

J.T. FINDLAY: ARCHITECT

JOHN. T. FINDLAY . ARCHITECT . ST: THOMAS.



FOREWORD

The Elgin County Museum is pleased to present this survey of the work of architect John T. Finlay. The exhibit is the work of Paul Baldwin who has spent years documenting the work of many Elgin County architects including John Findlay, during brief respites from his teaching and political careers.

The buildings listed in this catalogue are attributed to Findlay based mainly on their design and on the period they represent. The main intent in assembling this list is to make owners aware that we think their home or building was designed by Findlay and to encourage them to check their records for such things as architect's plans and specifications or any other proof that Findlay was the architect. We would ask owners to contact the museum if they are able to find such records.

The other purpose in presenting this exhibition on the work of John Findlay is to draw attention to the wide range of heritage properties extant in St. Thomas and Elgin, the surviving work, if not of John Findlay then of some other equally talented architect. This is particularly the case with the public buildings which represent a key period in the development of the municipalities in which they are found and as such the hopes and ideals of the people who then lived in them. All politics is local and the building of a school, or a memorial library or a municipal hall was in the 1920s and 1930s, a very local act.

Finally, the properties listed in this catalogue make the communities in which we live all the more interesting and esthetically pleasing or as Mr. Baldwin says, in connection with Findlay, "St. Thomas and Elgin are the richer for the public art he was commissioned to build here."

Mike Baker Curator, Elgin County Museum mbaker@elgin-county.on.ca



John Findlay, Architect

Paul Baldwin

...he had "the reputation of one who possessed true artistic ability and the knowledge and skill to carry out his plans with precision and in close keeping with estimated costs."

ARCHITECTURE IS PUBLIC ART. The best of architects are artists and whether you experience their work as an occupant or just as an observer, it will touch you. Consciously or unconsciously, the shapes and proportions, the interplay of space, light and shadow, the textures and hues will awaken your senses to the beauty they have created.

Not all building is architecture and builders are rarely architects. Most build sound, functional and appealing structures that properly apply the science of engineering and faithfully employ the skills of the trades. Many utilize the conventions of popular styles and include elements that dress their work in a particular style but unlike architects, few are artists. Ideally, an architect must be able to do all of the above as well as translate the hopes of a client into a form that is both functional and fashionable, all with a flair that comes from the practised eye, mind, and hand of a skilled drawer.

John Findlay was such an architect and St. Thomas and Elgin are the richer for the public art he was commissioned to build here.

Why John came to St. Thomas is unknown. He was born in October, 1884 in Inverness, Scotland, raised there and left Glasgow for Canada aboard the Pretorian at the age of 23. He landed in Montreal on May 10, 1907. The ship's passenger list includes his signature and his profession: architect. It seems that he didn't speak much of his formative years or his family, not even whether he was related to the then-prominent Montreal architect, Robert Findlay, another native of Inverness. We do know that he served with the Cameron Highlanders but not whether he gained his architectural training at an architectural school or in an architect's office.

It seems that he was not in Montreal for long and either came directly to St. Thomas or by way of a London office. In the St. Thomas Street Directory of 1908, he is listed as a draughtsman in the office of Neil Darrach. By 1909, even though Darrach's office was very busy, John is in the City of Toronto, a draughtsman for the architectural firm of Ellis & Connery. Perhaps he had moved to gain exposure to a larger practice. Interestingly, in 1909 and 1910, that firm designed and supervised the construction of at least two buildings that are akin to Findlay's later work in St. Thomas: the Presbyterian Church at St. Clair St. West and Vaughan Road, and a double house at the corner of Annette and Medland Streets.

John had been in Toronto for about 2 years when, in March of 1911, Neil Darrach left St. Thomas for Regina. Although only 26 and with limited experience, John, no doubt with encouragement from friends in St. Thomas, returned to take over the office of his former employer. And while Darrach chose to move because of a lack of work in St. Thomas and Elgin and the opportunities in the West, John was immediately in demand, busy from then until the outbreak of The Great War, three years later.

