

Dusty roads and thirsty throats

VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

Tavistock and District Historical Society

Last week's article showed an 1895 photo of the Commercial Hotel at the main intersection in Tavistock and this week is an excellent indoor photo of its well-stocked bar, owner and two employees in a setting that would be the envy of a Hollywood film with an old-time bar-room scene.

The ornate cash register has a plate above the keys with "Tavistock" on it and on the very top it says, "This Registers the amount of your Purchase." Beer and whiskey seem to dominate the drink selection or coffee could be had from the large urn on the left. Four decorative pistols hang from the mirror and three draught beer-tap handles are in front of barman Loth.

The three natty men are clearly posing for the photographer who used natural light to illuminate this ornate setting, but Mr. Evans didn't follow instructions to "hold still" as his face is slightly blurred. Indoor-exposure times were very long by today's standards (one-eighth of a second versus 1/250th), which is also why people posing for photos during the first century of photography usually aren't smiling because to hold a smile for a photo very often results in a stiff, wooden look. Today's fast shutter speeds allow for more spontaneous, natural expressions and stop-action movements.

The original Commercial Hotel building was Georgian style, so it looked very similar to Fryfogel Inn east of Shakespeare but with big porches. Mr. Jung kept the main

building that stretched east and west (Hope Street today) and added the north-south part (Woodstock Street today), plus a third floor in 1896. This is why the window shapes don't match on the lower two floors in last week's photo. Jung was an enterprising businessman who recognized the value of a good location as his hotel was at the centre of the village and only a moment's walk to the train station immediately north of it.

The late Carl Seltzer's *Fact & Fantasy* (a local history book published in 1967 by the Tavistock Rotary Club) has a good description of the Commercial's facilities (page 153) in 1898 when John Landreth purchased the property for \$13,500 from Mr. Jung.

"His premises are well equipped having hot-water heating, a private water system. For the commercial trade he has three large sample rooms thoroughly equipped. There are forty-three bedrooms in the house, and the dining-room seats fifty guests. The bar is most elaborate."

The Commercial's heyday passed when prohibition became law in Ontario from 1916-1927 greatly limiting the sale of all alcohol. By 1932, the hotel lost its third floor and part of the first and second floors were removed. The remainder was turned into a gas station and lunchroom. In 1945, Wally Schaefer bought the property, lived on the second floor with his young family, retired and sold the property in 1973. Three years later, Dave Jutzi Sr. purchased the property and in 1986, what remained of the grand old structure was demolished to make way for a three-shop plaza and gas station, as it is today.

Mayor Phil Schaefer is Wally Schaefer's son. He grew up on this property and recuperated the liquor cabinet that's on the left in the photo during the demolition, refurbished it and it now graces his home as a China cabinet. As well, he acquired a key from

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Disappointment after Wilmot council fails to take a stand against Bill 5

Dear Editor,

Wilmot Council had the chance to take a stand against Bill 5 as many other municipalities in the province have done.

Coun. Martin introduced a motion at the council meeting on June 23 opposing Bill 5. It was supported in a delegation by a member of the Nith Valley EcoBoosters. The motion addressed the many problems with the bill including reducing protections for the environment and endangered species, overriding the control that municipalities have over planning in their own jurisdictions, and threatening the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

After Coun. Sidhu commented that, since the bill has already been passed, supporting the motion would only be a symbolic gesture, Coun. Cressman responded that at some point it is important

to take a stand. In this case, the stand is for the right of the municipality to have autonomy over decisions affecting the community it serves.

Coun. Sidhu obviously does not remember that Premier Ford responded to public pressure regarding changes to the Greenbelt after Bill 23 passed. If there are enough so-called "symbolic gestures," changes can result. Hopefully that will be the case with Bill 5 but there will be no thanks to Wilmot council since only two of the four councillors present voted for the motion and the mayor then declared the motion defeated.

*Dorothy Wilson,
New Hamburg*



(PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, LEMP STUDIO COLLECTION #0189)

The Commercial Hotel's bar with Otto Jung, the proprietor, on the left, and barmen Ezra Loth and John Evans on the right. Mr. Jung's portrait hangs high over the horns in the top, centre.

the old establishment. The small metal pendant that's attached to it says "Comm. Hotel Room 14 O.J."

Otto Jung speaks to us from the past.

Last week's History Mystery question was: What were the three colours of the Commercial Hotel's flag? Despite the photo being black and white, the period of time when the picture was taken and the country of origin of the owner as noted in the write-up tells of the colours. Phil Schaefer of Tavistock answered this correctly: black, red and white. These were the colours of the German flag from 1867-1918; the photo of the Commercial Hotel was taken in the mid-1890s. The current colours, black,

red and yellow, were adopted in 1949. Curiously, in 1977 I printed a photo from the glass negative and noted that a large but difficult-to-read "Commercial" was printed on the middle fess (stripe).

This week's History Mystery is more subjective than past questions. The question is: What is a hint in this picture that might lead someone to think that the barmen had a sense of humour but in fact is not intended as humour at all? This question is open to all ages. The first reader to send the correct answer to me at tim_mosher@hotmail.com will have their name and community or rural route number published in the next edition.

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