

YESTERDAY

News from the Tavistock and District Historical Society

VOLUME 8

SPRING 2008

Zimmerman's: A Family Business

In an address given by George Zimmerman to the Tavistock Rotary Club in March of 1960 he noted that "In 1867 my father, John, came from Blenheim Township, a few miles southeast of Bright, as a carpenter to erect the Baptist

Church. At that time there was a man running a stave and heading factory in a small way. They became acquainted and dad made him a loan. The man was very honest and finally said, 'John, I don't think I will ever make a success of this business. If you hope to get your money back, the only way I see it is for you to buy me out.' That was the beginning of the Zimmerman Industry. It has continued as a wood-working industry to the third generation of Zimmermans."

Back in 1870 John Zimmerman's operation employed 5 men and 4 boys. The business grew rapidly, benefiting from access to the railroad and the expansion of flour mills which increased demand for barrels and cooperage supplies. It soon comprised the stave and heading factory plus dry kilns, cooperage shop and a sawmill. Wages varied from 62 cents to \$1.00 per 10-hour day.

The cooper industry in the early days was a busy industry,

especially the apple barrel. When the apple season started the farmers came from Millbank, Brunner and distances from 20 to 30 miles away and would be at the shop at 3:30 right up to 11 at night lined up waiting their turn to get barrels.

Transient coopers on piecework got 6 to 7 cents per barrel which sold for 25 cents each. Some of these men had a weekly cheque of \$75 but since they were real drinkers, Monday mornings often produced hangovers and a total depletion of wages, even with whiskey at 35 cents a gallon.

In time, John married Gertrude Schmidt and they had six children – four boys and two girls. In 1900 John retired and turned the business over to three of his sons, John Jr., Harry and George, under the name Zimmerman Brothers. Son William had gone into the Evangelical ministry.

Zimmerman Brothers operated the Palace Shoe Store, the stave and barrel business, had extensive timber rights at Nottawa and a lumber business near Collingwood.

In 1906 Zimmerman Brothers purchased the planing mill and box factory of John Kalbfleisch. They also worked as build-

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*The Zimmerman Family
front row: George, Mary, Gertrude, Kate, John Sr.
back row: Harry, John, William*

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday, March 29, 2008 at 1:30 p.m. in the Tavistock Library Hall • Open House 10am-4pm
Theme: Tavistock Historical Society on Display

**Tavistock & District
Historical Society Inc.**

Executive:

Chair – Sherrill Calder
Secretary – Mary Nicklas
Treasurer – Bob Rudy

Directors:

Paul Bartlett
Roy Erb
Bill Gladding
Bruce Halliday
Barb Matthies
Blain McCutchen
Ed Pellow

Swastika Mine: 100 years later

Few people in the Tavistock area realize there is a local connection between our village and Swastika, a small mining community in northern Ontario.

In 1904, Jim and Bill Dusty, two rugged freelance prospectors, took a contract from a group of investors to locate a silver mine in an area known to hold gold. They found no silver but in 1907 they staked out the Swastika Gold Mine. The claim, alongside Otto Lake, was in the name of the Tavistock Mining Partnership.

Prospectors and miners flocked to the area and a village sprung up named Swastika, after the mine. Areas to the east were staked and the major gold mines of Kirkland Lake were found and developed.

Dr. Michael Steele, a practitioner in Tavistock and MP for South Perth was the President of the Swastika mine. In the early 1900s the Tavistock Gazette featured stories about his trips to Swastika and operations at the mine. The Lemp Studio Collection pictures, available for viewing at the museum, depict life and industry in Swastika during the mining days.



Swastika Gold Mine as photographed c.1910

In 2008, Swastika is celebrating its centennial and reliving its days as a boom town. The village today is within the municipal boundaries of Kirkland Lake.

Tavistock & District Historical Society Inc.

37 Maria Street,
Box 280,
Tavistock, Ontario,
Canada N0B 2R0

**MUSEUM
HOURS:**

*Saturdays
10am-12 noon*

*Other times
by appointment*



All Aboard! for the Atrium

It was only fitting that the grandson of the station master lay down the track and place the model station building in the current display on Tavistock's railroad history at the atrium in Quehl's Restaurant in Tavistock. Thanks to Bob Rudy and, as always, to Cindy and Brian Larsen of Quehl's for use of the atrium. If you have a moment, drop in to see pictures of Tavistock's glory days with the railroad as well as the model train and railway gear.

Did you know?

- that the Historical Society has over 1,000 items in its permanent collection.
- that the Historical Society has over 50 family histories on record.
- that the Historical Society has over 20 binders of Lemp Studio Collection photos ... with more arriving all the time.
- that the Historical Society will soon be opening the "Tavistock Room" at the museum showing our many items of Tavistock and area memorabilia.

MUSEUM CALENDAR:

Please mark your calendar, check your attics, scour your basements and plan to participate in the 2008 lineup.

Displays feature items related to the theme loaned by people in the community as well as artifacts from the Historical Society's permanent collection of Tavistock and area memorabilia.

January 1 – 5

Final week of "Bless This House – Our Churches"

January 12 – March 15

Tavistock – A Sports Town

March 22 – May 31

The Zimmerman Family Businesses

June 7 – June 28

Rotary – A Special Anniversary

July 5 – August 30

Hobbies and Collections – What's In Your Display Cabinets?

