

Dec 14/88

# EVENTS Diary

## The Erland Lee Home: Museum of the Women's Institute

On December 7, an Open House was held at the Erland Lee Home in Stoney Creek; members of the Erland Lee Home Committee of the Women's Institute showed visitors around the house where, over ninety years ago, a young couple worked to start an organization for rural women which has now become an international association for "country women".

The Erland Lee Home sits on Ridge Road, overlooking a Stoney Creek that did not exist in the days it was built. The house is furnished in the late Victorian style and at this time of year is decorated for a Victorian Christmas. In the house and in the Drive House are displays of Victorian furniture and tools, as well as the home crafts so necessary in those days, but now admired for the skill that went into their making and for their beauty.

The Home was purchased by the W.I. in 1972, marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Women's Institute, and is now run by a Committee of W.I. members from across the Province. The home holds a special place in the hearts of Women's Institute members the world over because of its significance in the founding of the organization. On a table



Erland Lee Home

that sits in the parlour, Janet Lee wrote out the constitution of the first Women's Institute, in 1897. Shortly before, her husband, Erland Lee, had attended a talk by Adelaide Hoodless at a Farmers' Institute meeting. Adelaide Hoodless was on a speaking tour of the countryside to speak about the necessity for farm women to learn more about the domestic sciences — especially proper hygiene and sanitation and treatment of illness. Her speech convinced Erland Lee that rural women needed a forum where they could meet to discuss and learn from each other the basic knowledge that would improve their lives and that of their families and communities. Erland and Janet Lee brought their neighbours to-

gether at a meeting and the decision was made to form an organization for rural women: this became the Women's Institute.

*The New Hamilton Weekly* spoke with Mrs. Hilda Beachin, the Publicity Convener for the Erland Lee Home and a member of the Women's Institute since 1938, about the importance of the Institutes in rural communities.

Mrs. Beachin described the W.I. as the "Rural Women's University". The Institutes played a key educational and social role in a community where the only organizations for rural women were the W.I. and the Church. In its early days branches of the Women's Institute were concerned with matters such as hygiene and

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legislation to protect food from contamination, and basic skills such as sewing and cooking. The Women's Institutes in farming communities all over Ontario, then Canada, helped alleviate the incredible isolation of farm women; this is perhaps why the organizations grew so quickly.

In the past ninety years, the Women's Institute has not only grown in numbers, it has altered its work as the role of women has changed. Today rural women do not spend most of their time on work such as sewing their own clothes or spinning their own wool and many of the sanita-

tion and health problems they faced have been resolved. There are also many fewer women on the farm and many more organizations for women and men. Nevertheless, the W.I. still plays an active part in many communities; the Women's Institute now considers in its sphere concerns such as the environment, safety in industry, and international affairs.

As well as the local organizations there are provincial organizations — in Ontario The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario — a national and an international organization, The Associated Country Wom-

en of the World. The worldwide organization has over 8 million members.

Membership is open to all women and girls upon payment of an annual fee of \$5.00. The W.I. considers itself non-partisan, non-sectarian and non-racial.

To contact the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, write the Guelph Agricultural Centre, Box 1030, Guelph, N1H 6N1. For more information on the Erland Lee Home, call the Home at 662-2691.

