

Picture of Blackwood's Store, Wallacetown, taken about 1860.

Early Days of Wallacetown

(By Mrs. Norman Welch)
 Scots wha hae wi Wallace
 bled,
 Scots wham Bruce has
 often led,
 Welcome tae your gory
 bed,
 Or to victory!

So said Robert Bruce, as he wrote one of the "Lyric Gems of Scotland." One hundred years later, the memory came, as Scottish settlers came to find a new home in the Talbot settlement. Bad times had come to the Scottish Highlands -- the lords could make a lot of money herding sheep on the Scots' lands and had little regard for the poor families existing in one-room log shacks. So they were pushed to the seaside, and eventually many arrived in the New World.

Sometime in the 1820's, Colonel Talbot had been given a crown deed to more lands north of Pt. Talbot, and as he did not like the Scotch as well as Irish or English, he sent them to land farther away in the forest: people from Argyleshire, Ayr, Kildoman and other Highland lands. In 1833 Donald Currie came out from Argyleshire, and

went to the Colonel for a deed. (There was an interesting bit in "The Talbot Regime" -- a letter the colonel was writing home -- quote: "Those Scotchmen Galbraith, Currie and Graham are here with me, to inquire about their land. They went by mistake to wrong lots in Ekfrid.") The registry office in St. Thomas says Currie was given part of lot 12 in 7th concession of Dunwich township. (Another interesting aside: that is now the Welch farm.) Currie laid it out in lots down to the corner between lots 12 and 13. A few settlers had come around -- it was a swampy place called Frogtown -- a good name. But Currie was a person the people looked up to -- "what will we call this place?" So he suggested they name it after their Scottish hero, Sir William Wallace. Wonderful idea!!

As settlers came, the Indian trail going by the corner came to be a road, and was called the Currie Road. Colonel Talbot had firm rules for settlers -- a portion of land must be cleared, and a log house built as soon as possible; also, a road had to be put in front of the property.

Wallacetown soon became an important village, being on the stage-road that went from St. Thomas to Chatham. Large hotels were built on the cross-road corners: The Britannia Hotel, kept by Thomas Luton; the Ontario House, David Clay, and the Argyle-American with Colin Henry (who later donated land for the Methodist Church). There was a livery stable, where horses were changed on the stage coach; passengers stayed overnight in the hotels.

By the year 1855, Wallacetown, located in the centre of rich farmland, where hard-working Scottish people had also settled, was really prospering. All shoes, clothes, and household needs, had to be made by hand; so in came shoemakers, builders, general merchants, sawmills, blacksmiths, livery stables. (Research at the Elgin County Library, as well as the Wallacetown Womens' Institute Tweedsmuir book on micro-film, have brought out some early names). Dr. George Ling was a real good medical man; he was also the coroner. Dr. Ruthven was another doctor, also Dr. Daniel Maccoll. L.W. McIntyre was an auctioneer who issued marriage licenses, conveyances, etc. McKillop & McIntyre Co. had a flour and grist mill, capable of grinding 200 bushels of grain daily; also was a steam sawmill. Door and sash factories, planing mills, carriage factories, implement manufacturing. So there was employment for a great many people. There was even a fruit-tree agent.

To encourage the sowing of good seed, and the production of better grain, fruit and livestock, the West Elgin Agricultural Society was formed, and a fair held before 1860. In these years, there was fear that this

corner of the new country might be invaded by groups of Irish revolutionaries, called Fenians, who had military bases in the United States. So a drill-shed was built on the corner of John L. Pearce's farm to train soldiers. The Fair Board could have the use of the building for the fall fair. Later, when it was no longer needed for military purposes, the fair board was able to buy it.

An interesting entry in the registry office was the document telling about a "grant of land" to the trustees of the Presbyterian Church, dated in 1850. This was the first church group in Wallacetown; the first church was built in 1852, on the same corner of the thriving community; later rebuilt.

