

YESTERDAY

News from the Tavistock and District Historical Society

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THE CASSEL WE KNEW!

East Zorra hamlet was once a thriving community. (p4)

1952 - 'Big' Ed Kaufman tells some of his young friends the story behind the totem poles which he carves in his spare time. His young listeners, from the left, are Jimmie Everett, Douglas Wettlaufer, Willie Dawe, and Keith Kaufman.

This photo and a story (p4) appeared in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record on Wednesday, June 11, 1952.

Photo courtesy of "Kitchener Waterloo Record Collection of Photographic Negatives, University of Waterloo Library"

Time takes its toll on a village

Cassel just won't be the same without 100-year-old sawmill

by Gerald Wright • *K-W Record* - Sept. 26, 1980

CASSEL – Unless a miracle happens Saturday, this once bustling village six kilometres southeast of Tavistock will join Ontario's rural ghost towns.



Cassel Cheese Factory

Photo courtesy of the Tavistock & District Historical Society

Cassel's last place of business, a 100-year-old sawmill, will go on the auction block at 10 a.m.

The grocery store folded up two years ago, a tractor repair shop 10 years ago

and a cheese and butter factory 13 years ago. Now it's the mill.

Cassel's only hope - and it's a slim one - is that some unknown entrepreneur may show up at the sale, buy the mill and continue to operate it.

Most people you talk to here expect that whoever buys the mill will dismantle it for use as spare parts on some existing mill.

Nobody feels any worse about it than 82-year-old George Rockett, owner and operator of the mill for the past 24 years.

Other people who feel almost as bad are Rockett's customers including dozens of farmers from within a 100 kilometre radius.

For them it will mean the end of a handy, low-cost lumber supply for farm-building repairs,

Until now any farmer in the area could turn a mature tree in his bush into instant lumber at Rockett's mill.

Unless some unexpected buyer steps in and offers to keep the place going, all that will be just history.

Oldtimers can tell you that Cassel once had a post office, hotel, blacksmith shop, chopping mill, clock and watchmaker, two shoemakers, a wagon shop, a tinsmith and a school.

In 1875, Valentine Grenzebach's cheese factory was turning out 131,000 pounds of cheese a year.

The village took its name from Kassel, the principal city of the German province of Hesse. About 90 per cent of all the original pioneers in this area were Hessian natives.

But it's not just the loss of their mill that Cassel-district folk will mourn.

The biggest loss of all will be the disappearance of George Rockett himself.

He's perhaps the only sawmill operator anywhere who has doubled as a kind of family counsellor and confidant of people with problems of almost any kind.

His customers and clients include many people who came to him as much for his advice as for the lumber he sawed.

A typical bit of Rockett wisdom: "I've learned that if a man tells you he's getting something stolen almost every night, you better watch him. He's the one that's stealing"

Rockett got orders from his doctor two weeks ago to stop sawing lumber. It was the second time he had been given this advice, and after three painful stays in hospital in the past two years, he decided he'd better follow it.

Since the word got out about Rockett's decision, the sawmill's makeshift "office" in a small board building has been filled by a steady procession of friends and customers.

"I had a fellow in here with tears in his eyes yesterday when he heard I couldn't keep it up any longer."

Almost without exception the visitors have come to tell him they're sorry to see him go.

Rockett, a bachelor, was, a successful district farmer who became a sawyer almost by accident in 1956.

"I took over the mill as payment for a debt. Until then I had never sawed a piece of lumber in my life."

The present sawmill was set up 50 years ago by the late 'Little' Ed Kaufman to replace a mill that had been destroyed by fire.

Its main building is historically important because prior to being taken over as a sawmill, it served at various times as a blacksmith shop and chopping mill.

The chopping machinery is still intact. Rockett describes it as "a 15-inch double-end-drive Robinson chopper" and it will be sold with the sawmill and all its accoutrements Saturday.

Rockett has done most of the work (and all the repairs) alone at the mill for the past 2-1/2 years.

Previous to that he always had at least one employee and at one time had five.

The mill's production capacity, when fully manned, was about 5,000 board feet a day.

