

Old Wall-paper in Nova Scotia

(From an article by Blodwen Davies, printed in the Halifax Herald, May 27, 1929)

"There is a demure little early colonial home in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, a quaint white house with dormer windows and a great sentinel tree before it. It is in the centre of the old college town now; but when it was built, over a century ago, it was surrounded with fields and meadows, and the roadway was the post road between Halifax and Digby.

Across the beautiful Basin of Minas on the picturesque shore at Economy is another old white house, something akin in its design, its history and its associations. They were both built for bridal couples who were cousins, and in each of them is a room still decorated with rare old wallpaper, quaintly designed and painted, and brought across the seas with great care and expense when it was sufficiently unique to be the talk of the countryside.

The Wolfville house was the first to be built, and was erected by Judge Elisha DeWolf as a wedding gift for his son, Thomas Andrew Strange DeWolf. The DeWolfs were a proud and prosperous family, and the old Judge was one of those Nova Scotians who boasted the friendship of Edward, Duke of Kent, who had lived at Halifax as commander of the forces, and who was familiar with all the lovely highways between the capital and Annapolis Royal. On one of those ~~#####~~ journeys the Duke was the guest of the Judge in another great white home down the road from the spot chosen for Thomas' bridal home.

(Andrew DeWolfe's bride was Nancy, daughter of Col. and Mary (Crane) Ratchford, of Parrsboro. He married her in 1817. ~~1817~~ H.R.) (1818)

The bride was a niece of Colonel Jonathan Crane, one of the imposing figures in the old Tory society of Nova Scotia. Like so many Royalists he had left the rebel colonies and settled at Horton N.S. in 1780.

Col. Crane's youngest son was Silas Hibbert Crane, a young lawyer and business man who found an attraction in the Haliburton home in Annapolis, because there pretty Anne Chandler, bereft of parents, had grown up with her clever cousin Thomas Chandler Haliburton. Anne's mother had died in a shipwreck while crossing from St. John to Digby, and her father, Judge Chandler, died some time later, so the orphan girl was welcomed to the home of her mother's sister, Mrs. Haliburton; and there, on Guy Fawkes Day, 1823, she became the wife of Silas Hibbert Crane.

Andrew and Nancy DeWolf, in their lovely new home in Wolfville, had a room papered with the last word in wall decoration, the painted panels ~~#####~~ which in story book fashion depicted travels in Europe. There is a tradition that this paper was a gift from the Duke of Kent to the young couple, but it is based on slender evidence. Nevertheless the Duke may have had something to do with it, for he was always in the forefront of building and furnishing fashions, and no doubt some of his Nova Scotian friends had picked up some of his ideas in the town and country houses so lavishly equipped by him and so graciously presided over by Madame de Saint ~~#####~~ Laurent.

The paper that the young DeWolfs chose ^{for} from their drawingroom is still upon the walls, eleven decades after it was pasted up with such breathlessness and exhibited with such pride. It was paper beautifully designed and executed by one of the foremost makers of the day.

*J.A. DeWolf, born 1795,
married Nancy Crane Ratchford
about 1818. Came to Liverpool
in the early 1820's to set up as a merchant,
but only stayed about a year.*

Wallpaper became the rage in the time of Madame La Pompadour, who introduced it into Versailles, and eventually it reached the stage where even very beautifully designed and executed papers were within the reach of the moderately rich. Towards the end of the 18th century and in the first years of the 19th, printed and painted wallpaper was immensely popular in America. Some of the designs were pictures of travel in various European and American ports and cities. The publication of several volumes of design from Herculaneum also gave rise to the introduction of classical stories. The story or subject was carried through a series of panels, and each set was accompanied by a book, so that when the rolls reached their destination they were put into place in accordance with the sequence of the story as it was told in the text book. Some ~~##~~ of these printed papers had as many as 24 colors and were consequently expensive and rare.

