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# WORTH

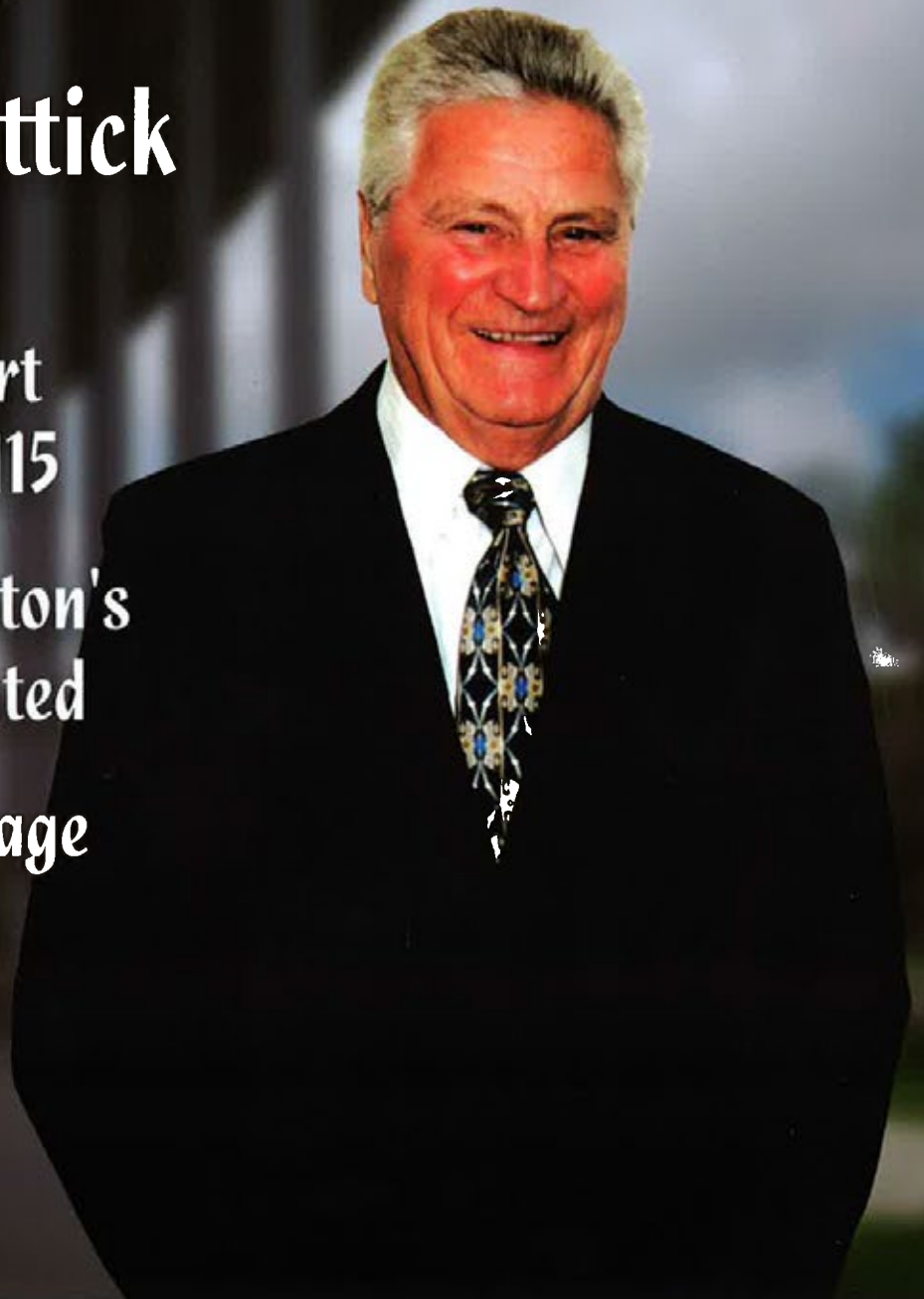
SASKATCHEWAN'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE MAGAZINE

**Joseph Pettick**  
1924 - 2010

**Wolseley Court  
House Turns 115**

**Mail Order Eaton's  
House Recreated**

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# MAIL-ORDER EATON'S HOUSE Recreated

**SASKATOON:** The Western Development Museum in Saskatoon has mixed the old and the new in the construction of a replica Eaton's mail-order house for its new "Winning the Prairie Gamble" exhibit.

**T**HE MUSEUM chose to recreate Eaton's Earlsfield model because it was so popular on Saskatchewan farms during the early 20th century. Dozens of Earlsfield houses are still standing on the prairies today – their distinctive double gambrel rooflines recognizable from miles away.

