

# Interesting Pioneer History Surrounds Residence Built by Dr. Elijah Duncombe

(By GLADYS E. ELLIOTT)

The decision of the Women's Institutes of Elgin County to purchase the historic home of Mr. and Mrs. Bramwell Saywell at 32 Talbot street for an Elgin County Museum is reviving much interesting pioneer history. There is widespread general interest in the project and a particular interest on the part of descendants of the pioneer families who resided in this beautiful old home.

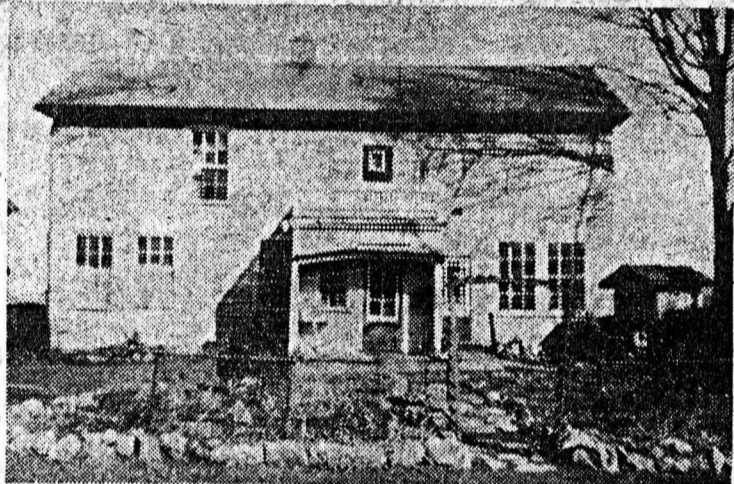
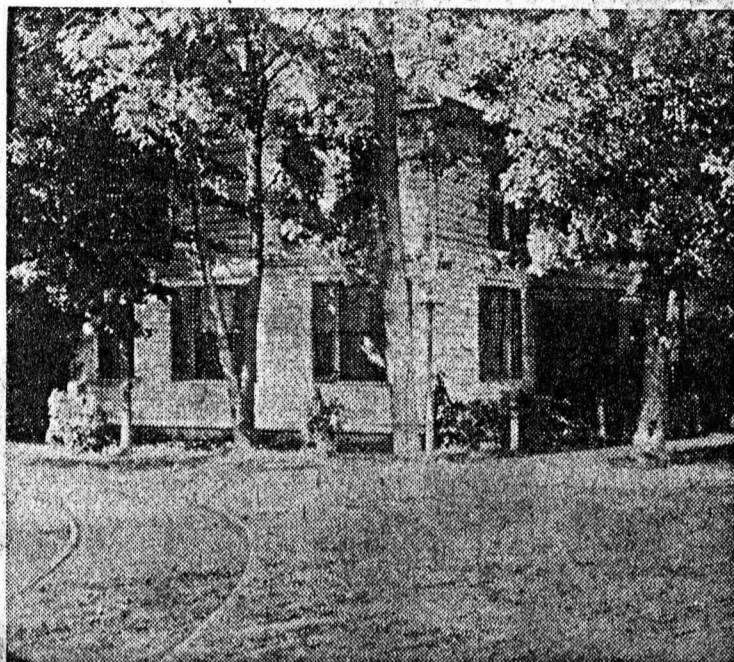
Among the latter is Mrs. John Butler Wilkinson, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, whose mother, the late Mrs. Ida Morris, of Madison, Wisconsin, was born in the old home in 1858, when it belonged to the latter's grandfather, Dr. Elijah Eli Duncombe. That is going back to very early history indeed, for according to the first book of records in the Registry Office here, it was on Sept. 19, 1833, that Elijah E. Duncombe bought for £125 two acres of Lots 1 and 2, commencing on the south side of Talbot Road at the North West angle of said Lot 1. Thence South on the Western limit of the Township of Yarmouth 8 chains 50 links more or less to the North limit to Walnut Street. Thence Easterly along the North side of Walnut Street 2 chains 95 links more or less to Pleasant Street. Thence North on the West side of Pleasant Street 7 chains 75 links more or less to Talbot Road. Thence Westerly along the South side of Talbot Road three chains more or less to the place of beginning.

Mrs. Wilkinson happens to be collecting material at present for a history of the Duncombe family, which she plans to write, her research going back even to the tracing of the family history in England. From information given her by her mother and also by her aunt, Mrs. P. M. Thompson, of Windsor, the former Clara Moore, Mrs. Wilkinson gives a good picture of the home many years ago.

