

# How the WI Began and Grew Story of Vision and Action

1897-1947—Next week, marking a milestone for Women's Institutes of Ontario, will record doings of momentous importance to this world-famed organization. Wednesday, June 18, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Women's Institutes in Ontario, will assemble prominent officials, representatives from every branch in the province, and many visitors in the celebration of a Golden Jubilee on the campus of the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph.

Beginnings are always interesting to recall, but particularly so when success has been attained. How the Women's Institute began and expanded is a very entertaining story.

In 1896 when the Hon. John Dryden was Minister of Agriculture and F. W. Hodson, superintendent of Farmers' Institutes, it was arranged that Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless, of Hamilton, should address the Farmers' Experimental Union at Guelph. Her address, stressing the need of science being applied in the management of the home and the family as well as on the farm, voiced a general feeling among thoughtful men and women in rural Ontario.

Being very much impressed Erland Lee, of Stoney Creek, secretary of South Wentworth Farmers' Institutes, asked that the address be given at the South Wentworth Winter series of meetings at Stoney Creek.

The suggestion of organizing in some form, with a purpose of helping women acquire sound and improved practices for greater home efficiency was so popular that a motion was passed to begin at once a sister society to the farmers' association.

## The Seedling.

The following week Mr. Lee worked up interest in the movement, with the result that on February 19, 1897, over 100 girls and women attended a meeting at which the first Women's Institute in the world was organized. It was named the Saltfleet Township Women's Institute, later taking its present name "Stoney Creek".

The first officers were: Honorary president, Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless, Hamilton; president, Mrs. E. D. Smith, Winona; vice-president, Mrs. S. Molson, Stoney Creek; secretary, Miss M. Nash, Stoney Creek; treasurer, Mrs. J. McNeilly, Stoney Creek.

## Purpose.

The purpose of the Institute at that time was "the dissemination of 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 fuels, a more scientific care and training of children with a view to raising the general standard of health and morale of our people".

As time went on the scope of endeavor expanded, as will be noted in the following: "In the carrying on of any line of work which has for its objects the uplift of the home, or the betterment of conditions surrounding community life."

In December of 1902, at the annual meeting of the Experimental Union held at Guelph, a session for women was arranged. Twenty four institutes were represented. This gathering was so effective that in 1903 the first Women's Institute convention was held at Guelph, where delegates were present from the 53 institutes, representing a membership of 6,000.

In the Spring of 1903 a lecture service known as "Summer Series" was established. In the Summer of 1903, 189 meetings were held in a period of four weeks. This service was continuous each Summer for 31 years.

A circulating library was one of the early features of county and district institutes. Surplus funds were used for the purchase of books and magazines. At the annual meeting a librarian was appointed. Each branch had a sub-librarian. Later travelling library cases were available from the Department of Education.

In 1918, 14,067 children were examined in 289 schools. The institutes at the 1913 convention passed a resolution requesting the Department of Education to take steps for the early establishment of a provincial system of medical and dental inspection of school children. This met with the approval of the Minister of Education, and the result was the establishment of this work under department supervision.

The above are but a few of the many works of benevolence and community service undertaken and brought to successful issue by the Women's Institutes of Ontario. To them we extend congratulations, and wish them a gala day on the occasion of their fiftieth anniversary.