

From Teeth to Toenails, Dr. Niemeier Did It All

VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

Tavistock and District Historical Society

Dr. Otto G. Niemeier was a Tavistock physician from 1887 to 1904. He built this handsome red brick home, clinic and pharmacy at the corner of Woodstock and Jane Streets in 1892.

The one-storey on the right dates from the 1870s. The two structures are an interesting mix of styles with Italianate brackets under the eaves, dichromatic slate shingles and four Romanesque arches including two with elaborate stained glass windows. Over the front door is “Dr. Niemeier”, again, in stained glass. The designer was conscientious in that he matched the modest gingerbread under the two dormers and the gentle arches over the rectangular windows. Oddly, though, there’s a broken roof line on the top left. Hidden on the left side is a corner door to enter a small pharmacy. The large rectangular plate glass window was remodeled years later with a Romanesque window matching the other two on the ground level. A hitching post for the horses can be seen in front and what appears to be a raised wooden curb making it easier to alight from car-

riages, especially for those in long dresses.

Dr. Niemeier was a second generation doctor. He graduated from Trinity Medical College, Toronto in the late 1880s and started his practice here at age 25. Circa 1966 his daughter recounted to Carl Seltzer, author of Tavistock’s first published history book “Fact and Fantasy” that during a flu epidemic her father had a stable of seven horses. On one occasion at daybreak, the doctor was seen riding a horse into town pulling the buggy that he would usually be driving. The problem was as Mr. Seltzer recounted that he “... had a fence rail lashed beneath one axle to replace a missing wheel, lost in the mud.”

In addition to fixing buggies and bodies, Dr. Niemeier was also a skilled dentist. Extractions were commonplace as fillings were crude, including - surprisingly - mercury mixed with other materials. Recuperating patients could sometimes stay in the home of the doctor as he reserved a spare bedroom to supervise those in need of overnight care, his wife acting as nurse.

Oh to be alive during these days of very limited anesthetics. If granny had appendicitis, abscesses or angina, offer her two fingers of whiskey and she’d be all better.

The answer to last week’s history mystery: The photo was of twelve employees and the proprietor of Entricken’s Brickyards and the question was “What’s the connection between the men’s facial hair in this photo and cycling?” The first reader to send the correct answer was Connie Hitzroth of



(PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN; LEMP STUDIO COLLECTION #0192)

Ladies in their Sunday finery with parasols and a carriage await at the front steps of Dr. Niemeier’s on the main street in Tavistock.

Tavistock, which was “Many of the workers have mustaches that are called ‘handlebar’ because they resemble the handlebars on a bicycle.”

This week’s history mystery: What’s the

sculptural vertical thing on the top left of the roof? This question is open to all ages. The first reader to send me the correct answer at tim_mosher@hotmail.com will have their name, the name of their community or rural route number published in the next edition.

Our future is not symbolic

CLIMATE CORNER

By Ashley Ropp
Nith Valley EcoBoosters



On June 23rd, a Township of Wilmot Council Meeting included a vote on a motion put forward by Councilor Martin opposing the recently passed Bill 5, or the ‘Protecting Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act’. If you haven’t heard about Bill 5, Councilor Martin describes it well - “Bill 5 includes substantial changes to environmental planning policies, including replacing the Endangered Species Act with a new framework that reduces protections for at risk species, and enabling the creation of ‘special economic zones’ that may override local planning authority and environmental oversight.” In these ‘special economic zones’, ‘designated projects’ are exempt from municipal and provincial laws. This is intended to speed up the process of industrial projects to grow our provincial economy as quickly

as possible. This raises concerns when we look at the vagueness that Bill 5 is wrapped in. There are few details given regarding crucial factors, such as, how it is decided to designate an area as a ‘special economic zone’. This bill appears to have the ability to bend, and even break, existing laws as the province pleases, at the great cost of the environment.

To quickly sum up this meeting, Councilor Martin and Councilor Cressman voted in favour. Councilor Sidhu, Councilor Dunstall, and Mayor Salonen voted against. Sidhu voted against on the grounds that “passing this motion [...] largely seems symbolic to me.”

I am deeply disappointed in the Wilmot Council’s response to this motion. The Council demonstrated that they do not appreciate the extreme harm Bill 5 will cause, and

why it is so crucial to push back against it. I am also disappointed by the view that openly speaking out against injustice is just a ‘symbolic gesture’ and therefore is not worth it. Whether or not it’s truly symbolic is frankly irrelevant; that’s a matter of language. What matters is that speaking out against injustice has always been the first step to change. Looking throughout history, we can see that change has always started with someone saying, ‘This is not okay, and I won’t stand for it.’ So, I would like to ask the Council members who voted in opposition: if this is just a symbolic gesture, what action will you instead take to ensure the wellbeing of the communities you are responsible for?

Now, why is Bill 5 so bad?

The biggest concerns regard the environmental impacts. Current environmental regulations – regulations that are already inadequate in the face of the climate crisis – will mean nothing if they can be bypassed in the name of ‘economic growth’. This means ecosystems and species that are currently protected (however weak that protection may be) are now at even higher risk. While the extinction of a couple of species may not seem like the end of the world, this can throw an entire ecosystem

off balance.

Not only are there environmental implications going without address, this bill also goes against our governments claims of commitment to Indigenous rights and reconciliation. Article 19 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) claims that States are required to “obtain [Indigenous peoples] free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.”. Bill 5 allows major infrastructure and extraction projects to begin without the free, prior, and informed consent that is required- posing extreme threats to Indigenous safety and livelihoods.

What I consider to be the most **important opposition** to Bill 5, is that prioritizing economic needs over the environment does not recognize the ways that **environmental destruction and the climate crisis crumbles our economic wellness**. For example, food scarcity has a negative impact on the economy and is also a major consequence of climate change. Another example is how the increase in climate disasters, such as wildfires, require an increased budget for emergency responses. ‘Fixing’ the economy at

the cost of the environment will just lead to more environmental destruction, leading to worsening the climate crisis, which will worsen our economy. Then what?

And, honestly, what does the economy matter if we cannot eat? What does the job market matter if we cannot survive the heat of the summer? What does more housing matter if it’s all bound to get destroyed in a climate disaster? This may sound melodramatic, but many climate experts have made it clear that this is the course we are currently on. Stepping outside and seeing the smokey haze that blankets our towns shows that this disaster is not as far away as we’d like to think.

All of this comes together to make a bill that will erode biodiversity, put at-risk species at further risk, disregard Indigenous rights, and worsen our economy in the long run. So I ask, what pros remain? What good does this bill bring, when it not only makes everything else worse, but also cannot even be assured to fulfill it’s one purpose? And how is opposing this dangerous law simply a ‘symbolic gesture’?

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