

THE ORIGIN OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

The Women's Institute movement, as almost everyone knows, had its origin in the little historic village of Stoney Creek, four miles east of Hamilton in the county of Wentworth. It is a strange coincidence that both the Farmer's Institute and Women's Institute should have their origin in Wentworth county. For thirteen years before the first W.I. was formed, there was in Wentworth a Farmer's Institute organized through the efforts and influence of the late Public School Inspector, Mr. J.H. Smith, ably associated by Mr. Erland Lee, one of the most intelligent and broad-minded farmers of Saltfleet, and it was at an evening meeting of this Farmer's Institute, at which the women were present, that Mrs. Hoodless (after giving an address on Mr. Lee's invitation) suggested that the women form an Institute for the women, similar to the Farmer's Institute for the men. As it was then too late in the evening to discuss the matter, it was decided that the women would meet again the following week. On Friday, February 19, 1897 Mrs. Hoodless again came to Stoney Creek and found awaiting her in Squire's Hall, 101 women and one man--needless to say that the man was Mr. Lee and he acted as chairman for the evening. After much discussion and argument, it was decided to organize a Women's Department of Domestic Economy in affiliation with the Farmer's Institute to be known as the Women's Institute of Saltfleet, now called the Stoney Creek Women's Institute.

The following officers were elected:

Hon. President	- Mrs. Hoodless
President	- Mrs. E. D. Smith
Secretary	- Miss N. Nash
Treasurer	- Mrs. J. H. McNeilly

At the first regular meeting held six days later, the constitution and by-laws (drafted by the committee appointed for the purpose, assisted by Mr. Lee, Mayor Carpenter and Senator Smith) were adopted and the fact that the constitution has been little changed to this day, bears mute testimony that the little society must have been founded for its development into what is regarded today as the largest organization of women of the world. For, as we know, the movement has spread not only to England, Scotland, Wales, and many of the oversea dominions, including India and South Africa, but also to Belgium, France, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Germany, Hungary, in fact, to almost every quarter of the globe. At the second regular meeting of the Mother's Institute, a paper was read on "The Proper Feeding of Children" and at the next meeting, an address on "The Child in Health and Disease" given by Dr. Mable Henderson. Thus, you see that the women in the earliest days were blazing the trail along "Health" and "Child Welfare" lines that we later followed. At their very early meetings, they had papers, addresses, and demonstrations on such subjects as "Child Culture", "Sunshine in the Home", "First Aid to the Injured", "Homemaking", and "Housekeeping", etc. Thus, you see that our pioneer Institute women were not interested, as many believe, in the "Art of Cookery" alone, but in everything pertaining to the improvement of that home and its surroundings, from a Physical, Intellectual, Social and Moral standpoint. Miss M.U. Watson was among the first outside speakers, and Miss Laura Rose (Stephens) was the first government speaker in 1899. Some forty odd years ago, a young mother stood in an agony of grief beside the little white casket containing the body of her first baby. Agonized chiefly because of the knowledge that the child died because of her ignorance in regard to the care of it, and as she stood there, Adelaide Hoodless resolved all that one woman could do in her lifetime she would endeavour to accomplish toward giving to girls and women the best possible training to homemaking and motherhood.

To this end, she worked unceasingly, interviewing governments and influential people, among them Sir William McDonald of Montreal. Through her influence, Sir William built McDonald Hall, Ontario Agricultural College, and another in Quebec. It was Mrs. Hoodless who interested Mr. Lee and who suggested to him the possibility of having an organization for the rural women similar to the Farmer's Institutes, which then existed for men. Needless to say, she met with opposition, and whether she knew it or not, many were jealous of her.