opposite: Blueprint, McKillop House, West Elgin, 1923, Courtesy, Beth McClelland The City, School Boards, clients who had used Darrach and new clients all looked to his office. The only notable exception was the new E. T. Wright Shoe Co. which had their new Victoria Building at 180 Talbot St. (1913-1914) designed by the London firm of Watt & Blackwell. But John was responsible for the cottage hospitals on Chester St., an animal house and conservatory at Pinafore Park, a major addition to St. Thomas Collegiate Institute, a bigger Scott St. Public School and the new Fingal School. Additions to both commercial and manufacturing establishments, new business properties, notably the Frank Goodwin Furniture Store at 452-454 Talbot St., and alterations as well as wholly new residential properties flew from his draughting table. Perhaps because of client demands, most of his first designs were much like the Edwardian styles of Darrach. But on a path that seems to have begun in the summer of 1907 with the George C. McCubbin house at 85 Stanley St. to the residences for George P. Smith at 145 Wellington St. (1912) and J. W. Stewart at 7 Drake St. (1912), George Oldreive at 79 Metcalfe St. (1913), Miss Gilbert at 26 Margaret St. (1914), the Anglican Rectory in Port Stanley (1915) and particularly the work he did for George Ferguson at 50 Rosebery Place (1914) and J. McKelvey Urie at 2 Farley Place (1914-1915), he shows a product that separates his work from Darrach's and a design talent that will mature in the '20s.

As busy as he must have been at work, John was active in the local militia, a Lieutenant then a Captain in the 25th Elgin Regiment. He also took the time to court the interest of Miss Anne Leith and on April 10, 1914, they were married at the home of her parents at 26 Jackson St., St. Thomas. A Daily Times announcement of their marriage notes that the couple honeymooned in Toronto and would return to reside at 15 (now 21) Margaret St., a home they had bought and would live in until a lack of work railroaded them back to Toronto. Son Donald was born May 15, 1915 and in 1918, when John took work with the Building & Bridges Division of the Grand Trunk Railroad, the family moved. They were in Toronto until 1921 when they are listed as living at 108 Metcalfe St. and John reappears as a partner with his old mentor, Neil Darrach.

In 1918, at 68, Darrach had returned to St. Thomas. He had had many successful projects in Regina but tensions with the tradesmen there undermined his practice. It seems that he was so accustomed to the exceptional work of St. Thomas firms such as A. E. Ponsford and so critical of some of the work in Regina, tradesmen there eventually refused to bid his jobs. He practised a bit on his own for 3 years and then joined with John in the firm Darrach & Findlay. Together they designed Elmdale Public School, a one-storey, flat-roofed building with classes arranged about a central open space, all so different from Darrach's earlier schools, the Western Dairy, Dutton Memorial Hall and the

St. Thomas Memorial Hospital. Neil Darrach died May 4, 1926, leaving the legacy of a truly significant pile of buildings.

John maintained the practice for the next 21 years. Dama Lumley Bell, St. Thomas' first and only female architect, worked in the office in the 1930s while George (Bud) Morley was there in the later 1940s. While busy at times, the work was sporadic, dictated by outside forces. When major local commissions went to outside firms, John was the resident architect in charge of site supervision and specifics. He did that work at the building of Arthur Voaden Vocational School and the St. Thomas Psychiatric Hospital. In 1938, when he designed 16 Rosebery Place, it was said that business was so off that he was desperate for a commission. And during World War II, he spent several months working on wartime projects in Ottawa, no doubt because his skills were needed there, and perhaps because work was so scarce in St. Thomas and Elgin that he was not needed here. Like other artists, the finances of architects were at times a bit tight. But throughout the '20s, at times in the '30s, and at the end of war, John's services were in great demand. In total, he was involved in the design and supervision of some 350 buildings, most in St. Thomas and Elgin, the majority during these years. Moreover, while he would still have clients request the traditional St. Thomas red brick, he increasingly used more modern styles and more current materials.

Modern architecture of the 20th century demanded that function be the focus of design and that the extraneous detail of popular classical architecture be discarded in favour of basic geometric forms with limited and simpler detail. Neither Darrach nor Findlay had been at all Beaux Arts in design and both readily adapted to the new ideas by modifying their Edwardian Classicism to an even simpler version. John had used this style extensively in the design of his public buildings, often with a flat roof. The Fingal School, Centennial Ave. and Locke's Schools and the Hydro Sub-Station on St. Catharine St. were his earliest efforts at this modern style while Darrach and Findlay used it in Elmdale, Dutton Memorial Hall, and the Memorial Hospital. The Port Stanley Village Hall, St. Thomas YWCA, Dutton Continuation School, Straffordville Public School, and S. S. #17 Yarmouth do as well, function and fiscal concerns being priorities of public officials. In the 1940s, he built two smaller versions of the same, albeit with gable roofs and gable-shoulders. Both are little gems: S. S. #11 Bayham (Richmond) and S. S. #11 Aldborough (Maple Grove), immediately north of Rodney.

