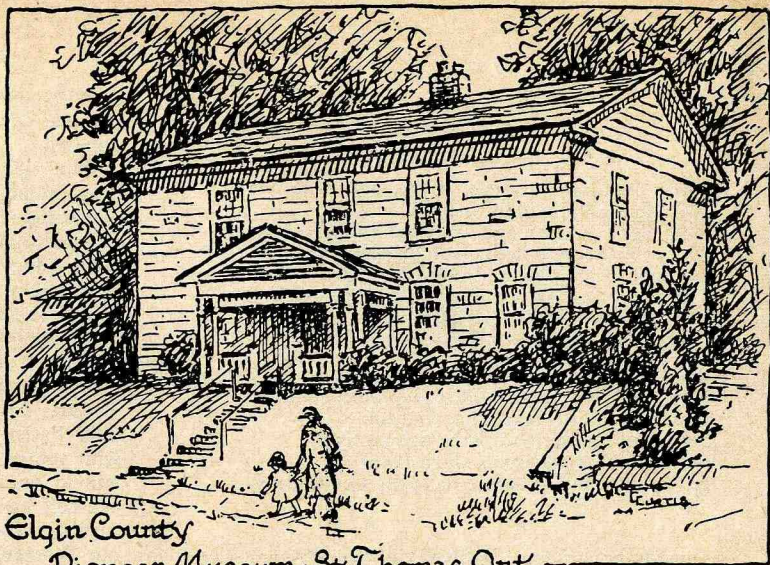


Launching a Pioneer Museum

By Mrs. R. J. Futcher

Elgin County
Pioneer Museum, St. Thomas, Ont.



This drawing by a local Institute member is printed on hasty notes which are sold as souvenirs to supplement the museum funds.

Editor's Note: This article is taken from an address by Mrs. Futcher at the Grey-Bruce Women's Institute convention. In addition to the interest of the story we believe the experience of the Elgin County Women's Institutes may offer suggestions to others planning or directing pioneer museums.

INSTITUTE WOMEN know all about Tweedsmuir Histories. We go back to the years 1936-1939 when Lady Tweedsmuir first suggested this project. I'm sure I'm safe in saying that ninety per cent of Ontario Women's Institutes have written or are in the process of writing a Tweedsmuir History, and what an intimate story it is. No historian could possibly unearth the wealth of material these histories contain; for established families of the community delve into family records and family albums to make the story complete. A museum is the natural follow-up of this written story.

We know how well the brain retains what the eye sees. The written story of our communities — the Tweedsmuir History — is tucked away on the shelves in closets, in libraries or vaults, and brought out on occasion; but the visual story, the local museum, is there ready for perusal and instruction whenever one is so inclined. Our Elgin County Historical Society—we used to have a very flourishing one—had been defunct for many years, so the Women's Institute, because of our interest in the history of the county, was the logical organization to promote the establishment of the museum.

There were other reasons: We wanted to honour our pioneer ancestors who, with fortitude and endurance, opened up our county. And a local museum is truly a memorial to the past and its traditions, for it preserves the way of life of our forefathers for present and future generations. We realized that understanding and appreciation of the past, help in the understanding of the present. There is one phrase that sums up the whole importance and need of the study of history. It is engraved in stone over the doorway of the beautiful State University of Colorado at Boulder. The phrase is, "He who knows his own generation only, remains always a child."

Another reason we pushed ahead: we realized there was no time to lose. Articles were being broken, lost and thrown out or carried away, many

of them across the border by eager antique seekers.

As we talked museum, we were asked this question: "Why bother with small museums? We have splendid provincial ones." True—and they tell a broad story of our civilization and the civilization of other countries of the world. They do not tell the intimate story of our communities—the story that is ours alone.

It took us three years to establish our Elgin County Museum, three years of intensive effort. The project was first approved by the Women's Institute members of East and West Elgin districts in the spring of 1954, and the museum opening was in April 1957.

In October 1954 twenty-four Institutes of the county arranged a showing of historic articles in the largest department store in St. Thomas for a week. Each Institute had an allotted space to set up its display. We felt we must know what interest citizens in general would have in such a project. Public interest far exceeded our hopes. Some school children came back day after day to have a better look. The interest was so great it put us on the spot. We had to go ahead and capitalize on that interest, else how would we ever pick it up. We raised our first money, \$450, by serving afternoon tea each day at that department store.

In November 1954, just one month later, the historical research conveners of the branch Institutes met and decided to go ahead with the promotion of a County Museum in St. Thomas, the county seat. Next spring we set up two boards, one honorary, the other active and representing the branch Institutes, a defunct historical society, local historians and interested businessmen.

