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The Battle of Stoney Creek and the founding of Canada's first Women's Institute portrayed

By Kathy Ward
Special to the News

The study of Stoney Creek's postal history leads one into the study of local history too. The cover illustrated brought me in touch with a lot of Stoney Creek's past and led me to write the following.

Stoney Creek is best known for three reasons. Firstly, it was the scene of a decisive battle between the British and Americans in the War of 1812. Stoney Creek is also noted as the birthplace of the Women's Institute Organization in 1897. Thirdly, we can't forget its contemporary claim to fame — the world-famous ice cream.

On the cover shown, the map illustrates how the Americans in their quest to annex British North America to the United States, had taken York April 27, gained control of Lake Ontario, and on May 27 defeated the British at Fort George. They stopped at Stoney Creek to await for supply ships.

On the night of June 5, 1813 more than 3000 American troops appeared to hold a most favourable position. They had commandeered the home of James Gage and were busily confiscating badly needed supplies. Their right flank was protected by a swamp which extended all the way to the lakeshore. Their left, by the Escarpment face. When the Americans retired that night, there's no doubt what was on their minds,

'Victory at Burlington Heights tomorrow'.

BRITISH GRIM

On the other hand, the British situation looked grim. After defeat at Fort George militia were disbanded and Brigadier-General John Vincent retreated to Burlington Heights to prepare for a last-ditch defence of the Peninsula.

Aware that the Americans had advanced to Stoney Creek, Lieutenant-Colonel John Harvey scouted the American camp and found it to be poorly organized and lightly guarded. (Most sources contend it was Billy Green who passed the information about the American position to Harvey) He urged a surprise night attack. General Vincent agreed.

At 11:30 p.m., under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John Harvey, the attacking column supported by a solitary fieldgun set out for Stoney Creek. At the

head of the column wielding a sword given to him by Harvey strode 19 year old Billy Green, the Scout, a native of Stoney Creek. Billy knew every inch of the way and could lead them to their quarry in the dark.

This surprise attack by 704 British troops put the Americans on the defensive. The subsequent battle in the early hours of June 6 lasted about an hour. With the capture of the 2 American leaders, Brigadier-Generals John Chandler and William Henry Winder, the Americans retreated, never again to penetrate as far on Canadian soil.

The Gage House, riddled with musket shot, weathered the historic Battle of Stoney Creek to become Battlefield House, a monument to the successful defence of the Niagara Peninsula.

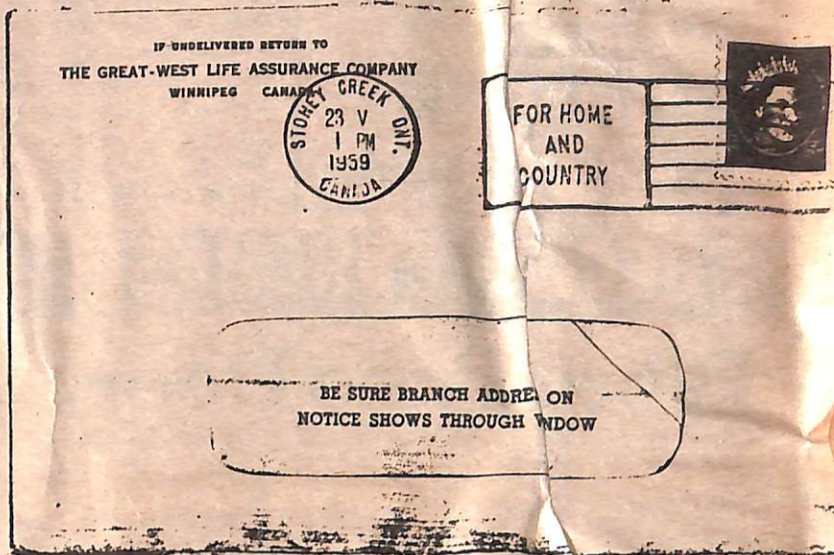
Inspired by Mrs. Calder (granddaughter of James Gage) and the Women's Wentworth Historical Society, a

30-metre stone memorial was erected at the battlefield. The monument is dedicated to the men of both sides who lost their lives in the battle. On June 6, 1913, 100 years after the historic altercation, her majesty Queen Mary pushed a button in Buckingham Palace to officially unveil the monument by electricity.

