

SOUTH ONTARIO DISTRICT WOMEN'S INSTITUTE
DISTRICT HISTORY 1897 - 1917

by Mrs. C. McTaggart
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Ontario County, the Keystone County, is wedged between Durham and Victoria on the east, York and Simcoe on the west, and rock-ribbed Muskoka to the north, while its southern shores are washed by Lake Ontario. The District of Ontario South is comprised of the four Townships which lie at the southern end of the County; Pickering and Whitby, whose gentle slopes face southward and whose streams empty into Lake Ontario; Uxbridge with its higher elevation with its streams flowing northward to Lake Simcoe and Reach which partly surrounds Lake Scugog.

It was here in this District that the Women's Institute became established at the end of the Nineteenth Century, the second W.I. in the Province. It is unfortunate that this story has not been attempted before (1971) as some records have been misplaced and lost, and those who might have given valuable assistance are gone. However, I have put down the information I have found and in some places I shall leave it to you to interpret as you wish.

"January 1885 was the time of revival of the farmers institute work in Ontario. It was the date of the revival of the work under the name of the Farmers' Institute, and the main inspiration for the revival was the success attending the Farmers' Institute work in some of the United States. This however was not the first time instruction of farmers had been attempted. The first Agricultural Society was organized in Upper Canada in 1792 or 1793."

We are all familiar with the story of Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless and the birth of the first Women's institute at Stoney Creek in Wentworth County on February 19th, 1897 and so I shall not repeat it here but rather try to show how and why this District became the second in the Province to have a Women's Institute.

Mr. Erland Lee who gave Mrs. Hoodless valuable assistance in the organization of the Stoney Creek W.I., was a public-spirited young farmer and was vitally interested in the Farmers' Institute. Mr. Lee, on behalf of the new organization wrote to Mr. J. I. Hodson, Superintendent of the Farmers' Institutes, and the Hon. John Dryden, Minister of Agriculture, asking for affiliation with the Farmers' Institutes and for Government co-operation and support. As a result there was during the first years a close affiliation of the Farmers' Institutes and Women's Institutes and there has been support and co-operation given by the Department of Agriculture to this day.