Two of the oldest quilts with the conveners of the fair. Left to right: Mrs. R. G. Brown, Miss Annie King, Mrs. E. J. Martin, Mrs. Wilfred Gardiner, Mrs. W. C. Barrie, and the president, Mrs. M. J. Cochran.
—Kitchener Waterloo Record Photo

Quilt Fair In A Farm House

WHEN Central Dumfries Women's Institute in Waterloo county decided to have a Quilt Fair and to hold it at the farm home of a member, Mrs. W. C. Barrie, they had no idea the thing would grow to such proportions, that 150 quilts would be brought in for display and that 350 people from Ontario and the United States would come to see them. There was even a visitor from Australia — an Institute member, too — but she didn't come all the way from Australia to attend the fair; she was visiting in the county at the time.

It would tax most homes to find space to display 150 quilts, but the spacious old Barrie home has been host to big community events before, and it could provide five rooms for show rooms. When Mr. Barrie had fitted the walls with lines of scaffolding, the quilts could be hung "like pictures in a gallery." On the veranda there were three large autographed quilts made by the Institute and bearing 1000 names. Children's quilts, woven counterpanes and homemade rugs added to the exhibition. To advertise the event to passers-by or to mark the place for visitors from outside the community, two quilts flapped on the Barrie clothesline and a quilting bee was in progress on the lawn.

A quilt fair of this sort naturally had a great attraction for women of the district because of the human interest associated with the old quilts, each a family heirloom with a history of its own. There was a good deal of comparing of the old quilts with the newer models, too. Most of the newer ones were appliqued rather than pieced; the patterns were larger and usually part of the work, such as sewing blocks together was done by machine. Occasionally the design was original — sometimes the designing was the quilt-maker's hobby; sometimes originality of design had been required for a competition at the time the quilt was made. The older quilts were mostly of conventional patterns, such old favorites as the Log Cabin, Dresden Plate, Flower Pot, Sunburst, Churn Dash, Wedding Ring, Rising Star, Goose Tracks, Goose Chase, Chimney, Flower Basket, Oak Leaf and others.

Something of the patience of the old time quilt-makers was shown in notes attached to exhibits. For a quilt named "Ramble Around the Green" the maker had used 3355 pieces. A glazed chintz quilt was made up of 4500 pieces. A quilt entitled "Child's Play" had been made by a present Institute member, Mrs. Andrew Taylor when she was a child. She had bought the patches at the dime store a few at a time for a cent apiece. A quilt owned by Mrs. A. Dunnett and made by her great, great grandmother was over 150 years old. Another belongs to the oldest resident of the county, Mrs. Ophelia Rife aged 104; the quilt, made by Mrs. Rife's grandmother is over 100 years old. A "Goose Chase" quilt made in 1856 by a woman of 84, Mrs. John Eaton, was exhibited by her granddaughter, Mrs. E. J. Martin. Some quilts were for sale but most of the old ones are held as family treasures. So many people wanted to come to the quilt show that it was held over for a second day.

Perhaps it should be added that sometime ago the conveners of the fair, Mrs. E. J. Martin, Mrs. Barrie and Mrs. Walter Filsinger visited the annual Simcoe County Quilt and Rug Fair held at Collingwood. Perhaps sending a delegation to this fair would be a good idea for any Institute considering holding a fair of its own.