September 5-7

Tavistock Fall Fair – special display

Sept. 18 – Nov. 29

Interesting Ancestors – Wanted Dead or Alive!

Dec. 6 – Jan. 31, 2009

A Victorian Christmas

Speaker Series

Dates and speakers to be announced.

Zimmerman's...

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ing contractors ... over the years erecting 14 homes in Tavistock, the arena and the Oxford Hotel.

World War I produced radical changes in containers. The demand for wooden boxes and boxes in knock-down form (shooks) increased greatly. Zimmerman Brothers Ltd was incorporated in 1919. The fox farm operation began in 1923. By 1930 the employees numbered 90. Ten thousand boxes were made each day, requiring about 40,000 feet of pine or spruce lumber. Some 150 to 200 fox pelts were marketed.

Early in 1938 Zimmerman Brothers started manufacturing shell boxes for Dominion Bridge at Toronto. During World War II they were considered a war industry. During the war years the staff reached a peak of 130 employees, 25 or more being women, working 55-60 hours per week. Two carloads of lumber were cut daily, turning out anti-aircraft shell boxes, howitzer boxes, boxes for TNT, powdered eggs and beer along with a small amount of domestic production.

The Zimmerman family was active in the



George with one of his finest animals.



An overview of the fox farm operation in Tavistock.

municipal and church and social life of the community. As well, they were noted for the fine horses they used to train and display at the Fall Fairs and the Royal Winter Fair. These teams of Greys and Clydes were used to haul lumber into the factory and to the piles in the yards but they were always kept in such fine shape that even though they earned their keep, they won many prizes and brought many ribbons back to Tavistock.

In the 1930s and 40s management of the company transferred to the third generation of Zimmermans.

In 1949 Percy Bleay, one of the top fox breeders in Canada, came from Alliston to manage the fox farm operation and to start raising mink, as the foxes were being phased out.

Anyone living in Tavistock at the time most likely still remembers the night of December 11, 1956 when the box factory was destroyed by fire. It was not rebuilt but the mink ranch was developed into a major enterprise. The vacant factory site was sold to Yantzi Feed & Seed in 1961.

The corporation name was changed to Zimmerman-Bleay Ltd in 1965. For several years it was one of the top mink ranches in Canada. In 1972 it ceased operation.



A photo of the Zimmerman factory as it appeared in the Canadian Graphic magazine, October 1905.



Howard, George and Harry with anti-aircraft shell boxes.

Tavistock: A Sports Town

Tavistock is known as a sports town, with Tavistock teams competing and winning in many different sporting activities as far back as the early 1900s. Football, soccer, hockey and tennis were popular early sports, captured in pictures from the Lemp Studio Collection.

Our young people have always grown up playing baseball or hockey. Some have gone on to make names for themselves in the Junior A and Junior B hockey teams as well as the NHL ... Jeff Zehr, Ross Yantzi and Bob Zehr to name a few. Brian Stere and Barry Eckstein excelled in baseball. Over the years lawn bowling behind the Masonic Hall and alley bowling and pool at Joe's Place were very popular. In more recent years figure skating has been prominent with many competitions and a carnival.

The display on Sports at the museum from January 12 to



March 15 had many of our sports teams represented ... the Braves, Royals, Jets, Harmony Hurricans and the Cassel hockey teams as well as the Merchants ball team. The Tavistock Rod & Gun Club was featured bringing back memories of good fishing holes, Saturday rabbit shoots and some she-nanigans best not repeated. The well-known South Easthope Tug-o-War team showcased a beautiful album as well as ribbons and trophies and the big boots worn by those big men on the team. From our popular local golf course we had the golf clubs, the club history and trophies.

Of special interest was horse racing with a display on Tavistock's famous race horse - The Eel.. A painting and three silver trophies was on loan from the Stratford Perth Archives along with local coverage and pictures of the horse that put Tavistock on the map many years ago.

The display runs Saturday mornings from 10 am to 12 noon until March 15, 2008 or by appointment.

The Rabbit Drive

Every Saturday, from the first of January to the end of February in the 1960's, there would be a Rabbit Drive around the Tavistock area. There was an abundance of rabbits at that time, which created problems for farmers.

Hunters would gather at Les and Hap's Restaurant to plan their strategy. They would drive in trucks and leave men at their designated fan-like positions to start the walk through that concession block to end with men along the opposite road. The motive was to chase any rabbits into their path. At the end of the average day, the men may have walked 3 to 5 concessions to find as many as 8 rabbits and sometimes a fox.

The rabbits would be taken to store at the home of Edward Wilker in Tavistock. Then, a buyer, Mr. Greenspoon of Toronto, would come every 3 to 4 weeks to buy the frozen rabbits for market in Toronto. They would be purchased for meat and the pelts or skins would be used for hats and other warm winter clothing.



Left to right, front row, Jim Weicker, Rick Morgenroth, Len Yungblut, Leonard Wettlaufer, Ed Dennis, Ed Pellow, and David Pellow; back row: Bill Stock, Doug Wettlaufer, Ray Yungblut, Bill Bannerman, and John Ridgeway.

(Photo by Wooliever Studio, Pontiac, Mich)