



ADELAIDE HOODLESS

Pioneer tribulations led to world-wide institute

FLORENCE DIGGINS
Spectator Staff

After the death of her husband from contaminated milk, a grieving farm wife vowed to help other rural women improve their homemaking and child-care practices.

The woman, Adelaide Hoodless of Hamilton, eventually founded the first Women's Institute in 1897 with the help of Erland Lee, a public-spirited young farmer from Stoney Creek.

From its small but ardent beginning in Stoney Creek, the Women's Institute today has grown to over 100,000 members throughout Canada and over 60 other countries in the world. The Hamilton area alone boasts over 3,400 members, scattered over town, country and city.

The Hamilton institutes celebrated their Ontario Women's Institute Week May 31 to June 4 at the Erland Lee pioneer homestead, nestled in the hills of Ridge Road overlooking Stoney Creek.

Friends

Purchased four years ago by the institute, the home and drive house have been restored to their 1850 rustic elegance with many original artifacts remaining from the owners or donated by members and friends of the institute.

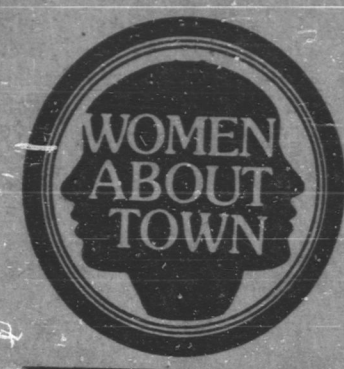
Dressed in bonnets and turn-of-the-century gowns, thousands of visitors annually ramble through the home and picnic in nearby fields.

The pioneer kitchen is the focal point of the home, as it must have been for the Lee children, and Erland and Janet, who together with Mrs. Hoodless formed a women's organization. Loyal to the Farmer's Institute, its purpose was to raise the standard of homemaking in rural homes.

Homemaking tools of the 1800s make the tasks of today's kitchen seem arduous. Compare today's automatic washer and dryer equipped with a saver, five wash programs and three dry cycles with the 1875 model washing machine which handles about three pounds of clothes by cranking a handle that scrubs the wash against a board.

Compare today's zig zag, embroidery-stitch electric sewing machines, with the foot-powered 1834 New Williams sewing machine in the Lee kitchen. Yet the same quilts and clothes made on that machine still adorn the bedrooms of the Lee home after almost a century of wear.

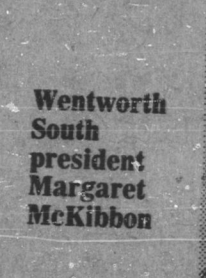
The long, harvest table in the kitchen is strewn with small house-



HAMILTON AREA WOMEN'S INSTITUTES



Lincoln president
Jessie Harper



Wentworth South president
Margaret McKibbin



Wentworth North president
Thelma Mills

hold appliances of the day, including a large, wooden sampling spoon donated by the first president of the Women's Institute, Mrs. E. D. Smith, "the Jams and Jellies lady."

Past the parlor where, among other objects, the ladies china spittoon sits sedately on the Persian-carpeted floor in front of the fireplace, you walk into the dining room. The solid walnut dining table, lightened by years of sunshine streaming through the window, is the same table on which the original constitution of the Women's Institute was hand-penned by Janet Lee.

Objective

The group's original objective was to "promote that knowledge of household science pertaining to home sanitation, a better understanding of the economic and hygienic value of foods and fuels, and to a more scientific care of children with a view of raising the general standards of the health of our people."

This concern for home improvement was a major concern with Mrs. Hoodless who is said to have commented about her times that farmers took better care of their farm animals than wives did of their families and homes.

The topics of study in 1897 were domestic economy, architecture pertaining to heat, light, sanitation and ventilation, personal health, gardening, and the arts and education. Groups soon formed in other towns and provinces, and by 1915 members carried the movement to England. From there it spread to Belgium, Australia, South Africa, Rhodesia, India, New Zealand, Holland and other countries.

Automation

Traditionally a rural organization, the Women's Institute has tried to shed its "apple-pie-and-checkered-apron" image. Automation has spread to towns and villages as well as cities, and many of the institute branches which started off as rural groups are fast being hauled into townships and suburban areas.

The aims of the group are essentially the same as those of 1897 but current programs include agriculture and Canadian industry; citizenship and world affairs; education and cultural activities; and family and consumer affairs.

Supported by a provincial act for agricultural societies, the institute offers its members courses in nutrition, crafts, health and cultural activities through the ministry of agriculture and food. Trained mem-

bers then teach the courses to other women in their local branches.

Perhaps because the members' families are involved in working with the land, all branches take a keen interest in compiling a Tweedsmuir history of the farms and communities in which they live. The history is so named in honor of the wife of Lord Tweedsmuir, a former governor general of Canada.

Branch members seek out newspaper clippings, original photographs in old estates, deeds to farms, family trees, birth certificates and old historians to complete their community history books.

Books

Local institute members also sponsor most of the 350 youngsters enrolled in 4-H homemaking clubs in Wentworth. Taught by the ministry of agriculture and food, the club programs include food, clothing, home furnishings, and gardening.

Along with these activities, branch meetings involve discussion of such issues as various consumer recommendations, protection of wildlife, salary for farm wives, misleading labels on meat products and cessation of alcohol ads in the media. Letters on these issues are sent on behalf of the institute to the relevant government agencies and replies are pursued.

Executives

Despite attempts to modify its conservative image with the public, the institute is not drawing the new, young membership that it should, according to some district executives.

Margaret McKibbin, president of the Wentworth South district which comprises 12 branches with 314 members, said she enjoys the fellowship that goes along with being a member.

"There is a need to get together with country women who have common interests. Maybe this is why the rural branches are expanding more than the urban branches. Many branches that were country have now become part of the city."

The Hamilton area Women's Institutes also include Wentworth North, Lincoln, Haldimand East and West, Welland East and West, Brant North and South, and Norfolk North and South.