We were able to buy a \$10,000 property in the old part of St. Thomas, built in 1842. Never will I forget the qualms when I signed my name, on behalf of the Institutes, with only \$450 in the bank. I must confess I had visions of my small bank account being completely wiped out. The old house on the main street was ideal for our purpose—not too big, something we could manage, and it had an interesting story of its own. The property had been owned by Dr. Charles Duncombe who, with Dr. John Rolph, founded the first medical school of Upper Canada, here in St. Thomas, in 1824. Dr.

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BY THE SAME LAW

By Adelaide Love

I saw one day a straight young pear tree bound
With thongs of leather to a garden wall
And, both amazed and troubled to have found
Such slim, green loveliness in helpless thrall,
I sought the gardener, asking why he tied
The pliant tree to obdurate brick and stone.
"To make it bear its fruits, ma'am," he replied,
"When left to spread it ran to leaves alone."

With this for answer and rebuke, I saw
How well the Husbandman supreme contrives
By virtue of a strange, impartial law
To gather ampler fruit from human lives,
How often have I seen a spirit know
Restraint of bonds before its fruits would grow.

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Duncombe became involved in the William Lyon McKenzie rebellion of 1837, and Dr. Rolph later founded the medical school of Toronto University. This connection provides the background for our "medical room," one of the features of our museum.

Now came fund-raising in earnest. The objective of our campaign was \$16,000, enough to pay for the property and necessary renovations. The Institutes of the county raised \$3,300 in two winters of tea parties and special projects. Rural Elgin was canvassed by our members, bringing in another \$4,500. Letters to former Elgin citizens living elsewhere resulted in donations of several thousands. The I.O.D.E. groups of St. Thomas assisted us by canvassing the city, and that added another \$4,000.

The renovations were carried out during the winter of 1956-1957 and the museum was opened in the spring. We made our money go as far as we could by doing a great deal of the work ourselves—scraping, painting, papering, etcetera. Here is an example of how we saved: to have a plasterer plaster the walls of a room we had decided would be the pioneer kitchen, would cost us \$170. One of our women learned how to do this work and the cost was just \$7.60 for material. The floors are outstanding—original wide pine boards of a lovely honey colour. It cost \$100 a room to bring them back, but it is worth it; they stand up well under very hard wear.

Ours is a museum home. Our curators live in. We have an apartment there for them. It is always warm and comfortable and very clean. Their presence there gives full protection to our display of articles at all times. We have set up a bedroom, a kitchen and a sitting-room as pioneer type rooms. Our Women's Institute members rolled wool rags into balls for two winters for a colourful rag carpet for the sitting room floor. We also have a document room, an Indian display, a large miscellaneous room that takes care of the overflow, and a "Col. Talbot Room" where we are collecting data honouring the founder of our county in the year 1803. Tea is served in our pioneer dining room where we display old glass and silver.

From an Institute cook book we raised \$500. Interior views of the rooms on coloured cards sell readily at 10 cents or three for 25 cents. This spring we ordered 12,000 of them, 4,000 of each view. Our total cost was \$360, so we make well on them. We also sell hasty notes with a drawing of the building,

done by one of our members. We have never paid out one cent to acquire any article—all have been donated.

Plans for the maintenance of the museum have been soundly laid. The County Council accepted ownership of the property, making it eligible for a Provincial Grant. I must admit this took some doing. We had to appear before them three times before they accepted ownership. They are a pretty canny bunch of men; they seemed to think there was something wrong when it was offered to them debt-free, all furnished, ready to go. The County Council gives us a \$500 yearly grant and the St. Thomas City Council maintains the grounds under their Parks Department. Women's Institutes helped with yearly donations until we got on our feet. To add to our funds we have yearly \$1 memberships. We sell homemade jams and jellies. The museum furnishes the jars, so as to have them uniform, and our Women's Institute members fill them from their surplus fruit. The admittance charge is 25 cents for adults. Children are admitted free, so are school classes and other groups when accompanied by teachers and leaders.

Our future plans include the building of a small barn in the garden of the museum in which we will display larger household equipment and farm machinery.

We receive excellent support from our local newspaper; we've had it all the way through. I personally write a weekly column headed "Museum News"—not too long, informing our citizens of museum visitors—and they come from all over the world, of articles that have been donated, articles we need to complete a special display, and historical events of the past and present. We have tireless committees looking after the various rooms, programme committee, publicity committee, committees for special projects.

This is the story of our Elgin County Museum. If you are thinking about establishing one, go ahead. We did it. You can, too. Take one step at a time and be sure you have a sufficient number of dedicated souls who will see the project through. If you have an established museum perhaps you can make use of some of the ideas we have found to be good.

