

YESTERDAY

News from the Tavistock and District Historical Society

VOLUME 11

WINTER 2009

Golden tales from Swastika Mine



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday, March 28, 2009 at 1:30 p.m. in the Tavistock Library Hall • Open House 10am-4pm

Theme: Swastika Mine - Tavistock's link to the first gold producing mine in Ontario

Tavistock & District Historical Society

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Tavistock & District Historical Society

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Box 280,
Tavistock, Ontario,
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MUSEUM HOURS:

Saturdays
10am-12 noon

Other times
by appointment

Swastika: Ontario's first gold-producing mine

The gap in the rock was just wide enough for a man to squeeze through and James Dusty was used to tight spots. His prospecting had brought him into this region many times over the years, but this time he knew it was something special. He could feel it. He had staked his claim with the proper authorities, assembled his gear and made the trek to his favourite spot on the west side of Otto Lake. From the outcropping, he could see Dorothy Island across an expanse of water and Bear Mountain in the distance on the east side of the lake. He lowered himself into the pit and followed the quartz vein like he had so many other times before. But this time it all paid off.

"GOLD!" Mr. Dusty soon realized a crowd was gathering at the mouth of the crudely excavated mine. They had been summoned by his ill-timed cry that echoed through the birch-lined bush. It was high noon on September 2, 1907 with a tinge of autumn in the air and now a renewed hope that would see him through the long, northern Ontario winter.

An inquisitive young girl, the daughter of one of the company's directors who had been there to inspect the fledgling operation, also followed the excitement to the edge of the mine and joined the crowd. "What are you going to call this mine?" she asked. Looking up from his discovery point a few feet below the surface, the crowd formed silhouettes against the bright, cloudless sky. The young girl's lucky cross charm flashed in the sunlight as she bent forward and peered down at Mr. Dusty.

"Swastika Mine," he exclaimed.

Such was the beginnings of the Swastika Mining Company and Tavistock's interest in its fortunes.

A native of St. Marys, James Dusty came to the region with his brother and partner, William Dusty, to make his fortune in the lesser-known northern Ontario gold rush. Mines had already been started in Otto Township and nearby Teck Township as a result of surveys done by W. J. Wilson, who made a reconnaissance survey of the Blanche River for the Canadian Geological Survey. Later, Mr. L. L. Bolton, who accompanied Speight's survey party in 1904, reported on the geology of the country from Round Lake to Abitibi for the Ontario Bureau of Mines.

From a distance it looked like any other indentation in the rock. The countryside all about Otto Lake is nearly all rock, "not good enough soil to have an onion bed," said Mr. Dusty. He had staked nine claims in total just off the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario railway line which was built through the district in 1904. A few years later, a siding marked the spot where hundreds of claims were being staked from the rail line up through the bush and out onto the edge of Otto Lake. Bear, lynx, bobcats, and swamp fox roamed freely through the dense bushland which was now being cleared in fits and starts close to the rail line. The Furlong family had the only cows in the area and provided some of the milk for the village.

But it wasn't until that day in 1907 that gold was actually discovered by the Dusty brothers and their mine, the first gold-producing mine in Ontario, became the name of the town. At that time it is said that gold bricks could be brought to



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAROLYN O'NEIL
The Dusty brothers at Swastika Mine.

the railway siding and be left lying uncovered until the train came through with no fear of anyone taking off with them. It was also said that they had more problems during Prohibition with the liquor than with gold bars.

The Swastika Mining Company was formed in 1908 and Dr. Michael Steele of Tavistock was secretary-treasurer and was financially interested in its success, later serving as president. Mr. A.T. Bell of the Tavistock cheese

factory served as president during the first years. As work progressed, Dr. Steele returned to Tavistock and placed some splendid samples of free gold ore on exhibit at the Tavistock Fall Exhibition to raise much-needed funds for the work. An assay from a piece of quartz not showing visible gold gave \$39.42 to the ton.

With the discovery of gold, mining operations outbuildings were hastily constructed. Swastika installed steam drills and cross cutting and drifting commenced at the 75 foot level on the big quartz vein. The rock came out of a drift and the good rock went straight up to the top and down to the mill. The useless rock went along a trestle and out into the lake for fill. Steam engines were used, fired by wood cut from the bushland around the site. Steam drills were used and the same power was used to run the circular saw used to cut foot boards for the boilers. Eight men were in the bush chopping, two teams hauling, and the crew worked 10 hours a day for \$2.00. They worked until 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays and had Sunday off.

(continued from previous page)

MUSEUM CALENDAR:

Please mark your calendar, check your attics, scour your basements and plan to participate in the 2009 lineup.

Displays feature items related to the theme loaned by people in the community as well as artifacts from the Historical Society's permanent collection of Tavistock and area memorabilia.

Feb. 7 – Apr. 25

“Centuries of Farming” featuring local farms and tools.

May 2 – July 25

“Games & Toys” that families once used and maybe still do.

