

ELGIN COUNTY PIONEER MUSEUM

the kitchen with its fireplace and accompanying equipment, were found many articles used in this all important room of pioneer days. The sitting room with its hand-woven rag rug and fine antique furniture, grandfather's clock, pictures, and other mementoes of a past era, was an interesting spot. In the medical room was displayed authentic equipment and books used in the early practice of medicing in Elgin County. Dr. J. D. Curtis and Dr. E. Crane were largely responsible for this valuable collection. An interesting room upstairs was the bedroom with its old fashioned four-poster bed, a trundle bed, and other pioneer furniture, as well as homespun spreads, and lines, knitted articles and other old-fashioned items of clothing. A valuable collection of miscellaneous pioneer items were displayed in another large room upstairs.

It had taken three years of planning and joint effort of many people to achieve the establishment of the museum, but now at last they were able to enjoy the commendations of the many present for the opening ceremonies.

At this time Mr. W. C. Miller announced that the "Susan Paul" dress, on loan from the defunct Historical Society, to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, was to be returned to the newly opened museum. Displayed in a specially constructed glass case in a small upstairs room, the beautiful silk gown worn by a St. Thomas girl, Susan Paul, as she danced with the Prince of Wales (King Edward VII) at a ball in his honor in London in 1861, is one of the most attractive exhibits in the museum.

In 1960, under the supervision of Mr. John Ker, who resides on the old Colonel Talbot Estate, the Colonel Talbot room was opened. Here are displayed many documents and personal effects used by the Colonel as well as pictures connected with his life.

In 1961, Mrs. Fatcher, with Mr. W. C. Miller and Mrs. Gown Young, met the Elgin County Council and made a plea for assistance in planning an extension to the museum. The council was very sympathetic to the proposal and assured the delegation that every consideration would be given it. Finally assured of the councils financial assistance, plans were laid to carry out the proposed extension, to cost about \$16,000. The council made a grant of \$5,000 and an interest free loan to that amount and soon other generous donations were received. Mr. W. C. Miller was chairman of the building committee and the contract given to Mr. Lea Wright.

In a few months the annex erected to the south of the original building was completed. It consists of an attractive assembly and display room, a large storage room above this and a basement or lower display room below. In addition there

are very comfortable and well appointed living quarters for the curators and facilities in the basement.

The re-arranging of furniture and displays from the original building to the new as well as making minor changes in the older part, including re-decorating of some rooms, necessitated much work and added expense. Since more space was now available, more contributions were received and had to be placed, Committees were set up for the task and the work soon completed. The opening date was May 22nd, 1963. Those officiating at the opening of the annex included Hon. Bryan Cathcart, Minister of Travel and Publicity, Mayor V. A. Barrie, Warden H.C. Emerson, Ronald K. McNeil, M. P., Dr. J. M. S. Careless, Historian of University of Toronto, Mr. D. H. Anderson, Reeve C. D. Philipps of Bayham, Mrs. J. H. Futcher of the Archaeological & Historic Sites Board, W. C. Miller, chairman of the building committee, and Rev. D. A. Burns of the St. Thomas Ministerial Association.

Erected near the side entrance, a Provincial Historical Plaque honoring Dr. Charles Duncombe, was unveiled by Mr. D. H. Anderson, while ribbon-cutting ceremonies were performed by Hon. B. Cathcart, assisted by Mr. W. C. Miller. A dinner marking the 100th anniversary of Col. Talbot's arrival was held that evening at the Grand Central Hotel. Tours to old homes in East and West Elgin and a tea and craft display in the museum completed the memorable week.

Many visitors again registered for the annex opening. Very attractive was the assembly and display room with its arrangement of glass cases containing many treasured and delicate pieces of china and glass. In the lower display room pioneer utensils used inside and out of pioneer homes were featured. Upstairs in the "Document Room" Mr. Miller had arranged an interesting exhibit of crown deeds, maps, photographs, books, and volumes of clippings. - while Mrs. W. G. Lyle in the Music Room had a display of old time musical instruments and photographs of present and past local musicians, ~~and~~ individually and in groups. The I.O.D.E. in a small room on the main floor had arranged a showing of china, silver, and pewter pieces together with some fine examples of early furniture.