In residential design, John and clients seemed most comfortable with houses in either the Edwardian Classicism or the American Arts and Crafts style made popular by The Craftsman magazine although a few were in American Colonial Revival styles, some were in the British Arts and Crafts style and three had references to the great American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright.

No doubt, John was an admirer of Wright. Certainly, one could not be an Ontario architect of the period and be unaware of his work. Buffalo had a number of Wright designs and since it was on the Michigan Central Railway, citizens of St. Thomas and Elgin had direct access to that beautiful city and his well-publicized work. But as John was educated in traditional British practices, trained in the very conservative practice of Darrach and neither by nature nor client preference modern in a radical way, the influence of Wright here was limited. Three examples, however, should be noted. The slope of the roofs, the graceful brows of the dormers and the projections of the eaves and both the prominence and the privacy of the porches of the suburban Pincombe Houses at 40 and 44 Crescent speak of Wright's Prairie Style as does the front of the urban, two-storey house at 58 Queen St. with a sidewalk that leads to a projection of front windows and a graceful side entrance up to a porch that also gives privacy even though just a stone's throw from the street. With the eye of an artist, John's rendering of Wright is both subtle and true.

Another American style popular in the '20s and '30s was American Colonial Revival. Whether at the suggestion of Don and Mary Anderson or on his own, John used this style in the design of their house at 16 Rosebery Place in 1938, and in another variation, the Cape Cod cottage, for two smaller residences; one at 49 Alexandria Ave., the other at 70 East St. All three use elements from the British classical tradition and reclaimed brick, giving the houses historic bearing. On the same theme, he designed the neo-Classical Revivals at 31 Elgin St. and 115 Stanley St., the former as a funeral home for Charles and Marshall Towers, the latter a home for Erle Ponsford.

Until after The Great War, the common, 20th century St. Thomas brick house was built in the Edwardian Classical style, a four square with a full basement and a grade entrance, an expansive front verandah, two-and-a-half or three storeys with a hip roof or roof with a hip and gables, large rooms, big windows, quality woodwork and a veneer of pressed brick usually red, occasionally yellow. This style became a standard for Darrach and was the design John often used in his early years. The houses at 7 Drake St., 79 Metcalfe St., 37 and 651/2 Southwick St. are examples. Later, as seen in the houses at 29 and 1451/2 Wellington St., 105 and 107 Elgin St., 5 Margaret St. and 21 Southwick St., John developed a smaller home of the same model. There was still a full basement, a verandah, sizable rooms and windows and a hip roof, but all was on a smaller scale than the Edwardians. Noticeable from the street are the second storey windows, tucked up under the soffits as the

bedroom ceilings were lower. Different, too, was the fabric: rug brick rather than red.

Finally, despite success in other styles, John showed a special affinity for residential work in the Arts and Crafts style. Whether this came from lessons learned in Scotland, the American interest spread in The Craftsman magazine or his exposure to Wychwood Park while in Toronto is unknowable. He had used it in the renovation of 118 Metcalfe St. in 1912 but by the '20s, it had become his and St. Thomas' favoured style. In some cases with a small footprint, small porches, doors and windows and a tight roof, they were ideal for smaller lots and seem more old world than new. In others, with a broad roof, large dormer front and centre and a wide verandah, they were big and open, more of California than the Highlands. The homes on Farley Place are almost all of this design and a mixture of the two types making it a significant Arts and Crafts enclave. Sunset Dr., Forest Ave. and Myrtle St., Lynhurst and Port Stanley all have homes he built in this style as well, as do a number of other streets, where, on a small lot will sit an exquisite example of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

John and Anne Findlay's own home, built in 1923 at 27 Crescent Ave., was of this design, small and compact, built close to the ground with a stoop rather than a porch, finished with stucco and shutters, a shelter from winter and inclement weather, surrounded by wild flowers, more Highland than American. Next door at 25 Crescent Ave. was the home John designed for in-laws Mac and May MacKenzie, stuccoed, with elements of the Arts and Crafts style and beautiful gardens, more American than British. The houses at 14 Gladstone Ave. and 97 Stanley St. are also of this ilk, the latter being the home and studio John built in 1933 for St. Thomas Smith after his return from Scotland. And in 1947, his last design, the Ella Bowes Chapel at Alma College, not just Arts and Crafts but wholly British, with all the gothic details and rustic charm of a small parish church in rural England.

