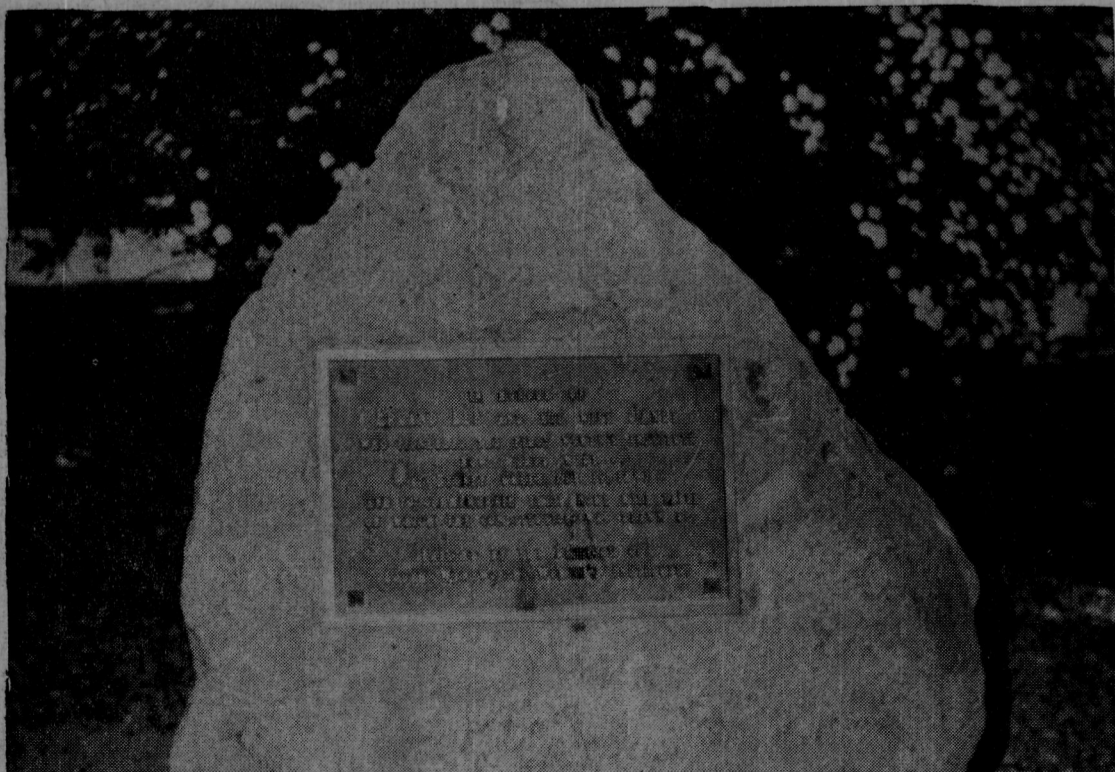
In 1873 the present Lee home was built. This building too was built from pine hewn from the property. The scroll work around the eaves was all hand carved on the property by a boy carpenter apprentice. His name was made from this pine. (Continued page 4)



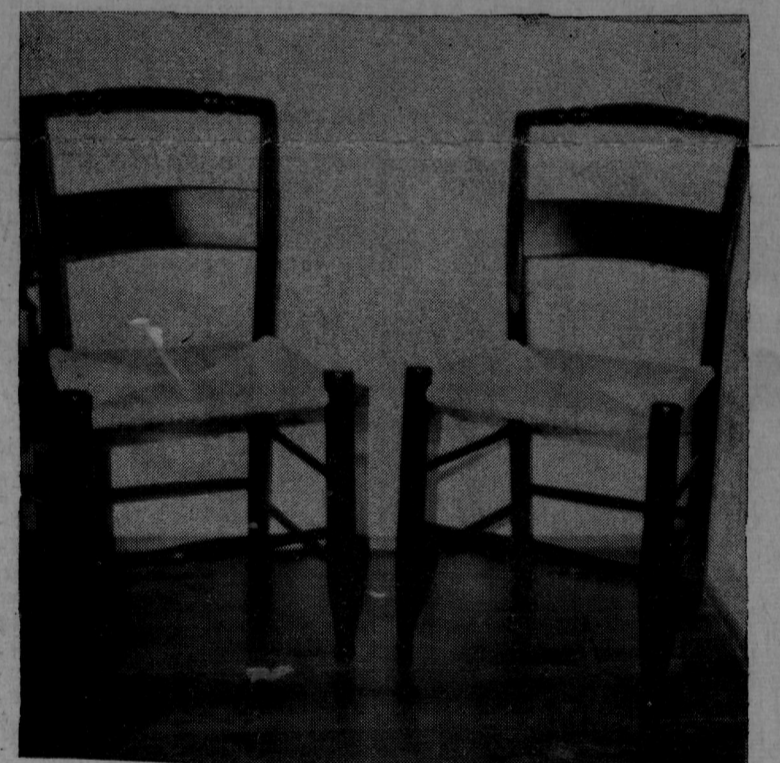
Mrs. Frank Lee entertains her sister-in-law Marjorie Lee to a cup of tea on the famous dining table in the Lee homestead. This is the table on which the Constitution for the Women's Institute was drafted by Erland Lee in 1897.



