

Adelaide Hoodless

Adopted as the patron saint of the Women's Institutes, [Adelaide Hoodless](#) occupies a singular position in the organization's mythology. Hoodless was a crusader for domestic science education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her chief interest was in the establishment of a training centre for teachers of domestic science and the inclusion of this subject in the school curriculum. She was active in several women's organizations, especially the National Council of Women of Canada and the YWCA. But, curiously, not the Women's Institutes.

Her sole physical contribution to this organization appears to have been an invited speech given to women attending a Farmers' Institutes meeting in February of 1897 and a return visit a week later to help the South Wentworth Farmers' Institute organize a women's auxiliary. The new organization was first called the "Department of Domestic Economy." At the second meeting, this was changed to "Women's Institute of Saltfleet"; and this name was eventually changed again to "Stoney Creek Women's Institute."

Aside from her organizational encouragement, what Hoodless actually seems to have given the Institute movement was an emotive founding myth for the Institutes that has resonated with its members for over a century. Hoodless had lost a child to an infection caused by contaminated milk and had vowed that she would not lose another child to a preventable disease. She had concluded that, had she only been trained in the principles of domestic science, she would have known enough to save her baby. This tragic personal event led her to campaign across the province for the establishment of Domestic Science courses, not women's institutes.

Even so, the Hoodless story is still repeated by heart by WI members who know little else about Adelaide Hoodless, or her significant history of social activism. Her story was powerfully relevant to women over a century ago, when infant mortality was much higher than it is today. But, it clearly speaks to abiding fears all mothers have for the health and well-being of their children and their mutual desire to learn as much as possible to keep their families safe.

Sources:

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