

Women's Institutes To Observe

50th Anniversary

February 19, 1947

Stoney Creek Was Scene Of First Such Gathering

Movement Which Began In District Village Has Spread To Corners of Empire — Bond Unites Country Women, Betters Farm Homes

By CHARLES R. McCULLOUGH

One hundred and thirty-four years ago, devoted pioneer "Fencibles" and soldiers of the King turned back the tide of invasion at Stoney Creek and gave the hamlet a high place of honour in Canadian history. Fifty years ago, through the co-operation of a few far-sighted and purposeful souls, the same community gave to humanity what has become, in the fullness of time, the greatest rural federation for women in the world. That meeting for organization held in Squire's Hall in the village of Stoney Creek on the evening of February 19, 1897, reminds the reviewer of lines in one of James Russell Lowell's poems:

"O, small beginning, ye are great and strong,
Based on a faithful heart and weariless brain!
Ye build the future fair, ye conquer wrong,
Ye earn the crown, and wear it not in vain."

Shakespeare himself, in his "Merchant of Venice," sets the same idea in these memorable words:

"How far a little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

Looking Back On Beginnings

And now let us look back to the "lighting of the candle" and the "small beginning" of Women's Institutes, turning to Mrs. A. E. Walker of Hamilton, president of the mother institute—1915-20—and holding a like post in the Dominion Federation from 1933 to 1937, for guidance: "It is a strange coincidence," she remarked lately, "that both the Farmers' Institute and the Women's Institute should have their origin in Wentworth County....Some 13 years before we had a Women's Institute there was organized in the county, mainly through the efforts and influence of Public School Inspector Joseph H. S. Smith, the Farmers' Institute. Mr. Smith had as right hand man Mr. Erland Lee, a clever, broad-minded young farmer of Saltfleet township....To Mr. Lee we are indebted for the Women's Institute for, while we recognize Mrs. Hoodless as our founder, yet it was Mr. Lee who made conditions possible."

Wrote History Of Movement

Beside me lies the 100-page History of Ontario's Women's Institutes written six years ago by the able hand of the devoted Miss M. Viola Powell, of Whitby. From the volume as well as from such authorities as Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Emberley, Mrs. Rogers and Mrs. Jackson (present president of the Mother Institute) your reviewer offers the following story of the rise and progress of a movement dedicated to the spiritual and physical welfare of the rural homes of this and other far-off countries.

In the autumn of 1896, Erland Lee (who had been a student at the Ontario Agricultural College) attended the annual meeting of the Experimental Union in Guelph. There he heard the address of Mrs. John Hoodless of Hamilton on the need of instruction in sewing and domestic science in the schools. The zealous lady avowed that training boys and girls alike was wrong. Girls ought of right to be educated and made fit for that sphere of life for which they were destined—home-making. So impressed was Mr. Lee by the speaker's viewpoint that he and Major F. M. Carpenter made bold to invite Mrs. Hoodless to speak

along the same lines at the Farmers' Institute open meeting, to be held at Stoney Creek in January following. So well did the speaker make her points that even the hard-boiled men were convinced. Encouraged by her reception, Adelaide Hoodless made bold to suggest an organization of women similar to that instituted for men by Inspector Smith. The chairman recommended calling a meeting of farmers' wives and daughters for the following week. Thirty-five then and there promised to attend.

Erland Lee Was Only Man

When the protagonist of a fair deal for feminine farmfolk appeared at Squire's Hall, Stoney Creek, on the night of February 19, 1897, she was greeted by 101 women and one man—Erland Lee, who was to take the chair. The able and eloquent speaker (who had been born on a farm near St. George) drew attention to the fact that if the men, in their institute, profited by consultation and study, learned how to care for and raise better stock, why couldn't their women help in the work for betterment of farm and home by aiding home-craft and mothercraft. Sensing their responsibility and opportunity as homemakers, the 101 women decided to make a beginning by forming "The Women's Department in Domestic Economy in affiliation with the Farmers' Institute of South Wentworth" (a cumbersome if meaningful title). At the very next meeting the name was changed to the "Women's Institute of Saltfleet," and later, when other women's units were founded, the body became the "Stoney Creek Women's Institute." The broadening-out process took on promotion of improved conditions of the home and farmstead, including the physical, intellectual,

social and moral well-being of their members.

