

“The greatest public event ...” but no photos?!



VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

Tavistock and District Historical Society

One of Tavistock’s most iconic structures is the tall, rubble-style stone entrance to Queen’s Park. Nearly a century old, it was a project of the local Women’s Institute who proposed the structure to the Tavistock council in 1927. It was approved, monies raised, fieldstone donated by local farmers, constructed and inaugurated in 1929 on a grand day. Final cost of construction? \$443.37.

You’d expect the ribbon cutting and ceremonies to follow would have been front-page news in the local press with large black-and-white photos, but many newspapers at the start of the Great Depression were structured very differently than today. Then, like now, the Tavistock Gazette and its predecessor, the Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette, are weeklies, but periodicals of the 1920s had a very different design.

On page 1 of the Sept. 12, 1929, Tavistock Gazette that was published one day preceding the gate’s inauguration is: the local mortician advertising horse-drawn or motorized hearses; piglets for sale; houses to rent; a small butter churn for sale; an advertisement referring to women as “dames” and a long list of who visited whom around the town during the past week, aka, tea ‘n’ talk and not a single photo.

On page 4 of the same edition is first, without a title, the workman who was injured while building the archway and then details about the ribbon cutting and festivities to follow in the arena nearby. The writer penned “This is the

greatest public event that has ever taken place in Tavistock.” See the two-paragraph report in the accompanying screen grab of the 1929 writeup.

was held after which the meeting was closed by repeating the benediction.

While assisting in erecting the new archway at the entrance to the park on Saturday, Mr. Siegfried Bowien, one of the workmen employed, had the misfortune to have a large stone fall on the top of his head, rendering him unconscious. The injured man was rushed to the Stratford General Hospital where the attending physician pronounced the man as suffering from a hemorrhage of the brain. Mr. Bowien, who just came to Canada from Europe about seven weeks ago, was making his home at the Oxford Hotel. Latest reports from the sick room state that the injured man is progressing as favorably as possible.

Official opening of the Archway at the entrance of Tavistock Park will be held on Friday evening, September 13th, under the auspices of Women’s Institute. At 7.30 p.m. the procession begins at the Fountain, headed by the Village Band, followed by the guests and citizens to the Arch, where the opening will be performed by Senator J. P. Rankin. The ceremony will then be continued in the Arena, where an interesting programme will be rendered consisting of addresses by Senator Rankin, F. G. Sanderson, M.P., Hugh Allen, M.P., and others; interspersed with choruses, readings, band selections etc. This is the greatest public event that has ever taken place in Tavistock. Refreshments to your heart’s content. Entrance fee 15 cents and 10 cents. Chairman of evening, J. F. Krug. Dance after the programme, under the control of the Park Board. Music by Olin Brown’s Orchestra.

Among local people who attended the C. N. E. at Toronto were Mr.

The next edition of the Gazette has more information but again no photo and a very tiny title that

says “Beautiful Park Entrance Opened” on page 3. A very different hierarchy of information compared to contemporary newspapers.

The very odd thing about this “... greatest public event ...” is there are no known photos of it! The local professional photographer was John Lemp who was very active in the district, taking pictures of innumerable activities large and small, but there are no photos taken by him of the big day. His 4,000 glass negatives comprise the Lemp Studio Collection at the Tavistock and District Historical Society (TDHS), so he was pretty thorough during his almost 45-year photo career.

Also, I’ve never seen amateur snaps of this event either. Small box and folding cameras were extremely popular at the time (and sold by Mr. Lemp in his pharmacy) but I’ve never seen a photo of the gate’s inauguration or related festivities.

Readers, if you have old family photos that you suspect were taken on the day the gates were inaugurated, please take a picture of it or scan it and send it to me at my email address below in the History Mystery. The historical society is always interested in having copies of photos – or originals donated – that record the full breadth of life in Tavistock and the district. Your image(s) would be unique and highly appreciated.

Sadly, the Tavistock Women’s Institute disbanded in 1993.

Photos are unique windows into the past. They record the stories of our ancestors, community and country. We must be sure to preserve them for future generations as they help to tell our history after we have all gone silent.

The last History Mystery: The article was about J. G. Field’s woolen mill, Tavistock. The question was “What’s the relationship between wax and wicks and the phone that Mr. Field is touching with his right hand?” The first



(PHOTO BY JOHN LEMP, T.D.H.S. SCAN #0224)

This photo of the new Queen’s Park gates was likely taken shortly before the ribbon-cutting ceremony because of what appears to be leftover rubble on the bottom right and behind a pillar on the left. The structure behind on the right was the community’s first arena, the Old Show House.



(TIM MOSHER PHOTO)

The gates as they appeared five weeks ago.

reader to answer this correctly was Connie Hitzroth of Tavistock, stating the design resembles a candle. A common way to refer to this device during its heyday in 1920 was as a “candlestick phone.”

This edition’s History Mystery: The question is open to all ages. The gates were dedicated in 1929 when George V was the Monarch, so why aren’t they called the “King’s Park Gates”? The first reader to forward the correct answer will have their name and community name or rural route number published in the next Vintage Views article in two

weeks. Send your answers to me at tim_mosher@hotmail.com.

To read the old Tavistock Gazettes, go to tavistockhistory.ca, which will take you to the TDHS website. Then, in the grey box on the left, click on “Research.” Click on the first item at the top, “Newspaper Archive,” scroll down and you’ll see a list of five different community newspapers. Click on “Tavistock Gazette.” Scroll down and you’ll see a long list of Gazettes spanning 1895 to June 2021. The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette follows.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Wilmot Lions/Lioness Club thanks community for Tree of Light ceremony

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!!

The Wilmot Lions/Lioness Club wishes to thank everyone who supported the 42nd annual Tree of Light Ceremony, held Friday evening (Dec. 5).

We appreciate the participation of our New Hamburg Concert Band who played great Christmas songs during the evening as they do every year for us. The incredible harmony of the Mixology A Cappella Singers was absolutely wonderful to listen to.

Thanks to Mayor Natasha Salonen and Tim Louis, MP, who joined us. Congratulations to the

children whose colouring pages were drawn from the Christmas box, and each of them won a prize: Estelle O., Hailey D., Rosalynn F., Sloane O. and Lila E.

Mostly, thanks to all the businesses that support our Tree of Light campaign, and all the people who joined us at the tree lighting.

Happy holidays to all.

Wilmot Lions/Lioness Club,

Wilmot Township

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