

# YESTERDAY

News from the Tavistock and District Historical Society

VOLUME 17

FALL 2011



## 100 Years of the Tavistock fire service

**FIRE DEPT. 100TH ANNIVERSARY - SEPTEMBER 24, 2011**

*Dedication of the restored 1926 firetruck on August 30, 1990, left to right: on truck: Clarence Neeb, Don Eckstein, Harry Zimmerman, in front: Scotty McDermott and Harold Wilker; in driver's seat: Mahlon Leis, Jack Wettlaufer.*

**Tavistock & District  
Historical Society**

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**Tavistock  
& District  
Historical  
Society**

37 Maria Street,  
Box 280,  
Tavistock, Ontario,  
Canada NOB 2R0

**MUSEUM  
HOURS:**

Saturdays  
10am-12 noon

Other times  
by appointment:  
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■ BITS AND PIECES

**Genealogy researcher finds home**

From time to time we get requests for information from genealogists all over the continent. Recently, Faith Hope Macey from New Mexico was looking for information about her grandmother who was born in Tavistock in 1878. Her great grandfather was Christian Herrick, a hatmaker listed in the 1878 Tavistock directory.



Armand Schaefer

Faith had already completed an exhaustive search of information available on the internet (including our website and Fact and Fantasy online) but was looking for information only available locally. Specifically, she wanted to know if the Herrick family owned property.

Thanks to our Registry Office records we were able to determine where her ancestors lived.

Faith's grandmother married Frederick Schaefer (a good local name) and they had a son, Armand, who became a noted Hollywood producer of Gene

Autry movies and others. He was featured in our Fall 2008 newsletter, Volume 10. Historical Society researcher, Sherrill Calder, linked Faith up with Phil Schaefer of Tavistock who is e-mailing her with Schaefer family information. Faith is from grandma's second marriage.

The Historical Society sent Faith a large package containing Registry Office records; house history and photos; the Herrick-Schaefer marriage registration (including signatures in their handwriting) from Trinity Lutheran Church records; a picture of Trinity Lutheran where they were married; and several pictures of downtown Tavistock in the era when the Herricks lived here. The first reaction in New Mexico was "Holy Cow!"

The following is a recent note from Faith. "I have been sharing most of our communications with my brother (John Wesley Simmons) in Denver, Colorado, who lives about a mile from our mother's facility. We have spoken about a possible trip to Tavistock and he and his wife are going to try to join us in Ontario next year. You and Phil have added valuable information, Sherrill. This has been an awesome experience and I'm sure it isn't finished yet."

Faith Hope Macey, Los Lunas, New Mexico

**A history of the printed page**

On July 1, 2009, the Gladding family marked 40 years as owners and operators of The Tavistock Gazette. To mark the milestone and educate the public on the advances in printing and publishing over the years, a display has been set up in the back room at the Tavistock Museum/Archives for the past few months. The items demonstrate the changes in technology from the dawn of moveable type to the advent of computer technology.

Bob and Doris Gladding took over the newspaper on July 1, 1969 and continued to operate the business until their son, Bill, and his wife, Sheri, purchased the company on March 4, 1988. Bill had worked with his parents full-time since 1974 and became editor in 1980.

The Gazette converted to offset printing in 1974, going from Linotype linecasting and handset headings to Selectric typewriters and computer-based imagesetters. A Kodak digital camera was first used in August of 1998, then the photography changed to Canon digital SLRs.

Along the way, handwritten copy has made way for fax and now mainly e-mail correspondence.

The Gazette also has an internet presence at [www.tavistock.on.ca](http://www.tavistock.on.ca) and is responsible for the construction and maintenance of several other local web sites.



Bob Gladding looks at The Gazette museum display.

**Did you know?**

Doors Open Oxford is happening on Saturday, September 24. The local attractions include Danensview Farm on the 16th Line of East Zorra and the Tavistock Public Library.

