

Setting Up a County Museum

The first arrivals in the Elgin county Women's Institutes' project of doing the actual work of painting and papering exhibit rooms in the County Museum. Standing, left to right, Mrs. J. R. Futcher and Mrs. J. McCormick, kneeling, Mrs. H. C. Duff and Miss Edna Scott.

—Photo courtesy
St. Thomas Times-Journal



Editor's Note: Knowing something of the interest of Women's Institutes over the province in setting up county museums, we asked Mrs. J. R. Futcher, chairman of the museum committee of Elgin county, to tell us how the Institutes of that county aroused the public interest and made the enterprise a community project. The accompanying picture shows one very practical sort of work the women did to fix up the museum building.

IN the spring of 1954, at the District Annual meetings of both East and West Elgin, Mrs. J. R. Futcher, a past president of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, proposed the county pioneer museum project as a follow-up of work on the Tweedsmuir histories.

In October the Institutes of the county arranged for a showing of historic articles in a department store in St. Thomas. They took over practically the whole second floor. Twenty-three Institutes participated with a space of better than two card tables allotted to each, room behind to display quilts and space in front for small furniture. These exhibits were laid out in a large ellipse and the enclosed space was arranged as part of a pioneer home with braided rugs and old time furniture. During the time the exhibit was

on display different Institutes served tea each day and raised \$450 to give a start to a fund for the project.

In November at a meeting of the Historical Research conveners of the Institutes of the county, it was decided to go ahead and promote a county museum and that this museum should be located in the county seat, the city of St. Thomas. They had yet to find a suitable building. A prospect of special interest was the historic Saywell home in the old part of the city. The house was 115 years old and on the same property, but not the same house, where Dr. Charles Duncombe lived, who with Dr. Charles Rolph founded the first medical school in Canada in 1824. Dr. Rolph left St. Thomas to found the Medical School of Toronto University.

In January 1955 two boards were set up to promote the museum project: an honorary board and an active board consisting of representatives of each Women's Institute in the county, representatives of the defunct Elgin Historical Society, local historians and interested business men. The Saywell home was bought for \$10,000.

Then came the campaign to raise funds for the project. In two winters, largely through teas and similar affairs, the Institutes of the