

Tavistock grows up



VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

Tavistock and District Historical Society

Tavistock was growing and so too were its water needs for fire-fighting, washing and drinking. The late Carl Seltzer reported in his 1967 history book, *Fact & Fantasy*, that the costs for this new water system in 1911 broke down to " ... land, (a brick) pump-house, 6,900 feet of mains at \$6,275, 16 hydrants at \$504 and elevated tank, 40,000 gallons (181,844 litres), at \$4,000."

Along with other unnamed items, the "total cost (was) \$17,379."

After the system was completed, it was tested successfully with 60 pounds of pressure. "When

pressure was stepped up to 120 pounds, it seems the men had trouble hanging on to the hose and were bowled over," reported Seltzer.

John "Jack" Lemp climbed the tower a short time after its construction with his heavy tripod-mounted camera to take bird's-eye-view photos of the community. One of these photos will be featured in the next Vintage Views article two weeks from now. The photo in this article captures the construction of this new village amenity before "Tavistock" was painted on its side. The tower became an icon,

visible from a great distance to generations of local people.

The system served the community well for 82 years until 1993 when the tank was removed and a new concrete and steel tower was built a short distance away. It serves about 3,550 people from three wells. Capacity? 1,590,000 litres (350,000 gallons). Cost? \$1.046 million. Thank you for paying your taxes.

The last History Mystery: The question was "Why are kerb sets (thin stone borders on a grave's surface) almost unknown in Canada but widely seen in England, unrelated to grass cutting, tradition or appearance?" The first reader to answer this correctly was Marilyn Pearson of Tavistock, when she wrote how "Canadian winters with heavy snow and freeze-thaw cycles shift kerb sets, causing them to break (creating) tripping hazards." Tavistock artist Reginald Selfe was buried south of London, England with a kerb set, where winters are comparatively mild.



(JOHN 'JACK' LEMP PHOTO)

The village's first elevated water tank was constructed for \$4,000. The four men atop the tower are thought to be part of the 1911 construction crew.

This week's History Mystery: What was Mr. Lemp, the photographer, standing on to take the 1911 photo of the water tower? Note that he's considerably higher than the buildings that are visible. The first reader to send me the



(PHOTO COURTESY OF TAVISTOCK AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

Constructed in 1993, the new tower has a capacity almost nine times greater than the first tank.

correct answer at tim_mosher@hotmail.com will have their name and community name or rural route number published in the next Vintage Views article.

The joys of collecting

DONNA DICKSON

Tavistock and District Historical Society

On Saturday, April 11, the Tavistock and District Historical Society (TDHS) will host 20 exhibitors at our annual general meeting as part of our unique items and curious collection display, "The Olde Curiosity Shop."

The items being displayed are diverse, including collections of antique steam toys, photographica, motion lamps, antique checkerboards and stereoscope cards. How many have that special piece passed down to them

through generations? Unique items include a family Bible, an antique toy car and even a first Canadian passport! Local history will also be represented with a sampling of Tavistock and area items shown.

As a collector of antique lighting and clocks, it has always been interesting to know why people collect. For my husband and I, it is the focus of many day trips taken throughout Ontario, and it is part of every vacation we take.

For others, it is the search for that unique piece that has eluded them for years in their search, the

Holy Grail piece! For some it is tied to years gone by or a special memory. For some it is the historical significance that the item carries. Regardless of why, this is a hobby where passion meets obsession and, quite often, results in a fantastic curation of personal collections.

The TDHS museum collection also includes diverse items ranging from the Lemp Studio collection to simple pencils with local advertising. It is always fascinating when people visit and notice something that triggers a fond memory from childhood or

a local historical connection.

Recent unique additions in 2026 to TDHS include an old sled and a wooden wagon, both found half buried in the dirt under an old house back porch on Henry Street, Tavistock. The Lemp Studio collection also features a photograph of two children in a wagon. Is it the same one recently donated that was used in the Lemp photograph?

TDHS also received a wooden Canadian Butter Box – common itself, yet it has the "511" registration number which is unique to the Tavistock Cheese and Butter Company.

In asking those exhibiting what they collect, why they collect

and how their collection evolved, the answers were mostly different but passionate. In discussing what makes an item unique, rarity, historical significance, condition and popularity are all good reasons. Maybe it's not about the "why"; maybe it's simply just nostalgia for the past!

If you are interested in bringing a unique item with you to the annual general meeting, we will have a show-and-tell table set up for last-minute contributions. Mark your calendar for Saturday, April 11, at 1 p.m. at Grace United Church, Tavistock.

Admission and membership are free. All are welcome!



(PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAVISTOCK AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

A photo from the Lemp Studio Collection of two children and a wooden wagon is seen here on the right, and on the left is a familiar-looking wagon discovered half-buried underneath a porch on Henry Street, now in the Tavistock and District Historical Society museum collection.



A wooden Canadian butter box with the registration number, 511 – unique to the Tavistock Cheese and Butter Company.