

Adelaide Hunter Hoodless

1857-1910



Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph

ADELAIDE HUNTER HOODLESS, one of Canada's most creative social reformers at the turn of the century, was a primary participant in the establishment of the Women's Institutes, the National Council of Women of Canada, the National Council of the YWCA, the Macdonald Institute in Ontario, Macdonald College in Quebec, and the Victorian Order of Nurses.

At the annual meeting of a farmers' organization in 1893, she startled those in attendance by stating forcefully that the health of their wives and children "which you are neglecting is far more important than that of your animals."

She spoke with the conviction born of a tragic personal experience. One of her children, an infant son, had died in 1889 after drinking infected milk. This tragic event motivated her for the rest of her life.

She endeavoured, by various means, to assist women throughout Canada to provide more intelligent care for their children, their families, and themselves.

Born in 1857, on a farm near St. George, north of Brantford, Ontario, young Adelaide was the youngest of 13 children. Her father died before she was born. As she matured she became aware of the difficulties her widowed mother faced in raising her large family alone.

When Adelaide married John Hoodless, a successful manufacturer, she moved to Hamilton, Ontario. There, after the death of her infant son, she led a campaign for the pasteurization of milk. She became the president of the Hamilton branch of the Young Women's Christian Association when it was organized in that city. Her experience in the YWCA strengthened her beliefs that girls, and through them their families, would benefit greatly if they were trained in homemaking.

This 1909 portrait of reformer Adelaide Hunter Hoodless by John W.L. Foster was painted shortly before her untimely death which occurred while she was giving a public address in Toronto

Classes she initiated in domestic science at the Hamilton YWCA received a most enthusiastic response. In 1893, after serving as a delegate to the World Congress of Women in Chicago, she proposed the establishment of a National Association of the YWCA to assist underprivileged girls. This was founded the following year and she became its president in 1895.

Through various activities, Mrs. Hoodless became a recognized authority on domestic science education and child welfare. As treasurer and home economics convener of the Hamilton Local Council of Women, she organized the second branch of the Victorian Order of Nurses, today a national, non-profit organization providing home nursing care, particularly for the elderly and chronically ill.

At the end of the nineteenth century, as a result of Hoodless' efforts, courses in domestic science for girls and manual training for boys were added to the Ontario school curriculum. Ontario's Minister of Education, the Hon. G.W. Ross, asked her to travel across the province to inform the public about domestic science and to write a book on the subject. She thus became one of the first women on the province's payroll. Her book, *Public School Domestic Science*, was published in 1898.

Her crowning achievement was founding the Women's Institutes. On February 19, 1897, she spoke to a meeting of farmers' wives in Stoney Creek, Ontario. Out of that meeting came the first Women's Institute. The inaugural meeting was held shortly afterward at the home of Mrs. E.D. Smith in Winona, Ontario.

Adelaide Hoodless was eager to initiate resources for the development of the abilities, confidence, and prospects of women living in rural communities. Her aim was to establish and develop what might be described as a rural university for women and, within ten years, more than 500 Institutes had been organized across Canada.

Through the efforts of Mrs. Hoodless, her associates, and supporters such as Senator E.D. Smith, the Institutes became widely influential: increased attention was paid to child welfare and women's interests; medical care and child dental care were more frequently provided; recreational and additional library facilities were established; services for helping immigrants to preserve their own cultures and customs were improved.

In 1903, through a grant secured by Mrs. Hoodless from tobacco magnate Sir William Macdonald of Montreal, the Macdonald Institute was established in the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph (and later, Macdonald College in Quebec) to train Canadian women in the teaching of domestic science.

Adelaide Hoodless died suddenly on the eve of her 53rd birthday in 1910. Her vision and determination, however, continue to stimulate women in Canada and around the world. During World War I, Women's Institutes were introduced into England and Scotland. In 1919 the Government of Canada granted the Institutes a federal charter and provincial representatives met that same year in Winnipeg to form the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada. Their membership today is 30,000.