

# YESTERDAY

News from the Tavistock and District Historical Society

VOLUME 9

SPECIAL EDITION

SPRING 2008

## A century of memories at the Oxford



THE LEMP STUDIO COLLECTION

The Oxford Hotel has continuously served patrons for 102 years ... through two World Wars, prohibition, the Great Depression, the swinging sixties and clear through to the new millenium. Several generations of children were born and raised at the Oxford. For many single male full-time boarders, the Oxford was home. Throughout the years, the heart and soul and public perception of the Oxford has always been a reflection of the hotelkeeper.

Have a look inside this publication and we'll take you on a tour back through the years at The Oxford Hotel.

**HOTEL OXFORD - OPEN HOUSE - Saturday, May 24, 2008 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

## Tavistock & District Historical Society

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## Tavistock & District Historical Society

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

**MUSEUM  
HOURS:**  
Saturdays  
10am-12 noon

Other times  
by appointment

## 100 YEARS AT THE OXFORD HOTEL

# Frederick and Arthur Liebler

### FREDERICK LIEBLER

Frederick Liebler began his working career as a cheesemaker in Heidelberg. The next stop was Erbsville. In 1897, Fred and his wife, Henrietta, and 2 sons, Arthur and John Henry, moved to Tavistock. Son Elmer was born a few years later. Why Tavistock? Fred had purchased the Union Hotel. Little did he realize that the Liebler name would be associated with hotelkeeping in Tavistock for the next 61 years!

The Union Hotel was a small old frame building (*see page 4*) and Fred soon had designs on something much more substantial. In 1906, he built an impressive, 3-storey, brick hotel on the same site and named it Hotel Oxford. Very quickly it was ranked as one of the better establishments in the district.

In the early days the room rate was \$1 a day and \$11 a month for regular tenants. There was always free lunch in the morning at the bar and an eye-opener on the house. If you wanted ... or needed ... the eye-opener at 6 am, why that was quite fine.

Fred was an active and concerned citizen in Tavistock. The 1908 newspapers list him as part of the deputation before Oxford County Council seeking incorporation of the village.

In 1911 Fred died at age 48. His obituary stated that he was "respected by all with whom he came in contact". Fred's widow, Henrietta, took over the business, capably assisted by her son, Arthur.

### ARTHUR LIEBLER

Art Liebler's initiation to hotelkeeping began in 1897 when his father purchased the Union Hotel. He was 9 years old. Art liked to tell people that he started to work full-time in the hotel trade at age 18. He was 20 years old when the Oxford was built ... already well-experienced.

Art was a tireless worker, often putting in 18-20 hour days. The hotel was a thriving concern ... in the beverage rooms, in the dining room and with room rentals. For many years beer was delivered by horse and wagon from the Kuntz Brewery in Waterloo and the Heuther Brewery in Kitchener. A "schuper" of beer sold for 5 cents in 1916.

The period 1910 through to the late 1950s was the heyday for travelling salesmen. The "travellers" would set up their wares in their bedroom at the Oxford or in the front room on tables that were hinged to the wall. When all the samples were arrayed the local merchants were invited to come in to inspect the goods and place their orders.

One might have thought that prohibition would have been a big setback for Art. Not so. He put in a soda fountain and turned out tasty treats for patrons of all ages.

Art and his wife, Aggie, raised four daughters at the hotel ... Helen (Mrs. Roger White), Marcella (Mrs. Tom Hanlon and later Mrs. Neil Gregory), Margaret (Mrs. Lloyd Pearson and later Mrs. Herman Mueller) and Marie. Marcella and Margaret are better known by their nicknames – Ebby and Buster. The girls all had jobs at the hotel when they were growing up and Ebby remembers that her dad paid them for their work. During World War II when their husbands left to serve, the girls moved home to the Oxford with their children. For many years the wide hallways on the third floor (the Liebler family floor) rang with the happy sounds of children and grandchildren.

Art was 72 years old when he sold the business. He said it was "a good life" and that he would repeat it again if he could. He died in 1972.



Arthur Liebler family: left to right, Marcella, Marie, Art, Aggie, Helen, and Margaret.



Arthur Liebler



**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.

**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. 13 – Nov. 29**

Interesting Ancestors – Wanted Dead or Alive!

**Dec. 6 – Jan. 31, 2009**

A Victorian Christmas

## Quiz?

- 1) How many bricks were used in building the Oxford Hotel?
- 2) In the old days the whiskey served at the hotel came in two brands ... white and rye. What was white whiskey called?
- 3) To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the business, the Liebler family arranged for two community dances. Where were the dances held?
- 4) What was the cost of a meal, including dessert, during the Albert and Marlene Ruby days?
- 5) What was Aurla Bannerman's nickname?
- 6) Can you name some of the bartenders?

(answers on page 4)

## 100 YEARS AT THE OXFORD HOTEL

# Ruby, Bannerman and Yarich

### ALBERT RUBY

In 1958 Albert Ruby set out to buy a garage with a little lunch counter. Instead he bought the Oxford Hotel. Albert and his wife, Marlene, sold everything they owned to buy the Oxford. They had no sooner moved into the hotel than a beer strike was called. Even though they had beer two weeks longer than the Arlington Hotel, it was a long and rough 6 weeks.

In 1958 the hotel still had regular full-time boarders but the casual room rental was starting to slow down a bit. The dining room and beverage rooms, however, were going full steam! Beer was served by the bottle or glass and wine was available in the dining room although the latter was rarely ordered. Albert's homemade sausage and Marlene's pies were much bigger draws than wine.

These were the days when people played shuffleboard on the "ladies side" and the men played poker in the Blue Room. Back then, almost everyone smoked, wherever and whenever.



