

WHEN the Associated Country Women of the World met in Copenhagen this September, tribute was paid—as it is at all assemblies of this international body—to the name of Adelaide Hoodless, the Canadian woman who founded the first Women's Institute at Stoney Creek, Ontario, and so started a movement that has spread pretty well around the world. There are now women's institutes in every province of Canada, in Great Britain, Belgium, France, New Zealand, South Africa and India; and no doubt the institute idea has prompted the formation of some other groups that go to make up the world's organized country women.

It must have taken the courage of a pioneer, fifty years ago, to launch an educational movement for women who were right in the thick of their heaviest family responsibilities, most of them farm women with all that this implies in the way of limited leisure time. And certainly it took a pioneer's vision to lay plans so sound that the objectives are still adaptable to changing conditions, the program still attracting women after half a century.

The First Woman's Institute

The story of how the first women's institute came into being is pretty well known. In Ontario, back in the late 1800's, the farmers had what they called Farmers' Institutes. They also had an Experimental Union, very busy just then with a campaign for the health of farm animals. And when the Experimental

Union, in 1896, someone had the bright idea of bringing in a woman speaker, a Mrs. John Hoodless of Hamilton, who was creating quite a stir in that city by agitating for the teaching of "domestic science" in the public schools. It is impossible to say whether the Union was particularly interested in Mrs. Hoodless' message or whether they wanted a special attraction for their program, for however queer her views might be, this crusader already had a reputation as an entertaining speaker. At this meeting Mrs. Hoodless heard the men discussing the health of farm animals. When her turn came she argued that the health of their families was more important than the health of their cattle—an approach that is still used by home economists doing rural extension work.

At the Guelph meeting a public-spirited young farmer, Erland Lee of Stoney Creek, was particularly moved by what Mrs. Hoodless said, and he asked if she would speak at a meeting of his Farmers' Institute when they would have the women out to hear her. At that meeting Mrs. Hoodless suggested that the women have an organization of their own to study homemaking just as the Farmers' Institute studied farming. She offered to meet with them to talk this over and a meeting was arranged for the next Friday night. Thirty-five women promised to attend. When the night came, one hundred and one women and one man, Erland Lee, crowded into Squire's Hall in the village of Stoney Creek and there, on February 19th,

1897, the first women's institute was organized.

Why did this organization of farm women, banded together for the simple purpose of better homemaking, grow into something so far reaching and so significant? We have a good part of the answer in the manner of woman who was its founder.

Crusader For Household Science

Adelaide Hoodless—Adelaide Hunter before her marriage—was born on a farm near St. George in Brant county, Ontario, one of thirteen children. Her brothers were university men and Adelaide grew up in a home of culture and uncompromising Presbyterian ethics; grew up, too, with all the social graces that come of natural charm and a gentle background. There is no doubt that her personal appeal helped her over many difficult places, but she never depended on it. I saw a copy of her letter to Sir William Macdonald asking for funds to build Macdonald Institute, and certainly there were no "woman's wiles" in evidence. It was as clear-cut and forthright as a case history; she made her cause plead for itself. Perhaps her experience as one of a large family gave her the emotional hardihood and the perseverance she needed to carry through some of her schemes in spite of criticism and opposition; no doubt her own youth on a farm gave her an understanding of the needs of farm women.

But there was no experience to prepare her for a trouble that struck in the early years of her married life. Her first baby died when he was eighteen months old, and she felt that if she had known more about how to take care of a baby she might have saved him. Also it was discovered too late that the milk delivered to her house was not safe for babies, and she felt that she should have known about that, too. Out of her grief came the resolve to try to save other women from suffering like her own. So she headed a campaign for clean milk in her city, and she began her crusade for home economics education for girls—"domestic science" they called it then. And for women whose school days were over, she started the women's institutes, one of our first Canadian ventures in rural adult education.



THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE FOUNDER OF
WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

ADELAIDE HUNTER HOODLESS 1252 —
ST. GEORGE, ONTARIO BRANT CO. 1910

IN THE 65TH ANNIVERSARY year of one of the organizations she founded, Mrs. Adelaide Hunter Hoodless has been officially recognized as a "great Canadian" and her birthplace has been marked as a national historic site.

Several hundred people watched from the shade of two spreading maple trees in front of an unpretentious farm house near St. George last Saturday as a bronze plaque was unveiled by Mrs. Keith Rand of Nova Scotia, a former president of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada. The plaque was erected by the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board.

Speaker Dr. John A. Charlton called Mrs. Hoodless "one of the most remarkable women to leave her mark on Canada and the world."

SHE WAS A PIONEER of household science teaching for girls, founder of the Women's Institute and Macdonald Institute, Guelph, one of the organizers of the National Council of Women, the Victorian Order of Nurses and the YWCA of Canada.

In speaking of Mrs. Hoodless, Dr. Charlton said: "Her favorite writer, if we may judge by the number of times she quoted him, was Herbert Spencer, and her favorite quotation, which she used many times, was 'The goodness of society ultimately depends on the nature of its citizens, and since the nature of its citizens is more modifiable by early training than by anything else, we must conclude that the welfare of the family underlies the welfare of society.'"

Her efforts were not generally acclaimed in her day, Dr. Charlton said. She was often derided as one of those despised "new women" and a frequent comment was, "Why doesn't she stay at home and look after her children?"

THE HOSTESS of the Hoodless home, which was purchased by FWIC in 1959, is Mrs. Lockman who called last Saturday "one of the highlights of my year."

She recalled that in October, 1937, Lady Tweedsmuir, wife of the governor-general, unveiled the cairn (a half-mile east of the homestead) honoring Mrs. Hoodless. This was the culmination of resolutions from nearby Blue Lake and Auburn WIs to recognize the founder's birthplace.

In August, 1939, a flag and pole were dedicated near the cairn on the occasion of Scottish Women's Rural Institutes on tour in Ontario. A plaque was unveiled June 13, 1959, by the Archeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario.

A MESSAGE OF GOOD WISHES from the Queen, patron of FWIC, was read by Mrs. James Haggerty, national president. She also brought a message from the president of the Associated Country Women of the World.

One of the most popular speeches was made by Reeve James Howell of South Dumfries Township who announced that council has bought two acres of land adjoining the homestead at the west for a park area "because we want to be your neighbors."

Others attending the ceremonies included Mrs. L. G. Lymburner, Ontario WI president; Dr. Margaret McCready, principal of Macdonald Institute, Guelph; Helen McKercher, director of the home economics service of the Waterloo County Historical Society, and Dr. J. J. Talman, librarian of the University of Western Ontario.