



MRS. ADELAIDE HOODLESS
- - - founder of Women's Institute

WI Found Origin In Infant's Death

By Jean Murray

IN GROWING NUMBERS during the past half-century, rural women have banded together as members of Women's Institute groups. The movement which grew out of a mother's heartbreak at the loss of an infant through lack of knowledge, spread through the Dominion, and beyond to countrywomen all over the world.

It was on February 19, 1897, that the first "Women's Institute" meeting was held. Recognizing the prime importance of the home and the need to improve conditions in the home from the physical, intellectual and cultural standpoints, 101 women gathered in Squire's Hall at Stoney Creek, to discuss the possibility of forming an auxiliary organization to the then-prominent Farmers' Institute.

They met to hear Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless, of Hamilton, speak feelingly on the need for training in domestic science and sewing to fit girls for homemaking. Mrs. Hoodless could speak feelingly on the subject. She had lost her eldest son, an infant of 18 months, through illness which the doctor told her could have been prevented had she had the necessary knowledge. To her the need for such an organization as the Women's Institute was a real and vital thing.

Government Support

At that meeting, the movement that was to spread throughout the world started its assured and lively existence. With the co-operation and encouragement of Erland Lee, the young Saltfleet Township farmer who was the only man to attend the first W.I. gathering, Government support was soon obtained for the or-

ganization, and by the turn of the century interested organizers were carrying the Institute purpose to rural communities in all sections of Ontario.

Membership of the Women's Institute in the province now nearly hits the 40,000 mark with close to 5,000 of these in the London area. More than 1,350 Ontario branches now hold regular monthly meetings where members contribute, each to the others' enlightenment, and of these, 218 regard the London Convention as their mother group.

Ten of Western Ontario's active branches were among the first 50 Women's Institutes to be organized. Goderich Institute marked its 48th anniversary in February, and groups at Walkerton and Clifford were organized in January, 1901. January, 1902, saw the formation of branches at Aylmer, Paisley and Fordwich, and two months later Durham, Wheatley and Tavistock organized. Exeter formed a Women's Institute in January, 1903.

Women of Vision

From the beginning Institute members were women with vision and foresight. They were among the pioneers of organized women's groups, and illustrated through their sincere efforts the benefits to be derived from united womanhood.

Spreading her conviction of the need for teaching homemaking talents in public schools, Mrs. Hoodless soon had courses started in Hamilton. It was largely through her that Macdonald Institute was established at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, to provide scientific education in all phases of homemaking on a comprehensive scale.

Individual branches took action in fields hitherto untouched, as when Byron W. I. in 1926 overcame the disapproval of trustees and had the school-house wired for electricity. Institute history is symbolized by that act; a story of spirit and of progress.

Home and Country

Changing though the generations have been, the original purpose of the Institute has never been forgotten. The motto, "For Home and Country," is on the tip of every member's tongue, and the friendship and helpfulness that kept the first group of women together is carried on into each existing organization today.

Even the educational program of the Institute, while changed somewhat in name, remains substantially the same. In 1897 the six departments suggested as a working basis for the organization were set down as domestic economy, architecture with special reference to heat, light, sanitation and ventilation; health, embracing physiology, hygiene, calisthenics and medicine; floriculture and horticulture; music and art; literature, education, sociology and legislation.

Today's six standing committees cover the same fields: home economics, citizenship, social welfare, historical research, agriculture and Canadian industries and publicity.

Proud War Record

No organization has a prouder record of effort than the Women's Institute established during the two great wars. Red Cross sewing, helps for servicemen and answers to all calls were only a few of the items on the list, and hundreds of pounds of jam were sent to civilians in Britain to eke out rations of the war years.

Inspired Leaders

Currently giving inspirational leadership to the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario is Mrs. J. R. Fletcher, of St. Thomas, a long-time member of Middlemarch W. I. and an energetic and enthusiastic Institute worker. Taking over after the organization's golden anniversary year, Mrs. Fletcher carried through the plan for the Adelaide Hoodless Memorial scholarship fund and early last year presented a check for \$19,000 to W. R. Reek, principal of the Ontario Agricultural College, to provide scholarships for girls entering homemaking courses.

An innovation she introduced to the W. I. program this year was the rally of branch presidents and secretaries after the spring session of the federated board at Guelph in May.

London Area Convention elected a new chairman last fall when Mrs. Edmund Hansuld, of Tavistock, took over from Mrs. Fred Oster, of Blyth. More than 400 district women gathered in London in October for the biggest area convention in history — the 34th annual meeting.

Hoodless homestead

"We had 1000 visitors in June," reports Mrs. H. Lockman, hostess at the Adelaide Hunter Hoodless Homestead, St. George, Ont. These have come from all provinces and some from abroad. The peak was reached the day five bus loads arrived. Visiting hours at the Homestead are from 2.00 to 5.00 p.m. and at other times by appointment.

The unveiling of the plaque, erected by the National Historic Sites Board on June 2, with the consequent publicity, has created even more interest in this historic spot, the birthplace of the founder of the Women's Institute, now an international organization.

Furnishing of the old home is proceeding satisfactorily. Articles required are being given by Women's Institutes and interested friends in consultation with the sub-committee in charge of this aspect of the national project. The chairman, Mrs. H. Nixon, St. George, Ont., asks that she be contacted when donations are being considered as it is necessary to make certain all items are appropriate to that period of 100 years ago.