

# Keeping History Alive

WI museum tells story of group's development

by JILL CLEAVER  
Staff Writer

STONEY CREEK — Before assuming her new duties as curator of the Erland Lee Museum Home, Jennifer Dunkerson had to do her homework.

Having grown up in the Toronto area, she had little contact with the rural-based Women's Institute (WI) which operates the museum.



Jennifer Dunkerson is the new curator of the Erland Lee Museum Home in Stoney Creek. Dressed in a period costume, she is shown in front of the museum. Staff photo

*"They have always been working for what they believe in and that's what I admire most."*

So the University of Waterloo student set out to learn as much as possible about the WI.

During her extensive research, she became fascinated with the WI's history, which began in 1897 when about 100 rural women gathered to discuss ways of improving their homemaking and child care skills.

Since then, WI has grown to a world-wide organization with some 20,000 members in Ontario and 43,000 in Canada.

**W**hile poring through the group's history, Dunkerson developed a real admiration for the WI's values.

"They have always been working for what they believe in and that's what I admire most," she said.

Dunkerson said the WI has great strength and commitment to its work and has lasted so long "because it has been a place where women can get together socially and stand up and speak out about what they believe in."

The organization was, and still is, non-denominational and has no political attachments.

Dunkerson says the museum, former home of WI co-founders Janet and Erland Lee, is the perfect focal point for tracing the history of both the WI and Ontario.

The home has been in the Lee family since 1801 and reflects various stages of development, says Dunkerson.

Located on Ridge Road in Stoney Creek, it has been owned and operated by the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario since 1972.

Dunkerson, who began her new job April 15, is determined to keep the rich WI history alive.

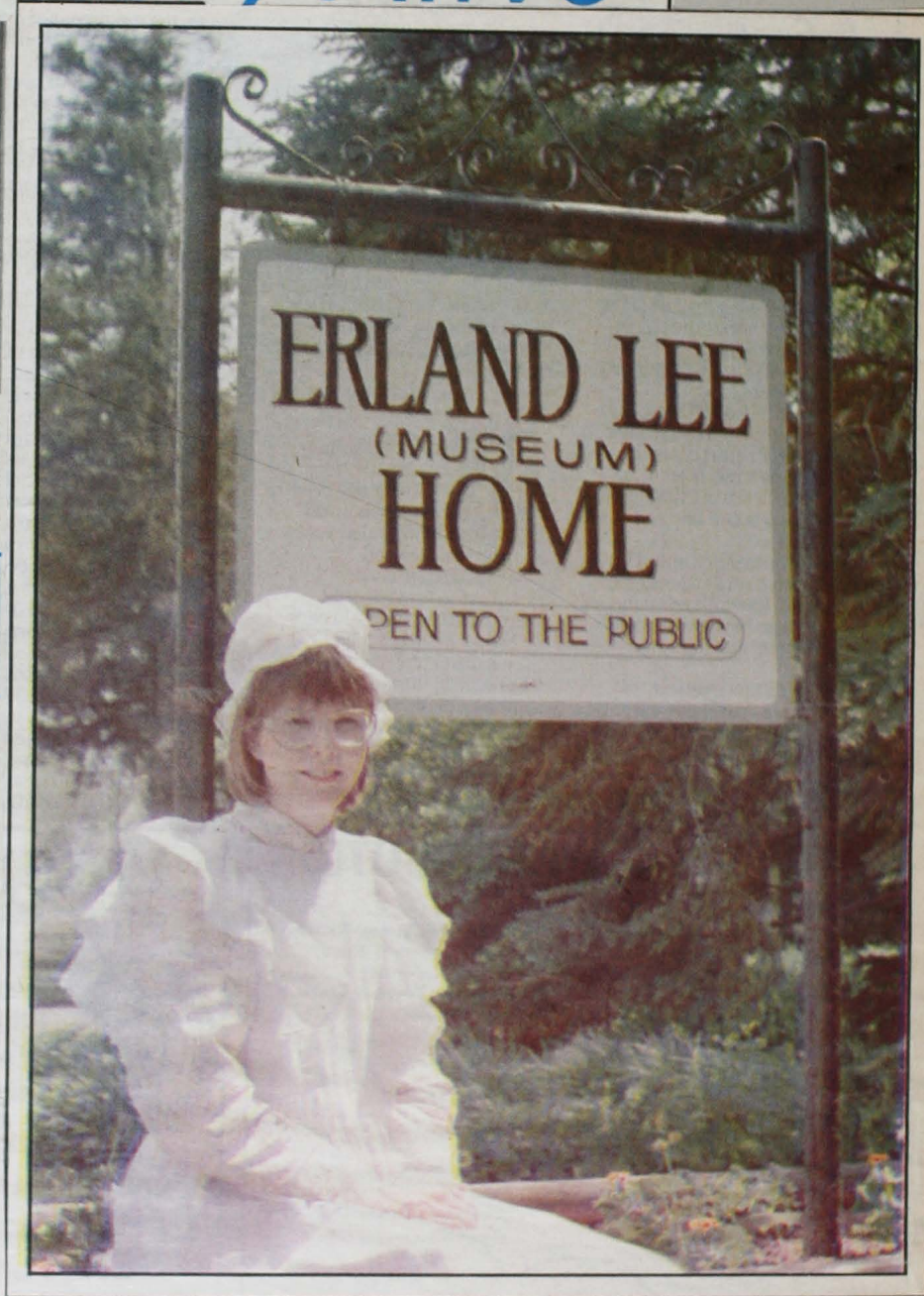
The Brantford resident, currently working on her Masters in applied history, is particularly interested in taking history and applying it to public institutions like museums.

And as curator she'll not only be able to implement new plans at the museum, but also gain the practical experience needed to complete her degree.

One of her main goals is to develop a more effective educational program at the museum. This, she hopes, will give school children a chance to develop an interest in heritage and history.

Dunkerson says the WI museum is a perfect place to establish such a connection. The museum comes complete with many historical artifacts reflecting both the history of WI and Ontario.

Dunkerson would like to see a more professional approach at the museum as well as additional funds to ensure this professionalism is maintained. "It's the little things" that can make a real difference in the



## WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Jennifer Dunkerson is the new curator of the Erland Lee Museum Home in Stoney Creek. The museum, operated by the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, is the former home of the WI's co-founder. In conjunction with Women's

Institute month — celebrated in June — Farming Today has put together a series of articles on the worldwide organization. Please see pages 2,3,5,6,7,8.

Staff photo by JILL CLEAVER

museum's look, she said.

So far the museum committee, consisting of WI volunteers, has been open to Dunkerson's new ideas.

While her tenure as curator is indefinite, Dunkerson is hoping to maintain a connection with the WI in the future.

