

# YESTERDAY

## News from the Tavistock and District Historical Society

VOLUME 29

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### THE MILKMAN

by Barb Matthies

If you are 70 years of age or older you probably remember having your milk and cream delivered to your door each day by the local dairy. Mom or dad would place the right amount of change into the empty reusable bottles each night or early morning and place them on the porch for the milkman to exchange for full bottles.

The milk wagon was pulled up the street by a horse, Patty, Bess or Molly, whatever names their owner and master had given them. They didn't have to be reined or told when to move along as they knew exactly when to start, when to stop and wait, and when to move on to the next homes. The milkman would return the empty quarts, pints or half pints in his metal carrier, which held six bottles, to the wagon, filling it again, and continue to go door to door with a good morning or how are you to-day to his faithful customers.

The children on their walk to school would always stop to pet Patty or Bess and often would end up feeding the horse the apples intended for their recess lunch.

Tavistock had such a milk business C. C. Matthies was embossed in the glass bottles. Charles Conrad Matthies started his milk business in 1915 by going to a neighbouring farm and bringing milk to his family home at 61 Woodstock Street South, where patrons would bring their own containers to be filled.

In 1916 he bought Josiah Rudy's milk business known as Silver Creek Dairy. He, also, bought a seventeen acre farm on Lot 34 & 35, Concession 12 of East Zorra Township (Highway 59) from Kaspar Kaufman, and lived and ran the C.C. Matthies Dairy from there. The building still stands on this property.

In 1942 Charles bought the farm across the road from Minnie Wettlaufer and built a new

dairy barn and drive shed. Mr. Matthies had one of the finest herds of Ayrshire cattle in Ontario and if you visited the large new barn it was most evident by the rows of sleek animals stabled there, 26 cows-24 Ayrshires, one Jersey and one Holstein.

Pasteurization equipment was installed in the dairy building and that is when it took on the new name "Robleen Farms Dairy" named after his son Robert and daughter Eileen hence "Robleen". A new bottle was made with the writing "Robleen Farms Dairy" on one side and a picture of a frolicking calf and a rhyme on the other side saying "O Boy Do I Feel Fine Try Robleen Milk I Just Had Mine"

Charles would employ some of the town teenage boys as well as his daughter Eileen, to help with the milk delivery on Saturdays and in the summer holidays.



Franklin Berger and Eileen Matthies.  
Old Boys and Girls Reunion float 1930

In 1946 Charles sold the business to Henry and Harold Neeb who also bought out the milk business of Gordon L. Ratz who had been in the milk business as well for twenty years combining the two into one. The business was still run from the Matthies Dairy and was renamed The Tavistock Dairy.

In 1949 Mahlon Leis purchased the business from the Neebs. Mahlon and the Neebs still used the horse and milk wagon for a few years before Mahlon changed to a milk truck for deliveries. Mahlon continued to run the operation from the farm until 1963 when he built a new dairy at 101 Hendershott Street in Tavistock. In the coming years due to the changing market and products such as jugs, gallon, and juices the small dairy was no longer competitive. In 1966 he started a franchise out of Oxford Dairies in Woodstock offering a complete line of products. Tokens could be used for payment. Mahlon operated the franchise until 1974 when he sold out to Oxford Dairies which later became Beatrice Foods. Mahlon stayed in the milk business joining Maple Lane Dairies in Stratford a subsidiary of Beatrice Foods managing that plant until 1983 when he was transferred to the Company main plant in Kitchener until his retirement in 1987.

The Matthies barn and drive shed still stand on the property west of Tavistock.

Oh for that time years ago when our lives were so much more laid back that we took time to chat with our neighbours and stop to talk to the people on the street, instead of rushing in and out of the super market or corner store to quickly purchase our needs.

*Fact and Fantasy – The Tavistock Dairy –page 130  
has more back ground to the local dairy industry.  
Acknowledgement- Tavistock Gazette*

# Tavistock Produce & Egg Circle

*30 years of the egg grading business in Tavistock*

By Barb Matthies

The Tavistock Produce had its beginning in April 1946, with Roy Knights, his brother Leslie Knights and nephew Fred Ghent in partnership. It occupied some of the ground floor of the Opera Hall a building on Woodstock Street North.

They began picking up eggs from area farmers with a car and trailer, then a small truck. Roy and daughter Norma candled the eggs using one and sometimes two egg grading machines.