One industry that lasted through the years was cheese factories. John L. Pearce had the first one, on his farm below Wallacetown. Alvro Keillor was working for him when he was only 10 years old, having been born and raised in Tyrconnell. In later years the factory was moved to Wallacetown, and Alvro Keillor bought it and it was rebuilt, with living quarters upstairs. He had a barn where he kept some cows, moving them down into pasture in summer. He persuaded the farmers around to keep some cows; so came the milk for cheese. The business was a family affair: everyone had a job to do. Then cream separators were invented, and the farmers persuaded Keillor to start butter-making; now the cream was gathered at the farms. Childhood memories are of the horse on the small wagon coming in the lane. The cream was weighed, a small sample put into a little bottle for testing, then the cream dumped into one of the large cans on the wagon. The horse knew

where to turn in, then turn around and go out, when he felt the weight of the driver on the seat. The Keillor cheese factory carried on for many years, till R.E. Fraser came to Dutton, and bought the Keillor business.

By this time, many farm people were churning their own cream into butter. First was the old dash churn, where cream was whipped in the tall crock, and when butter came, it was scooped out with the wood ladle from the buttermilk, and put into a big wooden tray. Salt was worked in, and the butter weighed into crocks, or made into pound prints. This was good farm income, easily found, because the butter always came to the top; and buttermilk was good for many kinds of baking -- what pancakes it could make!

Other Wallacetown industries that lived through the years were those run by the Cusicks: Samuel, a drover; William, a potash-maker (from wood ashes); Robert, a sawmill, and Richard, a butcher. A later one must have been a tinsmith, because years later, there was a store downtown, where all sorts of this sort could be bought. Later on, when there was mail delivery in Wallacetown, the post office was at Cusicks; where Emily looked after mail.

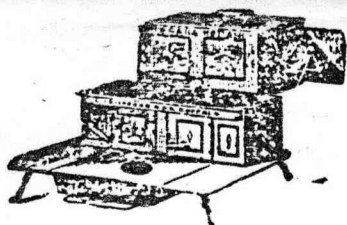
Very important in the early days were the grocery stores, which also had nearly everything needed by a household. Before 1860, the one in the thriving community was Blackwoods. It was run by Robert and James (my grandfather, who also had a store in Tyrconnell). In later years the Cameron's (Daniel was a boot and shoemaker) took over the Blackwood business, and carried it on for many years, till John A. died while in church (Presbyterian) one Sunday. By 1875 the Methodists had a church, and later the beautiful St. Helen's Catholic Church was built. Churches are separate history stories.

Schools came in the earliest days, as parents realized that children must learn to read. First held in homes where a teacher lived, later on schools built. Older boys worked at jobs all summertime, then to school in the winter. Teachers were trained at Model Schools (one in St. Thomas) and discipline set up. There could be as many as 60 or more in winter, sitting on benches all around the room, and writing on slates, wiped off with a "slate-cloth" dampened. The first Wallacetown school was on the Currie Road, just at the northeast corner of town. The first town hall was also over there on the knoll.

Now, an interesting clipping: "Wallacetown had two dentists, seven shoemakers, in 1871. Mail daily, population about 400." Quite a few of the folks already mentioned were also in the paperbit.

But, a year or so later, the "Iron Horse" plunged through the countryside farther north, where the new train-stop was at Dutton (named for the first engineer who drove a train through, on the Canada Southern Railroad). Then business began moving to railway-stops, and Wallacetown began to fade. But not all of it -- that can be another story.

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Dealer in Stoves, Plovs, &c.,

Manufacturer of Tin, Copper, and Sheet Iron Ware. Cheese Factories supplied with all articles in their line on short notice and of best material.

Also Silver Plating of every description. Carriage, House, and Electro Plating executed in first-class style. The highest cash price paid for Hides, Furs, and Skins of every description.