The expenses for the museum's upkeep are considerable. Then from time to time unexpected ones occur. Since the opening stacking chairs were purchased, a new fire escape built, and a piano purchased - the cost of the latter partially lessened by donations. The Ontario government gives a yearly grant of \$1,000, while the county and city councils give \$500 and \$200 respectively.

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Besides, the city council looks after the maintenance of the grounds. Institutes of Elgin County donate annually, membership tickets at \$1 each are sold, while the sale of homemade jams, jellies, and novelties, as well as cards and booklets, is another source of income. Adult visitors are charged 25¢ and children 10¢ for admission. From time to time individual contributions are received, some very generous indeed. Four families who have contributed substantially to financing the museum project have had the honor of choosing a room wherein a plaque was placed to honor their ancestors. These families are: Duncan McKillop and sisters Mrs. John Labatta, Mr. and Mrs. D.H. Anderson, Archibald McLachlan, and North Yarmouth W.I. Another plaque placed in the Medical room honouring Drs. Curtis and Crane, by the Museum Committee.

By the fall of 1963 payment of all outstanding debts incurred through the building of the annex had been met with the exception of the \$5,000 interest free loan from the county council. At this time, February 1966, \$1,000 of this debt has been paid and there is a substantial balance on hand for part of the current years' expenses.

In 1965 approximately 4,500 visitors toured the museum with many coming from distant places. Local visitors include W.I. and I.O.D.E. groups, other societies, school groups, etc. Several meetings of W.I. and I.O.D.E. are being held in the assembly room. Teas, exhibits, parties, and other functions have been arranged to help augment the funds.

From time to time further varied and interesting treasures are received for display - some donated, othes on loan. Changes are made from time to time in the displays, permitting some articles to be brought forth from storage and others to be put away. At the present time on the walls of the assembly room are featured several fine paintings by local artists. They depict local scenes of a past era in and around St. Thomas.

Recently too in a small room off the lower display room, Mr. Norman Scott and Marshall Field have set up a naturalists room. Here is an attractive display of birds eggs, the collection having belonged to the late R.W. Johnson. A small exhibit of mounted birds is another feature.

The museum has been represented at several "Museum Workshops" by different committee members who brought back interesting reports concerning the functioning and operation of other museums.

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Many have contributed to make the museum a success. Upon the opening the Times Journal paid this tribute; "the moving spirit behind the whole project from the beginning has been Mrs. J. R. Futcher of Middlemarch, whose vision, and practical dynamic leadership has seen the big task through, and it was she who has borne the heavy responsibility of leadership in the enterprise." Besides Mrs. Futcher who has devoted so much time and effort to making a County Museum a reality, others include Mrs. Gowan Young, secretary treasurer since the beginning of the project, all members of past and present committees, including Mr. W. C. Miller, chairman of the building committee, the county and city councils, the W. I. and I.O.D.E. organizations, the curators, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson who, with the exception of a few months, have held that office since the beginning, and who by their kind hospitality have made visiting the museum a pleasure; the Times Journal and Radio Station C.H.L.O. for their generous publicity, and many others who have given their labour, financial and material donations.

In the Centennial year, 1967, the committee hopes to erect a flag pole on the Museum grounds. Elgin's people may well be proud of their museum, preserving therein as it does, the heirlooms and pieces of another era, affording to all who call there, enjoyment, education, and inspiration.

SPECIAL EVENTS

TWENTY-FIFTH DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING

The West Elgin District Women's Institute held their twenty-fifth annual meeting at Crinan in May of 1934. Mrs. C. A. McLevey was the District President. Mrs. E. V. Docker read the history of the Women's Institute of West Elgin District over the last twenty five years. Mr. Putnam, the representative from the Department of Agriculture, introduced the magazine, "For Home and Country".