HISTORY OF BELMONT INSTITUTE

It was through the foresight and untiring efforts of Mrs. John Barons, after a visit to Harrietsville Women's Institute, that Belmont Women's Institute was organized. A meeting was called at the home of Mrs. Barons inviting Mrs. Batey, Dis. Pres., Mrs. Anderson, Dis. Sec. and Harrietsville Institute, also all the ladies of the community who cared to attend. At this meeting Belmont Women's Institute was organized on September 19th, 1912 with the following officers in charge:

President	Mrs. M. Wilkins
Vice Pres.	Mrs. John Barons
Sec. Treas.	Mrs. A.W. Venning
Dis. Dir.	Mrs. M. Wilkins
Directors	Mrs. C.O. Luton, Mrs. D. Carrothers, Mrs. Angus Taylor, Mrs. John Martin

One meeting each year was devoted to the following:

Agriculture and Canadian Industries
Citizenship and Education
Community Activities and Public Relations
Historical Research and Current Events
Home Economics and Health

At the meetings set aside for Agriculture and Canadian Industries, there were papers, speakers, roll calls and contests, a few of which were "How to make Farm Life more attractive", "Home as a Nation Builder", "Farm Women's Hospitality", and "How to keep the Family Interested in Farm Life". Roll calls were answered by a name of a Canadian Industry. Studies were made of different Canadian Industries, including salt, pulpwood, natural and manufactured gas, hydro, cheese, butter, powdered milk, cream, eggs, lemons, and coffee. Papers and addresses were given on mining and fisheries.

At the meetings for Citizenship and Education, the Belmont Institute sponsored the first Field Day for the children, providing lunch and prizes, also money donations to the Fall Fair each year to be used in prizes for the children for their work in such exhibits as crafts, cooking, sewing, woodwork, and arts. We have also had splendid papers and addresses from time to time on "Practical Patriotism for Women", "Our Responsibility as Canadian Women", "The Three R's, Rest, Recreation and Right Living", "The Home as a Nation Builder", and "The Kingship of Self-Control". A splendid address by our Member of Parliament on Parliamentary Procedure was given. Roll calls have been answered with the name of a Premier of the Province, and with the name of a Famous Woman.

Community Activities and Public Relations. In August 1915, the Institute felt the call for increased War Activities. Up until this time, they had been working in a small way in providing for our home boys who were overseas. It was at this time that they organized a Red Cross branch, known as the "Belmont Women's Institute Red Cross Society". They soon found, however, it was impossible to raise funds enough to take care of all the material they could use, so a delegation was sent to each of the councils of the four municipalities of which Belmont is a part, to ask for aid. The result was that each municipality granted them ten dollars a month for Red Cross purposes while the war lasted, with these grants and funds raised from Garden Parties, Open Air Concerts, Plays, Bazaars, Serving Dinners and other activities. Over five thousand dollars was raised, of which four thousand was spent in material for working purposes. Each boy of the community who served overseas was given ten dollars on their return home. Other donations were made to Russian Relief, China and Armenian Relief. Seventy-five dollars was sent to the department to help purchase a hospital ship.

When Peace was declared, all work left in work rooms was turned over to the London Red Cross Rooms. Many donations were made to different Institutions such as the Children's Shelter, St. Thomas, War Memorial Children's Hospital, London, Blind Babies' Home, Ottawa, Byron Sanatorium, London, and many others. The Institute is always on hand to help needy families, fire victims and the Red Cross. Many boxes of food and clothing have found their way across the seas and the far north country through the Belmont Women's Institute, never forgetting our shut-ins and sick members.

