

Winter fashions of yesteryear



VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

Tavistock and District Historical Society

This is clearly a carefully posed studio photo of an idealized set-up of children preparing to go ice skating. The beautiful soft lighting, a classic triangular composition, rich black and white tones and textures, eyes looking where they should be and almost faultless clothing and accessories suggest that it might have been used for advertising. Scrutinize the picture carefully and you'll see a photographer's oversight: one of the clamp-on skates is off the edge of the picture. This type of skate was common at the time. They simply clamped onto the sole of a shoe or boot.

John Lemp took a number of pictures with similar setups, including the photo with the Vintage Views article published April 3, 2025, of two children carefully posed in a studio, surrounded by cedar boughs and the boy was – oddly – wearing a mortarboard (a square, black, college graduate's cap). Such careful execution and the artificial setup clearly set it apart from a typical family photo.

The vast majority of Lemp's stu-

dio portraits were standard family photos, unlike these but those that were made in this style confirm that he was a very competent photographer likely hired to take pictures by companies to sell their products. He also took numerous photos of livestock and champion fowl, bottles of medicine, a tabletop cider press probably to accompany a patent application and car wrecks at garages perhaps for insurance claims. A few of these had their backgrounds eliminated with a liquid opaque material akin to White Out that would be brushed onto the negative by hand, resulting in only the main subject being visible and not the surroundings; useful in advertising.

Readers, if you ever come across a photo in an old catalogue or promotional material that you suspect was taken by John Lemp, please send a picture of it to me at the email address in the History Mystery. So far, I've only seen the original pictures, not the published advertisements.

Happy New Year! I hope you took lots of photos of your fami-

ly gatherings. Decades from now, they'll be cherished images that'll take you back to "the old days" of 2025.

The last History Mystery: The subject was the official entrance to Queen's Park in Tavistock and the question was "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 person to answer this correctly was Marilyn Pearson of Tavistock who wrote it was "... likely honouring Queen Mary (wife of King George V) due to her community work and connection with the Women's Institute." I agree that it's "likely" because there's no written record in the Tavistock Women's Institute papers noting how this name was chosen, so it's the accepted consensus today. Mary's connection to the W.I. was that she was the president of her local chapter at Sandringham, England, where she resided as Queen Consort and was known for efforts bettering local public spaces there.

This edition's History Mystery: Which clothing item's name in the picture with three children has a Dutch etymology? This 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 and the name of the community where they live or rural route number published in the next Vintage Views article.



(SCAN #1719, PHOTO ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN LEMP)

It's not known what the original purpose of this portrait was, but one theory is that the photographer, John Lemp, is thought to have been hired to take photos for catalogues.



(SCAN #1289, PHOTO ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN LEMP)

Note the repeating carpet pattern and backdrop. Sometimes the photographer would close his shop, sell his studio furnishings, cameras and negatives to the next photographer who set up in town. This can confuse us today wondering who took the picture, where it was taken and the picture's date unless it was recorded otherwise.



(SCAN #2523, PHOTO BY JOHN LEMP)

John Lemp's son, Leonard, grins in this Christmas picture for his photographer papa in 1911. Len joined his father's pharmacy in 1928, though he didn't continue the photo side of the business. Lenny and his family were my next-door neighbours in Tavistock. He passed away in 1978.



(SCAN #1707, PHOTO ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN LEMP)

This doe-eyed child is the centre of attention, but the surroundings often say a lot. The wooden column that she's leaning against, the backdrop and carpet repeat in other pictures, which sometimes helps identify which of Tavistock's multiple photo studios the pictures were taken in and who the photographer was.