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MUSEUM HOURS:
Now Open third Saturday of the month 1-4 p.m. Closed months of January & February
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MEMORIES OF CASSEL

by Lyle Roth

A few of my older friends decided it was time to begin smoking. As Laverne Brenneman was amongst them, and as his parents ran the General Store, I am assuming that he had access to the tobacco shelf. One day I was asked to join them and I experienced my first smoke. The gang stashed the tobacco in an old car that was close to the river on the Brenneman farm and this became a gathering place several times a week. In the evening we boys would play horseshoes and other games at the corner store when the men would socialize inside.

One night, following our afternoon of smoking, each parent came out, grabbed his son and took him into the store. It appears someone had seen us smoking and after we left visited the area and found the tobacco. He informed the parents that night at the store. Each boy was given several blows with a belt across his bottom. It must have hurt because the screams carried out of the store.

Since I lived with my grandparents, my father was not present to whip me and I was left outside. When I heard the cries I ran home. This terminated the afternoon smoking sessions. Although you might not believe it, that day was my last cigarette.

Lyle (Mickey) Roth, along with his mother and brothers, lived in Cassel with his grandparents, Andrew and Catherine Kaufman, in the early 1930s while his father, Laverne, was playing hockey with the Buffalo Bisons.



1935 Cassel Black Shirts:

Back row: left to right: Ron Wettlaufer, James Kaufman, Lloyd Pearson, Fred Kaufman, Harold Kaufman, Roy Kaufman, Walter Yeck; middle row: Lewis Wettlaufer; front row: Jack Henry, Arnold Kaufman, coach, Fred Redmond, James Wettlaufer, manager, Gordon Matthies; in front: Wray Kaufman.

Photo courtesy of Ron Wettlaufer

Black Shirts gain respect

An excerpt from "Raising the Rafters"

The two teams that actually met in the 1935 league finals were the Black Shirts from Cassel and the 'Highway Lads' from Shakespeare. Cassel was a new entry in the league that year and had looked impressive right from the start. Their only loss in the regular schedule was their opener against the tough Hickson team, but even there they should have been more fortunate. When Cassel defeated Shakespeare 5-1 in the second league game, the editor of The Gazette liked what he saw. In the line-up for Cassel their first year were Fred Redmond in goal, Lloyd Pearson and Jim Kaufman on defence, Ron "Farmer" Wettlaufer and Fred and Roy Kaufman on forward, and Gordon Matthies, Jack Henry, Harold Kaufman, and Walter Yeck as alternates. The team colour was black.

The Cassel outfit had two advantages over the other teams in the league. First, the Thames River ran just south of the hamlet and was a handy spot on which to practice. Second, the team practices were guided by Roter Roth whenever he was home from Buffalo. Roter had played junior hockey in Stratford on a line with Howie Morenz and was on a semi-professional team in Buffalo.

Practice sure did pay off for the Black Shirts. In the league finals, Cassel defeated Shakespeare, winning the first game 2-1 and administering a 6-1 trimming in the second.

With the victory, Cassel earned the right to carry on in the Ontario Rural playdowns and met Beachville of the Thames Valley League in the next round. The Black Shirts lost the round by a score of 11-3 but that did not stop the local editor from continuing his praise of the players.

An exhibition game was arranged at the end of the 1935 season between Cassel and the Tavistock Intermediate Greenshirts to see how the Cassel youngsters would stack up against an OHA team. The Blackshirts lost 7-3 but more than held their own. The Greenshirts "had to work hard to get their goals, judging by the sweat pouring off their brows.

The Blackshirts continued their march toward the 1940 ORHA Intermediate championship defeating Ripley in the second round 20-5 and took the semi-finals over Renton 7-6. The team went up against Schomberg in the final series and won 4-1 and 3-2 for the championship.

The Cassel team successfully defended its title in 1941. They defeated Brooksdale to win the North Oxford league final then defeated Drumbo, Kintore, and Fisherville in the final. Gord Matthies scored the winning goal late in overtime.

There was a North Oxford League in 1942 but Cassel did not enter a team. The nation had things on its mind other than hockey. The league disbanded after the 1942 season until the end of the war.

**WE NEED YOUR HELP
WITH OUR TAVISTOCK
SCOUTING PROJECT!**

The Tavistock and District Historical Society is



currently researching the Scouting movement in Tavistock which began in the 1920's. Anyone with photos, minutes, or other information from any era is asked to contact Mary Nicklas at 519-655-9915.

The Cassel we knew!

Hamlet was once a thriving community

From its humble beginnings of a few log homes in the mid 1800s, Cassel, by the turn of the century, had developed into a bustling little community.