When Silas and Anne Crane moved to their new home in Okonoma (the lovely name is now corrupted to Economy) they yearned to have a room ~~#####~~ papered after the fashion of the DeWolfs'. One of the rooms in their house on the shore of Minas Basin was specially prepared for the paper, with rounded corners, so that the sequence of the story would not suffer from right-angles. In 1825 the paper arrived, and Silas Crane made a trip all the way to St. John to get it from the ship. There were 20 rolls of it and each roll, it was said, was worth £5. Anne probably waited impatiently until she saw Silas driving up the long avenue of trees from the highway to the little white house; but so satisfied were they with their purchase that they never changed or covered it, and there the paper stays to this day. As the Crane children grew up, the paper with the celebrated Story of Telemachus was their story book, and again and again Silas and Anne had to tell the story of his adventures.

Hibbert's Green, as the place was called, was the finest home in the district, filled with beautiful furniture, including the first piano in the vicinity. Today it is a forlorn little place, reached with difficulty from Parrsboro by motor or bus. For years the house stood neglected, storms beat upon through the windows and destroyed some of the panels; but the natural loveliness of the place remains and enough of the old dwelling to recall something of its happier early days.

The Cranes have long since departed from Hibbert's Green, and the DeWolfs from the little white house in Wolfville. Some one may rescue the remaining panels from Economy and keep them as relics of early colonial days in Nova Scotia; but in Wolfville the paper will remain where it was pasted up for the bride and groom of 1817, for the deeds of the property, though it has passed into strange hands, provide that the old paper must never be covered or removed. "

(end quote from Blodwen Davies.)

Notes by T.H.R. --- I doubt if the Duke of Kent had anything to do with the wall-paper in the DeWolfe house. At the time of Andrew DeWolf's marriage, 1817, ^{or 1818,} the Duke of Kent was living in Brussels, having fled from England to avoid his creditors; and while he maintained his correspondence with the DeSalabries at Quebec, ~~chiefly because his mistress, Madame St. Laurent, was of that family,~~ there is no evidence that he maintained any ties with his old acquaintances in Nova Scotia. His old love-nest at Rockingham was permitted to fall into decay. His correspondence no less than his actions show that he regarded his stay in Nova Scotia as a trial to be borne as comfortably as possible, and that he lost no time or regret in shaking the dust of this province from his feet when at last the opportunity was afforded him of returning to the amenities of Europe.

The truth about the wallpaper is probably that it was purchased in Europe by the De Wolfs themselves. They were engaged in the ~~shipping~~ shipping business at Halifax and Liverpool N.S. and had ample opportunity to fall in with the craze for scenic wallpaper which was then sweeping the moderately well-to-do homes of America.

The following information was given to me in October, 1946, by Miss Anne McClearn, of Liverpool, N.S., a great-grand-daughter of James Ratchford DeWolf.

"In the early part of the 19th century the DeWolfs of Wolfville formed a number of close connections with the town of Liverpool, N.S. Two of the daughters and one of the sons of Judge Elisha DeWolf married Liverpool people in fact. They were; Olivia DeWolf, who married Captain Joseph Barss Jr., the noted Liverpool privateersman of the War of 1812; Margaret Maria DeWolf, whose first husband was James Calkin of Liverpool; and James Ratchford DeWolf, who came to Liverpool and married ~~Elizabeth~~ Elizabeth, the only daughter of Colonel Joseph Freeman of Liverpool.

Another branch of the DeWolfs came to Liverpool also. James (of Simeon) DeWolf married (as his 3rd wife) Jane Parker of Liverpool. In all he had 10 children, one of whom was Benjamin Otis DeWolf, born Aug. 1, 1810.

John B. DeWolf (a son of John DeWolf, of Simeon's descent) who was born 1786, married Eliza Rudolph of Windsor, and later lived at Liverpool, N.S.

