

## THE HISTORY OF SOUTH RENFREW DISTRICT

1897-1917 - by Eileen Brydges, Burnstown W.I.

As a member of Burnstown W.I., the oldest branch in Renfrew South, I feel proud and privileged to speak first. My topic is "the first 20 years of W.I." in Renfrew South.

When we are born we have a birthplace. Many (maybe most) of us here today know where our birthplace was down to the very building, even the very room. Our W.I. organization was born but we sometimes wonder why we recognize two birthplaces - The Adelaide Hunter Hoodless Homestead at St. George, and The Erland Lee Museum Home at Stoney Creek.

Adelaide Hunter was born on the homestead at St. George. She married John Hoodless and they had a family. Their fourth child, a boy, died at age 14 months from what was then called "summer complaint" from drinking impure milk. Mrs. Hoodless suddenly realized how little she knew of health and sanitation, and felt that there must be many women in the same boat. She spoke openly whenever she had the chance on the need for training for homemakers.

Erland Lee, a member of the Farmer's Institute heard her, was impressed, and invited her to speak to his Farmer's Institute group on a night when the wives were present. Again he was so impressed that he asked how many of the 35 ladies there would be interested in meeting again to organize an Institute for Women. All showed interest, the word spread and at the meeting in Stoney Creek the next week, there were 101 women (as our Centennial Song says) and 1 man, Erland Lee who chaired the meeting. The first branch of W.I. was formed February 19, 1897!

Organizations need constitutions. In the Erland Lee home the W.I. Constitution was drafted. That is why we recognize two birthplaces - that of the founder, that of the organizer.

By 1900 there were 3 branches - that baby was a slow grower. A set of instructions on how to organize a W.I. was issued. By 1904 the official motto, badge and colours had been selected. McDonald Institute in Guelph was established due to the struggling of Adelaide Hoodless and the W.I. Convention held there that year was a kick-off point to great expansion. The 149 branches that had been formed by then jumped to 843 by 1914 with nearly 25000 members.

And that is where Renfrew South comes in. In 1911 there was no such thing as a branch in Renfrew South, but there were handbooks available, regulation minute books with treasurer's entry pages in the back and advice on how to organize. One Miss Duncan from the Department of Agriculture came to help organize a Branch in