

Busy in Elgin West

Elgin West District is not only looking back at its past achievements with pride but forward to the future with enthusiasm.

The County of Elgin is divided into two districts, Elgin West and Elgin East and many activities have been completed with the co-operation of both districts.

Many people in Ontario, in fact all of Canada will know that in 1985 the County of Elgin is to be at the forefront of agriculture in Canada. The International Plowing Match will be held near St. Thomas. The federal Minister of Agriculture, Mr. John Wise farms in the county.

The County of Elgin skirts Lake Erie with the City of St. Thomas in the middle. Elgin West District consists of the townships of Aldborough, Dunwich, and Southwold. There is a diversity of agriculture within Elgin West, including, tobacco, beef, cash crops, some dairying and some fruit and vegetable farms.

Elgin West District began in Dutton on Feb. 10, 1905 through the interest and enthusiasm of Mr. Archie MacColl secretary of the Farmers' Institute. For the next three years meetings were held regularly with ladies from all over West Elgin attending.



Elgin West is located just north of Lake Erie in south-western Ontario.

The first District Annual was held on June 12, 1908 with 50 women present; this meeting was the real beginning of Elgin West and by 1913 the thriving group could pay their secretary \$20 a year. In 1917, seven branches reported raising \$3,384 for the war effort.

Mrs. Luke Brown was elected the first Federated Representative for Elgin West in 1920. In 1927, the first Winter Picnic was held at Alma College, St. Thomas with Emily Guest as speaker. A scholarship fund was begun in 1951 to commemorate the centennial of Elgin County. This is a joint project with Elgin East District to reward an Elgin County girl each year for her outstanding 4-H work.

Early projects of Elgin West included medical inspection of all schools, area health nurses, St. Thomas Memorial Hospital, Byron Sanatorium, music instruction in schools, public speaking competitions, prohibition, and legal rights for women and immigrants. The 14 branches that now make up Elgin West have a fine history to be proud of.

Mrs. Helen Saunders of Dutton and the late Mrs. Ida Galbraith of Iona Station, were members of the West Elgin Cancer Society and saw the need for service to cancer patients in the area. In 1960, Mrs. Galbraith, District President of Elgin West W.I. held a tea at her home with Iona Station branch assisting. It was a success and funds for the Elgin West Daffodil Auxiliary were begun. In 1965, Elgin West District WI did the planning and each year it has got progressively bigger and better. Each year one of the 14 branches act as hostess with branch delegates assisting. Helping cancer patients in need, whether at the tea or at Christmas time with food baskets, the Elgin West WI have provided comfort and happiness which is a rewarding accomplishment to each member.

The late Mrs. J.R. Fletcher, a former president of FWIO and member of Middlemarch Branch, felt the need to establish a museum in Elgin County in order to preserve our wonderful heritage. She approached the Elgin County Council in the early 1950's for this purpose and was highly successful. With Mr. J. Gowan Young, a former Board Director of FWIO, they worked tirelessly toward forming the Elgin County Pioneer Museum.

The Women's Institute members of Elgin East and West along with members of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire secured voluntary contributions for the purchase of a building and grounds in St. Thomas to become the home of the Elgin County Pioneer Museum.

The Women's Institutes of the county and the IODE have continued to hold fund raising social events each year. Spring teas, a December coffee break, raffles, flea markets and proceeds from bus tours are turned over to the executive committee to assist in the operation of a heritage from the past of which Elgin County is proud.

When the Elgin Manor Home for the Aged, on the outskirts of St. Thomas, was still in the planning stage the Administrator, Mr. Ivan Patterson called a meeting of the executives of Elgin East and Elgin West W.I. to discuss organizing an auxiliary. The auxiliary purpose would be to provide extra comforts for the residents, such as bus trips; and furnishings not provided by public funds. The Elgin Manor Auxiliary came into being in May 1964. It was decided that the auxiliary would operate a Tuck Shop. Space was provided in the building for a tiny store where residents can purchase candy, tobacco products and toilet articles. There is also a small tea room where for a nominal sum residents and their guests can enjoy a cup of tea or cof-