One of these DeWolfs lived on the east side of the river at Liverpool for a time. This part had always been known as Dean's Point. But DeWolf started calling it Bristol, in honor of Bristol, Rhode Island, the original home of the family in America. This part of Liverpool is still known as Bristol Avenue.

My great-grandfather James Ratchford DeWolf was born at Wolfville Sep. 14, 1787. When he was 23 he came to Liverpool and in a short time (April 29, 1810) married Elizabeth, the only daughter of Col. Joseph Freeman. For a number of years J.R. DeWolf and Col. Freeman did business in partnership, then Mr. DeWolf conducted a separate business of his own. He and Elizabeth had 5 children. J.R. DeWolf lived in Liverpool all the rest of his days and died a prosperous merchant in 1855. He built a mansion on the site of "Hillcrest", ^{later} now owned by Colonel C.H.L. Jones. Mr. DeWolf's house was known as the Grove Mansion, and in one of the drawingrooms was a scenic wallpaper exactly like that which still survives in the DeWolf house at Wolfville. There is nothing strange about this, for Thomas Andrew Strange DeWolf, who built and decorated the Wolfville house, was a brother of James Ratchford DeWolf. At one time -- I do not know the date -- T.A.S. DeWolf came to Liverpool, intending to go into business. He built the frame cottage now (1946) occupied by the manager of the Bank of Nova Scotia (between Lane's house and Shankel's) but only stayed a year. Tradition in my family is that T.A.S. DeWolf found things "slow" in Liverpool -- which sounds as though he came during the slump after the wars ended in 1815 -- and went on to found a shipping business in Halifax which still exists and still bears his name.

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After J.R. DeWolf's death in 1855, the big mansion gradually fell into decay. It was purchased by Captain Hill and operated as a hotel -- "The Grove Mansion House" in the 1880's and 1890's. Finally it was torn down ^{ABOUT 1900} by Mr. Seldon, father of Lawrence Seldon the present Liverpool druggist. Mr. Seldon erected the large house on this site which was afterwards modified and occupied by Colonel C.H.L. Jones ^{and called "Hillcrest"}

When the old J.R. DeWolf house was torn down, my sister and I rescued some of the old scenic wallpaper. As I remember it, we got some off the walls, and

we found one or two panels or rolls which had never been used. We saved them for a long time, out of sentiment; but we had not enough to paper a room or a hall, and the old paper was always getting in the way, and one day not many years ago we were having a house-cleaning and the old paper was burnt. I'm sorry, now, but it's too late.

The old J.R.DeWolf house in Liverpool was torn down about the year 1900.

Further note by T.H.R:- The wallpaper surviving in the old T.A.S.DeWolf house in Wolfville resembles very closely a paper illustrated in the Encyclopaedia Britannica 14th edition in the section on Interior Decoration. This paper is described by the Britannica, "Wallpaper, France, Directoire period 1795-99, issued by Nicholas Louis Robert, of Essones. The colors are blue, green and ~~#####~~ grisaille." This is Plate 21, part 1, Volume 12 of the Britannica.

Note:- I visited the old De Wolfe house in Wolfville on May 29th, 1948, with Professor Mosher of Acadia University. It was a frame building in poor repair, & occupied by a number of families, each living in two or three rooms. A fruit-packing company own the property & intend tearing it down to make room for their business, adjoining the old house. The historic wallpaper is in what once was the west drawing-room, to the left of the front door. It consists of small squares of paper, each 18" by 20 1/2", carefully pasted on the walls to form a continuous scenic panorama around three sides of the room. The scene represents the grounds of a nobleman's estate, with green lawns, tall trees, & leafy shrubs, with summer-houses & arbours constructed in imitation of classical Greek ruins. The paper has been heavily varnished in more recent times, and this and the encrusted dirt & smoke (the present tenant has a heating stove close against one wall, with a pipe-hole through the paper) have obscured the design to some extent. As far as I could learn, the house is too rickety to move, the paper cannot be removed without serious damage, and the owners are determined to tear the structure down. — J.H.R.