FRIDAY MAY 24th 1968

Women's Times-Journal

Mrs. Harold Butler Elected West Elgin WI President

IONA (Staff) — Mrs. Harold Butler, RR 1, St. Thomas, was elected president of West Elgin District Women's Institute at the 60th district annual meeting of the organization, held yesterday in the Christian Fellowship Church, Iona.

The meeting was highlighted by the presentation of comprehensive reports, given by the standing committee conveners and representatives of various organizations.

Mrs. Herbert Jackson presided for the meeting, and she was assisted by Mrs. Ray Johnson, secretary - treasurer. In her address, Mrs. Jackson referred to the historic church in which the meeting was held. She also spoke of the many areas in which West Elgin Women's Institutes have aided: Elgin Manor, the Bobier Nursing Home, the Elgin County Pioneer Museum, the Cancer Society, the War Memorial Children's Hospital in London, and the St. Thomas - Elgin Association for the Mentally Retarded.

In her public relations report, Mrs. Lloyd Healy told of the many activities in which the branches engaged during the past 12 months. These included activities which ranged from selling centennial envelopes and making quilts, to holding teas, clearing cemeteries and making a centennial dress which was later donated to the museum.

Mrs. Gowan Young, F.W.I.O. board member, presided for the election of officers, after the nominating committee's report was presented by Mrs. William McKillop.

1968-69 OFFICERS

Serving with Mrs. Butler on the executive are: past president, Mrs. Herbert Jackson, Fingal; first vice-president, Mrs. T. E. Silcox, Shedden; second vice - president,

Mrs. Gordon Gow, Dutton; secretary treasurer, Mrs. Ray Johnson, 14 Margaret Street, St. Thomas; assistant secretary treasurer, Mrs. Russell Campbell, RR 1, Iona Station; federation representative, Mrs. Jackson; alternate to the federation representative, Mrs. Herbert Parks, RR 3, Shedden; district delegate, Mrs. J. D. Fraser, Dutton; alternate district delegate, Mrs. William McKillop, RR 3, Dutton; public relations officer, Mrs. Lloyd Healy, RR 1, Fingal.

Representative to the Museum Committee of the County Council, and curator of Tweedsmuir History, Mrs. J. D. Galbraith, RR 4, Iona Station; auditor for 1969, Mrs. Tyrell Begg, RR 1, St. Thomas, Mrs. Robert Allan, RR 1, Port Stanley.

Standing committee conveners are: home economics and health, Mrs. W. Liepmann, West Lorne; historical research and current events, Mrs. Parks; resolutions, Mrs. Kenneth Butler, RR 1, St. Thomas; agriculture and Canadian industries, Mrs. John McCart, RR 1, Southwold Station; citizenship and education, Mrs. William M. Meek, RR 7, St. Thomas.

Other Officers: representative to the Federation of Agriculture, Mrs. A. D. McTavish, RR 2, Dutton; alternate to the representative to the Federation of Agriculture, Mrs. Marion Campbell, RR 1, Iona Station; nominating committee, 1969, Aldborough, Mrs. Charles Cooper, West Lorne; Southwold, Mrs. Curtis Campbell, RR 5, St. Thomas; Dunwich, Mrs. William McKillop, RR 3, Dutton; representative to the Farm Safety Council, Mrs. John Smith, RR 4, Iona Station; alternate, Mrs. Harold Carroll, RR 5, St. Thomas; representative for Junior Institute, Miss Linda Gosnell, RR 1, Iona Station.

Mrs. G. P. Cornell of Dutton sang a solo during the impressive memorial service. She was accompanied by Mrs. James Bennett, who was pianist for the day. The entire group sang The Hymn of All Nations.

Among those giving reports were Mrs. Kent Griffin, for the Elgin-St. Thomas Tuberculosis Association, regarding the recent multiple survey held in Elgin and St. Thomas; Mrs. Vermont Pow for the White Cross; Mrs. D. A. Saunders for the Cancer Society and Elgin Manor, and Mrs. Charles Oldham for the St. Thomas-Elgin Association for the Mentally Retarded.