## MEMORABLE TAVISTOCK FIRES:

**Fire destroys mill of  
Poehlman and  
Kalbfleisch**  
April 29, 1881



**Yost Carriage Shop  
and D. Vance Meat  
Market razed by fire**  
1908

**Flour Mill gutted**  
October 1, 1922

**Arlington Hotel barn  
badly damaged by fire**  
June 17, 1933

**Fire completely destroys  
Tavistock Cheese Factory**  
July 2, 1938

**Fire Brigade Fights  
Stubborn Blaze at C.L.  
Erb's Millwork**  
February 15, 1941

**Fire damages plant of  
J.G. Field & Company**  
October 29, 1944

**Weicker Bros.  
Slaughterhouse  
destroyed by fire**  
Nov. 7, 1950

**Zimmerman Bros.  
Plant destroyed in  
spectacular fire**  
December 3, 1956

**Woelfle Block burns**  
March 14, 1962

**Arlington Hotel  
completely destroyed**  
September 22, 1965

**December 21, 1933:**  
Peter Steinman resigns as fire chief. Fought his first fire in May 1874 at age 15 when the old flax mill burned down (at the time there was simply a pump and 6-man bucket brigade.)



by R. Paul Bartlett, 1998

At a public meeting in April 1911, Reeve Appel remarked that the people of Tavistock had been talking of fire protection ever since he had come to the village, and until then it had ended in talk. But a resolution had been passed at the previous year's nominations urging the incoming council to finally do something about it. In response, Council organized a committee to gather information on the subject.

In May of 1911, Tavistock Council unveiled a waterworks plan that would provide water for fire protection as well as for domestic use. Even though the proposed system would increase village taxes, most of the businessmen in town were whole-hearted supporters of the system. Tavistock had reached a crossroads in its history and the future appeared to be clear.

The By-Law carried by a "substantial" majority. 109 voters said "Let us have property protected, "and 45 voters conscientiously voted, "we are safe enough as we are." The long-discussed question of fire protection had at last been settled.

With a waterworks system about to be built, the next step was a fire brigade and a meeting was held to get it organized. Peter Steinman was appointed Fire Chief and twenty others were enrolled in the Brigade. Everything seemed to be going smoothly. "We have a plentiful supply of water," commented the newspaper, "good machinery for forcing the water through the mains, and in a very short time the apparatus will be on hand for the men to work with. With conscientious practice on the part of the members and a little encouragement on the part of the villagers, our brigade should soon be in a position to cope with almost any fire that is likely to break out in the village."

The waterworks test was an unqualified success. Taking everything into consideration, Tavistock could claim that it had "the best and most complete system of waterworks for fire protection of any place of its size in the Province."

In June of 1912, Tavistock Council proposed a by-law to raise a further \$4,500 in order to provide a place in which to store and care for the hose reel

and hose, and other apparatus belonging to the fire brigade. At that time, when any of the hose was used it had afterwards to be hung in different parts of the village to dry. Where was the hose? And in what condition was it for immediate use? Only those who had the hose in charge knew. The building under consideration was to contain, besides the fire hall, a tower in which to dry the hose, a lock-up, an office, and a hall in which to hold Council meetings, Board of Trade meetings, School Board meetings, Police Court and Division Court.

The By-Law was defeated: In favour, 27; against, 77. The citizens of Tavistock had decided they did not need a firehall.

In 1914 the Fire Underwriters checked the Tavistock system. When the system failed because the alarm whistle was frozen, the town council recommended improvements. An addition was built onto the PUC powerhouse in 1918 to store fire equipment, a fire bell was added in 1920 for \$39.00, and a fire truck was purchased in 1926.

## FALL FAIR SIGN

The Tavistock Fall Fair sign (as seen in the background of the photo on previous page) was discovered by chance in a pile of lumber put out for sale by Edgar Vogt when he retired from his shop on Minerva Street in Tavistock. The sign was painted freehand by Gordon Ratz in about 1952. At one time Mr. Ratz painted practically all the signs for businesses in the village.

