

Experimental Union, very busy just then with a campaign for the health of farm animals, and when the Experimental Union was planning its annual meeting at Guelph in 1896, some one 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 Stony Creek, was particularly moved by what Mrs. Hoodless said, and he asked if she would speak at a meeting of his Farmer's Institute, when he 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 Farmer's 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 Stony Creek, and there on Feb. 19-1897 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? A good part of the answer is in the manner of woman who was its founder, 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. Perhaps her experience as one of a large family gave her the emotional hardihood and 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 the understanding of the needs of farm woman.