The WDM exhibit actually features two versions of the Eaton's house. The first is the façade of a "brand new" Earlsfield in the 1920s section of the exhibit. The second, fuller version of the home is the centerpiece of the 1930s Depression scene.

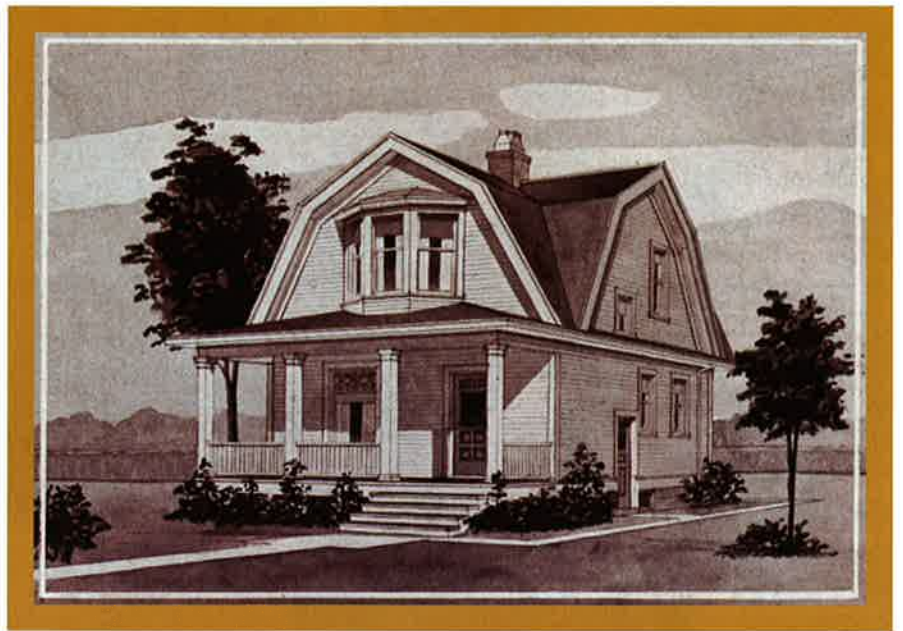
Museum visitors can walk into this weather-ravaged house and see what life was like on a Saskatche-

wan family farm during the Depression.

The house has endured dust storms, blazing sun and blasting wind, but it still stands as a testimony to the family's perseverance as well as to the quality of its construction. From the foyer, visitors look into the kitchen and the parlour, where a woman is fitting her daughter for a wedding gown – an indication that life went on in Saskatchewan despite the hard times.

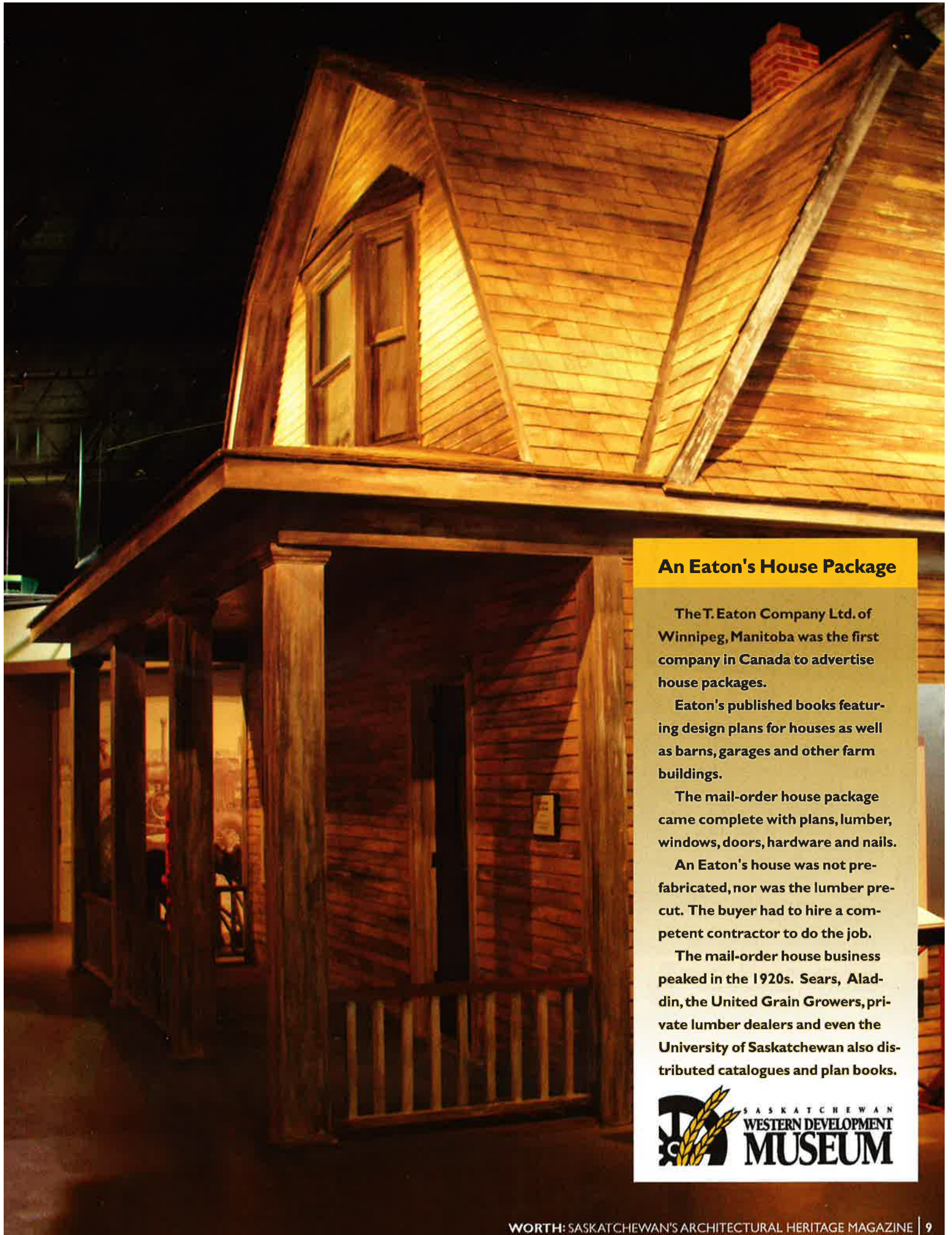
All of the interior fittings in the 1930s version of the Eaton's house were salvaged from an actual Earlsfield house that stood on a farm in the Cut Knife area. The WDM salvaged original doors (including interior pocket doors), windows, stairs and newel post, furnace grates, chair rails and baseboards which were then incorporated into the reconstructed Depression house.