Nation Limited By Its Homes

Proof of this growth may be found in the first minute book of the Stoney Creek organization: "A nation cannot rise above the level of its homes, therefore, we women must work and study together to raise our homes to the highest possible level." In the early records too, great objectives were set: domestic economy, household architecture (embracing, heat, light, sanitation and ventilation), health (physical culture, calisthenics, hygiene

and medicine), floriculture and horticulture, music and art, literature, education, sociology and legislation. The reviewer notes with satisfaction that the passage of years brought about a keen interest in local history through the setting up of study groups.

A recent prize Jubilee poster entitled "We treasure the past and face the future," by Betty Ann Rogers, of Stoney Creek, confirms the foregoing activities.

Mention must be made here of the first officers of the Mother Institute at Stoney Creek: honorary president, Mrs. John Hoodless, of Hamilton; president, Mrs. E. D. Smith, of Winona; secretary, Miss Maggie Nash; treasurer, Mrs. J. N. McNeilly. Incidentally, Mr. Lee, Major Carpenter and Senator Smith strongly backed the new body, the first-named helping materially in writing the institute's constitution and by-laws.

Appropriately, at the first regular meeting of the original institute, a member read a paper on the Proper Feeding of Children. A paper on Art was provided also. At the second meeting Dr. Mabel Henderson, of Hamilton, addressed the members on The Child, in Health and Disease—followed by discussion and question-asking. At successive gatherings topics such as Sunshine in the Home, Home-making versus House-keeping, Sanitation in the Home, were reviewed. These pioneers were but blazing the trail along which general health and particularly child welfare were later to make their way.

Were Sincere In Their Work

"When we consider these programs," wrote Mrs. Walker, "the efforts put forth by these women to improve themselves that they might better serve their home and country—when we consider their efforts to extend the work to other centres, that others might benefit thereby—we cannot but see that these pioneer leaders were most sincere in their efforts in living up to the objects set forth in the constitution. Their whole ambition and desire was to raise the status of home-making, for they were homemakers and home-lovers in the truest sense of the words....What a deep debt of gratitude we owe these pioneer leaders for the wonderful heritage they have bequeathed to us in our Women's Institute organization."

The second unit in Women's Institutes was organized in Whitby, on June 29, 1897—just four months after the founding of the Mother Institute of Stoney Creek. Kemble, in the county of Grey, followed to make the third link in a chain of institutes that was destined to girdle the world.

As time passed and the gospel of co-operation for rural betterment spread, so spread the movement to all parts of Canada—and abroad. In this country were formed district groups, provincial bodies and ultimately (1919) a Dominion federation. During the first year of its existence the movement had a score of branches. By 1905 the number reached 268. By 1941 there were 1,367.

The spread of Women's Institutes to Great Britain, (accomplished through the missionary zeal of Mrs. Alfred Watt, M.A., O.B.E., of Collingwood, during the First World War) began with one in a little village of Wales. In England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland there are now approximately 6,500 Women's Institutes! One of them, the Sandringham Women's Institute, has as honorary president, Mary, the Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth as president, and the Princess Elizabeth on its roll of members.

Receive Letters From England

Before the reviewer lie several Old Country letters. The first is from the chairman of the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the Countess of Albermarle, London. It reads in part: "Dear Fellow Members—The National Federation of Women's Institutes of England and Wales would like you to accept their congratulations on your Jubilee, and wish to join in celebration. You are pioneers in a movement that has brought happiness and opportunity to hundreds of thousands of country-women all over the world. Canada's gift to the world of Women's Institutes has been one of the many outstanding contributions to the cause of world fellowship. To-day, our hearts go out to you in gratitude for the enterprise and vision shown fifty years ago by the founders of your institute...."

"On this, your jubilee day, you will be looking not only to the past with gratitude, but to the future with hope, in which we would like to be associated with you so that by the strengthening of the bonds of understanding and common endeavour, the family of mankind may once again learn to live together in peace and happiness. Yours sincerely, Diana Albermarle, chairman."

