

From the Pages of History

Mrs. E. D. Smith, First W.I. President

The Smith family's community activities stretched well beyond business and politics. Senator Smith, a proponent of women's education, encouraged his wife Christina to become an active participant in the emerging Women's Institute.

As a result, Mrs. Smith was to be elected its first President, and many W.I. meetings were to be held at the Smith home. Her husband and others assisted Erland Lee, Secretary of the Farmer's Institute, to draw up the Constitution. The Institute was an important development in the lives of rural women who learned through it to apply a measure of science to their daily needs.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, farmers recognized the value of organizations where they could share and improve their knowledge of farming techniques, by learning from each other's discoveries and mistakes. But the women, who also played an important role on the farm, making butter, caring for the hens, milking the cows as well as rearing a bevy of children had no such assistance and support. Education was limited, ignorance was widespread.

It was as a result of ignorance that Adelaide Hoodless, the wife of a well established furniture company owner in Hamilton, lost a cherished baby. She had unwittingly fed her child contaminated milk and was distraught when she learned the reason for her child's death.

The frustration of knowing that her child could have been saved had she been better informed about child care and homemaking, launched Mrs. Hoodless on a vigorous campaign to improve the practical side of a women's education.

An invitation from Erland Lee of the South Wentworth Farmers' Institute to address the Institute's Ladies' Night gave Mrs. Hoodless an opportunity to expound her philosophy. "The health of your wives and children, which you are neglecting, is far more important than that of your animals." Mrs. Hoodless continued, "perhaps such an organization is more necessary since women's work, homecraft and mothercraft, is much more important than that of men since it concerns the home and the care of the loved ones who dwell therein."

With the aid of Mr. Lee, a meeting of local women was organized in Stoney Creek. From that meeting on, the first Women's Institute grew from strength to strength.

Mrs. E. D. Smith was born Christina Armstrong, a farmer's daughter from York Township in Ontario, she was a sensitive and retiring young lady. In 1886 she married E. D. Smith who originally studied to become an engineer. He had been forced to give up his studies, as his eyesight was in jeopardy. He then put all his youthful energy into his fruit farm, then the nursery, then the food processing business.

The Smith's had four children, and Christina was the disciplinarian, while her husband was inclined more toward leniency.

In 1889 the Smith's moved down from the escarpment to live in the house known as the Homestead in the Winona area. The original structure dates back to 1831 and a new wing was added later. In 1911, they moved into Helderleigh a grand post-Victorian structure near the present E. D. Smith office.

This home became a place where visiting salesmen, suppliers and other business men would go for lunch, when invited by Mr. Smith. Hearty meals were often prepared by Mrs. Smith herself, using recipes she copied painstakingly into a black book she entitled, Mrs. E. D. Smith's Cook Book.

Christina was fortunate to always have help in the house, usually an English family that arrived complete with trunks full of uniforms. Mr. Smith recruited workers in England and gave greatest encouragement to those with large families.

Around the turn of the century E. D. Smith and Erland Lee formed a joint stock company and built a creamery at Vinemount. Later the building was used as a spray plant for the fruit industry. Large kettles were installed for the manufacture of the sulphur mixture used then.

In 1928, the Women's Institute was allowed to hold meetings in the building, they later bought and remodeled it.

It is interesting to note that the E. D. Smith vineyards today supplies Canadian wineries. The only reason "E. D." did not become a wine-maker was that Christina objected on moral grounds.

Since those pioneering days, the Women's Institutes have never looked back and today are a worldwide organization, thanks to the zeal of Mrs. Hoodless and Erland Lee and the organizational ability of people like Christina Smith.



LUCKNOW WI, BRUCE SOUTH DISTRICT, purchased an Infant Mannequin for the Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Unit, CPR Committee, Wingham and District Hospital. L-r - Grace Gibson, President; Jean Whitby, Secretary Treasurer; Dr. J. C. McKim and Dr. D. Jolly, both Lucknow Doctors.



BETHESDA-REACH WI, ONTARIO NORTH DISTRICT celebrated their 25th Anniversary. Some of the Charter Members seen in a happy frame of mind are L-r Molly Heddle, Phyllis Ashenhurst, Fern Burnett, Jean Pogue, Ruby Paradine, Dorothy Doble, Jean Ward, Jean Jeffery and Corinne Croxall.