

Vintage Views: How to keep meat in the heat

VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

Tavistock and District Historical Society

The generations who came before us were a clever bunch. Without refrigeration, they could keep food and drink of every description cooled and safe. The Vance Meat Market on Woodstock Street North (today where Tavistock Dental is located) was no exception.

David Vance operated his butcher shop here from 1891-1904. After it burned to the ground in 1908, it was rebuilt as a larger, two-storey brick structure that had a variety of businesses in it until it, too, burned in 1985. Mr. Vance advertised his shop as the “City Meat Market” in the Tavistock Gazette, supplying meats and abattoir services to the Berlin (Kitchener) market. As well, he was asking to purchase skins and hides, presumably to make leather products. Next door to his shop on the right was Yost’s Carriage Works where they would have needed leather harnesses and straps. Note the carriage wheels leaning against Vance’s shop wall on the right.

There’s no record of who took this picture, but it was likely one of the five itinerant photographers who worked in Tavistock before John Lemp set up his popular studio in 1908. The precise date of when it was taken wasn’t recorded, or who the five people are in the photo. It’s likely that Vance is standing in the doorway for this posed shot.

This is a good example of a find in the collection of personal effects of an elderly widow of Tavistock, Emma Vollmerhausen, who passed away and her estate was being cleared. This picture was at risk of being thrown out with many other papers but I kept it and, decades later, donated it to the Tavistock and District Historical Society. It has been slightly cleaned up using digital technology. If you find or have pictures of local life, whether business, personal, church, school, sports, farming or other-

wise, please consider donating them to your local history group. Often times, they can be unique, so if they’re thrown out or deleted, it’ll be a permanent loss of the record of local history.

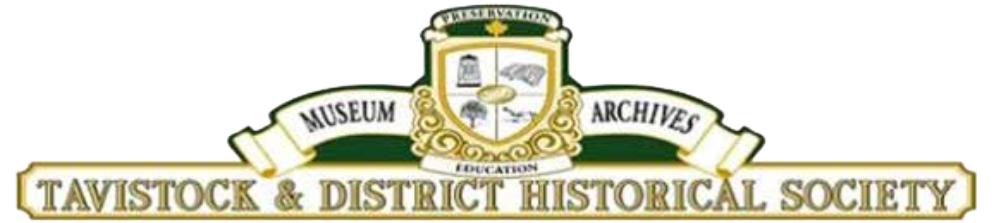
It’s interesting to see the sausage rings, goose and meats hanging in the window, the style of delivery wagon with “D. Vance” printed on its back end, the large carriage step, the two almost hidden boys on the left and the curious canine likely sniffing a tasty treat just behind him. The house on the north side is still there, though the board-and-batten walls and late Victorian gingerbread trim are long gone.

The most interesting detail is the dark sign with white lettering on the left edge of the shop. It says, “Fresh Oysters For Sale Here.” Oysters in small-town southern Ontario 120-years-ago? Even today, they would be a rare sight in local shops. Seafood spoils quickly, especially if it’s not refrigerated, so it makes you wonder how they kept these shellfish fresh, probably coming all the way from Atlantic Canada. This prompted the History Mystery question this week.

This week’s History Mystery: How did businesses and homeowners keep food and drink cold during hot weather, long before electric refrigeration became popular? The answer is a method that usually had a temperature lower than simply putting comestibles in a cool basement, or by draping a wet cloth over them and allowing evaporation to provide gentle cooling. This question is open to anyone under the age of 22. Send your answer, first and last name, your age and the name of your community or rural route number to tim_mosher@hotmail.com. The first person to answer this correctly will have this information published in the next edition.

The answer to last week’s History Mystery: The photo was a posed staff picture of 21 employees of the Tavistock Milling Company and the question was, “What article of clothing of at least three people was made of cardboard?” The question was open to all ages and answered correctly first by Connie Hitzeroth of Tavistock: the shirt collars.

Apologies to the History Mystery winner two editions ago for misspelling her name. Instead of “Connie Roth” it should have been Connie Hitzeroth.



(PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN; LEMP STUDIO COLLECTION #5016)

The quality of photos advanced quickly from its invention in France in 1822. By the time this photo was taken about 75 years later, the detail, sharpness, tonal range, camera and darkroom techniques produced untold numbers of high-quality pictures valued today as a record of how our ancestors lived.

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