Roy had been handling eggs and produce since he was thirteen years of age which is believed to be the longest period of any person in Western Ontario. He formerly was part owner of the Woodstock Produce.

From small beginnings, calling on farmers for their eggs, good management and honest dealings, soon demanded a fleet of four trucks and larger quarters. They took over the complete ground floor of the Opera Hall building, part was office, part egg grading, part cooler and another part feed room storage (SunRay Feeds and New Life), as they branched out into supplying feed as well. They were in the poultry business and at one time also sold potatoes. In a room on the second floor corrugated cases were assembled for the shipping of graded eggs to Toronto. With the added business more staff was required. Over the years of operation they would have employed over thirty people

For those who are not familiar with the egg candling and grading machine, two people work on each machine. The wooden crates of eggs which were collected from the farmer were trucked the same day to the Produce. The crate was placed on a bench at one end of the machine where a sealed beam candler was attached. One person took the eggs out of the crates, two eggs in each hand and candled them picking out any B's and cracks and placing them on trays on a nearby bench. The Grade "A" eggs were placed on an incline that rolled them down on to the grading machine where they are sorted by weight, Grade 'A Extra Large, Large, Medium, Small and Pee Wee. They drop off and roll down into separate alleys. The second person carefully packed the graded eggs into separate fiber cases (corrugated cardboard). A case held thirty dozen and when it was full the case was tagged appropriately and carried to another employee who sealed the top of the cases and placed them in a cool storage room sorting them by grade. They would then be trucked to Toronto to be sold.

When the farmer's eggs were picked up at the farms, their names were written on a tag on the end of each crate and also the number of crates they were shipping was recorded. Each



*Norma Knights and Doreen Wagner.*

lot was kept together and graded together and a bench count was taken. This is the record of the number of eggs in each grade which is credited to the producer. This count was checked by the packer and grader to make sure there were no errors. The bench sheet then went into the office where that all important "egg money" was worked out by the office personnel. The truck driver delivered the envelope to the farmer the following week when he returned to pick up their eggs.

The Tavistock Produce also bought a farm on the thirteenth concession of East Zorra, just north of Hickson and operated a dairy herd from there. Roy would start his day by going to the produce in the early morning to check to make sure that the operation was being looked after, and then drove to the farm to work there, returning to the office in the late afternoon.

In March 1959 tragedy struck as Roy Knights suddenly passed away at the Stratford General Hospital where he had been a patient for about a week. Just prior to his death the Produce had also purchased the farm of Charles Matthies at the west boundary of the village. The farm "Kay Gee" named after the Knights and Ghent owners was sold on the thirteenth line and the operation was moved to the newly purchased farm. Morris Snarey, herdsman and his wife Cora and family also moved from the former farm. In 1964 what had been the Tavistock Dairy building was converted to the egg grading station and all operations were then conducted from the farm.

In 1965 tragedy struck again when Fred and wife, Norma Ghent were killed in a car accident. This left Leslie as sole owner of the business.

As change came into the industry with many small flocks being replaced by cage laying houses, Les built a cage laying barn on the east end of the farm property. This supplied a lot of

the eggs needed for the business.

At this time an egg washing machine was installed. The eggs were lifted by vacuum cups out of the trays and placed on the conveyor belt where they were first washed and cleaned prior to their actual grading. The new machine was capable of handling 7,500 eggs an hour.

In 1975 Les and wife Helen retired and sold the egg business to Erb's Poultry Farms Ltd. in New Hamburg. This was the end of the egg grading business in Tavistock.

On April 1, 1930 Frank P. Corp purchased the Egg Circle business on Elizabeth Street, Tavistock from Duncan McKellar with a membership of 100. He sold it to Clarence C. Wettlaufer May 1, 1940 with a membership of 190.

**3 May 1950:**

## **C. C. Wettlaufer in Egg Business 10 Years**

Ten years ago on May 1, the business of the Tavistock Egg Circle changed hands, and on Monday of this week Clarence C. Wettlaufer looked back to the day when he decided to become his own "boss", taking over the complex business of grading and shipping eggs. The business has expanded considerably in the past decade, and today Mr. Wettlaufer not only grades eggs, but is also dealer for well-known brands of feeds, as well as poultry and chick equipment, and live poultry. With additional lines being added it was found necessary to expand the building, and a large addition was added to the front of the building, located on Elizabeth Street. The new addition houses the feeds and poultry equipment, as well as a workshop where the egg crates, as well as chicken crates are assembled. On purchasing the business from Frank P. Corp ten years ago, eggs were brought to the Circle for grading and while this still holds for many customer's it was found necessary to send a truck into the country to pick up eggs. This departure led to more and more contracts being made, and a larger feed business naturally followed. Ten years ago eggs were only received and graded three days a week, while today eggs are received and graded daily.