It is understood that Dr. and Mrs. Elijah E. Duncombe first lived in the home just west of the present 32 Talbot street, the house now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. S. A. Hammond and also a historic residence. There, their three older daughters were born. Dr. Duncombe later took over the practice of his brother, Dr. Charles Duncombe, and Dr. J. D. Curtis in his history. "St. Thomas Medical Men of the Past," records that at that time he also acquired his brother's home and office. The fourth of the Duncombe sisters, Mary, was born in 1836 at 32 Talbot street states Mrs. Wilkinson.

Mary Duncombe was married to Nelson Whitney Moore in 1856 and they lived for a time at the home of her parents and it was there that their daughter, Ida, was born in 1858, and also several other of their children, it is believed. Dr. Elijah Duncombe died in 1870, his wife, Catherine Bouck Duncombe, having predeceased him in 1863 or 1864 while on a visit to a daughter in Racine, Wisconsin.

Ida Moore Morris, who lived in Madison, Wisconsin, after her marriage, revisited St. Thomas frequently, as have also her



**TWO VIEWS OF MUSEUM BUILDING**—The top picture is of the house at Talbot and Pleasant streets, purchased recently by the Women's Institutes of Elgin County for an Elgin County Museum. At one time the Henry Thornton family lived there. Note the street-car tracks rounding the corner and the trees in front of the house.

The bottom picture is of the rear of the house as it is now, showing a portion of the garden.

daughters, Mrs. Wilkinson (the former Kathryn Morris) and Miss Margaret Morris, who resides with her sister in Milwaukee. They have always maintained a keen interest in the city and in the old home. There, an interesting record is still to be seen in the front upper east room, where Mrs. Morris was born, for while living there, she scratched her name and those of two of her brothers on the glass of a window with a diamond of her mother's. Part of that inscription is still clear on the original glass and the "engraver" was apparently very young at the time for she chose the lower middle pane for her writing.

#### Garden and Farmyard

From her mother's description, Mrs. Wilkinson pictures the old home. When Mrs. Morris was a girl, there were two kitchens extending to the south of the house, a summer one and a winter one;

also a woodshed. There seem to have been many buildings in the spacious grounds, too — a privy, chicken coops, huts for ducks and geese, pig pens, cow shed, and a barn for saddle and driving horses.

Also, in those days, there was a quite large one-room playhouse, built for Mrs. Morris as a child, which stood on the west side of the yard. A considerable part of the garden and farmyard was sold to the railroad, when the Canada Southern went through.

#### Doctor's House and Office

As for the house itself, as Mrs. Wilkinson remembers having heard about it and seeing it, she believes the back room on the east to have been the doctor's consulting room. This always had an outside entrance for patients, on the east side, and there was a porch over it. Later, the steps were removed and a ramp built when the room was occupied by Charles

E. Moore, who used a wheelchair after the loss of both legs in a railroad accident.

The front east room, where the doctor mixed and dispensed drugs, is described as having a bay window near the front corner, which held large bottles of green and red fluid and bottles of live leeches. The colored bottles at night had candles behind them to guide persons seeking the doctor, as the streets were not lighted. Twice, four years apart, reports Mrs. Wilkinson, runaway horses raced down Talbot street and plunged through the window, wrecking glasses and supplies.

It is possible that the rear west room was the doctor's bedroom when he was in active practice as it had easy access to the consulting room. The front west room is described as the parlor. Dr. Elijah Duncombe retired from active practice about six years before his death in 1870 and about that time, the east rooms were changed, the bay removed, and a partition removed between the front and back rooms, making another large living room. The partition was later restored for a room for the use of Charles E. Moore.

#### Appreciate Old Home

After the Duncobes and Moores, the Thornton family, also very well-known in St. Thomas, resided in this historic home until it was purchased in December 1921 by Mr. and Mrs. James Saywell and their son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Bramwell Saywell, who took up residence there in January 1922.

Formerly residing near Talbotville, Mr. and Mrs. James Saywell must have known this lovely old home well even before they moved into the city, when they lived for a short time on Wilson avenue. They would pass it every time they came into town, and Talbot street was then practically on a level with the house. Later, too, they would pass it whenever they took the street car, which went around that corner, and when it was offered for sale. Mrs. James Saywell knew it was a place she wanted to make their home. She still resides there with her son and daughter-in-law, but Mr. Saywell, Sr., passed away a number of years ago.

