

3/12/81

Homes for the holiday

Brahant Newspapers takes a peek inside the region's heritage homes

Story by Paul Svoboda
Photos by Andrea Francis

Nestled cozily among stately pines on Ridge Road, a beautiful white frame house stands as a monument to one of the areas most historical families.

The Erland Lee House, originally constructed in 1801, served the Lee family for six generations and now serves as a living reminder of pioneer

a seven-foot china cupboard which still stands in the pioneer kitchen.

The back portion of the frame house was built in 1801 by the Lee's eldest son John, and in 1873 the front part of the "old house" was added by John's son Abram.

Erland Lee inherited the family farm from his father Abram and subsequently died in 1926.



and United Empire Loyalist life in young Canada.

The home was also the site for the establishment of the first Women's Institutes in the world, when Mr. and Mrs. Erland Lee organized the association in 1897.

Today the house is owned and maintained by the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, and serves as a museum and historical site.

"The original pioneer kitchen was built in 1801," says June Coombs, the Erland Lee Home hostess. "The front part of the house was added on in 1873."

The Lee family arrived in Canada from Maryland in 1792, as United Empire Loyalists. Using virgin pine from the property, James Lee and his wife Hannah constructed a simple log cabin on the site. Lee used the local pine for much of the original furniture, including

Eventually the family left the farm in 1964, and a recommendation was presented to the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario to purchase the home.

This was accomplished in 1972, as the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario celebrated its 75th anniversary.

Today the house is preserved by the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario as one of the most beautiful vintage homes in Ontario and as a permanent memorial of Women's Institute beginnings.

"Tours run throughout the year except February," said Mrs. Coombs.

The home contains seven rooms, complete with period furnishings from the 19th century — some original and some purchased and donated from around the province.

"Much of the donated furniture comes from the Federated Women's Institutes

of Ontario women and from private individuals," explained Mrs. Coombs. "A local group of the women also go out 'antiquing' for furnishings and other period articles."

The pioneer kitchen features all the furnishings and utensils that would have dominated an early kitchen in the 1800's.

The room features a pioneer harvest table, Tillsonburg stove, gunstock chairs, copper tea kettle, and various other household utensils and tools.

Among them is an original rolling pin, crafted by Erland Lee's cousin Hamilton and traditionally presented to a new bride.

The parlor was traditionally used as the main entertainment area for the early Canadian family, and the Erland Lee parlor reflects this atmosphere.

"The parlor was a very sophisticated room, seldom used except for guests," said Mrs. Coombs.

Among the original furnishings in the parlor is the 100-year-old pure wool Persian carpet which graces the pine wood floor.

The parlor fireplace is surrounded by an ebony teak cabinet and shelfwork, which according to Mrs. Coombs was quite a common practice during the time.

A Sherlock-Manning organ from London, Ontario is situated at one end of the parlor, which also houses cherry wood chairs and bentwood rockers.

A walnut centre table, horse-hair sofa, and love seat complete the main furniture, as well as a so-called "what-not-stand", dubbed so because it was flat and situated against a wall.

Some of the more beautiful articles in the parlor include a 150-year-old quilt, a white Bavarian vase, and a pair of blue Royal Houlton vases.

Located just off the parlor, the dining room features the constitutional table where the original Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario charter was signed in 1897. A photostatic copy of the first original book of minutes from this historic session is on display.

Two of the three bedrooms include original Erland Lee furnishings, including the bed, wardrobe, and dresser in the master bedroom.

While most of the quilts and coverlets are original, the majority of the smaller artifacts have been donated, such as stone-ware wash basin sets.

Two of the original coverlets reflect the Lee family's Loyalist heritage, as one is adorned with an eagle design, and the other with an American capital logo.

The family nursery houses a collection of china-faced dolls, which have all been donated. A 19th century crib and



A pioneer version of the "jolly jumper" also served as a detachable rocking chair for infants.



Hostess June Coombs welcomes guests in the Victorian parlor of the Erland Lee Home.



A Manzer sewing machine situated in the sewing room was used by the women of the Lee household.



This antique oil lamp is but one of the treasures to be found in the Erland Lee home.

Continued to page 3