

Remembrance Day Nov. 7. What!?

VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher
Tavistock and District
Historical Society

As a former photojournalist, it's easy to see this picture is a gem. My geography teacher at Waterloo-Oxford DSS in the mid-1970s taught me well, both about landforms and how to take photos for the yearbook, which is nascent photojournalism (thank you Mr. John Buchanan). I studied photography after high school, worked as a photojournalist and became a high school teacher myself of – what else? – photography.

This photo is packed with so many interesting details, it's difficult to know where to start.

The picture was taken in November 1918 and it's very likely a few days before the 11th. One would automatically think it's Nov. 11 but there were reports of World War I ending days earlier. The front page of the London Free Press declared in its special edition with oversized letters, "World War Is Now Ended," on Nov. 7, 1918, among many other news sources across North America.

In Kitchener, a scarecrow was given the pejorative nickname, Fritz, and burned in front of city hall. A few days later came the accurate announcement that the war had ended, prompting the London Free Press to issue a second special edition at 3 a.m., Nov. 11 to correct itself. The Armistice agreement to stop fighting was signed in a dining car in France at the 11th hour, on the 11th day,

of the 11th month. It was then official; the war was over and celebration was in order.

It's difficult to imagine the local emotions of the time, especially among the German-descended people in this part of Ontario. The irony of sending daughters to the front to care for the wounded and sons to fight against the country of their family's origin is palpable. German culture and language took a sharp turn in the district.

The original name of Tavistock is Freiburg, a small city in southern Germany. Berlin, Ont., was re-named Kitchener midway through the First World War as public sentiments had shifted dramatically. Oh, wie sich die Zeiten doch geändert hatten! (Oh, how the tides had turned!)

The location of this celebration was the centre of Tavistock, often called "The Five Corners" where three streets converge: Woodstock, Hope and Maria. The grand structure on the left is the Commercial Hotel (later a private residence and service station that's now three shops and a gas bar), the two-storey building almost in the centre was Staebler's Jewellery and other businesses (the only building still standing) and the board-and-batten structure on the right was Siegner's Harness Shop. The well-known fountain at these crossroads was installed five years later.

Reeve Baechler, smiling to the right of the centre, spoke to the crowd that had gathered. A public holiday in the village was declared; all businesses would close for the day and grand celebrations ensued. The men and women in uniform were coming home – or, most of them. Some from Tavistock and the district had fallen and would remain, with ceremonies and monuments dedicated to their

service and sacrifice yet to be organized.

To liven the calithumpian scene, an impromptu Maypole was erected and horseless carriages formed a circle blocking traffic along with the crowd gathered there. This is where the picture merits close examination, as the details reveal the sentiments and lifestyle of the day.

The photographer, John Lemp, took this picture on a very large, glass negative measuring eight by 10 inches (20 x 25 centimetres). Generally, the larger the negative, the finer the detail, and this was a big one (akin to today's CD sensors in digital cameras, though this was analogue photography). Mr. Lemp no doubt shouted something to the crowd to look at the camera, as many faces turned towards him and his ungainly, big, three-legged photo apparatus with a good view above the crowd from the front steps of the Glasgow Warehouse (today's Home Hardware).

One thing that's not turned towards the camera and has a human form is the hard-to-see effigy of Kaiser Wilhelm II, leader of the defeated armies. A rough representation of him was made by stitching pants, a shirt and a head together and stuffing it all with rags or straw. It was hung overhead in the distance between the two ribbons on the right, one arm outstretched. A second one was made and burned. Effigies of the Kaiser were common in the allied countries at the time to condemn it as symbolic punishment of the offender.

In the opposite corner are two young men in uniform, likely in training, waiting for deployment or on harvest leave. Above them among the pines is the day's washing hanging out to dry, likely from the Commercial Hotel. Farther right is a group of males mostly standing on the back of a car. Close examination reveals one fellow blowing a large horn, a young man dressed as a clown astride the car's hood and, on either side of him, are two men wearing odd masks and holding pairs of pot lids likely used as symbols. Two other men stand arm-in-arm with blackened faces and two more in top hats. A motley bunch giddy with the good news!

No doubt a glass or two were raised in the community and well beyond on this very special occasion.

In all, 20 million lives were lost during World War One. It makes me wonder what happens in Germany on Nov. 11 every year.



(JOHN LEMP; LSC SCAN #1334)

After four long years of fighting on a scale never seen before, the European conflict that as yet hadn't been named World War I had ended. Grand celebrations in the allied winners' countries were in order, but rumours persisted as to when the Central Powers surrendered.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF TAVISTOCK AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

This is page three of the Tavistock Gazette, Nov. 14, 1918 (the front page was always local news). The main store in town, the Glasgow Warehouse, was advertising socks, underwear and trench candles "... for the boys over there" for Christmas, in ads purchased prior to the war's end.

The history mystery of Oct. 30: "What was Fred Hotson's prize when he won the Canadian national oratorical competition in 1927, in addition to the trophy that he posed with?" Marilyn Pearson of Tavistock was first to answer correctly: A trip to Europe.

This week's history mystery: What clue in this article is a strong

hint as to what day of the week it was when the photo was taken? The 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, the name of their community or rural route number published in the next Vintage Views article.

This is Doug.

Doug is an active member of his community.

Doug knows he can stay up to date by checking the local newspaper, in print and online, for the community calendar and other details about upcoming events and social gatherings.

Doug is smart.

Be like Doug.

#localnewspaper

News Media Canada
Médias d'Info Canada