When the family took over the old home, it still had the two big kitchens and woodshed, extending to the south. This old wing was forty-six feet long, longer than the main house was wide in fact, and part of it was two storeys high. The east side of the first kitchen, which was about a third of the forty-six feet, came within a few feet of the hedge which bounded the east side of the lawn. The entrance was from the east, while the second, summer kitchen, had an entrance to the west. A giant Dutchman's pipe vine covered the south and east sides of this wing.

Not being needed for its original purposes and as it was falling into a state of disrepair, this wing was torn down shortly after the Saywell family moved into the home, clearing away what seems obviously to have been an addition to the original home, and making place for an attractive lawn and garden.

At the back of the present lot there used to be a barn, which Mr. Saywell was told might at one time have been a parochial school in connection with the Old English Church. It had a wainscoting of very wide horizontal boards and was plastered above that. A house has replaced this building a few years ago.

The Saywell family has been appreciative of the historic interest of the house and its pioneer architecture and have avoided major changes in the main structure of the house. A window or two have been added for needed lighting and a partition that had been taken out previously has been restored. The present porch was put on about twenty years ago about the time the Talbot street hill was cut, and the present permastone covering was put on about seven years ago, adding much to the comfort of the old house, which has been made a very attractive home.

## When the Thornton Family Had Their Home There

# Mrs. Fick, Cleveland Tells About House Bought for Elgin Museum by W. I.

A much appreciated letter from Mrs. F. A. Fick, 1768 Noble road, East Cleveland, Ohio, has been received by Mrs. J. R. Fitcher, chairman of Museum committee of the Women's Institute of Elgin County. The letter contains some interesting facts concerning the house at Talbot and Pleasant streets, recently purchased from the Saywell family and which will be converted into an Elgin County Museum.

Enclosed in the letter was Mrs. Fick's cheque for \$25, a donation towards the W. I.'s fund for the transformation of the house into a museum.



**OLD BUILDING**— Shown here is the front door of the old Sunday School house at the old St. Thomas Church, Walnut street. It stood just east of where the Lichgate is now. The lad in the picture is William



When the Thornton Family Had Their Home There

# Mrs. Fick, Cleveland Tells About House Bought for Elgin Museum by W. I.

A much appreciated letter from Mrs. F. A. Fick, 1768 Noble road, East Cleveland, Ohio, has been received by Mrs. J. R. Futcher, chairman of Museum committee of the Women's Institute of Elgin County. The letter contains some interesting facts concerning the house at Talbot and Pleasant streets, recently purchased from the Saywell family and which will be converted into an Elgin County Museum.

Enclosed in the letter was Mrs. Fick's cheque for \$25, a donation towards the W. I.'s fund for the transformation of the house into a museum.

Mrs. Fick was the former Mary Thornton, daughter of Henry Thornton, a leading St. Thomas citizen, who purchased the house in 1883 after Nelson Moore and family moved out and after it had been vacant for some time. The Thorntons who put the building in good condition and kept it that way sold the house to the Saywells. As will be gleaned from Mrs. Fick's letter, she is the only member of Henry Thornton's family now living and her only surviving relative is the son of her sister, Rebie, William Thornton FitzGerald, of Ottawa.

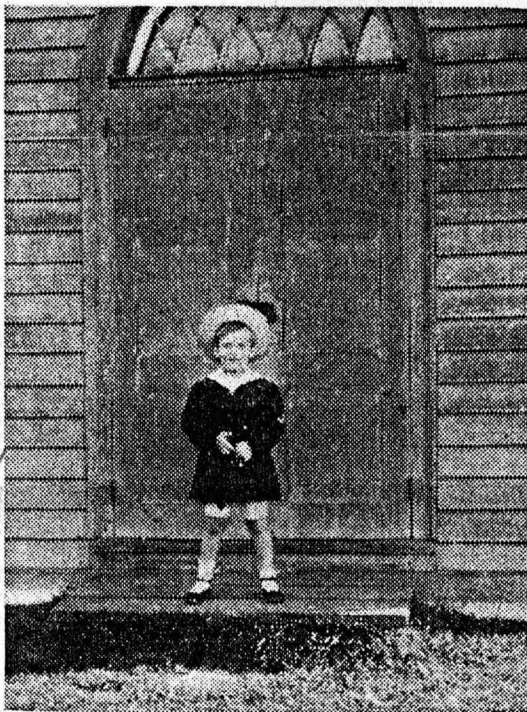
Mrs. Fick's letter to Mrs. Futcher reads as follows:

"I have read with great interest the story in The Times-Journal of the plan of the Women's Institute to purchase my old home on Talbot Street as a museum for the County of Elgin. It seems a most worthy undertaking and I wish to add my contribution which is enclosed.