Aug. 1 – Oct 31

“Fill'er Up” memorabilia from garages and old cars.

Nov. 7 – Jan. 31

“Tavistock Artists” grand opening of Tavistock Art Exhibit

Between May and October of 1911, three log cabins located just off the T & N.O. siding were replaced by frame buildings. The town soon included a hotel, hardware store, four saloons, a barber, baker, grocery store, general store, drug store and physician. Within five months, Swastika had grown from a series of scattered claims to a town of some 400 people with at least 1,000 more scattered through the bush within a few miles of the place. A union school opened in 1912 and then a church built of boards inside and out took the place of services held in Mr. Love's store. The church was used on Sunday afternoons by the Presbyterians and the Methodists in the evenings.

To mark the first births in the new village, the first boy and girl were given property with lots tax free until sixteen years of age. Charles “Swastika” Culbert was born October 4, 1911 and Cecile Chaput was born six days later. Her parents later gave the property to the Catholic Church. Along with the town site, a railway station was soon built.

Mining is a dangerous occupation and Swastika was not without its close calls and tragedies. In the spring of 1908, Pat Gillian had a narrow escape from taking a quick trip to the bottom of No. 2 shaft. He had fired 11 holes the day before and in the morning had gone down to do the mucking out. Two fellows were there to operate the lift when Pat called to be pulled up and just as he reached the top, he was overpowered by the fumes of the previous day's dynamite charges. He would have fallen from the bucket had not one of the men grabbed him by the wrist and swung him to safety on the platform. Malcolm McLaughlin came to a different fate. The engineer, who is a native of Nova Scotia, was endeavoring to start the engine in connection with the big compressor plant which has been installed at the mine, using a crowbar for that purpose. It appears that the steam had not been securely

closed off, and the push of the crowbar caused the engine to start quickly throwing the frame of the engine and the bar with such force that the bone in his leg was completely shattered just below the knee joint and down to the ankle. Dr. Lowrey, of Englehart brought the injured man down to the Liskeard Hospital, where Dr. Fisher and Dorsey assisted him in performing the necessary amputation.

Three months later, while performing his duties on the machinery, he dropped dead. It was stated he died from heart failure.

Entertainment around the village consisted of a



THE LEMP STUDIO COLLECTION

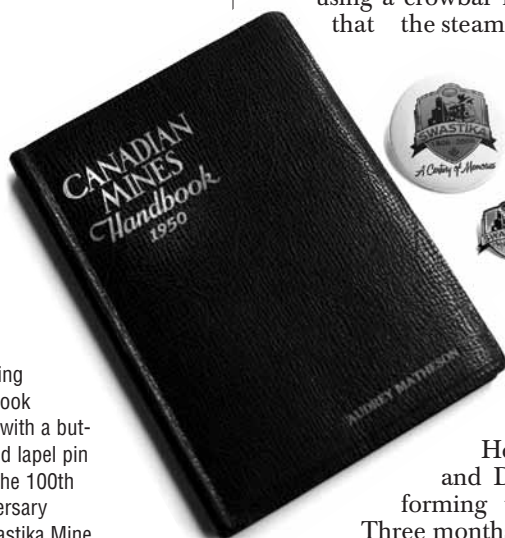
A train arrives at Swastika Station c. 1911

gramophone with a big horn on it owned by a Mr. McFarlane, who kept the steam up in the boiler. Several locals used to step dance and do fancy tricks during these evening gatherings. In order to play hockey the men had to go down to Cobalt first and buy their equipment which they then used on Otto Lake. In one report of March, 1912, it was stated that the Swastika Mine team had “walloped the Lucky Cross at hockey on Saturday last, by the score of 1-0, after twenty minutes of overtime play. Goe. Cooper was the bright star, having scored the only goal.”

Fishing in Otto Lake was hard to beat and the lakes provided many of the meat staples with the excellent fish available. They used to catch fish in a net and sell them to the miners. They could recall one Northern Pike brought in that weighed twenty-six pounds with two suckers in it - one seven and the other nine inches long. The suckers would be used as a fertilizer in the gardens. The local stores used to sell all their beef, regardless of the type for twenty-five cents a pound. This was a lot of money at that time as the men would only make \$2.50 working 12 hours a day. Seeding potatoes sold for eleven dollars in 1914.

Shares in the promising claims such as Swastika started for as little as 10 cents a share and by 1909 had ceased selling for 20 cents to nothing less than 35 cents a share. Six months later the stock jumped from 35 cents to 60 cents and surviving samples of stock certificates from Swastika are made out for \$1.00 per share. These increases were undoubtedly sparked by great reports that workers had struck the large vein again after much trenching. The outcropping proved to be a very rich vein, a real bonanza, but the vein was lost and the mine closed down within a year. The Swastika didn't bring good luck to Dr. Michael Steele.

