



ADELAIDE HOODLESS

Major accomplishments often have their roots in tragedy. For example, millions of women and their families around the world have led happier lives because of the death of an 18-month-old boy in the summer of 1890.

The child was John Harold Hoodless, and he died of "summer complaint" after drinking contaminated milk. His grief-stricken mother, Adelaide Hunter Hoodless, blamed herself, and vowed to do everything in her power to prevent another tragedy. From that moment on, she devoted herself to improving home life for other women. Her efforts not only affected domestic life in Ontario, but in other provinces, and drastically altered the education of girls as well.

Adelaide was born on a farm at St. George, near Brantford, on February 27, 1857, the youngest of 10 children. Her father David had died some months earlier, leaving her mother to raise the children who remained at home. Records of Adelaide's education are sketchy, but she may have attended a Ladies' School while living with a married sister. Whatever her education, she has been described by contemporaries as intelligent and extremely charming.

In 1881, she married John Hoodless, son of a prosperous furniture manufacturer. The young couple moved to the Hamilton area, where the first of four children were born the following summer.

After John Harold's death, Adelaide became involved in public life. Like many prominent women of the day, including Judge Emily Murphy, she never questioned that a woman's place was anywhere but in the home. However, she did question many other facets of daily life. In her opinion, the educational system did not prepare women for their role as homemakers. More was known about the care of livestock than of women and children, she observed repeatedly, arguing that a special "domestic science" program was therefore needed in schools to overcome this ignorance.

Derided at first as a radical "new woman" she eventually won many supporters. Between 1893 and 1908, she was responsible for introducing courses in 32 schools, and wrote a domestic science textbook for the courses as well. She also influenced others, notably tobacco magnate Sir William Macdonald, to found schools for domestic science teachers.

Her accomplishments in the educational field might have satisfied another woman, but Adelaide Hoodless had boundless energy. Having grown up in the country, she was familiar with rural conditions. "Life on a farm



Courtesy Public Archives of Canada

can be pretty dull and lonely," she commented. "I know, I was brought up on one." She proposed an institute for women, similar to the Farmers' Institute their husbands attended. The idea caught the attention of Erland Lee, a young farmer. So, at a meeting in Saltfleet Township (Stoney Creek), on February 19, 1897, the Women's Institute was formed at Lee's house.

Along with providing a social focal point for rural women, the Women's Institute taught domestic science, beekeeping and other skills they could use in their daily lives. The movement gradually spread throughout the British Commonwealth as the Association of Country Women of the World.

In addition, Adelaide was involved in the formation of the Victorian Order of Nurses and the Hamilton YWCA. She lectured, raised funds for her various projects, and served as an American government advisor on industrial schools. And yet, one daughter recalled, "As a homemaker, Mother was an inspiration. Eastcourt (the Hoodless home) was always open house and she was the gracious centre about whom everything revolved... She was beautiful, had travelled widely... our beaux flocked to Sunday Tea... if Mother was home, even if Muriel and I were out."

She seemed tireless. On February 26, 1910 she travelled to Toronto, despite a painful headache, to speak to the Federation of Women's Clubs. On the platform she pled eloquently for money to establish the Lillian Massey School of Domestic Science, later the Household Science Department of the University of Toronto. Half-way through her speech, the audience broke into applause. Adelaide sipped some water then collapsed on the platform. She died within seconds.

Tributes and glowing eulogies poured in, praising the woman who had done so much to change education and the condition of homes in North America. But the most lasting memorials to her work are the organizations she founded. Today, more than 70 years after her death, they have all survived.

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As one Area PRO stated: "Remember, the Women's Institute continues to succeed, not because it is big, or because it is long established, but because there are people in it, who live it, sleep it, dream it, and build future plans for it."