They Play House With Antiquity

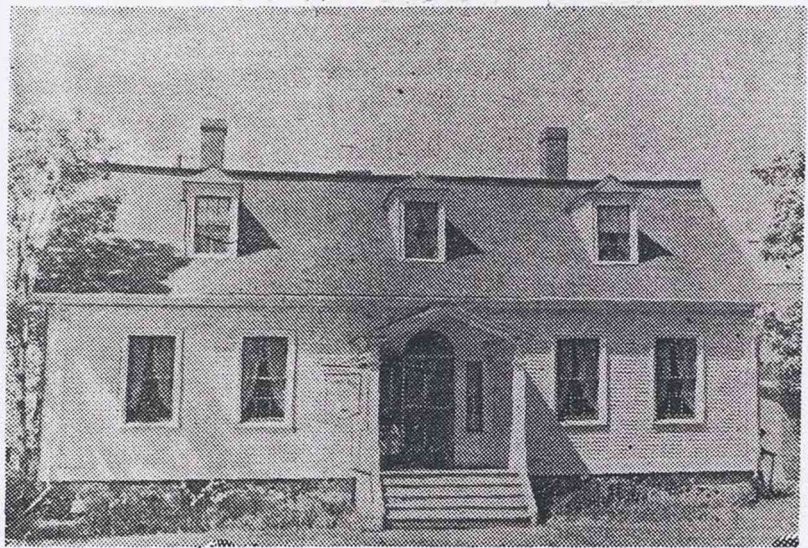
written about 1946

By Claire Van Wart

BECAUSE someone wanted to cut a door through the wall of an old house in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, a museum was born, an historical society was formed; the town has now a tourist attraction of its own creation, and a project with small beginnings is taking on county-wide proportions.

The house in question is today known as the DeWolf House Museum, and is one of the oldest residences in this historic community. The wall through which the door was to be cut had on it wallpaper of far greater value than the owners of the property evidently realized at the time, for when word went around that the paper was to be mutilated, there was civic reaction.

In this town the name DeWolf connotes the prestige of another century, typified by such renowned oldsters as Judge Elisha DeWolf, about whom the story of the paper centres. The wallpaper has been a matter of civic comment for years, for it was a royal gift sent to the son of Judge Elisha DeWolf on the occasion of his marriage. It was presented by His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent, who, as Prince Edward, stopped in the town en route from Halifax to New Brunswick. He was entertained at the home of Judge Elisha, now known as Kent Lodge, on West Main Street. Some years later the paper was sent to the Judge's son and was put on the walls of the new home which Judge Elisha gave his son for a wedding gift. That was about 126 years ago. The paper is dark and lush with sumptuous scenes showing old Italian gardens and castles, richly adorned lords and ladies. It depicts court life in 1794 and is a panoramic series running around the room.



DeWolf House, seen above, is an attractive and well maintained museum created entirely by a small group of citizens.



Wolfville (N.S.) ladies and girls donned last century costumes for the opening exhibit of the museum.

Impossible Can Be Achieved

One could hardly suppose, however, that a museum could be created on the strength of some old wallpaper—and that, after a century and a quarter, in a sad state of disrepair. Yet today Wolfville has one of the finest little historical museums to be found anywhere, and the fact that it has support from neither the government nor the town proves that when enough interested people get their heads together, impossibility sometimes becomes accomplishment.

The name DeWolf, from which Wolfville is derived, has always meant prestige and culture in this community, and the old homestead on Main Street, now wedged between two business houses and flanked by a warehouse, had had its fate bewailed by historically minded folk for years. Older folk who remember Wolfville before this part of the town became commercialized, say that the House had beautiful grounds and was not then considered nearly so modest as it appears to us today. Wolfville citizens have always thought it a great pity that one of the few remaining evidences of a Wolfville of a century ago should be quickly degenerating, for this quaint old house, until recent years, has been nothing but a second-rate rental. At that it could not bring its owners a great deal because of its age and disrepair. And because the name DeWolf has had such connotations locally, the older folk were more than disturbed when first fire threatened to wipe out the only real historical site in the town, and then unthinking tenants prepared to mutilate the valuable paper.