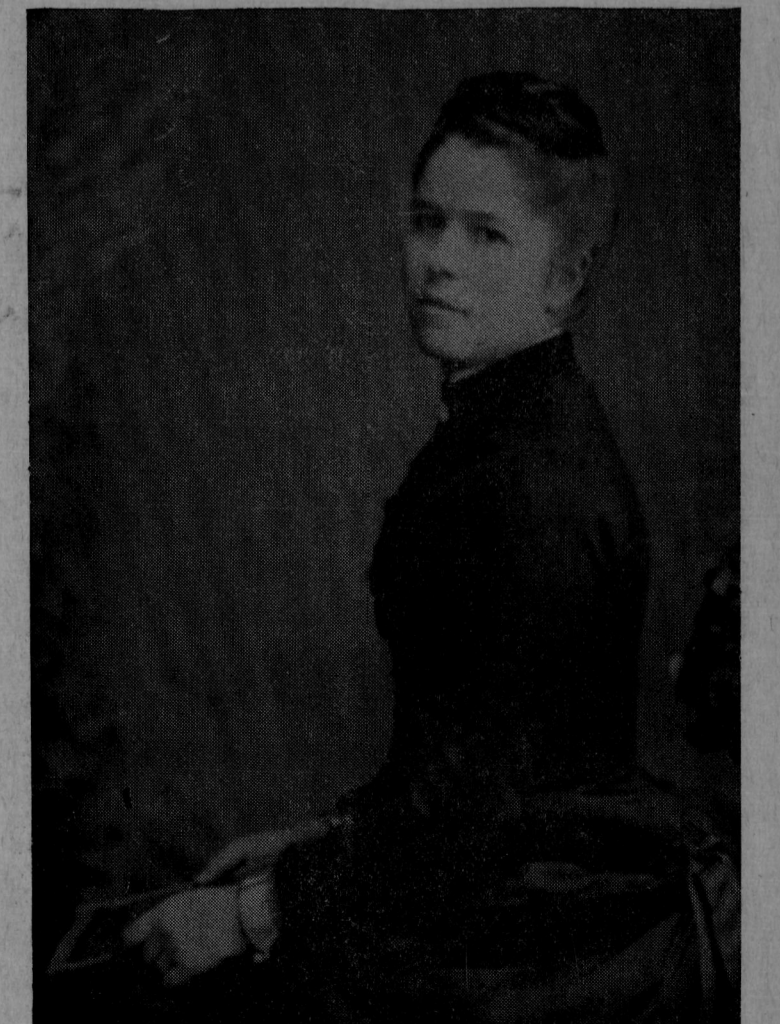
A cabinet hand made of virgin pine cut on the property has no nails but the wooden pegs used in its construction are plainly visible. Generations of Lee's contributed to the collection of china and glass stored in the cabinet.



Situated on the front lawn of the home, this stone bears a plaque inscribed "In honour of Erland Lee and his wife Janet who pioneered the first Women's Institute. Now world wide. At Stoney Creek February 19, 1897 and to commemorate their home with table on which the constitution was drawn up."



A pair of rush bottom chairs brought to Canada over Indian trails through the bush, are still used in bedroom of the Lee homestead.



Janet Robertson Chisholm, the pretty young woman who became Mrs. Erland Lee, after meeting him through family visits.