*Fact and Fantasy page 162-163 has additional info. Acknowledgement- Tavistock Gazette*



## Till We Meet Again

Wednesday,  
October 19th  
7:00 p.m.

An evening of  
wartime songs  
with Ted Comiskey  
and Jim Gonder.  
Accompanying  
WW1 display.

### Goodwill donation

All events are at the  
Tavistock Legion Hall,  
Branch 518,  
223 Hope Street  
West, Tavistock

This concert is part of  
a 5-day event at the  
Legion Hall and is  
year 3 of a 5-year  
WW1 commemorative  
activities program.

**Membership dues  
for 2016 are now  
due - still \$10.  
Simply complete  
the Renewal form  
found at [http://  
tavistockhistory.  
ca/membership](http://tavistockhistory.ca/membership).  
Payment can be  
sent by mail or  
dropped off at the  
museum at 37  
Maria Street.**

# Santa Claus Parade

*A festive Tavistock tradition since 1939*

By Mary Nicklas

We have recently enjoyed watching the Men's Club Annual Santa Claus Parade. Christmas parties with packs for up to 700 youngsters sponsored by the Men's Club have been held annually since 1939. The venue has changed over the years. It began outdoors around the lighted Christmas tree in the square, and now a parade is held featuring floats from organizations, commercial establishments and families and has had musical accompaniment by local groups, Tavistock Citizens Band, New Hamburg Concert Band, North Easthope Pipe Band and the Hickson Central School Band.

During WW 2 money was collected for the British Children's Fund to help thousands of children in England who were without a home and parents and would not have the happy Christmas Canadians enjoyed. In 1950 the 10th annual visit of Santa to our town both the Opera Hall and the Library Hall were jammed for the visit and at both Halls comedy motion pictures were shown, with Walter Schaefer and Carl Seltzer as the projectionists. The Men's Club sold tickets on turkeys to raise the money to provide candy for the children. In a space of about 5 years it went from being in the Opera Hall and Library Hall (both halls are no longer). Then in 1953-1955 in the Arena which the owners graciously gave free to the Men's Club and 1956 to the Memorial Hall. Starting in mid 1960's entertainment was provided by residents of the community and Santa also visited the nursing and seniors homes.

The first Santa Claus Parade was held Nov 26, 1983 with twenty-three entries. The Tavistock Citizens Band along with the Wilmot Twirlers led the parade with the North Easthope Pipe Band participating. Other floats included Bonnie Brae Nursing Home, Baby Band, Four Thumbs, Tavistock Cheese Co., Mohr's Home Hardware, Sommers Motor Generator Sales, Stedman's Store, Township of East Zorra-Tavistock, Tavistock Braves,



Photo: December 1992 - 1st Tavistock Beavers dressed as reindeer and pulling Santa's sleigh are, left to right: kneeling - Daniel Ferguson, Jeremy Quehl, Steven Meekes; standing - Mark Brooks, Mark Halliday, Travis Blum, and Adrian Loree. (Photo courtesy of the Tavistock Gazette)

Tavistock Brownies, Tavistock Fire Department, Doug Wiffen Family, Penny Jensen Family, People CareCentre, Len Johnson Family, Hostess Munchie and of course Santa Claus. His sleigh pulled into the parking lot beside Mohr's hardware and the people flocked to the site where Santa and his helpers handed out candy canes, rings and potato chips to 500 children. Congratulations to the Merchants Retail Committee for their most rewarding efforts. To say it was a success for Tavistock's first Santa Claus Parade would put it very mildly. It was tremendous!

The Tavistock Men's Club and Board of Trade continued to sponsor the event every year until 1992 and since then the Men's Club alone sponsors the parade. One special feature of the parade since its beginning is Tavistock's first motorized fire vehicle. The restoration of the 1925 Ford Model T. was in charge of Ed Pellow manager of South Easthope Mutual Insurance Company. The 2015 parade was also a tremendous success with 21 entries. We look forward to the 2016 parade to see who will participate.