In World War 2, Belmont Women's Institute worked faithfully with the Red Cross, sewing, knitting, and quilt making, and many of our members gave Blood Donations from time to time. The institute also helped buy a Canteen Kitchen for overseas use. On December 5, 1921, the members of the Institute were asked for financial aid from the Belmont Public Library Board, as well as two of the Institute members to serve on the board of directors. The Institute immediately co-operated and each year gave a substantial donation until the building was paid for, now known as "Belmont Public Library". On April 15th, 1917, five hundred dollars was donated to Byron Sanatorium for furnishing a room to be known as "Belmont Women's Institute Room". Since that time many donations have been made for redecorating, as well as bed linens and floor coverings. In 1921, an outbreak of Infantile Paralysis occurred in the village. While it was confined to one family with one death and two hopelessly paralyzed, it was a very anxious time for the community. The members of the Institute felt the need of medical inspection in the school and through their efforts, medical inspection and nurses were introduced in our school. In 1923, through the aid of the Institute, the street lighting system was installed, also better side sidewalks were laid down. Speakers were invited to attend our meetings and addresses were given on such subjects as "Domestic Science", "Our Responsibilities as Canadian Women", "What an Institute should mean to each member", and the "Outlook of Rural Ontario".

Historical Research and Current Events. A Paper was compiled by Mrs. E. George on the "History of Belmont", which was received with many favourable comments, and was very interesting and educational. Mrs. Norman Taylor, Mrs. Barons, Mrs. Willsie and others gave histories of the farms upon which they are now residing all dating back to the crown deeds. Current events have had a very prominent place on the Institute programme since 1916. In 1918, Miss McCann of the London Free Press visited the Institute and asked that a report of our meetings each month be sent to her. Hence, a press reporter has been appointed each year since that time.

At our Home Economics and Health Meetings, we have had many projects and demonstrations which have been very beneficial and interesting. Of special mention are "Good meals with Milk and Cheese", "Preparing and Caring for Vegetables", "Dressing up Vegetables", "Food and Nutrition", "Preparing Meals", "Jelly and Jam Making", "Making of Bread and Buns", "Preparing an Evening Meal", "Domestic Science", and "Making Salads". A nursing course was sponsored in 1946 with an enrollment of twenty-six members, which proved very beneficial. Also addresses by our local doctors on "Cancer", "T.B.", and "Child Diseases" were given. Papers were given on "Child Welfare", "The Responsibilities of Mothers", "Physical and Mental harm of Fault Finding", "Health Hints", and "Self Control in a Sick Room".

In September 1958, the Belmont Women's Institute sponsored a 4H Club with an enrollment of twelve members. The club has continued, completing four units and has steadily increased its membership. The club has been assisted financially whenever it has required funds. In 1959, a banquet was tendered to the 4H members and their parents by the Women's Institute.

All through the years our Institute has been steadily growing and reaching out for newer, better and more up-to-date understanding of the problems of our home and country.

Can the Women's Institute meet the challenge of the times?

Will this organization of 80,000 rural women play a vital role in the future of Canada.

In many communities, where there was once but one organization there are now dozens, e.g. service clubs, home and school, church group, Mary Hastings, Lions Clubs, etc.

New occasions it is said teach new duties. We must rise to the occasion and go forward -

Evelyn L. Moore - June 5, 1962

Living Charter members

Mrs. Gertrude Taylor
Mrs. Ethel Taylor
Mrs. Fannie Wintermute

Presidents -

Mrs. Mark Willsins	1912-1915
Mrs. James Moore	1916-1919
Mrs. Jno. Ferguson	1919-1920
Mrs. Jno. Barons	1920-1925
Mrs. W. A. Willsie	1925-1926
Mrs. Norman Taylor	1926-1927
Mrs. Lew Baker	1927- ?
Mrs. Jessie Wardle	?
Mrs. Jessie Holton	?
Mrs. Emery Cole	?
Mrs. Doerr	1948-1950
Mrs. Harold Johnson	1950-1952
Mrs. Archie Crawford	1952-1954
Mrs. Brock Harkness	1954-1956
Mrs. Elmer Garton	1956-1958
Mrs. Wm. Matthews	1958-1962



MRS. MCVICAR, GRADY STRIBE, MRS. MATHEWS,
ETHEL TAYLOR, JEAN BRADY

Doris Howey



MARY SANSUM. A FAITHFUL MEMBER