John Findlay died suddenly on December 19, 1947. An editorial in the St. Thomas Times-Journal notes that he had "the reputation of one who possessed true artistic ability and the knowledge and skill to carry out his plans with precision and in close keeping with estimated costs." Pete Birdsall, the columnist of the paper's "Hank's Corner" wrote: "We want to pay a last tribute to our very good friend, John T. (Jack) Findlay, whose untimely death occurred last Saturday. Scotland never sent a finer native son to Canada than Jack Findlay."

High praise. Well deserved.



44 Crescent Avenue



49 Alexandria Avenue

The works of John T. Findlay, Architect, to be found in the City of St. Thomas and the County of Elgin as determined by records or an assessment by Paul Baldwin. A plus sign (+) indicates an addition or visible alteration rather than a totally new building; An asterisk (*) indicates that John was the resident architect on that job rather than the primary architect.

ST. THOMAS

13 Alma St.	41 Elgin St.	121 Forest Ave.
24 Alma St.	43 Elgin St.	123 Forest Ave.
76 Alma St.	84 Elgin St.	126 Forest Ave.
78 Alma St.	95 Elgin St.+	127 Forest Ave.
80 Alma St.	105 Elgin St.	129 Forest Ave.
82 Alma St.	107 Elgin St.	132 Forest Ave.
84 Alma St.	12 Elizabeth St.	140 Forest Ave.
86 Alma St.	61 Elizabeth St.	150 Forest Ave.
88 Alma St.	St. Thomas Collegiate Institute +	156 Forest Ave.
49 Alexandria Ave.	St. Thomas Collegiate Institute	33 Fourth Ave.
59 Alexandria Ave	gymnasium	36 Fourth Ave.
114 Balaclava St.	41 Elysian St.	44 Fourth Ave.
116 Balaclava St.	115 Erie St.	46 Fourth Ave.
21 Beverly St.	13 Fairview Ave.	48 Fourth Ave.
68 Centre St.	2 Farley Place	14 Gladstone Ave.
33 ½ Chestnut St.	4 Farley Place	106 Gladstone Ave.
67 ½ Chestnut St.	5 Farley Place	7 Glenbanner St.
20 Crescent Ave.	6 Farley Place	1 Hammond St.
25 Crescent Ave.	7 Farley Place	23 Hemlock St.
27 Crescent Ave.	9 Farley Place	25 Hemlock St.
31 Crescent Ave.	11 Farley Place	30 Hemlock St.
34 Crescent Ave.	12 Farley Place	40 Hemlock St.
36 Crescent Ave.	14 Farley Place	7 Hiawatha St.
40 Crescent Ave.	15 Farley Place	81 Hiawatha St.
44 Crescent Ave.	16 Farley Place	6 Hincks St.
73 Crescent Ave.	18 Farley Place	23 Hincks St.
24 Curtis St +	21 Farley Place	25 Hincks St.
71 Curtis St.	24 Farley Place	66 Hincks St.
121 Curtis St.	25 Farley Place	88 Hincks St.
5 Drake St.	17 Fifth Ave	90 Hincks St.
7 Drake St.	60 Fifth Ave.	92 Hincks St.
18 East Ave.	62 Fifth Ave.	95 Hincks St.+
20 East Ave.	66 Fifth Ave.	100 Hincks St.
18 East St. + garage	68 Fifth Ave.	5 Hughes St.
49 East St.	70 Fifth Ave.	6 Hughes St.
51 East St.	Broderick Memorial Church	41 Inkerman St.
62 East St.	41 First Ave.	8 ½ Isabel St.
64 East St.	Parish Hall, St. John's Anglican Church	36 Isabel St.
70 East St.	Rectory, St. John's Anglican Church	Royal Canadian Legion Branch # 41
72 East St.	Arthur Voaden Vocational School *	41 John St.
74 East St.	46 Flora St.	9/11 Jonas St.
PUC Substation, Edgeware Road	3 Forest Ave.	43 Locust St.
PUC Bldg. Waterworks Park	33 Forest Ave.	45 Locust St.
S. S. No. 18, Yarmouth (Locke's)	70 Forest Ave.	75 Locust St.
31 Elgin St.	92 Forest Ave.	11 Lynhurst Cres.
35 Elgin St.	114 Forest Ave.	11 Manitoba St.
37 Elgin St.	116 Forest Ave.	Horton Market
39 Elgin St.	117 Forest Ave.	110 Manitoba St.
40 Elgin St.	119 Forest Ave.	16 Maple St. (coach house, only)

