

# Women's Institute chapter fights to keep museum open

By CHRISTINE RIVET  
FOR GRAND RIVER LIFE

## ST. GEORGE

Adelaide Hunter Hoodless deserves a more fitting tribute than the seasonal closing of her birthplace home by the organization she helped to found more than a century ago, say members of an area chapter of the Women's Institute.

"Her memory needs to be honoured, not diminished," said Mary Derbyshire who, along with other members of the St. George branch, aim to reverse a decision by the organization's national office, the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada.

In December, the national office decided the white clapboard farmhouse where Hunter Hoodless was born would be closed in winter months. It should still be open from mid-May to Aug. 30.

The Ottawa-based office also dismissed the museum's curator of 14 years, Sue Doiron, in an effort to cut costs.

The home, where Hunter Hoodless was born in 1857, has been run as a public museum by the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada for 43

## SPECIAL VISITS

The Women's Institute chapter near St. George will hold public awareness days at the Adelaide Hunter Hoodless museum Wednesday, Feb. 27, 1 to 4 p.m., during the home's annual birthday tea, and Saturday, March 2, from 2 to 4 p.m.

A petition to keep the home open year-round will be circulated.

years. But it fell on hard times because visits from the paying public dropped off at a time when repairs of \$50,000 to upgrade windows, roofing, the chimney and foundation, are needed.

"Unfortunately, our national level has seen the easy way out," said Derbyshire, who is spearheading a campaign to keep the museum open year-round and to keep the curator on staff.

The museum, located between Cambridge and Brantford on Blue Lake Road, is two kilometres west of Highway 24, near the community of St. George.

Derbyshire said her chapter has asked the national office to collect a



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The Adelaide Hunter Hoodless museum is near St. George, between Cambridge and Brantford, on Blue Lake Road.

mandatory \$2 fee from Women's Institute members toward the cost of operating the home, estimated at \$40,000 a year.

The chapter has also applied for a provincial grant to pay for repairs to the building.

But a spokeswoman for the national association said the fee proposal was rejected by board members. Unless new funding is found, the winter closures and dismissal of the curator will stand.

"We just can't afford to keep running the museum at a deficit. We tried different ways of keeping it open year-round. This was a decision that was not taken lightly," said Maxine Routledge of Lenore, Man., chairwoman of the national Hunter Hoodless museum committee.

The museum has lost \$8,000 to \$10,000 annually in each of the last few years. Visitors have dipped from 1,200

to about 700 a year, Routledge said.

Derbyshire believes the museum is a treasure that ought to be open year-round so the public and school children can learn about Hunter Hoodless.

After the death of her 18-month-old son, John Jr., who had consumed contaminated milk, Hunter Hoodless launched a public lobby against the sale of spoiled milk.

She became a crusader responsible for introducing domestic science courses into Ontario schools. She obtained funding for the construction of the MacDonald Institute at the University of Guelph and helped to found the world's first Women's Institute, which she hoped would promote standards of homemaking and citizenship.

The organization now boasts nearly 20,000 members in Canada, 11,000 of those in Ontario alone, mainly in rural areas, and nearly nine million members worldwide.

"People from all over Ontario, from all over Canada, should care about keeping this museum open year-round," said committee member Mien Donkers of Branchton, just south of Cambridge.

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