In 1899 Battlefield House and 4½ acres of land around it were purchased by the Women's Wentworth Historical Society, (Mrs. Calder was president). By Oct. 7 that year, Battlefield House was open to the public.

The women of the Society renovated and furnished the house, and maintained it for 63 years.

In 1962, Battlefield House was turned over to the Niagara Parks Commission. The Commission restored it to the 1830-40 period and opened a museum room containing many objects of interest from the Battle of Stoney Creek and



the War of 1812. The Women of the Historical Society helped to furnish the house as it might have been when it was the home of the Gage family.

June 6, 1963 (the date on the cover) was the opening day of a four-day celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Stoney Creek. On June 8 Battlefield Park was officially reopened and dedicated.

References: 1873 account by Emerson Bristol Biggar; Stoney Creek News articles; Clipping files; Saltfleet and Stoney Creek Libraries; Visit to Battlefield House.

Just over 26 years ago, on May 13, 1959, a group including 20 local women gathered at Stoney Creek United Church and prepared over 10,000 envelopes for stamp collectors worldwide. The picture shows one of these 'first day covers' prepared by members of the Stoney Creek Women's Institute. How did this FDC come to be?

It all began in Stoney Creek in January of 1897. Adelaide Hoodless had been invited by Erland Lee to speak to an open meeting of the Farmers' Institute. She spoke of the need for girls to be educated in the art of homemaking. Her remarks were so convincing she even suggested that an organization of women similar to the men's group be formed. So effective were her words that the first meeting at Squire's Hall February

19, 1897 drew a group of 101 women and one man — Erland Lee. This was the birth of the Women's Institute first called "The Women's Department in Domestic Economy in affiliation with the Farmers' Institute of South Wentworth". At the next meeting the name was changed to the Women's Institute of Saltfleet and later it became the Stoney Creek Women's Institute. Now the organizations are worldwide and to think it all started her in Stoney Creek.

The idea for the stamp on the above cover originated with the Manitoba Women's Institute. They applied to the government for a stamp to honour the founder of the Women's Institute. As a result of this application, the Postmaster General authorized a 5 cent stamp in honour of the International Organization, the Associated Country Women of the World. The stamp is unique in the fact that it is the first Canadian stamp to be designed by a woman — Helen Fitzgerald Bacon of Toronto. The stamp features a female figure kneeling beside a tree over which a globe is poised. The words "Associated Country Women of the World" and "Union Mondiale Des Femmes Rurales" border the stamp on three sides with Canada and 5 cents on the fourth side. An interesting point that casts some doubt on the originality of the design is that I have seen a 1949 German coin with a very similar design — female figure in same crouched position and tree but the globe is absent.

Why was May 13, 1959 chosen as the day of issuance? I do not know if the May 13 date holds any significance but 1959 was chosen because it was the 100th anniversary of the birth of Adelaide Hoodless, the organization's founder. Incidentally Erland Lee is credited as co-founder of the Women's Institute because he was a driving force in the club's beginnings.

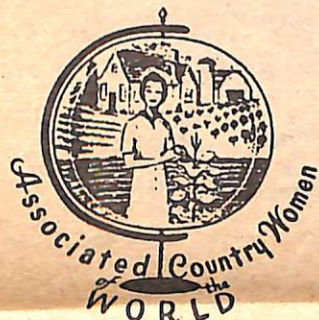
The words "For Home and Country" are on the cancellation covering the stamp. Philatelic lingo this termed a slogan cancellation. For Home and Country is the motto of the Women's Institute. The true purpose of the Women's Institute can be found recorded in the early minutes of the Stoney Creek organization, "A nation cannot rise above the level of its homes, therefore we women must work and study together to raise our homes to the highest possible level." This slogan cancellation was unique to Stoney Creek and was used to cancel mail for some time after May 13, 1959.

My postal history study of Stoney Creek has certainly led to a personal uncovering of Stoney Creek's most interesting past. Just a few short months ago I didn't even know that the above cover cancelled in Stoney Creek existed. I look forward to uncovering more of Stoney Creek's past especially its postal history. If you can be of assistance to my study of Stoney Creek's postal history, please contact me at P.O. Box 9343, Stoney Creek, Ont. L8G 4S1.



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A Tribute to
Canada Women's Institutes
and the



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