10 Manla Ct	12 Prince Albert St.	2E Chamley Ch
18 Maple St. +		35 Stanley St.
29 ½ Maple St.	14 Prince Albert St.	37 Stanley St.
42 Maple St.	2 Princess Ave.	39 Stanley St.
54 Maple St.	18 Princess Ave. +	48 Stanley St. +
56 Maple St.	78 Princess Ave.	55 Stanley St. +
8 Margaret St.	82 Princess Ave.	87 Stanley St.
10 Margaret St.	51 Queen St.	97 Stanley St.
15 Margaret St.	58 Queen St. +	115 Stanley St.
26 Margaret St.	59 Queen St.	138 Stanley St.
Young Women's Christian Association	119 Redan St.	172 Sunset Dr.
16 McIntyre St.	121 Redan St.	174 Sunset Dr.
Alma College +	125 Redan St.	176 Sunset Dr.
Ella D. Bowes Chapel at Alma College	133 Redan St.	207 Sunset Dr.
48 Metcalfe St.	137 Redan St.	213 Sunset Dr.
50 Metcalfe St.	139 Redan St.	215 Sunset Dr.
54 Metcalfe St.	58 Regent St.	216 Sunset Dr.
79 Metcalfe St.	12 Rosebery Place +	218 Sunset Dr.
86 Metcalfe St.	16 Rosebery Place	222 Sunset Dr.
107 Metcalfe St.	28 Rosebery Place	224 Sunset Dr.
111 Metcalfe St.	46 Rosebery Place	226 Sunset Dr.
118 Metcalfe St	50 Rosebery Place	228 Sunset Dr.
20 Miller St.	58 Rosebery Place	230 Sunset Dr.
25 Mitchell St.	48/50 Ross St.	275 Sunset Dr.
30 Mondamin St.	54 ½ Ross St.	368 Sunset Dr.
32 Mondamin St.	60 Ross St.	291 Talbot St.
Myrtle St. Public School +	62 Ross St.	398-402 Talbot St. +
78 Myrtle St.	64 ½ Ross St.	Baldwin Robinson Furniture
79 Myrtle St.	275 Ross St.	454-456 Talbot St.
80 Myrtle St.	15 St. Anne's Place	Goodwin Furniture
82 Myrtle St.	Western Dairy	593-597 Talbot St.
84 Myrtle St.	St. Catharine St.	Conley Bros. Hotel
86 Myrtle St.	Hydro Electric Sub Station	606-610 Talbot St.
90 Myrtle St.	St. Catharine St.	Noble Manufacturing Co.
98 Myrtle St.	39 St. George St.	672 Talbot St. *
100 Myrtle St.	40 St. George St.	Young Men's Christian Association
101 Myrtle St.	42 St. George St.	1237 Talbot St.
102 Myrtle St.	Memorial Hospital Nurses' Residence	S. S. No. 18 Yarmouth (Centennial Ave.)
103 Myrtle St.	58 St. George St	4 Victoria St.
104 Myrtle St.	5 Scott St.	48 Walnut St. +
106 Myrtle St.	8 Scott St.	57 Walnut St +.
107 Myrtle St.	28 Scott St.	72 Walnut St.
109 Myrtle St.	30 Scott St.	74 Walnut St.
112 Myrtle St.	114 Scott St.	14 Weldon Ave.
118 Myrtle St.	119 Scott St.	29 Wellington St.
119 Myrtle St.	4 Southwick St.	51 Wellington St.
123 Myrtle St.	21 Southwick St.	70 Wellington St. +
16 Naama St. +	31 Southwick St. +	78 Wellington St.
28 Owaissa St.	32 Southwick St.	80 Wellington St.
6 Palm St.	35 Southwick St.	89 Wellington St.
25 Pearl St.	37 Southwick St.	91 Wellington St.
28 Pearl St.	50 Southwick St.	92 Wellington St
49 Pearl St +.	64 Southwick St.	93 Wellington St.
71 Pearl St.	65 ½ Southwick St.	94 Wellington St.
Animal House and Conservatory,	31 Stanley St.	137 Wellington St.
Pinafore Park	33 Stanley St.	145 Wellington St.
1 11141010 1 4111	33 Starrie, St.	1.5 // 61111161011 54