It was Miss Rosamund Archi-

bald, a teacher at Horton Academy, already hampered with a heavy weekly schedule, who really took the initiative in preserving the old property. She admits that her ideas were promulgated quite some time before interest was aroused, but eventually a small group sat down and pooled their ideas—and a local museum was born. A meeting was called for the public consideration of DeWolf House preservation, and although the number in attendance was small, it was representative of almost every phase of community life. From that group the original committee of what was later an Historical Society was formed. It consisted of Miss Archibald, who would be both secretary and treasurer for the campaign; a university history professor, Dr. R. S. Longley, of Acadia University; Edson Graham, well known photographer, and the mayor of the town, W. K. Fraser.

These people were willing to wager that if the house could be rented for a reasonable amount and maintained by an historical society, then eventually a museum could be established. When the plan was made public, most people were pessimistic. What, for instance, would you ever find in Wolfville to put into an old house to make a museum? How could enough money ever be raised to pay rent each month? Why, a caretaker or curator alone would cost far more than a small group could possibly raise. No, said many, it will be just a civic millstone—a lot of work for nothing. But the little group of enthusiasts was not easily deterred.

Previous to that first meeting inquiries concerning financial arrangements had been made. It appeared that the chief obstacle at the moment was a 24-hour deadline which must be met. The owners of the DeWolf property must know by the next day whether or not the house would be rented on

the terms set \$22.50 a month for rent; no lease. No further appeal would be considered because of the commercial value of the property to the business firm which owned it. The little group, not as yet bearing the authority of an organized society, thought hard, and decided to accept the terms when the deadline was reached the next night, and to trust to the generosity of the Wolfville citizens. One bright spot was that the town had agreed to waive taxes, and that the owners would assist to a certain extent in repairing the property. And to set the project rolling the group present in the Parish Hall that evening pledged \$125 within a matter of minutes. At least the first month's rent could be paid.

Heartened by their own bravado, the original committee literally took to the streets. Miss Archibald herself went from store to store on Main Street canvassing contributions from the merchants, while other committee members worked elsewhere. When the local paper went to press August 14, 1941, pledges of \$300 were reported, and Wolfville's first museum was not only a plan but a promise.

The Next Question

Now then, said the citizenry, how are you going to make a museum with nothing to exhibit? Repairing the house in itself will take most of your funds. A look at the old property wasn't promising. The place certainly needed repair; the old wallpaper had nothing royal about its disheveled aspect, torn and soiled as it was; there weren't any museum pieces to fill up the rooms which suddenly seemed so large.

Wolfville, however, was not entirely disinterested. William Murphy, the painter, for instance, contributed a job of redecorating. Miss Archibald herself supervised the cleaning, and admits that it nearly broke her heart when she saw the amount of work to be

completed. The Garden Club sent word that it would gladly look after the grounds. Mrs. Guy Bleakney, a former member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, began a correspondence with experts of that body to make plans for converting the gardens of the DeWolf House back to the 1800's. Donations of money and repair materials began to come along, and most heartening of all, promises of donations for exhibit filtered through to the thankful Society.

The local paper carried reports of progress week after week: in the same breath the correspondent stated that an artist and reporter from the Boston Globe had stopped to sketch the DeWolf House, and that "we shall need two Franklin stoves." The community began to find "playing house" with antiquity rather interesting, and contributed accordingly.

