

# Thirsty throats and thrifty rooms, Tavistock circa 1915



## VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

*Tavistock and District Historical Society*

The April 23 Vintage Views article was about photographer John "Jack" Lemp's picture that he took from atop the tall, new water tower in Tavistock in 1912. It showed the centre of the growing village in the foreground including the second Commercial Hotel and the forests and farmlands beyond.

The May 7 article concentrated on the Commercial Hotel corner with four photos illustrating the original neo-classical building circa 1914, the grandiose three-storey structure circa 1918 and the greatly renovated and shrunken building that became Meisner's gas station circa 1934 and then Schaefer's Sunoco service station and lunch counter from 1945-1975 showing elements of the original Commercial Hotel. The fourth was a colour photo that showed what this wide corner looks like today with an Esso station, Subway, Hasty Mart and New Orleans Pizza.

The Canadian Graphic wrote in 1905 that the Commercial was "well equipped having hot-wa-

ter heating (and) a private water system. For the commercial trade (Mr. Jung) has three large sample rooms thoroughly equipped. There are forty-three bedrooms ... and the dining room seats fifty guests. The bar is most elaborate. The hotel is lighted through-out by electricity."

The Commercial was on prime real estate in Tavistock, on the northwest corner of the main intersection. Passengers stepping off the train at the railway station were within sight of the hotel, only a few steps north of it, so rooms were let to one and all, in competition with the Arlington Hotel a short distance away as well as the Oxford Hotel.

In this article, we'll have a close look at the bar of the Commercial Hotel, about 110 years ago. It's an overtly masculine design but that's not surprising because alcohol in all its forms was largely a man's beverage at the time. From the 1930s to the 1970s, Ontario instituted men's and ladies with escorts separate beverage rooms

and entrances, which is after this picture was taken. It's unlikely too that this photo dates from between 1916 and 1927 because the Ontario government enacted prohibition, which banned the sale of alcohol stronger than 2.5 per cent as a wartime measure and to prevent the spread of venereal diseases, says one source. I figure this last point merits research and a future Vintage Views article.

The rich details of this image reveal tastes, interests and designs of the time. Look closely above the central mirror and you'll see a large pair of bull's horns. Below that is a reflection of a buck's stuffed head. There are four pistols – real or not isn't known – hanging by strings or wires against the beveled mirrors. Steins, bills nailed to the right cabinet and what appear to be beer bottles fill the upper spaces.

On the far left might be a water or bulk wine dispenser with glasses on top. A big, brassy cash register is on Mr. Jung's left with an illegible sign on its top. Three beer-tap handles are at the ready in front of Mr. Loth. The heavy wooden cabinetry and literal bar running along the front edge on which to lean and a footrest all speak of an era gone by in the early hospitality industry over a century ago.

What will people think some 110 years in the future when they look at photos of the interior of Ontario bars of 2026?

**The last article's History Mystery:** The question was "Why is there a pince-nez in one of the



(PHOTO BY JOHN "JACK" LEMP)

The rich details of a local Edwardian bar are revealed here. The proprietor, Otto Jung, is standing on the left and his portrait hangs in the top-centre. Barmen Ezra Loth is centre and John Evans is on the right. Their wing-tip collars, extra wide tie knots and vests with watch chains were all fashionable at the time.

four pictures?" Pince-nez are two French words ("pance nay") that are commonly used in English to describe a design of eyeglasses that were popular from about 1875 to 1910. This literally translates to "pinch-nose" because they don't have temple arms over the ears. They stay in position by gently pinching the bridge of the nose. Pince-nez were worn by American President Theodore Roosevelt and untold others. In the 1918 photo of the hotel, there's an oversized pince-nez on top of a post advertising an optometrist's shop on the corner, just out of sight of the camera. The first reader to answer this correctly was Connie

Hitzerth of Tavistock. She wrote that the pince-nez "was an advertisement that one could buy a pair of these reading glasses at the adjacent store." Nicely observed, Connie!

**This week's History Mystery:** It's difficult to say for sure but there appears to be some subtle, ironic humour in this photo, likely the idea of either the barmen or the photographer. What is it? The first reader to send me the correct answer will have their name and community name or rural route number published with the next Vintage Views article in two weeks.

## Planting more trees at the Mannheim Carolinian Corner

MARLENE KNEZEVICH

*Let's Tree Wilmot*

Yellowwood, shagbark hickory, spicebush, hazelnut, and black oak are a few of the Carolinian species of trees and shrubs Let's Tree Wilmot (LTW) will be planting this Saturday in Wilmot's Mannheim Carolinian corner.

In April, Let's Tree Wilmot's first planting here, about 40 community volunteers planted mostly bareroot stock from our seedling bed. This planting will use one- and two-gallon potted nursery stock. Easy digging in this sand/gravel of 1.85 hectares (4.6 acres) tucked in the northwest corner of Mannheim north of Milne Drive.

"This is going to be a beautiful forest in the years to come, with blooming trees, edible nuts and distinctive trees," said Dean Peachey, Let's Tree Wilmot's project chair.

Wilmot Township will be installing a trail in the future.

LTW has dubbed this project, "Mannheim Carolinian Corner." Southern Ontario has a Carolinian Forest Zone south of an imaginary line that runs approximately from

Grand Bend to Toronto. The Carolinian Zone is the most diverse and fragile ecoregion of Canada, the smallest forest region, amounting to just one per cent of the country's landmass. The Carolinian Zone has the highest diversity of wild species and number of species at risk in Canada.

By planting species that are typically south of us, called assisted migration, we are helping nature along. In the natural world, plants would migrate north over time but there are barriers such as cities, towns, agricultural fields and the 401 highway that block the movement of seeds and plants.

The Mannheim Carolinian Corner must have drought-tolerant species growing due to the sand and gravel soil. In other Wilmot plantings with moist conditions, we have planted Tulip trees, our native Magnolia or Cucumber tree, Kentucky Coffee Tree and others. In the Corner, we are also planting trees/shrubs familiar to our forests such as white pine, red and sugar Maple, ninebark, ironwood, thorny honey locust and others.

The most recent Green Communities Canada grant awarded to Let's Tree Wilmot (a Garden Wilmot project) for

the value of \$67,240 covers two years of planting and one year of maintenance. Further tree planting and tree maintenance initiatives are carried out by way of the Enova Reforestation grant the township generously receives annually; this advances long-term community and environmental sustainability goals.

Join Let's Tree Wilmot/Garden Wilmot to grow a special habitat for Wilmot Township on Saturday, May 23, from 9 a.m. to noon. This is the last tree-planting event of the spring season. For details and registration, visit [letstreewilmot.ca/events](http://letstreewilmot.ca/events).

Bring the whole family. There are snacks and camaraderie!



(PHOTO COURTESY OF LET'S TREE WILMOT)

Volunteers with Let's Tree Wilmot and community members work to plant trees at the Mannheim Carolinian Corner at the site's first planting event in April.