

NOTABLE FIGURES IN INSTITUTE HISTORY



Mr. Erland Lee co-operated with Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless in planning for meeting at which the first Women's Institute was formed at Stoney Creek, Saltfleet Township, Wentworth County, on February 19th, 1897. Senator Smith and Major Carpenter, along with Mr. Lee assisted the Committee of ladies in formulating the Constitution and By-laws. Mrs. E. D. Smith, Miss Nash and Mrs. J. H. McNeilly were the first officers of the Stoney Creek Women's Institute.

Dr. Creelman's Letter

We quote from a letter sent out by Dr. Creelman at the time: "What Farmers' Institutes have done for the farmers and farms, Women's Institutes can do for the homes. In Ontario we have been so busy cleaning up land and growing out of the log cabin period that we have had little time to attend to the development of the beautiful about our homes—Homes become an experience of the culture of their inhabitants and preach a sermon to the passer-by—From such homes (cultured and beautiful) the boys do not rush away and choose some other profession in life; the girls do not yearn for the attractions of the towns and cities".

"We have now a number of estimable lady delegates on our staff, and their services may be secured at any time to assist any proposed institute in organizing or in carrying out any practical schemes of the organization".

This same 1899 Superintendent's Report records the organization of the second Institute thus: "At Whitby on the 29th of June (1899) a meeting of the ladies of South Ontario was convened by Mrs. J. L. Smith for the purpose of organizing a Women's Institute. A partial organization was effected. A short time later another meeting was called, officers elected and the Women's Institute of South Ontario launched". Miss Laura Rose helped organize this Institute.

Here, also, it is recorded that the Women's Institute of North Grey was organized at Kemble on September 15th, 1900.

Hence we see that the Institute idea had taken firm root and was to grow and branch out into much wider territories than the first Institute workers ever contemplated.

Dr. Creelman years later (1915) while reminiscing about the early days stated, "I began to see there was something more in the Women's Institute than we saw when we started out, and I began to see that when the women of the country start to move, we have to make way because they are going to move solidly forward in the direction in which their consciences lead them".

Across Canada and Beyond the Seas

With its primary aims of improving farm home conditions and affording opportunities for the wives of farmers to meet together for fellowship and study, the new organization met a very real need in Canadian rural life. By 1915 Women's Institutes were established in all nine Canadian provinces.

In England, the outbreak of the war 1914-1918 created a need for a combined effort among country women, particularly in connection with the production and preservation of food. Two Canadian women, Miss Emily Guest of Ontario and Mrs. Alfred Watt of Ontario and B.C., in England at the time and both enthusiastic Women's Institute workers, were asked by the British Government to aid in a campaign for food conservation. The Government was soon convinced that the best way to do this was through organizing Women's Institutes.

From a speech delivered by W. B. Roadhouse, Deputy Minister of Agriculture at Toronto convention 1915 we quote: "There came to the office an enquiry from London, England as to the nature of the Women's Institutes, their method of organization and their method of work. This enquiry came from one of the most prominent organizations in Great Britain bearing the names of persons who are leaders in the public life of that

country. This will possibly result in the organization of Institutes in the British Isles."

Help was sent from Ontario. So the Institute idea spread to Great Britain.

Premier Baldwin while touring Canada paid the following tribute: "One of the greatest contributions Canada has ever made to England was the Women's Institutes, and we cannot be too grateful to you for giving us the idea. These Institutes have brought new interest, fresh life, activity and happiness into hundreds of our villages. They have given a stimulus to education and many forms of co-operation which I hope to see extended everywhere."

Rural women in other countries also became interested in our organization. The circle widened and Women's Institutes spread to New Zealand, Australia, Africa, Rhodesia, Ceylon, India, Belgium and Holland. Sister organizations sprang up among countrywomen in other countries and in 1933 there was organized the Associated Country Women of the World with a Canadian woman, Mrs. Alfred Watt, as its first and only President.

Pages of History are Turned Back We Meet to Honour Our Mother Institute Stoney Creek

Over two hundred guests, including charter members and past presidents of the world's first Women's Institute, turned back the pages of history at the 50th anniversary banquet of the Stoney Creek Women's Institute, held in the United Church of that historic Wentworth County village on Wednesday, February 19, 1947 and took part in a review of all that had been accomplished during the half century of progress of what is now a world-wide organization of rural

women. It was a banquet which abounded in unique features. Eleven of the charter members of the first Institute, organized on the same date in 1897, were present as honoured guests. Seven past presidents recalled the chief events of their years in office. A representative of the Women's Institutes of Great Britain was present and brought greetings. The birthday cake, was adorned with five candles, one for each decade and these were lit by the oldest surviving past president, Mrs. Hamilton Lee. And the guest speaker for the occasion was Mrs. Gordon D. Conant, daughter of the first president of the world's first Institute, Mrs. E. D. Smith. A portrait of Mrs. E. D. Smith occupied a prominent place above the table for the charter members.

The beautiful flowers in the Institute colours of blue and gold, the fine music and the friendly atmosphere of members and friends set the stage for this festive celebration.

The Institute had been showered with letters, telegrams and greeting cards which were used very ingeniously as wall decorations. In all, 2,179 such messages were received, from practically every country in the world in which there are Women's Institutes today, and a selection from these was read to the audience by the secretary, Mrs. Lyle Nash.

Individual pieces of the birthday cake, made by Mrs. Chester Nash, were attractively wrapped in cellophane and sealed with a gold seal bearing the Institute crest and the inscription "The Mother of Institutes—Stoney Creek".

Mrs. Angus Jackson, President of the Stoney Creek Institute presided over the gathering.

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