Mrs. Oldham told in detail of the work being done by the association to aid the district's retarded children, and spoke of the residence which is a projected activity presently. She said the association is keenly interested in learning of homes where there are retarded so that parents and children alike can be helped.

The work being done by the employees at Friendco Workshop was described by Mrs. Oldham, who told too of the nursery and school program.

BRING GREETINGS

Greetings were brought by Mrs. Harry Strang, Exeter,



HONORED GUESTS — Past presidents and secretary-treasurers of West Elgin Women's Institute were honored yesterday when the organization held its 60th district annual meeting in Iona. Mrs. J. Robinson Futcher, a past district president and past president of the Federated Women's

Institute of Ontario, cut the anniversary cake. Past officers present were (left to right) Mrs. Futcher, Mrs. Charles Cooper, Miss Margaret Lyle, Mrs. Roy McNeil, Mrs. E. S. Down, Mrs. Neil Nickleson, Mrs. George Silcox, Mrs. J. D. Galbraith, Mrs. Herbert Parks, Mrs. Vermont Pow and Mrs. Morley Blewett.—(T.-J. Photo)



NEW EXECUTIVE—At their 60th district annual meeting, held yesterday in Iona, members of the West Elgin Women's Institute elected their 1968-69 executive. Taking office were (left to right) Mrs. Lloyd Healy, RR 1, Fingal, public relations officer; Mrs.

J. D. Fraser, Dutton, district delegate; Mrs. Herbert Jackson, Fingal, federation representative and past president; Mrs. Gordon Gow, Dutton, second vice-president; Mrs. Harold Butler, RR 1, St. Thomas, president; Mrs. Ray Johnson, St. Thomas, secretary-treasurer.—(T.-J. Photo)

Centennial Pictures Shown

Mrs. Frank Vincent of St. Thomas was guest speaker at the May meeting of the Sparta Sorosis Women's Institute held in Ye Olde Forge and Anvil. Mrs. Vincent gave an interesting commentary on the lovely pictures she showed, Centennial Reflections, which were of local Centennial events predominately.

Mrs. Walter I. Rogers presided for the meeting, the program for which was arranged by the historical research committee, Mrs. Sherman Beapre, Mrs. Emmett Garrod and Mrs. C. Warren. The Tweedsmuir Book was on display, and the roll call response was. Photos or articles for that book. A wooden rake, the property of the late Gilbert Zavitz was presented for inclusion in the collection of antiques at the Forge, by Mrs. Beapre.

The East Elgin District Women's Institute are planning a bus trip to the Martyrs' Shrine at Midland and the Blue Mountain Potteries at Collingwood, on or about July 18. Interested women are requested to contact Mrs. Rogers or Mrs. Nichols not later than May 30.

London Area chairman; A. V. Langton, Elgin agricultural representative; Mrs. Charles Phillips, East Elgin president; Mrs. Fred Shelton, Woodstock, South Oxford president; Mrs. Gertrude Holmes, Elgin County president.

During the afternoon sessions, Mrs. Young addressed the members in her capacity as F.W.I.O. board member, and told of her activities. Mrs. D. G. Marcou, home economist for Elgin, spoke of the various facets of her work and paid tribute to the W.I. members for their interest in 4-H Homemaking Clubs, and in the several short courses which have been taken.

Reports were given by Mrs. Liepmann, for home economics and health; Mrs. Meek, citizenship and education; Mrs. McCart, agriculture and Canadian industry; Mrs. Alex Turner, historical research and current events; Mrs. Kenneth Butler, resolutions; Mrs. McTavish, federation of food and agriculture; Mrs. Galbraith, Tweedsmuir history, and Mrs. Harold Carroll, home safety.

The opening prayer was given by Rev. Robert V. McCrea, pastor of the church,

and the address of welcome by Mrs. E. Lazenby, president of the Iona W.I., the first group. Mrs. A. Mc-

Callum, Iona Station, invited the West Elgin Institute to hold their district annual in Iona Station next year.