*Acknowledgements:  
Tavistock Gazette and Fact & Fantasy.*

## 2016 Annual General Meeting Saturday, April 2, 2016 - 1:30 p.m.

Grace United Church, Tavistock • Speaker: Dr. Paul Bartlett • Special Guest: Mrs. Ples, South Africa  
**Subject: "I Can't Help It, I'm Part Neanderthal"  
or How Genetics (DNA) Helps Us Trace Our Deep Ancestry**

# Insurance at a premium

*A brief history of South Easthope Mutual insurance business*



*The original tin building owned by W.S. Russell was demolished in May of 1967.*

*By Mary Nicklas*

Over the past few months we have seen the property at the corner of Woodstock Street and Jane Streets transformed, under the watchful eye of our seniors, into a majestic office building the home of the South Easthope Mutual Insurance Co. This company started with humble beginnings in 1871 with a small group of farmers who banded together to furnish fire and lightning protection. The first name of the company was The Mutual Fire Insurance Company of the Township of South Easthope. It served not only that Township but many of the surrounding communities.

The first meetings were held in the hotel at Sebastopol. The business of the company was carried on at the present site beginning in 1889. It was a two-storey, metal covered building. The Brownies, Scouts and Cubs held their meetings in the upstairs meeting rooms during the years 1950-1960.

In 1931, Mr. Edwin Caister was appointed secretary-treasurer, with his daughter Marguerite as his assistant. Marguerite was appointed secretary-treasurer in 1942 when her father retired. She remained in that position as

well as being office manager until 1966 when Edward Pellow accepted that position. She continued in the position of secretary-treasurer until her retirement in 1973, having missed only three working days during that time.

In 1967, the old building which was cold and drafty and heated by coal stoves was demolished and a handsome new single-storey brick structure was put in its place. Later a two-storey addition was added to better serve the growing number of policy holders.

In 1972 on the 100th anniversary of the Company the board of directors decided to

mark the occasion by extending an invitation to its policy holders to attend a Rib and Pigtail Supper at the Tavistock and District Community Arena on October 5th. There was such a good response that manager Edward Pellow had to break the event into two nights, Monday Oct. 4 and Tuesday Oct. 5th for the more than 1600 members. The company began with 92 policy holders and \$125,000 at risk. The financial statement for the year ending Dec. 31, 1970, showed close to 2,000 policy holders and \$73,542,000 at risk.

In 1990 the Company was instrumental in having Tavistock's first motorized fire vehicle restored. It was a 1926 model T. Ford fire truck which was originally purchased from Ingersoll at the cost of \$1,400. A replacement was purchased in 1950 and after being equipped cost around \$6,000. and the surplus truck was sold by auction to a local grocer for \$64.00. A special room was added to the office to display the restored truck.

To celebrate their 125th anniversary policy holders as well as local residents were invited to Queen's Park, Saturday, June 15, 1996. About 6,000 people attended and many sat down to a complimentary meal served in the arena by staff members and service club volunteers. The theme was country fair and there were several attractions for visitors to view during the afternoon and evening.

On February 20, 2015 the official ground breaking ceremony was held for the new head office. The same shovel was used for ground breaking in 1967 for the existing building. This new facility makes a statement that the South Easthope Mutual intends to remain part of Tavistock well into the future.

*Acknowledgements: Tavistock Gazette, Stratford Beacon Herald, Fact & Fantasy*



*Early directors of SEH, from the left: J.A. Fraser, Werner Mogk, John Cook, Leonard Schaefer, Werner Yungblut, A.H. Goring, Wm. S. Russell, Ed Caister, Conrad Wilker, John Pfaff.*

## **Tavistock & District Historical Society**

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

### **Executive:**

Secretary – Mary Nicklas  
Treasurer – Bob Rudy

**Membership: \$10/year**

### **Directors:**

Paul Bartlett  
Brian Bennett  
Harry Lawry  
Barb Matthias  
Denise McLachlin

Ed Pellow

**Volunteers:**  
Bill Gladding  
Sherrill Calder  
Tim Mosher

### **MUSEUM HOURS:**

Now Open third Saturday of the month 1-4 p.m. Closed months of January & February  
*Other times by appointment:  
call 519-655-9915 or 519-655-3342*