"You may be interested in my recollections of the place and also in the book of snapshots I am sending you.

"After the Nelson Moore's moved out, the house was vacant for a long time and was badly run down. My father bought it and we moved there in 1883.

"The plaster on the walls was rough and full of cow hairs, used as a binding material. This was all taken off and replastered, and all repainted. Lamps had



**OLD BUILDING.**— Shown here is the front door of the old Sunday School house at the old St. Thomas Church, Walnut street. It stood just east of where the Lichgate is now. The lad in the picture is William Thornton FitzGerald, grandson of Henry Thornton, who resided in the house at the corner of Pleasant and Talbot streets.

been used up to this time but father had electric wiring put in and I recall a workman saying, "This place must have been built for elephants, it is so sturdy and substantial." There was a well in the cellar, fed by a spring, but this was closed up when sewers were installed.

"The garden was a jungle but we cleared it out, planted fruit trees, shrubs and flowers, and it was always so beautiful in the summer, and the lovely view over the valley has always been vivid in my memory.

"We sold the house to the Saywell's in 1922, and, though I have seldom seen it in recent years, it doesn't look at all the same with the clapboard covering and the hill cut away.

"I left St. Thomas in 1895 to enter the nursing profession and went to Detroit and Duluth. In 1905 I married Frank Allen Fick, a captain on the Great Lakes ships, and came to Cleveland to live. My only surviving

relative is Rebie's son, William Thornton FitzGerald of Ottawa, the small boy in the pictures.

"I am now in my 88th year, (the last leaf on the tree) and, except for impaired sight and hearing, am well and able to carry on with my household duties as usual.

"I earnestly hope the old house will renew its youth under your care and be a credit to your enterprising venture."

The book of snapshots which Mrs. Fick sent Mrs. Futcher included a view (reproduced here) of the house as it was at the time the Thorntons lived there with the street car tracks and the trees, a garden scene, view of the living room, a picture of Mrs. Fick's sisters, Grace, Matilda and Rebie with her son Thornton FitzGerald, and one of Thornton standing in front of the door of the old English Church Sunday School building which was just east of where the Lichgate is now.



# Elgin sisters producing rugs using loom that is century old

By CHERYL PURDEY

Annabell and Marjorie House, of RR 1, Port Stanley have an unusual hobby to keep themselves busy during the winter months.

Equipped with rolls and rolls of colorful material, consisting of long strips of cloth, and a huge old-fashioned loom that dominates one corner of their farmhouse, the sisters are engaged in turning out bright rugs for themselves and their friends.

They recently completed a 21-foot rug for the Elgin County Museum, which will be used to cover the stairs. The material was donated by the Women's Institute of West Elgin.

Annabell worked on the "off and on for two weeks," she said.

Many of the rugs the sisters have produced have been sold, despite the fact that they are not engaged in their hobby for mainly monetary reasons.

"We do sell a few. A lot of people want mats made," she

plained Annabell. She also produced some for friends in Arizona and California.

"So they're all over," she added. Annabell, who has been making the rugs for about four years, is the only sister to operate the loom. Marjorie usually prepares the material by sewing the long strips of material together, trimming the ends and getting them ready for the loom.

Actually, the first person in the House family to become interested in making rugs on the loom was not Annabell, but her brother Earl.

Annabell explained that the loom, which is about 100 years old, originally belonged to a woman called Mrs. Munroe in Iona, who used it for making old-fashioned blankets and carpets.

The huge loom was kept in a small room upstairs in her home, which was eventually bought by a cousin of Annabell's. Earl offered to buy the loom and dismantle it to bring it to his own home, and so he obtained it for a reasonable

price. Now the loom has become a fixture in the house, and, despite its antiquity, is as strong as the day it was made.

"It's made just like the beams of a barn," said Annabell.

She makes rugs and scatter mats in different colors and sizes, some out of cotton material and some of wool.

She said she can make a four-foot rug in an afternoon "if the material is ready."

"It's quite easy," she said. She said the only trouble in making the rugs is trying to get colors in an even pattern.

Making the rugs, though, is "just a hobby," for the winter months. "If someone comes and wants to buy one, they can if I have one ready to sell. I never get enough ahead," she explained.

Meanwhile, the House sisters have other things to keep them busy. Marjorie raises turkeys — about 20 of them — which, she said, have already been ordered for the Christmas season.

