

# Giant cedar or a mini man?

## VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

*Tavistock and District Historical Society*

Photographers sometimes trick the viewer, in many cases with digital editing in modern times but also a century or more ago with a wide variety of camera and darkroom techniques. Pharmacist John Lemp, Tavistock's longtime professional photographer, was no exception with this picture of his.

Did he take the photo as usual, with a friend leaning against the tree, or is the man standing four or five metres behind the tree pretending to be leaning against it and told to keep a straight face, creating a visual illusion? Mr. Lemp created other trick photos, so perhaps he's doing the same here.

This photo and a similar one taken the same day are in the Lemp Studio Collection. This is the better of the two. It's a hand-coloured black and white picture and is unusual as it's one of Mr. Lemp's rare photos of an oddity of local nature. The hand-inked note on the picture's mat says, "The cedar photographed in 1910 in J.J. Wettlaufer's swamp three-quarters of a mile east of Tavistock, measured 26 feet, four inches in circumference."

At 8.03 metres around its base, it's an extraordinary tree that merited Mr. Lemp to load up his big but delicate view camera, heavy brass lens, tripod, black hood cloth, glass negatives and his nattily dressed friend, William Dusty, onto a horse-drawn wagon and trudge through the marsh to preserve this image. Including a person in the picture provides scale, so the viewer can better understand the size of the main subject (coins are often used for unusual, small subjects to provide similar clarity) but Mr. Dusty could be posed in an either accurate or visually deceiving way.

Seeing this picture by itself could beg the question as to whether or not it's an accurate representation of a giant of the forest. It's the second photo of the same tree not seen here that clarifies whether or not it's a trick

picture because two friends are, importantly, in front of the tree leaning against it. This is easy to create in digital photography but is particularly difficult to do in a convincing way with the old silver-based analogue methods. So, this picture is most likely authentic.

Another interesting point about this photo is it demonstrates the attitude of the day of having your picture taken. By 1910, photography was a well-established field yielding excellent results, but it was expensive and so, was usually reserved for special occasions. Getting your photo taken almost always meant dressing up and posing stiffly for the camera as shutter speeds and the photo-sensitive materials of the time were slow-acting, necessitating no movement of the subject.

This is why livestock and pets are often blurred in pictures of this period but their owners and masters are not. Bessy and Fido just wouldn't stay still.

So, seeing Mr. Dusty dressed in his bowler hat, vest, wing-tip collar shirt and pocket watch chain are typical of the attitude of the day: If your photo is being taken, you dress up, even for situations like this – standing in a swamp. How times and technologies have changed.

Though this gargantuan tree is long gone, its memory remains with this marvelous photographic record of the old-growth forests of our forebears.

**The History Mystery of two weeks ago:**

I was on vacation and so can only now provide the answer. The question was about a 1895 photo of the bar in Tavistock's Commercial Hotel with Otto Jung and two employees posing for the camera: "What is a hint that might lead someone to think that the barmen had a sense of humour but in fact is not intended as humour at all?" No one provided the correct answer. There were two glasses of water on the bar and all three men were straight-faced, so the image could be interpreted as a subtle dry joke considering the setting. However, whisky – especially rye – is often diluted with water and it was the most popular hard drink in Ontario at this time, hence the water on the bar served this purpose. Very close inspection reveals a small pouring lip on each glass.

**Last week's History Mystery:** The 1920 picture was taken in Lemp's Pharmacy of

line at the back of the Blyth Community Centre property as a backdrop, I found myself easily transported to the closeknit Amish farming community somewhere near East Zorra Township set in the latter years of the First World War. The correspondence read by characters on stage sent from other like-minded communities in nearby places like Baden and Wilmot, as well as the introduction of military conscription and the characters' journey to Toronto to refuse military service on religious grounds, gives this play a wonderful grounding in local and national history, which I very much appreciate.

As the conflict between characters remains close to home and without much in the way of action or special effects, this production's emotional depth rests entirely on the shoulders of its remarkable



(JOHN LEMP; LEMP STUDIO COLLECTION #0028)

**One-hundred-fifteen years ago, giant old-growth trees were more abundant in southern Ontario. Today, most are long gone but there are still a few protected in parks and conservation areas.**

John Lemp pouring a liquid with an assistant alongside. The question was, "What is in this photo of Lemp's Pharmacy that tells you the picture was taken after 1915?" The correct answer was first provided by Phillip Schaefer of Tavistock: the presence of electric light. Village-wide, electricity started in 1916.

**This week's History Mystery:** This ques-

tion is for readers age 21 and under. What is the connection between cedar trees and the mortician's trade? Send your answer, your full name, age and the name of either your community or rural route number to [tim\\_mosher@hotmail.com](mailto:tim_mosher@hotmail.com). The first person to provide the correct answer will have this information published in the next Vintage Views article.

*Continued from page 26*

reported on issues affecting those communities a few times and I've interacted with members of those communities who own or work at local businesses. From the outside, it has been difficult to understand their way of life.

Through this production of *Quiet in the Land*, which frames the age-old conflict of long-held tradition against progressive change with a story about a father and son at odds over how to keep their people safe and a community on the brink of collapse unless its leaders adapt to changing times, I now have a better understanding of the culture, daily life and motivations that drive these communities to seek isolation and separation from the rest of the world.

With simple-yet-versatile, wooden set-pieces on stage, and the natural tree

cast. The onstage development of relationships between characters like Christy Bauman (Randy Hughson) and his son, Yock Bauman (Landon Doak), as well as the lopsided love triangle of Yock, Kate Brubacher (Shelayna Christante) and Menno Miller (Richard Comeau), does much of the heavy lifting necessary to earn the emotional heft of the confrontation between the characters at the end of the second act.

The entrenched friendship between Christy and Zepp Brubacher (James Dallas Smith), who support one another despite their growing division over how to lead the community forward, serves as important context to the conflict between father and son, between Christy and the rest of the community, and between the Amish people and the everchanging world

beyond their fences.

Hughson, a veteran actor with 13 seasons at the Stratford Festival, is a worthy lynchpin for this story, bringing the authoritative presence and the almost sad resignation to remaining stagnant in the old way of life that his character needs to motivate the actions of the other characters on stage and drive the story forward.

As the light fades at the end of this production, I feel sorry for Christy despite the fact his character has shown little if any growth from beginning to end, or a willingness to at least try and understand the viewpoints of those he loves. The misery he feels is of his own making.

*Quiet in the Land* runs at the Blyth Festival until Aug. 23.