

# Cold comfort



## VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

*Tavistock and District Historical Society*

The rigours of winters 100 years ago or more are hard to imagine today because of modern central heating, hot water 24 hours a day, snowplows big enough for Goliath to drive, efficient designs of insulation and enclosed transportation with heaters. Thoughts of rising repeatedly to stoke a fire throughout the night, single pane windows, midwinter personal hygiene and heating bricks to put in the family buggy to warm everyone are from a very different era but hey, that was reality a century ago or more. Our forebears were a hardy bunch!

The pioneers of the local counties came mostly from moderate to cold weather climates of central and Northern Europe and so were largely accustomed to cool or cold winters. They had to be self-sufficient producing a wide variety of products themselves or buy locally made creature comforts to make the bitter winters and steamy summers comfortable. York (later Toronto), Berlin (Kitchener), Cassel (New Hamburg), Georgiana (London), Little Thames (Stratford), The Town Plot (Woodstock) and surrounding communities provided functional and fashionable clothing of all sorts for the local princesses and plowman. Freiburg (later Inkerman and then Tavistock) produced socks of all sorts for over a century at the J.G. Field knitting mill starting in 1868.

Many of the fashions of Tavistock and the district were recorded by at least five itinerant photographers between 1878 and 1905: McEwen, Davidson, Elliot, Sutherland and Murray. Plus, one longtime lensman, John 'Jack' Lemp, from 1905-1952. It appears that each photographer bought out the previous one, acquiring their glass negatives (the precursor of plastic film and digital photography), their props, backdrops, developing equipment, perhaps their cameras and they likely used two of their photo studios on Woodstock Street.

The repeating backdrops, studio furnishings and props were used and passed on to the next photographer, making it difficult to know who took the photos as many were used year after year, photographer after photographer. There seems to be no surviving written records of photo appointments so unless they're well-known people, we have difficulty naming them today.

Though the photos of Jack Lemp comprise the vast majority of images in the Lemp Studio Collection, housed at the Tavistock and District Historical Society archive, these photographers created an invaluable set of images that are almost two-dimensional time machines recording life as it was. Very nominal image manipulation was possible then, compared to Photoshop today and AI (Artificial Intelligence), so we know that these 2,000 negatives in the village collection are accurate.

Wide-angle and telephoto lenses were in their infancy at the time, so their inherent distortion of depth that's prevalent today – wide angles deepening it and telephotos flattening depth – is non-existent or nominal at best.

Surprisingly, one photographer named Adrian O. 'Addie' Murray of East Zorra, started his career with a bang. When he was 18 in 1896, he took a picture of the governor general descending briefly from his train at the Tavistock station (Vintage Views, Aug. 28, 2025). In 1903, Murray moved to Detroit and worked in real estate, becoming executive secretary of the Elizabeth, N.J., Chamber of Commerce, a position that he kept for five decades. A.O. Murray passed away in 1980 at age 98.

The community is blessed to have such a large collection of images, as the early photos of many other centres have been lost in fires, floods or disinterest. The Lemp Studio Collection gathered dust for decades in the attic of the Lemp drug store on Hope

Street, however, in the late 1970s the druggist/photographer's son, Lenny, who took over his father's pharmacy, allowed interested local individuals to remove the glass negatives. A short time later, Lenny passed away. The negatives are now protected by the efforts of many individuals cataloguing, scanning and studying our forebears for today and the future.

**The last History Mystery:** The question was "Which clothing item's name in the picture with three children has a Dutch etymology?" No one answered this by publication time despite numerous attempts. The answer is: The boy's coat is called a pea jacket, which is derived from the Dutch pijjaker. The thick, rough, wool cloth that's used is called pij, and jakker means jacket. Double-breasted pea jackets these days are widely adopted by multiple navies, as well as fashion-conscious civilian men and boys.

**This week's History Mystery:** This question is open to all ages. What rare physical ailment does one of the people posing have? The first person to answer this will have their name and the name of their community or rural route number published in the next Vintage Views article. Send your answers to: tim\_mosher@hotmail.com.

*Tim is travelling overseas and will resume the Vintage Views series upon his return.*



(LEMP STUDIO COLLECTION #3573)

The new-looking snowshoes add an interesting element but what's the purpose of this picture? There's no record of this, so today we can only guess. The fur rug and white, wicker chair repeat in many of the studio portraits of this era in Tavistock. The man's fisherman's cap is rare among the 2,000 glass negatives in the collection.



(LEMP STUDIO COLLECTION #3515)

This couple could be siblings, as a married couple might show affection. Oddly, the man's coat has one button that's not showing and he's wearing a Coke (pron. "Cook") or Bowler hat, designed to replace the taller top hat. The women's hat with an enormous pin is almost big enough to be an umbrella.



(LEMP STUDIO COLLECTION #2285)

Real fur used for clothing is highly controversial today, but it was very fashionable in the decades leading up to 1915. The farming of dozens of types of mustelids included fox – like this women's stole and muff – mink and even skunks, and they often included the head and feet, like hers. Her 'picture hat' is so named because of how it frames the face. Circa 1905.



(JOHN 'JACK' LEMP #2656)

Their expressions perhaps show the discomfort of posing for a mid-winter portrait due to photo studios of the time being so cold having high ceilings, lots of windows for illumination and – if you were lucky – a wood stove for heat. This mother and son appear unamused despite the toy lion that the photographer provided that appears in other photos of children.

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