It will be of especial interest to Spectator readers to recall that a predecessor in the Albermarle title was that daughter (Sophia) of Sir Allan Napier MacNab, who, on November 15, 1855, married at Dundurn Castle, Hamilton, amid great festivities, the Viscountess Bury (William Coultis Keppel) later on 7th Earl of Albermarle, who had come to Canada as aide to the Governor-General, Sir Edmund Head. The present Earl of Albermarle is Walter Keppel, ninth in the line, who married Diana Grove in 1931. He won the Military Cross in World War II.

Among the 700 letters of congratulation received by the Mother Institute in anticipation of the celebration of its semi-centennial at Stoney Creek on the 19th of this month, is one from I. Nugent Harris, of Dane Hill, Hayward's Heath, Sussex, who so notably backed Mrs. Watt in establishing the movement in Great Britain and whose wife is president of the Dane Hill Women's Institute over there. In his letter Mr. Harris wishes the Institute "another fifty years of splendid achievement."

One more communication—this from Lady Patrick Ashley Cooper, of Hexton Manor, Hexton, Herts., wife of the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. It was written from Government House, Ottawa, whilst Lady Cooper was guest of Their Excellencies, early in November last. One or two extracts: "Just before leaving England to pay a visit to Canada, I was at a meeting of the National Federation of Women's Institutes in London, and were were told of your forth-coming jubilee celebrations. I had thought it might be possible to put in a day or two at Stoney Creek, but found it was impossible....I am intensely interested in the Women's Institute Movement—am a member of the Hertfordshire Executive Committee and president of the village institute of Hexton....Next

year I shall hope to meet some of you. I dearly love Canada. I have brought many, many messages to you to which I add my own and that of my Women's Institute and members."

Mrs. Conant Special Speaker

In the historic meeting on Wednesday next, the special speaker at the Jubilee Dinner will be Mrs. Gordon Conant, of Toronto, daughter of the Institute's first president and of the Hon. E. D. Smith of Helderleigh, Winona. Presiding at the dinner and sessions of the Mother Institute will be the able and indefatigable president, Mrs. Angus B. Jackson, whose fellow officers of the organization are: Mesdames J. B. Davis and L. O. Jones, honorary presidents; Mesdames Joseph Piott and Fred Mather, vice-presidents; and Mrs. W. Lyle Nash, secretary-treasurer.

INSTITUTES PLAN BIG CELEBRATION

As the central feature of the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Women's Institutes, the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario are planning a mammoth golden jubilee celebration, which will be held on Wednesday, June 18, at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph. Committees have been working on the plans for some time, and the plans provide for an all day program of events linking the past with the future. In the evening, a colourful and large scale pageant will be presented, to depict the origin and growth of Women's Institutes throughout Ontario, Canada and the world.

It is expected that this will be the greatest gathering of Women's Institute officers and members ever assembled in one place, as all Institute members and their friends are being invited to attend and take part in the celebration. It is expected that representatives from the other provinces of Canada as well as from sister organizations in other countries, will be present. For those coming from a distance, a limited amount of overnight accommodation can be arranged, but representatives desiring to secure such accommodation are specially requested to make their applications as early as possible.

W. I. Jubilee

The golden jubilee of the founding of the Women's Institutes in Stoney Creek, now become an international organization in 30 other countries under the name Associated Countrywomen of the World, is to be observed on Wednesday, February 19, with a special program in Stoney Creek arranged by this first Women's Institute. In addition a special trans-Canada broadcast over the C.B.C. has been arranged for the same day from 4.45 to 5 o'clock, on the Eastern network, when Miss Jane Weston will tell of the origin of the Institutes and their expansion. Mrs. Cameron Dow, F.W.I.C. president, will also speak on the future responsibilities and plans for the Institutes, now having 70,000 members in Canada. In Stoney Creek, a dinner meeting has been arranged, when Mrs. Gordon D. Conant, of Toronto, daughter of the late Mrs. E. D. Smith, of Winona, the first president of the Institute, will be speaker on February 19. A large general celebration is being planned for next June in Guelph, when every province in Canada, and the organizations in other countries will be represented as far as possible.