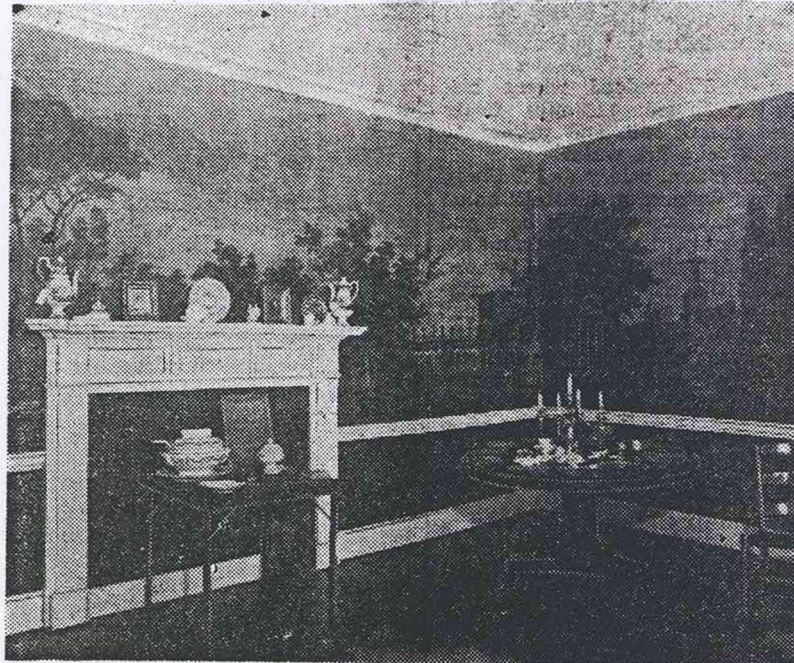
All through the first winter plans went apace. A former resi-

dent of the town, Mrs. R. S. Starr, agreed to sub-let the house from the society, to move in and care for the place. She was so enthusiastic about the project she actually sacrificed her time and comfort to help maintain the Historical Society's new baby.

A more suitable curator could not have been found anywhere, for Mrs. Starr, an artist with a deep appreciation for the beauty of old craftsmanship, has enhanced the museum by her own artistic arrangements of various displays. She has been the gracious chate-laine of the museum since its inception five years ago, living in small quarters that were often cold and uncomfortable during the winter, and personally caring for the hundreds of contributions which have arrived at this date. There was general rejoicing at that April executive meeting in 1942 when it was reported that Mrs. Starr would sub-let the house. Besides such a streak of good luck in thus obtaining a



Above: A weaving group learns an old craft in the quaint old front parlor of DeWolf House, whose gracious chatelaine, Mrs. R. S. Starr, is seen seated at extreme left.



The beautiful panoramic wall paper of DeWolf House is shown above. It depicts in oils the court life of 1794 and was a wedding gift of H.R.H. Duke of Kent to the son of Judge Elisha DeWolf at the time of his marriage.

chatelaine, part of the rental problem was automatically solved. The old wallpaper, of course, was the society's chief concern. Its restoration would require skilled hands, for it was done entirely in oils. Another generous contributor came to the rescue. Miss Annie L. Prat, Windsor, N.S., a well known local artist and sister of the new chatelaine, offered to go to work on the west room walls.

It was discovered that the paper had been darkened by varnish about 50 years ago, and samples were forwarded to Harvard to ascertain the advisability of having the varnish removed. The report came back that there would be so little difference, and the expense would be so great, that the plan would not be feasible.

Miss Prat, who is a charming, snowy-haired little lady, brought her expensive oils and worked for a month in the DeWolf House, her time entirely contributed. What she did toward restoring the paper was nothing short of incredible: the effect today is as rich as it must have been when the dignified DeWolf's entertained society long ago.

When the contributions of exhibits began to arrive, DeWolf House was opened to the public, and in October, 1942, the local paper reported over 400 had signed the register 'in this initial summer of restricted travel'. Society members were heartened, and decided that their project was worth expanding. In November a correspondent, almost bursting with pride, reported: "An event of historic importance occurred here yesterday when approximately 100 people gathered at the old DeWolf House to attend the first large meeting of the Wolfville Historical Society."

