

Group works to change women's role in Canada's country communities

By Mary Longman
district correspondent

ST. MARYS — The women meeting quietly in the town's community centre recently didn't look like a bunch of radicals, but that's what they would have been considered back in 1897.

That year, Adelaide Hunter Hoodless started the first women's institute near Hamilton to further the education of rural females. At the time it was a bold step, but today women's institutes are an accepted part of country life and flourish across Canada.

The group's beginnings and achievements were on everyone's mind at the 68th an-

nual meeting of the London Area Women's Institute here as members prepared for the 1983 theme — the role of women in society.

About 350 members from the 123 branches in Middlesex, Elgin, Perth, Huron and Oxford counties signed up for the two-day convention. As well as electing new officers and handling year-end business, the group considered its beginnings in the last century as it looks ahead to coming years of change.

In 1897, Adelaide Hoodless inspired a group of women attending an all-male Farmer's Institute meeting to set up their own group. Mrs. Hoodless is also remembered for making

domestic science part of public education. Her crusade began after her 18-month old son died from drinking contaminated milk.

Since then, women's institutes have spread across Canada and are affiliated with groups around the world as they continue to teach old and new skills to rural women.

Today, the women's institute

is renewing efforts to boost membership — especially among young women — and to modernize its program.

At the same time the group continues to follow in the footsteps of its founder, financially supporting everything from local libraries to the United Nations.

Resolutions to be presented at the provincial conference in

November reflect the institute's ability to keep abreast of the times. The resolutions include a call to stop construction of nuclear power plants in the province, better psychiatric care in northern areas, better facilities for the handicapped and concern over the nuclear arms race.

In 1983, the 50,000 institute

members across Canada will focus on how women fit into the world today.

At the annual meeting, Janet Hiepleh, president of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, chaired the annual elections.

The new officers are: Mrs. Joe Reily, of RR 5 Mt. Brydges, president; Mrs. Gordon Papple,



Mrs. Gordon Papple, right, past president of the London Area Women's Institute pins a maple leaf badge on incoming president, Mrs. Joe Reily.

of RR 5 Seaforth, past president; Mrs. Clarence Lewis, of Granton, first vice-president; Mrs. Jack Richardson, of RR 4 St. Marys, second vice-president; Mrs. Fred Arthur, of St. Marys, secretary; Mrs. Ray Cross, of RR 2 Thorndale, treasurer; Mrs. Wesley Bradnock, of Auburn, public relations.

Mrs. John Templeman, of RR 2 Staffa, will serve on the provincial board. Mrs. Papple, the outgoing president, said she felt the convention had been a "tremendous success" and looks forward to next year's convention, which will be hosted by the Oxford South division.



MOLLY MCGHEE
--- conducts study

Rural group criticized for irrelevant activities

The 66-year-old Ontario Women's Institute was criticized by several speakers at a provincial rural women's study session in London on Tuesday for not responding to the needs of today's farm woman in these financially and socially stressful times.

The critics, including past institute provincial secretary Hilde Morden of Rodney, said the institute isn't gaining young members because its activities aren't relevant. Sandy Forsythe, secretary of the Middlesex Cattlemen's Association, said the institute has gained "the image of being a catering group."

Morden told the session, attended by about 20 rural women, the provincial government should offer the institute alternative new structures to better meet those needs. "If they (members of the institute) don't

change with the times, then we'll all die off and so will the institute."

Lynda Earley of RR 3, Kerwood said she is concerned about the downplaying of competition for farm children through their 4-H Club programs which are administered by the ministry.

"We need these competitive young people," she said, particularly in selecting livestock for breeding because it will not only improve the breed of future farmers but will also benefit retailers and eventually consumers.

Tuesday's study session was one of 28 across the province by ministry adviser Molly McGhee of Toronto aimed at changes in ministry policy. She expects it will be a year before any policy changes are initiated.



HILDE MORDEN
--- change needed