

# Mrs. Gordon Conant's Speech At Golden Jubilee Banquet Of Stoney Creek Institute

**Mrs. Conant Is the Daughter Of the First President of A Women's Institute.**

The fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the Stoney Creek Women's Institute, which is the Mother Institute, held at Stoney Creek on Wednesday, February 9, 1947, Mrs. Gordon Conant, of Toronto, the daughter of Mrs. E. D. Smith, the first President, was the speaker and following is her address:

It was with much pleasure that I accepted the invitation to be your guest to night and I take great pride in representing my Mother, the first President of a Women's Institute.

It is a privilege to be so closely connected with this organization which in its growth has done so much toward bringing the women of the world together. I have attended its special functions down through the years; the 25th anniversary celebrated here in Stoney Creek and at the Battlefield, of which I have a treasured programme in my hand; the meeting of the Country women of the world at the Battlefield in 1936; and now at this golden jubilee.

It seems a coincidence that as a child I lived about four miles from the first Institute, and after marriage I made my home in Oshawa which is the same distance from Whitby where the 2nd Institute was organized.

I do not remember the first meeting, after all I was quite young, but I do remember in later years my Mother telling me that she worried about neglecting her family of two children, (my brother who is present and myself), but that Mrs. Hoodless who was her personal friend, persuaded her to be first President, which office she held in 1897, 1898 and 1900. An addition to the family at that time made her relinquish outside duties.

I definitely remember being taken to many meetings, climbing those rickety stairs on the outside of Squire's Hall, and being seated in the front row with my legs dangling, and thinking my mother must be

pretty important to be on that high platform.

Then I recollect when some subjects peculiar to the female of the species were discussed the door was locked in case some one of the opposite sex should intrude.

Also I recall the interest when Mrs. Rorer's cook book was published and in it the statement that tomatoes were not fit for human consumption. Mother felt that a farmer's life was ideal, if only there could be a little more social contact for farmers' wives. I know that Erland Lee, F. M. Carpenter and my father, E. D. Smith were of great assistance to Mrs. Hoodless in establishing the Women's Institute and I feel that women should give those three men credit for desiring the same privileges for farmers' wives that they themselves enjoyed.

I well remember Mrs. John McNeilly and Miss Maggie Nash. Their voices are very clear in my memory. Then when attending MacDonald College, Guelph, in 1912 it was a proud day when my mother read the address and unveiled the portrait of Mrs. John Hoodless. The signatures besides my Mother's on this address were those of Mrs. McNeilly; Mrs. Erland Lee; Mrs. F. M. Carpenter; Miss Nash; Mrs. C. E. Horning and Miss C. Walker.

My Mother would feel highly rewarded for 'turning the sod', as it were, for future Presidents the world over. The Women's Institute has been a constructive compelling force for good wherever it has been established.

Your motto, "For Home and Country" has a depth and warmth that stirs the heart. Homes are where the nations learn to live together. We need sound homes where there is laughter and love.

It has been said that, "a sound family of nations begins with nations of sound families" and that, "the destiny of a country is shaped in its homes."

War has disrupted the homes of the world. Even here in our Western Hemisphere where we still have our homes unscathed by bombs, we are in need of more houses to make

homes. But when one thinks of the sad plight of the Europeans, many of whom I was privileged to meet last autumn in Switzerland and France, one cannot help but believe that this continent was left unscathed for some divine purpose. During the two months abroad, I spent 20 days in Switzerland; 12 in France and 29 in England. The return trip was made more interesting and pleasant by becoming acquainted, at Heath Row while waiting to board the Lancaster which would fly us home, with Mrs. Charles Russell representing the Associated Country Women of the World and coming to Canada on the first lap of a speaking tour that would take her to U.S.A., New Zealand and Australia. She was also interested in meeting the first President's daughter. I attended as a Canadian delegate the 11th World Conference of the Girl Guide Association at Evian, well known French Watering Place on Lake Geneva. 140 were present from 23 countries. Although the theme of this Conference was "Open Windows," we had several speakers who told us of the "closed windows" for the children and adults of Europe. These men and women speakers were well qualified to tell us of conditions for they had worked for years in U.N.R.R.A., Y.M.C.A. and our own Guide International Service.