That was a big night for the hard-working museum supporters. Guests were pleased with the great accomplishments. Ladies sat in the quaint rockers and stiff chairs and admired the old paint-

ings, fingered frail china and lace, and marvelled that people lived so strangely in Wolfville 100 years ago. The men, looking awkward and large among the many dainty exhibits, were openly impressed. Many went home that night and remembered Aunt Mary's old pewter plate, or the diary of a long deceased and remote ancestor. The list of exhibits published periodically became longer, and Mrs. Starr busily penned descriptive tags for the numerous articles of antiquity, large and small, which arrived at the House. Gifts came from as far distant as Bermuda and Michigan.

It was in October, 1943, that the DeWolf House and its patrons established themselves firmly in the annals of the town, and became once and for all an accepted fact. During that month a three-day exhibit was opened and attracted people from all over the county. Many valuables loaned for this special display eventually became permanent exhibits when people realized that the museum was now a part of the town. During those three days cars and buses drew up at the modest entrance, and young and old assisted in the event. In a back room yet unfurnished for exhibit, the ladies of the Historical Society prepared tea for the guests; members took turn tending door and the registry book. Quarters and half dollars jingled incessantly in the collection plate in the front hall, and the museum fund grew. Upstairs several young girls and older ladies were quickly discovering how complicated were the details of milady's costume 100 years ago, as they struggled into genuine gowns of the last century, bounced bustles into place, turned about to be laced and snapped, and finally attempted to descend the steep little stairway with the same grace their ancestors had cultivated.

In the crowded rooms below, the select little group paraded among the furnishings that corresponded with their costumes, and the visit

century ago would undoubtedly have been horrified at having herself so closely examined! In keeping with the setting, Dr. H. T. DeWolf, honorary president of the new Historical Society, and Professor emeritus at Acadia, read a paper entitled: "Some Notes on the Education of Girls in the Maritime Provinces Before the Year 1865."

With the expansion of the modest funds resulting from the exhibit, the committee in charge was able to have a fireplace installed so that winter meetings might not freeze members inopportunely from the front "parlour."

The next project of the society was an exhibition of local art in November, 1944, which included every type of handicraft from delicate needlework to woodcarving. Guests were amazed at the wealth of local talent. At the annual meeting in June, 1945, it was reported that 500 had visited the museum during the previous summer, and that in September the museum would be the locale of a weaving class. Members of the weaving group found the front room of the DeWolf House a perfect setting for their craft, and once again the museum was the centre of public interest.

Last October the membership of the society had reached 100, an encouraging feature of the year's report, considering the modest representation at that first meeting in 1941. Recently the most outstanding exhibit of antiques to date was concluded, and the town is sincere in its acclamation of the untiring workers who gathered together the numerous articles for display. The House is now completely filled, with every room artistically arranged. The most recent exhibit is in the "Early Day Room" where pioneer utensils are accumulating. Upstairs the sleeping quarters are well maintained, and a complete last century lady's wardrobe is on display. A baby's wardrobe and a collection of children's toys has attracted much attention. Guests are always impressed by the fine needlework of old quilts and counterpanes, voluminous petticoats and shawls. Many of the household utensils of a century ago add greatly to the total effect.

To recount the details of the DeWolf House development would be to tell a bit of family history of almost every household in town. for Wolfville citizens are now proud to have old keepsakes on display in this re-creation of a last century Wolfville home. The little group which started "playing house" five years ago are happy in their success, but never cease to look ahead. More than anything in the world they want to own the house, but that is another project for the future. The town is proud of its new historic site, the only one within the boundaries of the community which has been preserved for the public.

With history knocking at every entrance to this little town in the heart of the Land of Evangeline, the society claims that its project, is no more than it should be. With an eye to the expansion of the tourist trade, the society will plan ahead, and every once in a while a meeting will be held in the quaint old rooms and up-to-date Wolfville citizens will have a game of "let's pretend" for an hour or two.