

The Eyes of the Institute World Look in Gratitude to Stoney Creek



CHARTER MEMBERS OF FIRST INSTITUTE

Above are shown the Charter Members of the Stoney Creek Women's Institute present at the 50th Anniversary Banquet on February 19. In the picture, left to right, are: Back row—Mrs. H. P. Van Wagner, Mrs. McKinley Morden, Mrs. G. D. Conant, guest speaker and daughter of the first president; Mrs. B. E. Thompson, Mrs. George Miller, Mrs. Murray Neil. Seated—Mrs. J. B. Smith, Mrs. John Budge, rs. J. B. Davis, Mrs. George A. Glidden, Mrs. Selby Corman and Mrs. Walter Ptolemy.

STONEY CREEK START OF W.I.

On February 19, 1897, a group of farm women gathered in Squire's Hall, near Stoney Creek, and from their meeting has come an organization that boasts 3000 branches throughout Canada.

Inspired by Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless, the good ladies met to study together and to organize what they hoped would be a women's department of domestic economy in affiliation with the Farmer's Institute of South Wentworth. They decided to call the new organization "The Women's Department of Farmer's Institute of South Wentworth." The name lasted exactly a week and at the next meeting was changed to the familiar Women's Institute.

It was decided to hold meetings once every fortnight on Thurs.p.m. at two.

A minute book preserved from the first meeting, records that women of that time had the similiar problems their daughters and grand-daughters have to-day.

At the first Annual meeting held in June, 1897, Mrs. J.H.McNeilly read a paper on Child Culture.

In 1899 the second Women's Institute was begun in Ontario County. From that time onward the movement spread until to-day it is world wide.

Across Canada and the U.S. and in foreign countries around the world, Women's Institutes will celebrate the founding of their organizations, an organization that stemmed from the district around Stoney Creek and Beaverdams, where another lady, Laura Secord, showed the stuff women were made of 80-odd years before.

Written on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary Feb. 19, 1947.

Wednesday, February 19, 1947, marked a memorable date on Women's Institute calendars all over the world for it was fifty years ago on that date that the Women's Institute idea was born in the little village hall at Stoney Creek, Ontario.

Mr. Erland Lee Instrumental in Arranging Meeting

Miss Marjorie Lee, a present member of the Stoney Creek Institute and daughter of Mr. Erland Lee tells us the story of origin.

"Stoney Creek, our village, is noted in every Canadian History as the site of a battle which marked the turning back of the American invaders in 1813 and saved Canada for the Crown".

"This district was settled by United Empire Loyalist families, who had been driven from their comfortable homes to the South by the American Revolutionists. They came bringing but few worldly possessions, since they had to carry them by oxcart and on horse back, but rich in their loyalty to the Empire and with courage to build new homes and a strong nation. It was mainly descendants of these hardy pioneers who met in 1897 and organized the 'Women's Institute' which has carried the name of Stoney Creek far beyond the borders of Canada.

"A Farmer's Institute with my father, Erland Lee, as secretary, had been formed about 1884. In the autumn of 1896 as a delegate from the Farmer's Institute father attended the annual 'Experimental Union' at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, where he heard Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless deliver a very stirring address on the value and need of having domestic science and sewing taught in the public schools. My father was much impressed and resolved that at the first opportunity he would invite Mrs. Hoodless to address the women of Saltfleet. It was customary to invite the ladies to the evening meetings of the Farmer's Institute but the men objected to having a lady as speaker. However, they had instructed my father to engage speakers so he went ahead and extended a personal invitation to Mrs. Hoodless to address their meeting."

Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless Organizes First Institute

"Mrs. Hoodless, in a day and age when woman's place was held to be in the home and not on a public platform had been aroused by a personal tragedy to the great need of homemaking education. Mrs. Hoodless' little son had died at the age of 18 months from drinking impure milk. She felt responsible for this death; that she should have known more about the care and preparation of food. It was her great longing to save others from the pain she suffered that drove her on to try to bring within the reach of all, homemaking education."

The Historic Evening Arrives

"The historic evening arrived and the meeting was called to order by my father as chairman. The Agricultural speaker had as his subject 'The Feeding of Calves'. Then Mrs. Hoodless gave a stirring talk on the need of instruction on the feeding of people. She hoped farmers would devote as much thought to the diet of their children as they did to that of their animals.

"When my father arose to thank Mrs. Hoodless he said he was much impressed by her address and asked the audience why a similar society to that of the Farmer's Institute could not be organized for women. Then,

while the men studied the science of Agriculture the women could study the science of homemaking. The women were asked how many would come to such an organization meeting. It was quite an innovation for women of those days. Timidly at first hands were raised but finally thirty-five women expressed their willingness to attend the organization meeting."

February 19, 1897 at Squire's Hall

"This meeting was called in the days when there were no rural telephones so my mother and father drove long hours notifying as many women as possible and when, on February 19, 1897, the women gathered in Squire's Hall, Stoney Creek, 101 women and 1 man were present. The one man was my father who acted as chairman and after an impressive address by Mrs. Hoodless on the importance of education in Homecraft and Mothercraft he conducted the election of officers and the first Women's Institute in the world came into being.

"Many men were inclined to scoff at a women's society amounting to anything 'All spats and gossip' one man said. 'We'll start every meeting with a prayer, that should put us in a frame of mind above bickering' was Mother's reply to this. 'Teaching women folk extravagance' was another criticism. 'We'll be a drain on no man's purse' said Mother jotting down in her clear hand as the constitution and bylaws were being drawn up 'Yearly dues twenty-five cents'."

Old Minute Book Tells Its Story

The treasured minute book, well preserved but with leaves yellowing with age, tells the story simply in these words:

"Organization meeting held February 19, 1897.

"Mr. Erland Lee was chairman of the meeting and an address was given by Mrs. John Hoodless.

"Moved by Mrs. Melson, seconded by Mrs. E. Lee that we organize a women's department of Domestic Economy in affiliation with the Farmer's Institute. Carried.

"It was decided that the name should be the 'Women's Department of the Farmer's Institute of South Wentworth.

The following officers were elected:-
Honorary President—Mrs. John Hoodless; President—Mrs. E. D. Smith; Ist Vice-President—Mrs. Melson; 2nd Vice-President—Mrs. J. Dean; Secretary—Miss M. Nash; Treasurer—Mrs. J. H. McNeilly.

Thus the first meeting held on a winter's night in 1897 was recorded. Little did those women assembled realize how profoundly the decision they made that night would affect the lives of countless thousands of rural women in many parts of the world.

Much work was yet to be done to start this organization on the right road. Mr. Lee, on behalf of the members immediately contacted the Honourable John Dryden, Minister of Agriculture and Mr. F. W. Hodson, Superintendent of Farmer's Institutes asking for Government support and affiliation with the Farmer's Institutes. This support and affiliation was willingly granted.

With the help of Senator E. D. Smith and Major Carpenter, members of parliament, and Mr. Lee the women drew up their constitution and by-laws ready for presentation at the next meeting.