Because of your theme of "home" and its meaning in our land, I purpose telling you something of the gulf between our experience and ideal of home and what our sisters and brothers of Europe are forced to substitute for that sacred word.

The stories of conditions of Displaced Persons (D.P.) camps were as interesting as they were heart-rending. Where parents have decided not to return to their native country, they live in camps which may be a factory, a row of houses or a barracks. But always people of one nationality are herded together. The D.P. child has not a father who goes out to work. He is sitting at home and probably in the one room in which the whole family lives and eating out his heart, losing all self-respect because he is not able to provide for his family. The displaced persons child is different from our children. Meat to him means "spam" or corned beef; fish comes in tins. He or she has never been with mother to buy a suit or frock. Clothes come from U.N.R.R.A. It is U.N.R.R.A.'s fault if he cannot go to school because of lack

of shoes. A little Latvian girl asked the U.N.R.R.A. worker next time to bring her a baby brother and not a baby sister. Children do not relate their families with having to provide for their wants. Family life is a travesty because of the herded way in which they live;—one room with beds, a table, a few chairs, no room to walk around. There is nothing hidden from the child, and all being so huddled together, without interests or reading matter, they squabble and incessantly talk of the past.

Children become confused. They are called D.P. children, and yet parents tell them they have a country of their own.

As no work is necessary to produce the bare necessities of life, the children consider work a punishment and shrug their shoulders and say: "Why work?" They only know the black market. That was a necessity of life during the war and now the older boys and girls want an easy life, or go into the black market if they do not become thieves and bandits. They absolutely despise people who work. They have missed six years of life, without family, without education, without worship and many have never heard God's name. Now they are adolescent and are without principles.

What of the parents? They fight against their child being labelled D.P. and go to the other extreme. The Kindergarten Schools are run separately for each nationality, where pupils learn only their own language and traditions. This makes them all fight when nationalities are grouped together for each child has been taught his country is "best". Thus the germ of intolerance is having a good start. Children wonder why they don't go home when their country is so fine and beautiful. I could tell you at length of the children whose number is legion, who have no parents, all without a home or country and in many categories. Holland has taken all those who can be proved of Dutch mothers and German fathers. Sweden has taken a great number of the homeless, so that they may be brought up belonging to a family and having a nationality. Must we in Canada remain heartless to their pitiful plight?

The older unaccompanied children are one of the major problems of the world. Many are searching through the countries looking for their parents. One boy recognized the family horse in another country and

threw the driver found his father. His mother had been killed.

These vagabond children have to provide for themselves—they know nothing of family love or the precepts of human society.

Boys and girls of all ages came to Belsen looking for their parents. Wishing to help them you ask, "Is your father alive?" and the child makes one of two answers,—either "he went to the right" (to work) or "he went to the left" (to the gas chamber).

There are other children of a higher age group who lived in the woods with the Russian partisans. They fought, killed, murdered and used weapons, which gave them the stature of men,—a superiority complex.

U.N.R.R.A. had found 10,000 parents and our Guide International Service, 2000. We found through our teams that where there was utter hopelessness before, when Girl Guiding was organized there sprang up a joy and new courage. They felt they were not forgotten and belonged to something bigger than themselves.

The youth of Germany today are in the same position as they were after the 1914—18 war. Hitler came along and gave them an ideal. They have no hope and no ideal at present and if we do not help and guide them some one else will do so.

80 million in Europe are without homes. Low morals previously only associated with the poorest class, now includes all classes. The great problem is to make the changes from their present life to a constructive one. One million children in France are without families. The children of today in Europe will either be the friends or enemies of our own children. What can you, whose motto, is "Home and Country" do to help the situation?

