

W.I. Born In Ontario Village On a February Day In 1897

The first Women's Institute was organized with Mrs. E. D. Smith, of W. I. as president, and Mrs. Hoodless as honorary president. First known as Saltfleet Township Women's Institute, it later was called Stoney Creek, W.I. The one man present at the organization meeting was Erland Lee, member of the Farmer's Institute in Saltfleet, who had been instrumental in having Mrs. Hoodless address a meeting of his Institute. It was at that meeting Mrs. Hoodless suggested formation of a women's group.

From that small beginning this rural women's movement has spread across Canada and into England and other countries.

Quick growth of the movement in its early days was, perhaps, an omen of the way it was to bring new knowledge and happy fellowship to women the world over.

A second Women's Institute, known as the Women's Institute of Southern Ontario was formed at Whitby on June 29, 1897 and it was not long before there was a third organization at Kemble, known as the Women's Institute of North Grey.

Of the first Institute, Miss Laura Rose (later Mrs. W. F. Stephen, of Ottawa), first government lecturer and organizer for the Women's Institutes wrote: "At first the members were diffident about taking part in their meetings but now excellent papers are prepared and most interesting discussions take place." She visited South Ontario W.I. also and in 1900 wrote of this district: "There are now 4 or 5 branches in neighboring localities. At one place the hall was so full I could not find a chair when my address was finished."

Mrs. Hoodless' aim was to give women knowledge which would help them to improve their homes and also to take away the inevitable loneliness of isolated rural homes by providing fellowship with other women. Through their study and interest in community life they would help to raise the standard of living.

These aims were well defined in the minutes of the first meeting. The original minutes, kept at Stoney Creek, have been copied at the Parliament buildings by the Women's Institute Branch, Ontario Department of Agriculture. As adopted at the first meeting after organization February 25, 1897 the constitution stated the object to be: "To promote that knowledge of household science which shall lead to improvement in household architecture with special attention to home sanitation, to a better understanding of the economic and hygienic value of foods and fuels and to a more scientific care of children with a view to raising the general standard of the health of our people."

In later years this was added to as follows: "In the carrying on of any line of work which has for its objects the uplift of the home, or the betterment of conditions surrounding community life."

The first Institute decided to meet once a fortnight and subjects discussed during these first meetings had a wide range of interest. On March 11 it was decided to conduct a question drawer and papers were presented on the following subjects: "Proper Food for Children," "Art" and "God Save the Queen." Later that month Dr. Mabel Henderson gave an address on "The Child in Health and in Disease," and there was a paper on "Women on the Farm." Fore-runner of the present Junior Institute programs was the paper given on April 27 dealing with "Home Decorations by Girls."

By the end of the year members had had a lecture by a graduate of a cookery school, and the following year both monetary assistance and lectures were provided from the Ontario Department of Agriculture.

In 1899 Miss Laura Rose was appointed first Government lecturer and organizer for the Women's Institutes and the same year the Institutes asked the Government to make provision for scientific education in home-making at Guelph. This was given impetus by the success of Mrs. Hoodless in securing \$200,000 from Sir William Macdonald of Montreal as a contribution towards Macdonald Institute, Guelph.

Today Ontario Women's Institutes are contributing to an Adelaide Hoodless Fund with an objective of \$36,000 to provide scholarships to enable girls from Ontario farms to study home economics at the provincial Agricultural College.

When the Experimental Union met at Guelph in 1902 in annual session 24 Institutes were represented and, the following year the first Women's Institute convention was held there with delegates present from the 53 Institutes, representing a membership of 6,000.

By 1911 at the ninth annual convention held in Toronto, the Institutes had grown to 600 branches with a membership of more than 16,000.

Welcoming the delegates to this convention, Mrs. A. M. Huestis of Toronto suggested that scientific knowledge of home subjects lifted the commonplace round.

"When mother knows why she cares for baby and baby's food in the most approved method, she no longer rebels over the time required to sterilize milk receptacles or to persuade father that the barn needs white-washing, cement flooring and window space to meet health requirements and make a modern cow barn. She even rejoices that she is permitted to look into the source of water supplied to the cattle and the water used to boil the vessels and when an epidemic such as typhoid strikes its deadly poison in her neighborhood, it will be the modern Institute woman who will lead in the reform to prevent such a dire calamity happening again."

Mrs. Huestis went on to refer to "municipal and rural housekeeping," a practice which Institutes over the years have faithfully carried on through their welfare work and community activities.

"If our civic and district fathers do not know how to housekeep and we do, it is ours to point the way to the needed cleaning and to help secure a department of public health to control by preventive means all these questions of a conservation of life," said Mrs. Huestis.

This was in 1911. In the fall of 1913 the Institutes in convention passed a resolution requesting the Department of Education to take steps for establishment of a provincial system of medical and dental inspection of school children. As this met with the approval of the Minister of Education, he established this work under department supervision, in co-operation with the Minister of Health. Medical clinics followed in 1918, and later dental clinics.

This was but one of many projects which the Institutes have instigated and carried forward through the years. This year establishment of school clinics, measures for the control of tuberculosis, cancer and venereal disease and immunization of children against infectious diseases are being stressed. In many districts Institutes are seeing to it that school lunches are provided.

Although few present institute members may remember the first superintendents of the Women's Institute Branch, Ontario Department of Agriculture, many will recall the days when the late George Putnam came to their conventions, a lone man in the midst of hundreds of women. But they knew he had their interests at heart and was indefatigable in giving advice and implementing their aims.

The first superintendent was F. W. Hodson, from 1897 to 1900, followed by Dr. G. C. Creelman, 1900 to 1904. Mr. Putnam served from 1904 to 1934 to be followed by Miss B. C. McDermid and Miss M. A. Clarke. The present director is Miss Anna P. Lewis, of Hawmarket.

Capable and gifted women have guided the work of the Women's Institutes of Ontario since their federation in 1919. Mrs. William Todd, of Orillia, was the first provincial president, and the second was a Western Ontario resident, Mrs. George Edwards, of Komoka, now of London.

Other presidents have been: Mrs. C. Field Robertson, of Lanark; Mrs. W. J. Stone, of Newton Robinson; Mrs. A. E. Walker, of Bartonville; Mrs. R. B. Colloton, of Lorne Park; Mrs. T. J. McDowell, of Milverton; Mrs. Ernest Duke, of Port Carling; Mrs. Clarence Holmes, of Belleville, and the present head, Mrs. Hugh Summers, of Fonthill, elected in 1944.

Public services which have been

projects of the Women's Institutes of Ontario have included Macdonald Institute, medical inspection, demanding immunization, equipping hospitals, culture through literature, drama festivals, music in schools, public speaking contests, introduction of first aid, drinking fountains and school lunches to school life; fighting for the franchise; country fairs, cemeteries, community halls and centres, and historical research. The institutes took part in the international peace garden in 1930, and have given valuable contributions in two wars.

Among honored guests at the celebration at Stoney Creek tomorrow will be the charter members of the first Women's Institute and officers of the F.W.I.C. Mrs. G. D. Conant, of Oshawa, daughter of the first president, Mrs. E. D. Smith, will be the guest speaker.