

How women's institutes began

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The Women's Institute is the largest women's organization in the world and its motto is "For Home and Country."

There are 1,000 Women's Institutes in Ontario alone and thousands more throughout Canada and in many countries of the world, but it was all started in Stoney Creek, near Hamilton, in 1897 by Adelaide Hoodless whose youngest child died after drinking contaminated milk. She campaigned at first against the sale of tainted milk and then started to fight for women to become better educated in such matters.

Hoodless first tackled the boards of education to teach domestic science in schools and wrote a textbook called Public School Domestic Science. She was a fighter for improved education for women right from the word go. The first convenor of the national YMCA, she was also its second vice-president in the formative years.

A co-founder of the National Council of Women, she was the first treasurer. Tobacco millionaire Sir William Macdonald provided the money for Hoodless to start the Macdonald Institute at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph. It was her drive and persuasion which resulted in the

establishment of the household science department at the University of Toronto—an offshoot of the Lillian Massey School of Domestic Science.

Erland and Janet Lee, of Stoney Creek, persuaded her to address a meeting at which there were 101 women at Squire's Hall, Stoney Creek, on Feb. 19 1897 and within a week The Women's Institute was born with the purpose "of disseminating knowledge relating to domestic economy, including household architecture, with special attention to home sanitation; a better understanding of the economic and hygienic value of foods, clothing and fuel and more scientific care and training for children, with a view to raising the general standard of health and morals of our people."

The WI proved so popular it spread quickly across Canada and eventually around the world. During World Wars I and II members of the WI sewed and knitted for the Red Cross and sent parcels to servicemen. It was also responsible for the pasturization of milk and the wrapping of bread in our stores.

In the many communities where branches have been established Women's Institutes have supported libraries, parks, 4-H clubs, agricultural fairs, hospitals and nursing homes and re-

creation areas. They have fostered children overseas and community halls.

On the local level they have developed and maintained Tweedsmuir histories which document history by recording the stories of buildings, people, farms and industry. The Erland Lee Museum in Stoney Creek is operated by the Federation of Women's Institutes and is refurbished to its original style.

Internationally Women's Institutes belong to the Associated Women of the World and as members support community improvements projects in the Third World such as nutrition education and sanitary water facilities. They also act as consultant to the United Nations.

Current issues being tackled include lobbying both Canadian and U.S. governments on the problem of acid rain and the holding of workshops on the impact of Free Trade. The WI speaks out against pornography and in 1984 initiated and developed the pilot project for rural day care programs.

Today the Women's Institutes are stronger than ever. Those responsible for the original idea in Saltfleet Township more than 80 years ago had a better vision that they perhaps realized when they decided to band together "For Home and Country."