Canadian homes at present are suffering from lack of domestic help, one outcome of which is our shortage of voluntary workers and leaders in all our organizations. Our young mothers are so tied with housework, that small families will result and more population is a crying need of Canada. The National Council of women have forwarded a petition to the Dominion Government asking that a selective type of female immigrant be brought into Canada to meet the need of Canadian women in domestic work in homes, institutions and hospitals, and that they be required to work for a specified time.

Europe is full of desirable female

## Institute's Superintendent's Message at Anniversary

**Miss Anna Lewis Brought Greetings To Stoney Lake Branch.**

On Wednesday, February 19, the Stoney Creek Women's Institute held a banquet to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the organization of the Branch, which was the first Institute in the world. Miss Lewis, Superintendent of Women's Institutes in Ontario, brought a message of congratulation.

It is with deep and sincere gratitude that we pay tribute to Our Mother Institute, Stoney Creek. Little did our first Institute members realize that out of that memorable meeting held fifty years ago

persons who could make good Canadian citizens and would be grateful for the work Canadian women can provide.

This action would aid in Europe's displaced persons problems—and give us an opportunity to welcome and extend a hand of warm friendship to those in need. We of America are the "haves",—the people of Europe are the "have nots". As human beings they covet the necessities of life and the luxuries that we enjoy. As Beverly Baxter so aptly put it recently in Toronto,—"In America luxuries have become necessities and in Europe necessities have become luxuries."

This tremendous disparity must be bridged if future wars are to be avoided and regard is to be had for the Biblical injunction—"Am I my brother's keeper?"

In conclusion may I congratulate you and wish you every success for the future.

Women's Institutes and kindred organizations throughout the world have accomplished much in the last half century. There is even more to be accomplished in the years that lie ahead.

Society is now more complex—the problems of the home and of the nation present difficulties without precedent. But from the experiences and knowledge of the past Women's Institutes may contribute a great deal by the fulfillment of their motto, "For Home and Country."

throughout the world it will take a the power we possess and can create to build right principles and relieve human misery. As our organization has expanded so also our responsibilities have increased. We have accepted the countries of the world as our neighbours. Are we ready to perform the neighbourly acts of kindness, understanding, tolerance and mutual help in order that we may live in harmony with our neighbours? This is a challenge which must be met if we are to help bring true peace to our world.

"And is he dead whose glorious mind Lifts thine on high? To live in hearts we leave behind Is not to die!"

Are they dead whose "glorious minds" have lifted ours on high? Have we not been stimulated to greater and nobler thoughts and deeds because our early Institute women lived and had a vision?

Are we the young women measuring up? Does this same courageous unselfish spirit and will to serve lives in the hearts of all Institute women today? Let this be our aim. May our ever increasing membership follow on to greater accomplishments because this Institute idea was born and because these noble women lived and inspired us.

Truly we treasure the past. We pay high tribute to Our Mother Institute, to those who helped with its organization and to our charter members (several of whom, we are happy to say, are still with us to celebrate this great occasion).

The finest tribute we could pay is keeping our standards high, to build our great Women's Institute super structure on the firm foundations already laid. The thousands and thousands of Institute members regardless of colour, creed or politics who go about doing good the world over form a living memorial to the great Women's Institute idea originated at Stoney Creek.

We face the future keeping ever before us our great motto "For Home and Country" and the words of our Ode "Each shall seek the common weal—the good of all mankind."

What hallowed ground? 'Tis our high priesthood shall make earth All hallowed ground!

May we the daughters and granddaughters of the first Institute women go forward with dauntless courage, determination and faith to help bring Peace! Independence! And Truth! to all mankind.

Matthew Arnold has said "If ever the world sees a day when women shall work together purely and simply for the benefit of mankind, it will be a power such as the world has never known."

Surely this is our Women's Institute challenge today. With chaotic conditions as they still exist