



HIGH SCHOOL, DUTTON, ONT

Dutton High School  
*Courtesy of Elgin County Photographic Heritage Society.*



Church in Frome  
*Courtesy of Elgin County Photographic Heritage Society.*



# OMAF — early Elgin history

Written by John E. Pearce, Wallacetown - 1956

The first farm meetings I ever attended were The Farmer's Institute. They were held in January of each year in Shedden, Dutton and West Lorne, with afternoon and evening sessions and supplementary meetings in February at Middlemarch, Wallacetown and West Lorne. I had attended several of these with father before I quit school in 1900. Mr. Arch McCole of New Glasgow was secretary-treasurer. In 1910 he announced that he was retiring and his expectation was that Will Kelly would be elected to his place. The publishers of Rodney, West Lorne and Dutton each supported a nominee and your humble servant won.

In November, 1910, I attended convention of Institute officers and workers in Toronto, held at the same time as Ontario Horticultural and Flower Show in St. Lawrence arena. The convention was held in the Forester's Temple. I met quite a number of workers and learned something of the new branch of county representatives.

From the old Walker House, I wrote our Provincial Representative in the Ontario Legislative Finlay McDiarmid, and the Ontario Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable James Duff, asking that a representative be appointed to Elgin County in 1911. I received a very courteous reply from the Minister informing me appointments were not made as naively as I supposed, but only through the elected representatives for the counties. Our member just ignored my letter. At the January institute meeting in Shedden, I introduced the matter and suggested that Elgin should have an application in, as the Department was only appointing four or five per year and it would be some years before all counties had the services of a Rep and, the counties bringing most pressure to bear, would receive appointments first. I mentioned that I had written our local member and received no reply, but had also written the Minister. Well, there were several liberals and conservatives at the meeting and as that was the year of reciprocity election, and later the Provincial Ontario election, Mr. McDiarmid got busy.

Appointments were always made in those early days in connection with a High School, as it was expected they would do more or less teaching agriculture in the schools, so the board of Dutton High School applied for an appointment for Elgin to be made in connection with Dutton High School, and brought all the pressure they could to bear on Mr. McDiarmid.

The result was that Elgin got the B.S.A. with the highest standing in class of 1911, Fred Moore Clement.

Fred Clement's house was near St. David's in Lincoln County. He was a born horticulturist and expected to be appointed to Lincoln, where he would be in his glory in the fruit industry. Lincoln had no Rep and did not for another year or two. Fred was quite surprised to be appointed to Elgin. He was in debt, I believe, when he came to Elgin, as he was quite often and as he was when he left. His good friend was C.W. Buchanan, and Fred, not being a stock man, sent for C.W. to come and help him. I think Fred felt C.W. might not get an appointment in the regular way for some time, but if he got him here, with a little experience, he would go right on, which was just what happened.

C.W. Buchanan arrived in Elgin on the first day of the Wallacetown fair. Clement, having arranged for some judging classes in beef cattle and horses to be supervised by Dr. Reed of Georgetown left the county for a couple of days. Dr. Reed landed in Wallaceburg and then found he was supposed to be in Wallacetown, so was late in getting to our fair. C.W. had to organize things in his absence, which was his initiation to Elgin County.

The Reps did all their travelling with livery horse and were supposed to patronize conservative livery men, but Clement said they had to give him a good horse or not next time. He rented what he thought the most suitable office in Dutton, regardless of politics, and after he left, the office was moved to the other side of the street to an office owned by a staunch Tory.

In the Spring of 1912, C.W. Buchanan was appointed to Kent, and J.T. Johnston was appointed assistant in Elgin. In September, 1912, Clement received an appointment to the Horticulture Department, MacDonald College at St. Anne's, Quebec, which was more in line with his liking and he left Elgin County and the Ontario Service.

One of the comments Clement made on Elgin County was that there were two outstanding communities, one at Middlemarch, where they had had a Grange for many years, the other was in Malahide, I think at Richmond, where they had a somewhat similar organization and these two communities worked together, or rather, the people of these communities did. He was a good missionary in the new service and did much to get it away to a good start, as there was a great deal of opposition and resentment in some quarters against these young graduates telling old farmers how to run their farms.

A short time after Clement left, C.W. Buchanan was appointed to Elgin where he remained till 1927.

Mr. McDiarmid, member for West Elgin, and Mr. Brower, M.P.P. for East Elgin, agreed that a B.S.A.

could accomplish more in Dutton or Aylmer than in St. Thomas, which was probably true at that time, so the office was located at Dutton and remained there till it was moved to its present site in 1922.

About 1913, the Elgin Rep was supplied with a motorcycle so he could cover the county more advantageously and several times he covered parts of it very strenuously, and had some painful memories. As Mr. Buchanan recalled a few years ago, the new Reps were sent out to do a job and no one knew what they were supposed to do. They had to look over their county and see where they could fit in and do the most worthwhile work. They succeeded wonderfully. Boys and girls in Elgin were given a setting of O.A.C. rock eggs, which raised the whole poultry industry in the county in a few short years. Some were given seeds for vegetable and flower gardens, and all were supposed to exhibit something at their school fair. I think I may safely say our rural fairs were on their way out had it not been for this new interest in them and the new generation of exhibitors, both male and female, that has long since grown to maturity. In taking the eggs and seeds to the schools, C. Buchanan came in touch with all the children, and was more welcome in some homes than he otherwise would have been. At one time he said he knew every boy and girl in Elgin County.

About 1914, they were provided with a Model T Ford car which expedited their work greatly. In August, 1916, a motor picnic was arranged, with farmers of West Elgin visiting East Elgin. The first stop was at R.D. Ferguson's, Union Road, who had a good herd of shorthorn cattle and quite an acreage of Burley Tobacco. Thence via Union to the Friends Meeting House, Sparta, where dinner was

enjoyed. First call after dinner was Summerville's fruit farm, Van Patter's and Laidlaw's dairy farms, Carnation Milk Plant, Aylmer, and dispersed for home.

In 1917, East Elgin came to West. Picnic dinner on the lawn of the Col. Talbot estate, then owned by Judge Talbot MacBeth, was held. Then, past St. Peter's Church and cemetery, through Tyrconnell to Jas Page's hereford farm, whose herds were just as outstanding show winners at that time as C.C. Lyon's are today, only smaller in numbers. Next, Talbot Road and through Stuart Pearce's lanes and back to the shorthorn farm of Duncan Brown and Sons. About 110 cars were together at dinner hour in Friend's Church Yard and about the same number at Port Talbot. Owing to the stress of war, none was held in 1918, but in 1919 and 1920 we went to Middlesex. The last was in Kent with dinner at Rondeau.

C. Buchanan assisted in organizing several farmer's clubs, the first one at Wallacetown in 1913. Many of these clubs started buying and selling goods for their members, and in Dunwich, four clubs joined together in shipping livestock in 1918. This farmer's business has never ceased to operate, and is quite strong today. Out of this, probably grew the Elgin Co-op Services, which Mr. G.S. Thomas helped organize and which has grown into the largest co-op in Canada.

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