Mail for Cassel was picked up at Ratho Station by the postmaster twice each week and conveniently located for pick-up by the residents first at the Commercial Hotel and later at the General Store.

The General Store carried everything from rubber boots to shotgun shells and featured all the latest news about everyone in the neighbourhood. Wagons were made and repaired at the wagon shop: horses were shod by the local blacksmith.

The sawmill on Louis Kaufman's farm was abuzz with activity. In 1903 just about every farmer purchased shares in the co-operative to build the Cassel Cheese and Butter Company

factory building.

The Commercial Hotel was one of the many business ventures of Nichlous Kaufmann, one of the first settlers in the area. The men would stop by for a cold brew, a good smoke and perhaps a game of checkers. If their boots needed repair, why that could be done while they waited by the shoemaker in residence at the hotel.

The women in the community spent their time

cooking and cleaning and taking care of their growing families. One day a week was reserved for "calling" day. A clean apron would be donned and the lady of the house would either "receive" or "go calling".

For the younger set, the very best of times were spent at the local swimming hole on a lazy hot summer's day or, on the freezing days of winter, skating on the river.

And, of course, there was school ... reading and writing and 'rithmetic taught to the tune of a hickory stick. Cassel School, officially named SS #1 East Zorra, was located on Black Louis Kaufman's farm about a mile south of the General Store.

The original school was a log cabin built in 1837. Fifty years later a one-room brick schoolhouse was built on the same site. Generations of Kaufmans, Currahs, Pearsons, Yecks, Lotzs, Wettlaufers and the list goes on received some or all of their education at Cassel School. They would go on make their living as master tradesmen, homemakers, businessmen, farmers, professionals, and more. Some moved far away while others stayed on the family homestead. Wherever their lives took them, one common and unshakeable bond remained, they were all from Cassel school. The school closed in June of 1965.

Church played an important part in the lives of people of Cassel. The early settlers were primarily German Lutherans who established a congregation that met in members' homes.

In 1854 they erected a log house of worship and in 1866 built St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. The bell that still calls its members to worship was purchased in 1902. This year, 2014, St. Matthew's is celebrating its 160th anniversary.



JOHN LOTH:

John Loth and sons purchased the Commercial Hotel in Cassel from Nichlous Kaufman in 1881. John's son Louis operated the hotel until 1893 when it was sold to a Schippling.

Tintype courtesy of Bill Gladding

Hobby tough on fingers *Excerpt from K-W Record, June 11, 1952*

CASSEL – In the realm of woodcarving (Big) Ed. J. Kaufman of Cassel, southeast of Tavistock, has one of the most unusual hobbies. He is a totem pole carver. Totem pole carving is an art in which one could spend a lifetime of study. When engaged in actual carving operations all sense of time disappears. Mr. Kaufman said he began whittling at night and when he looked out the window a few hours later, dawn was breaking.

The Tingt and other Indian tribes of Alaska and British Columbia developed this highly characteristic type of handicraft, said the Cassel man. He became interested in Indian lore through his association with their race while working in lumber camps near Parry Sound before the First World War.

"I became acquainted with an Indian

chieftain, Tommy Jones, who lives at Cape Crocker, 14 miles north of Wiarton. "He is a white man's Indian. He is the master of a Masonic Lodge and is in great demand as an after-dinner speaker.

Contrary to popular belief, totem poles are not idols or religious symbols. In the early days missionaries made their Christian converts chop down totem poles in this erroneous belief.

The figures on the poles mean many things. Mr. Kaufman found – an old legendary tale, the story of a battle or some other happening. Each clan or tribe had a different symbol always carved at the top of the pole. It could be a raven, bear, eagle or other fish or animal.

Indian lineage comes down through the mother. A number of family branches would be united under the symbol of one

clan – a raven, for instance. If the Indian was travelling he could tell whether he was in friendly territory by the symbol atop the totem pole outside the house.

Today the art is dying out in B.C. Young Indians regard it as much the same menial job as basket weaving and would rather have good jobs in canneries or sawmills.

Mr. Kaufman said to carve a totem pole one begins at the top and works down. For his miniature poles he uses dead basswood. He does not follow strictly the Indian legends from the original poles; neither are all his carvings truly authentic.

He has deviated into his own ideas such as carving images of friends in which their odd characteristics are emphasized. He has even made a startling image of himself.

At 67 he is fit as a fiddle.