

Unveiling Ceremony Honors Women's Institute Founder

Yesterday the wind bent heavy boughs of overhead pines low over a rugged boulder in front of the Lee Homestead, Ridge Road, Stoney Creek.

Inset in the boulder was a plaque honoring Mr. and Mrs. Erland Lee, who, in 1897, pioneered the first Women's Institute.

THE MEMORIAL was unveiled by Mrs. W. J. McEvoy of Woodburn, who instigated the plan for the monument, and Miss Alison Lee, granddaughter of the WI founders.

Mr. Frank Lee, who presently resides with his family in the house constructed of virgin pine cut from the property, and carved by hand, expressed his appreciation to the South Wentworth District of Women's Institutes for their tribute to his parents.

"I have a letter in the house, written to my father, from the Department of Agriculture, advising him to go easy in organizing a ladies' group as such groups usually fold up," said Mr. Lee.

"It has been proven that this organization was founded on solid constitution and wise by-laws written and drawn up by my mother and father, aided by the excellent counsel of "E.D." as he was respectfully known, and Mrs. E. D. Smith, and also Mr. F. M. Carpenter."

MR. LEE SAID it was the power and ability of women that had spread the WI to the four corners of the world in a relatively short time.

Mrs. Gordon Conant of Oshawa, daughter of Senator and Mrs. E. D. Smith whose mother was the first WI president, spoke to the many gathered to witness the ceremony.

"From the beginning the WI's have flourished and expanded and benefits have accrued for the good of mankind around the world," said Mrs. Conant.

"There might never have been a WI had not the energetic public-spirited secretary-treasurer of the South Wentworth Farmer's Institute, Mr. Erland Lee, journeyed to the Agricultural College, Guelph, to attend a meeting, in the autumn of 1896," said Mrs. Conant.

IT WAS at this meeting Mr. Lee met Adelaide Hoodless, and heard her speak on the need to educate girls for the sphere of life for which they were destined — homemaking.

When Mrs. Hoodless later

addressed a Farmer's Institute meeting at which Mr. Lee was chairman, he asked how many women would like to form an organization similar to the men's group.

"There being no telephones, Mr. and Mrs. Lee took it upon themselves though cold the weather, to visit women throughout the county, alerting and inviting them to attend the meeting," Mrs. Conant said.

Through their efforts more than 100 women were on hand to greet Mrs. Hoodless the following week.

THE GROUP was named "The Women's Department of the Farmer's Institute of South Wentworth" but the name was changed to "Women's Insti-

tute of Saltfleet Township". As other groups were organized, the name was again changed to "Stoney Creek Women's Institute" as it has remained, with the identifying affix "Mother Institute" said Mrs. Conant.

"THIS MUST BE a proud day for the children of Mr. and Mrs. Erland Lee, their daughter, Marjorie, and Frank, the son, still living in the homestead of his ancestors which is permeated with deeds and legends of the past . . .

"The plaque on this boulder will remind those who look upon it, that the world progresses through human interest and continual hard work of those who still have the enduring pioneer spirit coursing through their characters," Mrs. Conant said in conclusion.

A special guest, was Mrs. E. J. Roylance, of Greenwood, B.C., president of the Federated WI's of Canada, who spoke briefly.

Also participating in the ceremony were Mr. Frank E.

Lennard, MP, (who had arrived the week before in error for the occasion, and related his mistake with good humor) and Mrs. L. G. Lymburner of Port Colborne, FWIO president.

Mrs. Lymburner said it was a good thing to recognize those who not only made a fine contribution locally, but one that spread to a greater sphere. "Mr. and Mrs. Lee were extraordinary people, with imagination and vision, who lent their energies and talents as leaders in their community," said Mrs. Lymburner.

Canon John Lake Anderson of Stoney Creek officiated at the invocation and dedication.

At the reception that followed the ceremony members of the Saltfleet Branch of the WI were hostesses.

INSIDE the fine old home, guests signed the special book that rested on the walnut table in the Lee dining room, at which Mrs. Erland Lee, wrote, in her own handwriting, the constitution and by-laws of the Women's Institute.

Women didn't do it all says WI charter member

Mrs. G. A. Gliddon can look back to the very beginning of the Women's Institutes in Canada.

She was a teenager when the WI was first formed 60 years ago in the village near Hamilton. Now she is a spry 75 and a charter member of the WI, but she says she can't take any credit for getting the first institute established.

At 15, the former Maude Harper was too young to attend the evening meetings, although her mother herself unable to attend, had paid for her daughter's membership.

But in the years that followed, Mrs. Gliddon took an active part in institute work. She was a keen debater and also served as pianist at meetings.

And this year, the institute at Vinemount, near Stoney Creek, elected her as its president for the fourth consecutive year.

Mrs. Gliddon was the only one of five surviving charter members to attend the first national convention of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada held in Ottawa recently.

She gave delegates something to

think about when she took the floor to say that not all the credit for the first WI should go to the acknowledged founder, Adelaide Hoodless. There would not have been any WI at all if it had not been for the hard work of its first officers and members, she said.

Anyone glancing through the history of the Women's Institutes would note that founding honors must go to Stoney Creek farmer Erland Lee, she explained. He was a Farmer's Institute member who first asked Mrs. Hoodless to speak at the farmer's group.

Mr. Lee and his wife were staunch supporters of the fledgling WI, despite doubts about the women's organization, expressed in 1897 by P. W. Hodson, then Ontario superintendent for the Farmer's Institutes.

Mrs. Gliddon explained that WI members in Stoney Creek had unearthed a copy of a letter written by Mr. Hodson to Mr. Lee, in which the former suggested it would be a long time before women in an independent institute group would gain recognition.