We are proud of our museum! It is open daily. Please come and visit us!

MILLINERY NOTES

Millinery classes never seem to lack for original ideas. Mrs. Mildred Mulligan, Millinery Instructor, in Home Economics Extension Service reports a most attractive hat lining made by a class member from a very old crocheted doily which had been stretched and blocked on a hat block. Other linings were made from lace curtains.

Mrs. Mulligan also reports some unusual experiences with feather trimmings. A lady especially liked a feather ornament that the instructor had made from peacock and pheasant feathers. The next day the lady came to the class with two tail pheasant feathers and some small ones which a neighbor who raised pheasant's had pulled from a live bird. The feathers made a beautiful trimming for her hat.

EARLY HISTORY



PEWTER DISPLAYED AT TEA — Mrs. Morley Adams, past president of the Payne's Mills W.I., and a life member, and Mrs. Albert Auckland, secretary-treasurer of the Payne's Mills W.I., admire the pewter collection of Dr. E. Bloomer, Margaret street, now on display at the Elgin

Museum. Mrs. Auckland is wearing the wedding gown and hat which belonged to the late Mrs. John Fletcher, of Middlemarch, loaned by her daughter, Mrs. Bernie Gilbert, of Payne's Mills, for the week of teas which is being held at the Museum throughout this week. — (T.-J. Photo).

June 2-1959 Museum's Week of Teas Colorful Event

A background of spring flowers and W.I. members dressed in costumes of the past, was the scene on the opening day of the annual Week of Teas at the Elgin County Pioneer Museum. Hostesses for the day were Payne's Mills, Rodney, Aylmer, Bayham and Tyrconnell branches.

Dr. Bloomer's fine collection of pewter was on display in the living room with Mrs. Jesse Van Patter, Bayham W.I., in charge.

The tea table was graced with

a 225 year old hand woven linen cloth. This cloth was the property of the late Lela Weaver and donated to the museum by Mrs. Hugh Weaver, Lakeview, Ont. A silver bowl filled with lily of the valley, on a mirror surrounded with purple magnolias, white hydrangea and blue velvet streamers formed the centrepiece. Pink candles in silver candleabra completed the setting.

Mrs. J. R. Fletcher, board chairman and Mrs. Murray Wil-

son, in costume, received the guests. Murray Wilson was in charge of the register. Mrs. Fred Downie, Rodney W.I. and Mrs. Fred James, Bayham W.I., presided at the tea tables. Serving the guests were: Mrs. Arnold McCallum, Rodney W.I.; Mrs. M. Hepburn, Tyrconnell W.I.; Mrs. H. L. Godwin, Bayham W.I.; Mrs. Lorne Shain, Aylmer W.I. The guests were invited to the tea room by Mrs. Kenneth Bawden, Payne's W.I., and Mrs. Arthur Benner, Bayham W.I.

Mrs. Schollenger, Tyrconnell W.I.; Mrs. C. Ellis, Bayham W.I. and Mrs. Spurrell, Aylmer W.I. were responsible for the tea-making.

A well laden food table was in charge of Mrs. E. Lewis and Mrs. Hazel Bawden, Payne's W.I.; Mrs. G. N. Roloson, Bayham W.I. and Mrs. Buchner, Aylmer W.I. The display rooms were looked after by historical research conveners. Mrs. Hugh DeGraw, Rodney W.I.; Mrs. Thomas Blackman, Payne's Mills W.I.; Mrs. Lewis Marcus, Tyrconnell W.I.; and Mrs. Nelson Ward, Bayham W.I.; Mrs. Vermont Pow, Payne's Mills W.I. was general convener for the day.

ELGIN'S HISTORY

School Section No. 6 Southwold

(By Mark Wallis, Talbotville, Ont.)

Sept. 24th 1896

Printed in Southern Counties Journal, St. Thomas, Ont

The section lies three miles northwest from St. Thomas, and is generally known as The Five Stakes, or more properly Talbotville. The village being situated at the junction of the London and Port Stanley Gravel road, (or commonly known as the North street) and the Back street. The section contains 4,675 acres and 77 rate-payers at present, and is bounded on the north by the townline between Elgin and Middlesex, the final boundaries being fixed by the Southwold council, December 5, 1854.

