



The Family and The Home



Nestled among the stately pines on Ridge Road is the beautiful white frame house which was the home of the Lee family for six generations.

James Lee, of British soldier lineage, built a log cabin on this site when he, his wife, Hannah, and his family arrived with the United Empire Loyalists from Maryland in 1792. He brought some furnishings and flowering plants with him and several of these can still be found on the premises. He cut virgin pine on the property and built some of the furniture, one specific piece in the pioneer kitchen being a seven-foot china cupboard made with wooden pegs instead of nails. James Lee was accidentally killed by an axe flying from its handle at the raising of the first frame house built in Saltfleet Township. They had five sons and three daughters.

John, eldest son of James Lee, and Mary Lee were presented with the Crown Deed on their wedding day in 1801. It was John who built the back part of the frame house in the same year. This part forms the nucleus of the apartment at the back of the present house. John Lee served with the Fifth Lincoln Regiment in the War of 1812. John and Mary had eleven children. He died in 1875.

Abram, youngest son of John Lee, planned the present home at the top of the mountain on "Edgemont Farm" in 1860 and the front part was built to the "old house" in 1873. The present white board and batten house is of Gothic architecture. It has green shutters, two bay windows and hand carved maple verge boards running along the gables. These were made by a fourteen-year-old carpenter's apprentice, named Moore. His original pattern resembles a paper chain of maple leaves, and the job took him a whole summer to complete. Abram had married Jemima Pew in 1855. Erland was one of their three children.

Erland (now fourth generation) inherited the family farm. He was born May 3, 1864 and died June 29, 1926. Erland married Janet Robertson Chisholm (born Jan. 4, 1862, died 1940). They had five children - Marjorie, Hilda, Gordon, Frank and Alice.

Erland became a school teacher. In 1885 he received a Certificate in Agriculture given by the Agriculture and Arts Association of Ontario. He was a charter member of the Farmers' Institute and secretary for nineteen years, Saltfleet Agricultural Society secretary-treasurer for a number of years, and Saltfleet Township clerk for nearly twenty years.

Erland was a prominent, public-spirited, broadminded farmer and followed his ancestors in mixed farming with purebred Jersey cattle, fancy dairy butter, maple syrup and fruit.

Mrs. Janet Lee was a teacher also. She was chosen by the city of Hamilton to take a special course in Toronto, to return to Hamilton to help set up a kindergarten system for the city. She retired to marry Erland in 1889.

In the autumn of 1896, Erland Lee attended a meeting of the Farmers' Experimental Union, held at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, where he heard a stirring address given by Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless of Hamilton. Inspired by her enthusiasm and impressed by her ideas, Erland felt there was a need for a women's organization.

On his invitation Mrs. Hoodless was the speaker at Ladies' Night of the Saltfleet Farmers' Institute. The following week the public-spirited Erland Lee and his wife, Janet, travelled the roads of Saltfleet Township encouraging all the women to attend a meeting in Squire's Hall, Stoney Creek, on February 19, 1897. At that meeting the first Women's Institute in the world was organized.

Assisted by Senator E.D. Smith and Major F.M. Carpenter, Erland Lee helped the women draft the original by-laws and constitution. These were hand penned by Janet Lee sitting at the walnut dining-room table which remains in the Lee Home and is a focal point for all visitors.

Mrs. Lee became one of the first directors of the Stoney Creek Women's Institute, and it was she who suggested that the annual fee be 25 cents per member in order that all women could join. Mrs. E.D. Smith was the first President.

Frank (fifth generation) was the younger son of Erland and suffered from a bad heart, the aftermath of polio. However he was accepted and served overseas in the Army Service Corps, as a Red Cross Driver in England and later in France. When he returned from the war, Frank remained on the farm. In 1932 he married Katharine Isobel Matheson. They had four daughters. Frank died in 1966 and Katie in 1971.