The Museum's goal in building the Earlsfield in its exhibit was to



Eaton's Plan Book of Ideal Homes, 1919, cover. Used with permission of Sears Canada Inc., Saskatchewan Western Development Museum





## An Eaton's House Package

The T. Eaton Company Ltd. of Winnipeg, Manitoba was the first company in Canada to advertise house packages.

Eaton's published books featuring design plans for houses as well as barns, garages and other farm buildings.

The mail-order house package came complete with plans, lumber, windows, doors, hardware and nails.

An Eaton's house was not pre-fabricated, nor was the lumber pre-cut. The buyer had to hire a competent contractor to do the job.

The mail-order house business peaked in the 1920s. Sears, Aladdin, the United Grain Growers, private lumber dealers and even the University of Saskatchewan also distributed catalogues and plan books.







The "Earlsfield," Eaton's Plan Book of Ideal Homes, 1919. Used with permission of Sears Canada Inc., Saskatchewan Western Development Museum

make the house as authentic as possible. Original blueprints were never found. The Construction Coordinator, Randy Barwick, worked from Eaton's catalogue floor plans, 1919 building specifications, and drawings by exhibit designers, Reich & Petch Design International and Blair Fraser Exhibits.

The 1919 specifications were quite thorough. For example, the instructions for plastering the interior walls stated, "No lath is to run through behind studs from room to room and no vertical or diagonal lathing is to be done; the plaster is to be the best quality lime and sand in the usual proportions, and plenty of long, coarse hair is to be used."

The WDM used drywall, but the interior was finished to look like plaster. Not only was it significantly cheaper to use modern materials and methods, but it was necessary to make concessions in order to meet current fire regulations and building codes.

The biggest construction challenge in blending the old with the new was scaling the house to fit into the WDM's exhibit space. While the

replica Eaton's house was built to actual height, 2 feet had to be cut off the length, and 4 feet had to be trimmed off the width of the building.

All the original interior and exterior doors from the Cut Knife house had to be stripped and refinished.

The trimmings were then lightly sanded and given another coat of varnish to match the original finish. The wood flooring in the replica Eaton's house is new. Floor boards were milled to match salvaged pieces of B.C. fir flooring from the original home. The floor was then finished and sanded to look worn. The WDM used linoleum from the 1920s and 1930s for the kitchen and parlour.

The exterior of the Depression house was painted and then "aged" or faux painted by Amy Cheng, a member of the Museum staff trained in theatre set painting. The end result is remarkably true to a Saskatchewan farmhouse as it would have looked in the "Dirty Thirties."<sup>W</sup>

• *By Joan Champ and Randy Barwick*



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