

# Credit for founding WI due militant Adelaide Hoodless

By ANN KELLY

This year marks the 75th anniversary of Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, and Institute members coast to coast are celebrating. Credit for the birth of the project is due Adelaide Hunter Hoodless of Hamilton, a militant crusader with an elementary school education acquired at S.S.No. 6, South Dumfries. Mrs. Hoodless actually struck a blow for "women's lib" long before women were formally organized to assert their rights.

Had Adelaide Hoodless not attended the South Wentworth Farmers' Institute "ladies night" on Feb. 12, 1897 the Institute story might have been quite different. The farmers, and their wives, heard a man speaking on "The Care and Feeding of Calves". Later Mrs. Hoodless presented a stirring address in which she suggested women organize on their own to study homemaking, just as the Farmers' Institute studied farming. She offered to meet with the women to discuss the proposal and Feb. 19, 1897 was the date set for the meeting. There were 35 women who promised to attend and 101 women and one man appeared on the appointed night.

The man in question was Erland Lee whose suggestion it had been to invite Mrs. Hoodless to speak at the South Wentworth Farmers' Institute.

The minutes of the organizational meeting are still in the possession of the Stoney Creek Women's Institute. The motion was to organize a women's department of domestic economy in affiliation with the Farmers' Institute. It was at the second meeting that it was decided to call the organization the Woman's Institute of Saltfleet.

## KEMBLE AMONG FIRST

Within the next three years, Women's Institutes were founded at Whitby followed closely by a branch at Kemble. Mrs. James Gardner was instrumental in launching the Kemble branch. She made house calls on women inviting them to an organizational meeting of an Institute similar to that formed at Stoney Creek. Mrs. J. L. Smith of Whitby was present at the meeting and the outcome was the third Women's Institute in the world.

The first officers were honorary president, Mrs. J. L. Smith; president, Mrs. James Gardner (an office she held for 10 years); vice president, Mrs. Daniel Davidson; secretary, Mrs. Franklin Wilcox; treasurer, Mrs. George Beckett. Mrs. William McGregor succeeded

Mrs. Wilcox as secretary after a brief period.

In the early years the Women's Institutes were organized as ridings, then districts as the organization continued to grow. By the early 1900's, 1907 to be exact, the organization had reached out into every section of Ontario. Reports were that there were 84 ridings with 400 branches and a membership of 71,154. In 1972 there are 1,318 branches in Ontario, although membership in the organization has declined.

Adelaide Hoodless' favorite expression was, "The goodness of a society ultimately depends on the nature of its citizens and since the nature of its citizens is more modifiable by early training than by anything else, we must conclude that the welfare of the family underlies the welfare of society." This reflects modern day thinking of "experts" with advanced university education.

It was her interest in home and country that spurred Mrs. Hoodless on to challenging roles at a time when a woman's place was still considered to be in the home.

## LAUNCHED CAMPAIGN

When her 18-month-old son died, probably from contaminated milk according to the doctor, Mrs. Hoodless swung into action. She learned that many other babies were dying for the same reason and launched a campaign against selling impure milk in Hamilton. It was at this time she conceived the idea of teaching domestic science to girls as a part of their formal education. She waged a bitter battle, at a time when her husband was chairman of the Hamilton school board, before she succeeded in having domestic science taught in Hamilton. She was once quoted as saying, "Apart from my family duties, the education of mothers has been my life work."

Her interests in the YWCA led her to push for better methods of teaching household work. She eventually became president of the YWCA and in 1901 was elected the first convener of the committee of domestic science for the National Council of Women. She served in this office until 1908.

## WILD IDEAS

It was Adelaide Hoodless who campaigned for the inclusion of domestic science in the curriculum for public schools. She was ridiculed by press and pulpit. Her ideas were termed wild. "Why doesn't she stay home and look after her children?" was the question being asked about her. Her son Bernard said of his mother, "No home was

ever better managed and no mother was ever more devoted than ours." A daughter reportedly said, "As a homemaker she was an inspiration. Our old home was open house and she was the gracious centre around which everything revolved. She had a stimulating and lovable personality that drew young and old alike. Yet she seemed to have time for everything." Mrs. Hoodless believed that women had to learn not to waste valuable time on non-essentials. Credit for her success was due to her wise choice of essentials and her concentration on them.

Mrs. Hoodless prepared a textbook which was published in 1898. The "Little Red Book" was far ahead of its time, with calorie charts, chemical analysis and the importance of meat and fruit in the diet. The Ontario Government eventually agreed to support the training of teachers of domestic science but Mrs. Hoodless was given the responsibility of finding funds for the erection of a suitable building.

Mrs. Hoodless was able to get the interest of Sir William Macdonald, a Montreal tobacco millionaire. He donated \$125,000 for the establishing of Macdonald Institute on the campus of the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph as well as funds to establish Macdonald College in Quebec.

In an address to an agricultural conference in Guelph, who should tell an almost entirely male audience that they were more concerned with the health of their animals than the health of their children, but Adelaide Hoodless. Further she noted that they fed their pigs and cattle more scientifically than their families.

The interests of Adelaide Hoodless knew no limits. Of prime importance to her was the promotion of teaching household science. In 1897, as an officer of the National Council of Women, she assisted Lady Aberdeen, wife of the governor-general, in founding the Victorian Order of Nurses. She influenced Mrs. Massey-Treble to establish the Lillian Massey School of Domestic Science in Toronto. This later became the household science department of the University of Toronto.

## VISITED TRADE SCHOOLS

In 1908 she was commissioned by the minister of education of Ontario to visit and report on trade schools established in the U.S. In 1909 the director of Carnegie Technical Schools asked her to inspect their work in the U.S. and offer recommendations. Her great aim was to establish a course in household science at some university. The government wasn't willing to commit itself to the expenditure so Mrs. Hoodless set out on her own to get the capital.

On the eve of her 52nd birthday, Adelaide Hoodless died. She was addressing the Federation of Women's Clubs in Massey Hall. Part way through a brilliant speech she stopped, smiled, took a sip of water before the glass crashed to the floor. That was February 26, 1910.

Adelaide Hoodless was a woman of purpose, determination and conviction. Her dedication to priorities helped shape the world in which we live. Her memory lives on in the countless thousands of women around the world who continue to work for the good of home and country.