

WI birthplace opens



Mrs. Clifford Freel (standing) and Marjorie Chisholm Lee, both of Hamilton, are daughters of Erland Lee and were born in the Lee house.

STONEY CREEK — The Ontario Women's Institute has spent \$40,000 for the Erland Lee home and plans to maintain it as a shrine and showplace for people to see where the WI was born.

Mr. Lee was the man who invited Adelaide Hunter Hoodless to speak to 101 women at a ladies' night at the South Wentworth Farmers' Institute Feb. 19, 1897.

The immediate result was another meeting, held six days later, at which Mrs. Hoodless was elected honorary president and Mrs. E. D. Smith of Winoona, president of a new women's organization.

Mrs. Austin Zoeller of New Hamburg, chairman of the Erland Lee Home committee, says Mr. Lee drew up the original constitution and Mrs. Lee hand-wrote it at a dining room table in the old house.

Mrs. Zoeller says the home remained in the Lee family until the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) bought it, after several years of heart-searching over the problems involved in operating it.

They are restoring it to the 1850s, the era when it was built. She says donations of furniture have come in from

institute members, and the bedrooms and dining room now are complete.

Before the official opening this week, Mrs. Zoeller said several hundred people had already gone through it every week.

As yet, it is being maintained on the proceeds of a donations box and volunteer help.

The 30,000 members in the province are being assessed 10 cents a year each to build a maintenance fund, but that takes time, and the federation is hoping for some interim help from the secretary of state.

The idea to buy the home came to the FWIO originally from the Wentworth County chapter.

The county has helped the cause, as have Saltfleet Township and Stoney Creek, plus the provincial home economics branch.

Mrs. Zoeller says one member donated \$5,000 and the National Federation of Women's Institutes in England sent £100.

The rest has been raised by the FWIO and she says the home will be a provincial project for a long time to come.

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A Women's Institute member, in period costume, stands in front of the Erland Lee Home in Stoney Creek.