

Adelaide Hunter Hoodless - Founder of Women's Institutes

Adelaide Hunter was born February 27, 1857, the youngest of thirteen children of David and Jane Hunter. Her father died before she was born. She was born on the farm two and one half miles west of the village of St. George in Brant County, a half mile west of Highway 24 on the Blue Lake Side Road where the Adelaide Hoodless historic site and museum is now in the old homestead. Here she learned the social graces in a home of culture and refinement and developed a natural charm through kindly parental discipline and uncompromising Presbyterian ethics. Her schooling was all received at public school, although her brothers attended University.

In 1881 Adelaide Hunter married John Hoodless a Hamilton businessman and they had four children. She lost her first child through lack of knowledge as to its care. It greatly affected her life, as from then on she strove to help women and girls receive training in domestic science as she felt that the welfare of society was the result of the welfare of the family.

She was the first president of the Y.W.C.A. in Hamilton in 1889. Here working with underprivileged girls she started classes in Domestic Science and after strenuous efforts got the Provincial Government to permit the teaching of Domestic Science in public schools. She, with the financial assistance from Lord Strathcona, opened a School for the training of Domestic Science Teachers in the U.W.C in Hamilton. She organized and established the Dominion Association of Y.W.C.A. also.

Mrs Hoodless was one of the founders of the national Council of Women, with Lady Aberdeen as President. Mrs Hoodless was treasurer and convenor of the Domestic Science committee for twelve years. Through Lady Aberdeen the Victoria Order of Nurses was formed in 1897 for the Queen's Victoria jubilee and Mrs Hoodless was a member of the executive committee.

Mr. Bland Lee, President of Stoney Creek Farmers Institute had heard Mrs. Hoodless speak at the O.A.C. on the need of having domestic science and sewing taught in the schools. He invited her to come to the Stoney Creek. At this meeting she suggested that the women have an organization of their own to study Domestic Science in the same way as the men studied farming to raise the standard of homemaking. A meeting was held the following Friday and one hundred and one women attended with Mr Bland Lee of Stoney Creek as chairman and the first Women's Institute was organized and Mrs Hoodless was made Honorary President. Mrs E. Lee suggested that the joining fee be 25 cents and that the meetings be opened with the Lord's Prayer in Unison.

In 1899 Mrs Hoodless struggled to have her College of Domestic Science at Hamilton moved to the O.A.C. Guelph, She got permission from the O.A.C. and Department of Education provided that money to provide a building could be raised. She approached Sir Wm. McDonald, the tobacco King of Montreal, with the result that he gave \$200,000, A few years later he also endowed a Home Economics School at McDonald's College, Quebec.

Adelaide Hoodless was a pioneer in adult education, a real leader in showing concern for the home and family and uplifting conditions of life in the community. This has resulted in the government bringing help through trained personnel who help to train Women's Institute members and 4H Club girls in different aspects of Domestic Science.

On Feb. 25, 1910, Mrs Hoodless died on the platform at a Federation of Women's Club meeting at which she was appealing for a school of Household Science at University level. Mrs. Hoodless was only 52, but she had accomplished much. She taught us that we should not waste time on non essentials, but concentrate on the worthwhile things. In 1937 a memorial cairn was erected at the junction of Highways 5 & 24, unveiled by Lady Tweedsmuir. When the Associated Council of Women of the World met in Ottawa In 1950, Mrs Hoodless' portrait was unveiled in the national Archives. In 1958 a plaque was erected at her birthplace by the St. George's W.I. In 1959 the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada purchased the old home and have made it into a museum.

Contributed by: Edna Gardner Lowry