Swastika Mining Company was formed in 1908 by James and William Dusty and survived in one form or another until 1940 when the property was consolidated with other properties around Swastika into a company named Golden Gate Mining Company. Late in 1945, Crescent Kirkland Mine opened again until April 1949, when the mine was closed.



A mining handbook along with a button and lapel pin from the 100th Anniversary of Swastika Mine held in 2008.

Dr. Michael Steele, Tavistock

Dr. Michael Steele was born in Avonbank in July 24, 1860. He spent his early youth on the farm there, and then attended the University of Toronto. He moved to Tavistock in 1888 and was married three times, to the former Annie Clark, Annie McGregor and Elizabeth Caverhill. He had three daughters, Marjorie at Stratford, Mrs. Ray McKay, Detroit and Miss Dorothy Steele at Vienna.

Dr. Steele was an ardent worker in Knox Presbyterian Church, secretary of the Tavistock Public Library and a member of the School Board and as Medical Officer of Health in this area. In 1911, he was elected Member of Parliament for South Perth. He remained at Ottawa until 1921, having been re-elected in 1917 as a Union candidate.

He passed away in 1946 at Vienna at the home of his daughter, Miss Dorothy Steele.

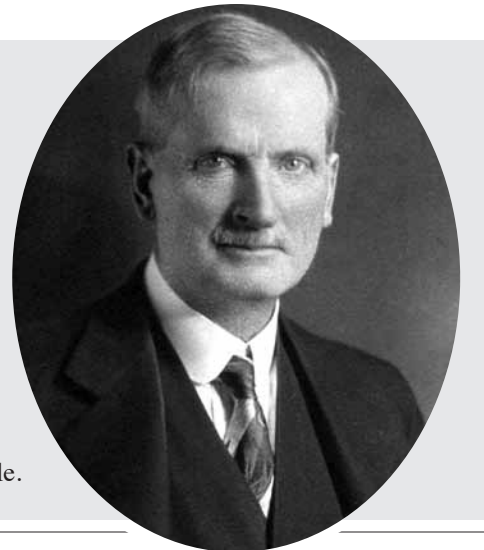


PHOTO COURTESY OF STRATFORD-PERTH ARCHIVES



Quehl's Atrium

Looking for a cure for the common cold? Perhaps some sweet red cough syrup? How about some tonic to provide a little pep? Maybe even some arsenic?

From 1905 to 1977 the people in Tavistock and community purchased these supplies at Lemp's Drug Store. The store was located at 16 Hope Street West. What a store it was! Pharmaceutical supplies, greeting cards, records, chocolates, gift possibilities for every occasion, the latest postcards of Tavistock and places far afield, cameras and film and so much more. Why you could spend a day just checking out the many bottles and boxes and drawers and cabinets. The Tavistock & District Historical Society has replicated a small portion of Lemp's Drug Store ... the pharmaceuticals ... in its current display at Quehl's Atrium. Please check it out. No prescription required.

The Atrium at Quehl's Restaurant (left) is now home to a display on Lemp's Pharmacy.

A Victorian Christmas!

The Victorian Parlour was a delightful journey to our past for the Christmas edition of the Museum/Archives' display. A time of elegance, a time when this special room was only used for friends, family gatherings and special occasions. A hundred year old fireplace mantel graced the one wall with stockings hung ready for Santa. A couple of pop corn poppers sat ready to use. Crystal dishes, a set of cranberry lamps and portraits of Tavistock families adorned the mantel. Two ornate chairs and a rocking horse were sitting by the fireside.

A beautiful black sequined dress on a form next to a corner what-not stand displaying beautiful hand painted china including a 1912 Glasgow Warehouse plate. Under the Christmas tree were games and toys enjoyed by the young and old, A stuffed teddy bear sat in a wooden sleigh, a wicker doll buggy and rocking chair held porcelain dolls. A gramophone played favourite songs, and on it's shelf lay a German Bible. A Westlake table adorned with a candelabra and a stereo scope sat in the centre of the room. A settee and more ornately carved chairs showed the love of the crafters workmanship. A wicker fern stand, shadow boxes with colourful yarn flowers, one displaying Henry Diehl's coffin plate. On the walls hung a framed baptismal and confirmation certificates in German along with their beautifully framed pictures from that era. A portrait of Queen Victoria and one of Mr. & Mrs. John Sipple adorned the walls in their antique gold frames.

On top of the memorabilia china cabinet sat a lovely display of oil lamps and a "Gone with the Wind" lamp. On the other cabinet was a hand made model of St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

O what a beautiful era in history this must have been. Don't you wish you lived back then?

NEED HELP?

Looking for help with your family history? We have a broad-based reference section ... several binders of obituaries, cemetery transcriptions for neighbouring townships, census records, old newspapers, family histories, school histories, church records and personal knowledge of many of the older families in the area. If a family member was part of the Armed Forces then perhaps we have the information you are looking for. Come in for a visit or call Mary at 519-655-9915.