First Settlement

In March, 1818, the following settlers came to this section and settled on the different lots as shown in the diagram, Squire Millard, Jas. Bowlby, Daniel Bowlby, John Boughner, Mathias Boughner, Daniel Boughner, Isaac Reilly, Samuel Smith, Charles Hannon, and Jacob Lemons. Within about five years the remainder of the settlers came, with the exception of the settler on lot 29, fourth concession. The first patents taken were by Jos. Tumbilson on lot 49, east of North street and Jerry Kentiner on lot 48, west of the North street on October 19, 1824. Many of the settlers were descendants of United Empire Loyalists, who had come to Long Point. Many of them took an active part in the war of 1812 and 1814, among them being Mathias Boughner, who fought at Chryslers Farm, and Henry Stringer, who fought at Chippewa.

Upon the shoulders of the first settlers, fell many difficulties for it was necessary to go to Long Point for every necessary. For some time no mill was nearer than Long Point, but about 1830 a mill was erected at what is now known as Byron, by one Hall. In going to this point, it was necessary to blaze the trees, and it required two days to complete the journey.

Money at this time was rather scarce. About the only means of procuring it was by making a sort of potash, called "Black Salts", and it often paid the taxes, which amounted to about three dollars on two hundred acres. The first wheat sold in this district was in 1830 when Squire Millard delivered a load at Port Stanley, and for a great many years this continued to be the chief market. Few villages are more widely known than this village considering its size, but from its location a great deal of business was done, particularly in the hotel line. The first hotel was built on the corner of lot 40, south of Back street, about 1832 or 1833, by Myrion H. Rowley, now living in St. Thomas, but it was conducted by Samuel Smith, who purchased the lot and buildings for a span of horses. Mr. Rowley having built it intending to conduct a general store, but he came to the conclusion he had not the means. This building burned some time afterwards, and was replaced by a large structure, built by Frank McQueen but it burned in 1888, and was replaced by another large building, but no license has been granted it. Among those, who conducted these hotels might

*Mansion
House*

*Smith's
Hotel*

Narrison
House

3 hotels & 1 saloon

(2)

Allworth's
Hotel
burned
about
1850

be mentioned Henry Wilcox, Peter Bowlby, George Smith, and John Boughner. A beer shop was conducted by Samuel M. Fassett and wife as early as 1831. Before this Mr. Fassett taught school here, but 1834 he went to Ohio to visit his son, and upon his return, he died with the cholera. The next hotel built here was constructed by Mr. John Allworth on the northwest corner of Gore "E". Mr. Allworth kept the first post office here, and it was through him that this village derived its present name, "Talbotville". It was called Five Stakes, from the fact that in the survey five stakes came nearly at one point. Mr. Allworth's hotel was the headquarters of Colonel Talbot, when going to or from London, and in honor to the Colonel the post office was called Talbotville. Before this the mail was delivered at Kettle creek. In these days it cost probably from seventy-five cents to one dollar to send a letter to Ireland. Mr. Allworth's hotel burned about 1850, and he purchased a large partially constructed dwelling house, which was situated on the southeast corner, and moved it to its present location on the northwest corner, and is now the only old hotel landmark we have. Mail

Towser's
Hotel

Charles Towser built a hotel on the northwest corner, but it was occupied by John Cuthbertson, but it burned and was replaced twice. William Widdifield moved a building that for many years had been used as a general store, conducted by Messrs. McQueen and Drake, about 1850, from the south side of Back Street to the opposite corner, and there conducted a hotel for many years. A saloon was conducted for many years by one, Esau Payne, and is long to be remembered as the Wine Ball saloon.

Wine
Ball
saloon

But in 1857, when the London and Port Stanley Railroad was opened for traffic the hotel business was nearly destroyed, for prior to this all teaming between London and Port Stanley was done over this road. Quite often the village was blocked with teams, and it was then that these three hotels and the Wine Ball saloon flourished. Prior to 1857 Allworth's Hotel was the headquarters for the main state line between London and Port Stanley, owned by Messrs. Seige and Kiely, London. They had both a six and four horse stage, and changed horses here. As many as fifty-six persons have been seen in the stage at once.

1825-1833

Henry Collins, Yankee cabinet maker, was the first person to conduct a business of any description here, except the sale of liquor. He arrived here about 1825 from Long Point, and built a large log building on the northwest corner, and here carried on a general cabinet shop, persons coming from as far west as Rond Eau to purchase the many necessities, giving as a rule in payment, pork, honey, etc. Mr. Collins had several apprentices, but gave up the business in 1833, and removed to St. Thomas. Samuel Cornish was the first butcher in this district.

The first general store conducted here was by James McQueen and Richard Drake, the store being situated on the southwest corner where the present hotel stands. John Spackman and Benjamin Knight kept the same business for some time. Esau Payne also conducted a general store in connection with the Wine Ball Saloon.

Mrs. John Allworth - first post master