FIFTIETH DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING

The 50th annual meeting of West Elgin District Women's Institutes was held in Knox Church, Fingal, on May 21st, 1958. Mrs. Chas. Cooper, West Lorne, the District president, presided. The Rev. Mr. Hirtle gave the opening prayer. Mrs. A. H. Hunter gave the address of welcome and Mrs. J. H. Messerschmid of Rodney, replied.

The noon luncheon was served in the church basement by the Ladies Aid of the church. A lovely anniversary cake was cut and Mrs. J. Duncan Galbraith read the history of the District over the past fifty years. The past District presidents and secretaries were introduced by Mrs. R. N. McLellan. Mrs. Baker led in community singing and during the memorial service the 23rd Psalm was read. Mrs. Earl Lyons, the Provincial Board member, was the speaker.

Bagnall

THE BOBIER HOME - DUTTON

The Institute branches of West Elgin, particularly the six branches in Dunwich Twp. - Cowal, Dutton, Iona, Iona Station, and Wallacetown and Tyrconnel, have been very active in the Auxiliary of the Bobier Home.

This fine large home was left by Mr. Edward Bobier, together with a substantial sum to be a home for elderly and convalescent people. It was officially opened about 1950. The Red Cross and Institutes of the district canvassed the surrounding area and raised a large sum of money. Each Institute and Red Cross unit furnished a room and a plaque bearing the name of the organization was placed over the door. Each year there is a large birthday tea, and all organizations, which now include church groups, assist. The president for this period, namely 1966 - 1967, is Mrs. Frank Silcox, a member of the Institute.

The Auxiliary contributes many comforts, lawn chairs and umbrella, television, and a piano, besides visiting the patients and giving small treats.

W. I. CANCER BENEFIT TEAS

In August of 1961 the West Elgin Institutes held a tea at the home of Mrs. J. D. Galbraith. The sixteen Institute branches supplied fruit bread and cheese for the "tea" and food for sale on the food table, also there was a "touch and take" table and a draw on a painting done by Mrs. Lyle Cook. A goodly sum was raised to be used for Gift Cupboard supplies for cancer patients in West Elgin.

The next year, 1962, Mrs. David Saunders held a successful "tea" arranged in the same way. At this affair more than seven hundred dollars was raised for the benefit of West Elgin patients.

In 1963 the "tea" was held at the home of Mrs. Ernest Lashbrook, Rodney. The Institutes convened this successful event and a splendid sum was realized.

In 1964 West Lorne played hostess for the "tea" which had now become an annual event, and there was a splendid response in aid of this important work.

Paynes Mills Hall was the scene of the tea in 1965. It was attended by many from St. Thomas and East Elgin, and again a goodly sum was raised.

In 1966 Clachan was hostess for the tea, and although at the western tip of the county, there was a splendid response in every way for this worthy cause, resulting again in a fine total being raised.

The Service Committee, under the chairmanship of Mrs. David Saunders, has done praise-worthy work in driving patients to the London Clinic, visiting patients in their homes or the hospital, and giving help financially or otherwise, when needed.

The Education Committee distributes literature to the schools, shows films, and have display booths at the local fairs.

WHITE CROSS

The Institute branches of West Elgin reach out in friendship to the people in the Ontario Hospital, south of St. Thomas. Mrs. Vermont Pow, a former District President of the W.I. is a past president of the Ontario Hospital Association and has always shown keen interest in this work.

Representatives from the different surrounding Institute branches have become members of the White Cross and visit the patients. Some members entertain patients in their homes, and parties are held at the hospital.

Each year at the annual Carnival the Institutes assist at booths, contributing cookies and candy. At Christmas the branches send in gifts for the patients.

On February 1st, 1967, Institute members were present at the reception and farewell party for Doctor Clelland who had headed the institution since 1952. He was presented with a lovely coloured picture book of Switzerland by Mrs. Pow and Mrs. Scott Griffin, on behalf of the Auxiliary.



Mrs. Pow,
Mrs. Galbraith
Mrs. R. McNeil
Mrs. D. Saunders
Mrs. E. Down.

Cancer Tea Aug 1963.