

A picture for posterity – or so it seems

VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

Tavistock and District Historical Society

Last week's Vintage Views photo was of the Zimmerman's house in Tavistock with the float the family built for the peace day parade to commemorate the end of World War I.

They first established a cooerage in the village in 1868 and in 1906 purchased this box and planing factory from John Kalbfleish. By the time this photo was taken of the factory in 1918, they had expanded, occupying much of the land between their house and the railway tracks south approaching the present-day Tim Horton's.

The approximate picture date was determined by the fashions and because there are electrical wires in the picture; electricity came to Tavistock in 1916. Zimmermans produced a variety of wood-related products as detailed in last week's article and were an important employer in Tavistock for many decades.

Front and centre in the group are two unnamed fashionable women who are thought to be secretaries working in Zimmerman's office. Behind them are the proprietors of the manufactory, from left to right, Harry, John and George Zimmerman, no doubt dressed up for photo day, unlike the unnamed labourers around them. A man behind George is wielding a very large wrench and the fellow on the bottom right of the group is posing with a hammer in his right hand and an unknown tool in his left. A large band that's usually on a pulley is on the ground beside this man. Three hostlers hold the horses' reins and – oddly – a well-dressed man seems to be hiding behind the wagon load of boxes on the right.

This is an example of Mr. Lemp's very good understanding of the adjustments of his view-type camera. These were professional cameras that were large, ungainly, always mounted on a tripod and had a black piece of fabric a little larger than a pillow case to put over the photographer's head while composing on the five-by-seven or eight-by-10 inch (13-by-18 or 20-by-25 centimetres) glass focusing screen on the back of the camera (equivalent to the tiny eye piece on a modern camera, or the screen on a cell phone).

The photographer could raise the entire

front of the camera higher than the back or vice versa, or twist the back of the camera so the negative was angled in relation to the lens, among other adjustments. The body of the camera was a bellows, which allowed for these movements. Adjustments of this type are unknown on today's mid-level or amateur cameras but they allow for a variety of image manipulations at the professional level (now largely possible in digital editing).

In this picture, note that the extreme left and right vertical edges of the building's facade are parallel. In reality, that's not possible because the upper floor is farther away from the viewer than the ground floor and so the structure's edges should appear to be converging slightly. If it were a much taller building, the edges would converge dramatically simply due to the upper floors being much farther away than the lower floors. Mr. Lemp corrected this natural diminution by adjusting his camera. This gives the facade a subtle though artificial appearance of being constructed as it is in reality: perpendicular to the ground. If he had not made these adjustments, the facade would look as though it were leaning slightly backwards with the edges converging.

Mr. Lemp took four very similar photos that day, though the others don't have the teams of horses, or it appears the camera accidentally budged. He also took a variety of photos in and around the factory and of the Zimmermans over the years posing on the front steps of their grand home. All of these images are available online on the Tavistock and District Historical Society's (TDHS) website.

Type "Zimmerman" in the search tool and 45 photos will appear related to this family.

The Tavistock Gazette is also available on the TDHS site back to 1895, including the Dec. 19, 1956, front page article and photo recounting the blaze that levelled the box factory in one of Tavistock's largest fires. A 12-year-old girl first spotted the flames when the Tavistock fire department was alerted and, shortly after, the Hickson, Woodstock and Stratford departments too, but all was lost.

A main transformer was damaged which created a village-wide blackout. Residents of Baden could see the light from the fire reflected off the clouds. The factory's most recent contract was with the Department of National Defence constructing ammunition boxes. The Zimmermans decided not to rebuild and pursued other business interests, rehiring some of the 35 men who lost their jobs only days before Christmas.



(JOHN LEMP; SCAN #0197)

Fifty-six men and boys and two women pose for their picture in the days before asphalt roads and motorized conveyances, but electricity had arrived in this 1918 photo.

So why was this 107-year-old photo taken? It's another example of a beautiful picture in the Lemp Studio Collection that was created for an unknown purpose. For advertising? For gifts to the employees? For posterity? It's hard to say but it's an important record of days gone by for local historians.

If the Zimmermans hired Mr. Lemp to take a photo for the record, i.e. for posterity, kudos to them for their foresight. Now, over a century later, we look at these pictures and marvel at what we see made by these time machines we call cameras. This is why I encourage current businesses, organizations, clubs and congregations to have these types of pictures taken. Years, decades or a century from now and beyond, our descendants will look at them and think, "Was life really like that in 2025? Oh my. So different. So simple."

Last week's first History Mystery: The photo was of the WWI peace parade float and Zimmerman house in Tavistock. The question was open to anyone under the age of 16. The question was "What is the meaning of 'Pinta' on the side of the float?" No one forwarded the correct answer. The an-

swer is that the Pinta was one of the three ships that Christopher Columbus sailed on when he – according to the popular legend – "discovered America" in 1492. The other two ships were the Niña and the Santa Maria. Why the Zimmermans chose this theme for their float is not recorded.

Last week's second History Mystery: The question was "What's the connection between popular American folk singer Bob Dylan and this story?" No reader forwarded the correct answer. It was open to all ages. The answer is that his name at birth was Robert Allen Zimmerman, which he changed to Dylan at the start of his singing career.

This week's History Mystery: Apart from some of the workers standing with their arms crossed, perhaps for warmth, and all wearing long sleeves, what's another hint that this photo was taken on a cool day, despite it being sunny? This question is open to all ages. The first person to send the correct answer to tim_mosher@hotmail.com by 9 a.m. next Tuesday will have their name and home community or rural route number published in the following edition.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE GAZETTE TO HAVE IT DELIVERED IN YOUR MAIL!

The cost is \$75.00 for a year.

Payment can be made by: Cheque mailed to PO Box 2310, St Marys ON N4X 1A2

OR dropped off at D&D Homestyle Cuisine & Café, 8 Woodstock St N, Tavistock

OR call 519-655-2341 with credit card details

OR e-transfer granthavenmedia@gmail.com