

YESTERDAY

News from the Tavistock and District Historical Society

SPECIAL EDITION

OCTOBER 2016

Tavistock: It was 1916



1916 started badly. World War 1, the war people believed would be over by Christmas of 1914, was raging on with no end in sight. News from the battlefield was grim. One in every five soldiers wasn't coming home. Enlistment in this rural community with its strong German heritage and large Mennonite population had been slow.

At the end of January the 168th Oxford Battalion opened a recruiting office in Tavistock in the Kalbfleisch Block, known in later years as the Opera Hall. Among the new recruits were the young men in this picture ... a picture that has become known as "Oxford's Own". They were an interesting group and included a bank clerk, a tailor, a machinist, 3 farmers, a salesman and a box maker.

The box maker worked at Zimmerman

Brothers, a local factory that had been going since 1868. World War 1 created an unprecedented demand for wooden boxes, especially boxes in knock-down form called shooks. Fully 75% of Zimmermann's wartime business was in shooks.

Another local firm, the Tavistock woollen mill, was also into wartime production. For over a year the woollen mill had been running until 9 o'clock every single night

except Sunday making yarn used in knitting socks and gloves for the soldiers.

It wasn't just the Tavistock businesses that helped the war effort. The Patriotic Sewing Circle, a group of local women organized by the Tavistock Women's Institute, more than did their bit. In January of 1916 they made a healthy contribution of hand-crafted items to the Red Cross ... 45 pairs of socks, 87 fracture pillows, 168 shirts, 316 bandages, 1120 face cloths and 5160 mouth wipes.

Local families contributed. When it was announced that the 71st Battalion was scheduled to march through Tavistock in February and that the men were to be billeted overnight in private homes every single household, save two or three, offered

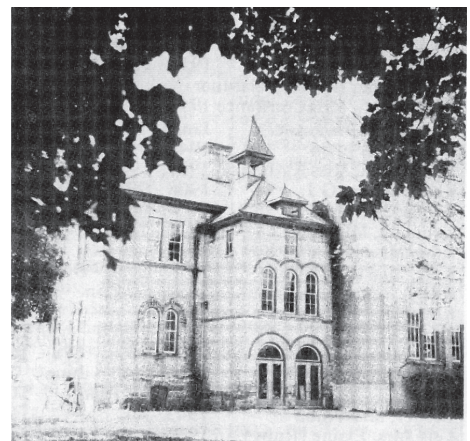
up a tasty supper, a warm bed for the night and a healthy breakfast to the men in uniform.

While wartime news captured people's attention, local news got them talking. The Tavistock school board approved an addition to the public school. The new rooms would include space for the Continuation School (grades 9-12) which had been housed at another location. In 1916 Tavistock boasted the second largest Continuation School in all of Oxford County.

Joe Steinman's ad for billiards caused a lot of chatter. Whoever heard of a woman playing billiards ... especially in Tavistock!

At one institution of higher learning, the University of Toronto, a young man named William Kaufmann from Cassel was listed as

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a successful student in the Ontario Dental College examinations. Doc Bill Kaufmann would be Tavistock's dentist for almost 50 years.

And a new institution was in the works for Tavistock. The Carnegie Corporation approved the plans submitted for a new public library. Work was to commence at once at the site on Maria Street.

And then, once again, the talk turned to war ... the Battle of Verdun, the Battle of Jutland and the Battle of the Somme. The cost of war, both in human lives and dollars and cents, was adding up at an unprecedented and staggering rate.

Constant calls were put out in 1916 for more men. From this area George McTavish signed up. He died in action in France in 1917. Milton Capling enlisted. He died in action in Flanders the following year. Herbert Spencer Weston answered the call. He was killed in action in Passchendale in 1917. Roy Rennie enlisted in 1916 for action in World War 1. He enlisted again in World War II.

Women were being drawn into the war in a wide variety of ways. Housewives in this area and all across the nation were asked to change their family's eating habits and to reduce consumption overall as food was needed for the soldiers overseas.

If things are sounding quite gloomy, it's because they were. Even in the darkest of times people need a release and need to have some fun.

The July 1 Dominion Day celebrations in Tavistock did just that. The Gazette reported that almost at daybreak the automobiles and



Recruits line up outside the town hall Recruiting Depot on Woodstock Street North.

trains and carts starting pouring in and by 9 am the village square (the 5 corners) resembled a veritable Broadway. There was a parade, of course, with prizes for best decorated car. The parade went from the fair grounds to Sebastopol and back and all around the village.

Patriotic dances organized by local women called the "Willing Workers" were huge successes. So many people attended that good dancing was almost impossible.

While the overall view of the world was grim, here in Tavistock things were lighting up literally. After years of talk hydroelectricity came to Tavistock. Promptly at 6:15 pm on October 26, 1916, Reeve Appel pressed the button which lit up the village.

The Gazette was busy printing ads for new gadgets like electric irons and toasters and light bulbs. It was the start of new career opportunities. A front page notice in bold print read "WANTED - at once, a young man desirous of learning electric wiring".

Believe it or not, a dog made the news in the local paper. In 1916 Tavistock had a laundry owned by a Chinaman as they were commonly called at the time. The owner's dog was run over by a car. The Gazette noted that the pup had been a very comforting

companion and the editor wrote a short verse in memory of the puppy.

The day was young
And thick with fog
An auto chugged past
And killed the chink's dog.

So much for political correctness 100 years ago.

The last major topic of conversation of the year ... and it was a major topic ... was the news that an inventory of men between ages 16 and 65 was to be done through the Post Office the last week in December. Everyone knew what this meant. The all-volunteer army was not sufficient to win the war. Conscription was coming. It was just a matter of time.

And so ends 1916.



Tavistock & District Historical Society
37 Maria Street,
Box 280, Tavistock,
Ontario, Canada
N0B 2R0

Executive:
Secretary – Mary Nicklas
Treasurer – Bob Rudy

Membership: \$10/year

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