145 1/2 Wellington St.

232 Wellington St.

313 Wellington St.

315 Wellington St.

317 Wellington St.

319 Wellington St.

321 Wellington St.

354 Wellington St.

363 Wellington St.

45 William St.

47 William St.

49 William St.

56 William St. +

145 Wilson Ave.

18 Woodland Cres. +

23 Woodland Cres. +

29 Woodland Cres. +



S. S. #1 Aldborough (Blacks Line) S. S. #8 Aldborough (Maple Grove)

S. S. # 12 Aldborough (Argyle)

U. S. S. #1 Aldborough/Dunwich

(Talbot Line/Dunborough Road)

U. S. S. #2 Aldborough/Dunwich (Marsh Line/Dunborough Road)

U. S. S. #3 Dunwich/Aldborough (Duff Line/Dunborough Road)

Rodney Community Hall

McKillop House, 24810 Talbot Line,

Bank of Montreal, West Lorne

Dutton Memorial Hall

Dutton High School

S. S. #18 Southwold (Fingal)

Johnston-Inch House, 8133 Oneida Rd. Campbell House, 35732 Talbot Line,

Sheddon

French House, 40085 Talbot Line. Talbotville

S. S. #7 Yarmouth

(Sparta Continuation School)

S. S. #8 Yarmouth (Seminary - Sparta Line/Centennial Road)

S. S. #12 Yarmouth (Southdale Line/ Centennial Road)

S. S. #17 Yarmouth (Shone's - 400 Sunset Dr. St. Thomas)



"The Croft" 27 Crescent Avenue, c. 1930, Courtesy, Josie Cosens

S. S. #19 Yarmouth (New Sarum) Imperial Bank, Sparta St. Thomas Golf & Country Club, 42325 Sparta Line, Union 41 Southdale Road, Central Elgin 42489 Southdale Road, Central Elgin 42729 John Wise Line, Central Elgin Smolyn House, Sunset Road, Central

4497 East Road, Central Elgin Walling-Cooke House, 44082 Talbot Line, Central Elgin

Port Stanley Town Hall

Bridge Master Tower, Port Stanley Lift Bridge

224 Colborne St., Port Stanley

318 Colborne St., Port Stanley

389 Talbot St. W, Aylmer

66 Centre St., Aylmer

213 John St. S, Aylmer

S. S. #7 South Dorchester (Crossley-Hunter)

S. S. #8 South Dorchester (Mount Vernon)

S. S. #11 Bayham (Richmond)

S. S. #14 Bayham (Straffordville)

U. S. S. #16/24 Bayham/Malahide (Corinth)



Anne and John Findlay, Courtesy, Findlay Family



105/107 Elgin Street



27 Crescent Avenue



14 Gladstone Avenue



97 Stanley Street



207 Sunset Drive



50 Rosebery Place



2 Farley Place



11 Farley Place



16 Rosebery Place



Hydro-Electric Sub-station, 44 St. Catharine Street



Dutton-Dunwich Community Hall



YWCA, 16 Mary Street



West Elgin - SS#8 Aldborough



Pump House, Waterworks Park



12 Farley Place



Ella Bowes Chapel, Alma College

J.T. FINDLAY: ARCHITECT

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Front cover: Blueprint, McKillop House, West Elgin, 1923 (detail), Courtesy, Beth McClelland



Elgin County Administration Building, 4th Floor, 450 Sunset Drive (Hwy 4), St. Thomas, Ontario 519.631.1460 ext. 160, www.elgin-county.on.ca