*Marlene, Linda and Albert Ruby*

Albert and Marlene had 5 children ... daughters Linda, Cathy, Pamela and Wendy and son, Dale. After leaving the Oxford in 1963, the Rubys went on to the Mansion House in Stratford and then to their farm in Milverton. Albert died in 2001.



*Bill Bannerman*

### WILLIAM "BILL" BANNERMAN

Bill and Aurla Bannerman, new to the hotel business in 1963, quickly settled in to life in the village. They were a popular couple and the Oxford was a popular spot.

The hotel was the gathering place for those wanting "a brew or two": for diners wanting a taste of Aurla's famous ribs and pigtails: for the newly-formed

Tavistock Rod & Gun Club meetings: for the older men in town who met daily in the front room to play cards: and for anyone who simply wanted to socialize and have a good time.

It was in the Bannerman days that American hunters used to stay at the hotel. They always marvelled that they didn't have to lock their car doors in Tavistock. In absolute fact, the front and back door to the hotel were never locked.

The Bannermans had 3 children ... Monty, Holly and Peggy. They sold the business in 1968 and moved to Brantford. Bill died in 1989.

### MILAN "MIKE" YARICH

As a small boy growing up in Yugoslavia, Milan Yarich had a dream of one day owning a hotel. It took many years, but his boyhood dream came true.

Mike emigrated to Canada in 1948. He first worked for Ontario Hydro and then moved to Hamilton where he worked for Ried Press for almost 20 years. During that time he acquired several rental properties.

In 1968 Mike purchased the Oxford Hotel and moved to Tavistock. He was always very proud of the fact that with hard work he was able to burn the mortgage in 1978.

During his 40 years of running the Oxford Mike experienced many interesting events. The

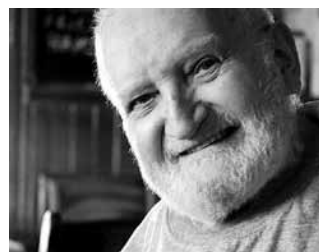


PHOTO BY SHAYDA McCUTCHEEN  
*Mike Yarich, 1923-2008*

one most memorable to him was the filming of a Molson Export beer commercial at the Oxford in 1980. Mike was very proud that Molsons had chosen his hotel to film their advertisement.

Mike died exactly where he wanted to on March 3, 2008 ... in his sleep, at his hotel. Mike willed a large portion of his estate to charitable institutions in Ontario carrying out their purpose in the Tavistock area.

# Tavistock has always liked its beer

Commercial ... Union ... Royal ... Grimms ... Bauers ... Zoellners ... Progress House ... Arlington ... Oxford. What do these names have in common? You guessed it. Each was a hotel in Tavistock at one point in our village's history. Yes, we do like our beer.

As far back as July of 1878 the Woodstock newspaper wrote of Tavistock ... "Notwithstanding the hard times caused by government rule, none of the industries are in a deprived condition. Kalbfleisch and Schaefer Furniture cannot supply the demand. Both mills are running four stone. Three stores are enjoying a rushing business and the four hotels have more than their usual demand for our national beverage – the lager beer."

Given that the early population of this area was of predominantly German background, it's only fitting that beer would have been viewed as the national beverage. Captain Henry Eckstein, founder of Tavistock built the first hotel, a log structure, situated on the triangular piece of land on the north east corner of Woodstock and Hope Streets. His second drinking establishment, The Commercial Hotel, built in 1854, was a prominent Tavistock landmark on the five corners for 80 years.

The origins of the Union Hotel, located on the site of the present Oxford Hotel, are a little murky. It's believed that the Union was built circa 1855 as referenced in the 1861 census which shows Duncan Stewart, innkeeper, listed as the resident



John Landreth operated the Union Hotel from 1882-1897.

THE LEMP STUDIO COLLECTION

on Lot 36, Concession 13, East Zorra. In 1878 it was owned by William Schaefer. Four years later, in 1882, the Union was purchased by John Landreth.

Fred Liebler purchased the hotel from Landreth in March of 1897. At some point a fire destroyed part of the frame structure. The remaining part was moved to the southern edge of the village to serve as a residence when Fred decided to build a new hotel on the site.

The new 3-storey brick building was named "Hotel Oxford." The year was 1906.

## Did You Know?

- The Hotel Oxford was built in 1906 at a cost of \$14,000
- Fred Liebler owned a winning racehorse called "Wisdom King". The horse raced in Canada and the US. With his winnings from "Wisdom King" Fred purchased an ownership stake in "The Eel".
- Art Liebler installed billiard tables at the Oxford in 1922. Some of the travelling salesmen staying at the hotel in subsequent years gave evening demonstrations with their jewelled cues.
- The rate for room and board when the Rubys owned the hotel was \$3 a night (1962). Full-time boarders paid \$12 a week.
- Beer was first served in pitchers during the Bannerman days (1963-68)
- During the 1985 lockout of brewery workers the Oxford was the only hotel in Ontario to have all brands of beer available for the full one-month strike period.

## Answers!

- 1) 15,600 bricks at a cost of \$8.40 per thousand.
- 2) White whiskey was called Zorra wine. It cost \$1.65 a gallon or about one cent an ounce. Zorra wine sold for 5 cents a glass until 1914 when it jumped to 10 cents.
- 3) A modern dance was held at the Opera Hall and an old-time dance at the Masonic Hall. A buffet supper at the Oxford followed the dances.
- 4) The noon meal, the main meal of the day, cost \$1.75 – including pie.
- 5) Aurla usually wore white. She stopped daily at the butcher shop ... a very fast trip in and out. She was nicknamed "The White Tornado"
- 6) Each of the hotel owners tended bar. People also remember Henry (Ike) Eckstein, Mayne Ramseyer and Ken Schmidt. If you know of any other bartenders, please tell us.