

Women's Institute founder spoke out when others wouldn't

Addie Hunter Hoodless made her mark as a tireless crusader for rural women's education

BY JUNE FLATH
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Adelaide Hunter Hoodless was a domestic crusader, a woman ahead of her time, a woman of her time.

Born on a farm near St. George, Ontario in February of 1857 she was raised when women were not encouraged to be outspoken. They were to stay at home, raise the children, keep house and keep their opinions to themselves. Husbands of headstrong women were openly criticized for their inability to keep their wives under control.

Still, women were beginning to

further education might spark other interests, such as careers in medicine and teaching.

Addie was the mother of all mothers says Karen Richardson, curator for the Adelaide Hunter Hoodless Homestead National Historic Site. Richardson educates her visitors, young and old, on Adelaide's impressive list of achievements.

While Addie has long been recognized for her involvement in the Women's Institute, this is only one of a long list of crowning glories.

The youngest of 13 children, her father died before she was born, leaving her to be raised by her mother and a tribe of older siblings. Richardson imagines that Addie's position in the family meant she got away with more than the other children, allowed her to be outspoken and possibly spoiled.

She married John Hoodless in 1881 and the couple settled in Hamilton. It was here that her life turned a corner and turned her into an activist.

As the wife of a successful manufacturer, living in a respectable upper class neighbourhood in Hamilton she purchased milk from a door-to-door salesman. The milk had not been kept properly cooled and her 14-month-old son died after drinking the contaminated milk.

The rest of her life was dedicated to raising awareness of health standards, the need for pasteurized milk, safe drinking water, and proper health care. She also lobbied for education for women both in formal school settings and informal gatherings in homes.

She rallied for classes in domestic science in the public school system, was involved in establishing the Victorian Order of Nurses, the National Council of Women, and the Young Women's Christian Associations.



The Hoodless Homestead



Adelaide Hunter Hoodless

speak out. They wanted to vote and be educated.

There are many ways to be heard. Addie has been referred to as a creative social reformer. She was strong-willed, but not confrontational. She brought her ideas in through the back door.

When addressing a group of men while rallying for domestic science classes in the public school system she coyly informed them, that these courses were in the men's best interest. The women would be better housewives.

She didn't advertise the fact that

Many of these were uphill battles. When addressing the board of education she was told that women didn't need to go to school to learn domestic skills, they learned them from their mothers, she should go home and take care of her own family.

Her most recognized achievement was founding the Women's Institute, which was established to advance the education of rural women.

In 1896 she spoke at the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph and one of her listeners, Erland Lee, invited her to speak at ladies night for the Farmers' Institute of South Wentworth.

During her address she suggested the women in the room find a way to encourage self-education. She was invited back a week later and that meeting resulted in the founding of the Women's Institute of Saltfleet Township.

The idea spread. Within 10 years, more than 500 institutes had been organized across Canada.

During World War I, Women's Institutes were introduced into

England and Scotland. In 1919 the Government of Canada granted the Institutes a federal charter and provincial representatives met that same year in Winnipeg to form the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada.

The institutes drew attention to child welfare, women's interests, medical care, child dental care, recreational and library facilities, as well as improved services to help immigrants preserve their cultures and customs.

In 1903, the Macdonald Institute was established in the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph (and later, Macdonald College in Quebec) to train Canadian women in the teaching of domestic science.

Adelaide Hoodless died suddenly on the eve of her 53rd birthday in 1910. In spite of suffering from a headache, and against her daughter's wishes, she insisted on following through with a commitment to address the Women's Canadian Club in Toronto. During her presentation she paused to reach for a drink of

water and collapsed.

Every year, on her birthday, Feb. 27, the Hoodless Homestead, her childhood home, hosts an Addie birthday party. Everyone is invited. There'll be punch and birthday cake, plus a display and presentation on the over 800 greeting cards and post cards in the museum's permanent collection.

During the winter school groups are invited to take part in the educational programs available. Other annual events include Addie's summer garden party in July and the Spirits of the Homestead in October.

This progressive play includes vignettes performed in various rooms of the Homestead. This year the theme of the skits will be the announcement of Addie and John's engagement. Her brothers want to know if he is worthy, the maids wonder if he's up to the challenge of their headstrong Addie.

For more information on Adelaide Hunter Hoodless or events at the Homestead call 519-448-1130 or at hoodlesshomestead@symatico.ca