This particular sign is unique in that it was made from one piece of solid lumber, roughly 10'x21'x1" thick. This board would have been cut from a tree that had a diameter of 26" or more. To achieve this diameter, the tree probably grew from a seedling in the year 1850. Our fall fair had its beginning in 1851.

This was truly a Tavistock tree for a Tavistock sign advertising a Tavistock institution - our Fall Fair. If this sign could speak, what a story it could tell!

# Fire brigade fights stubborn blaze two hours

*Planing Mill of C.L. Erb & Sons Destroyed Sunday Morning (Feb. 23, 1941)*



*from The Tavistock Gazette, February 26, 1941*

A stubborn blaze at the planing mill of C. L. Erb and Sons, corner of William and Hope Streets, was brought under control after two hours of strenuous work on the part of the Fire Brigade and members of the Civil Guard on Sunday morning, loss and damage by fire being estimated at close to \$7000 by Mr. Erb. The work of the fire fighters was directed by Wilfred Strahm, fire chief, and Harry Nuttall, officer commanding of the Guard.

Origin of the fire was not definitely determined, two possible causes being advanced by Mr. Erb and his sons, one from defective wiring, the other from an overhead stove pipe. However Lloyd Erb, who discovered the blaze about 10:30 Sunday morning, told The Gazette that he had been in the mill about 2:30 in the morning to attend to the fire which he found to be out. He stated that he had not noticed anything out of the way at the time. When he went to the mill Sunday morning to start the fire, he could not get into the building for blinding, choking smoke. He turned in the alarm to the telephone office from the home of E. A. Kalbfleisch.

The fire fighters were considerably hampered by the choking smoke, for they could not get into the building to fight the blaze from its starting point. Too, the building is double-boarded, and

as the flames licked their way between the outside and inside walls, it was necessary to chop holes in the outside wall to fight the fast-spreading flames.

Four lines of hose were operated for over an hour in an endeavour to keep the flames in the north end of the building. Those at the muzzles had to be replaced from time to time as the men became ill from smoke. But after a brief rest, the men went back to their endeavour, and were finally rewarded for their splendid efforts.

The blaze seemed to have started toward the north end of the building, and when discovered, had a good start. The portion of the building destroyed was the former Evangelical Church building, moved to that location a good many years ago. Three years ago considerable new machinery had been installed, and the interior

renovated to care for the fast expanding business of the firm. Though the iron parts of the machinery did not appear to be damaged to any great extent, pulleys, shaftings, beltings and wood parts will have to be replaced. The structure itself was much damaged both by fire and the necessary chopping of holes in the outside walls to get at the flames. A portion of the roof caved in, the uprights being burned through allowing for its collapse. The Gazette ascertained that the firm had considerable orders on hand, some of which was damaged by fire and water. Six men will be thrown out of employment due to the fire.

The alarm was turned in just at a time when most members of the Fire Brigade were either at morning service or on their way. Too, by a strange coincidence, as the telephone operator, Miss Pauline Lemp, pressed the button to sound the alarms, a fuse blew out, with the consequences the siren at the north end of the village did not sound. Miss Lemp realized that the fuse had blown, and calling to passers-by a switch was thrown on a post in front of Pepler's which set the siren at that point in action. Those living at the north end of the village did not hear the alarm, unless they happened to be out of doors at the time, The Gazette ascertained.

Mr. Erb could not say just when the work of rebuilding the mill would commence, but Curtis Erb, a son, estimated that rebuilding would begin as soon as possible.

## Life at the House of Industry and Refuge "THE POOR HOUSE"

Speaker: Susan Dunlop, Curator  
Wellington County Museum and Archives  
**Wednesday, September 21 at 7 p.m.**  
to be held at Grace United Church Hall

## SPEAKER SERIES '11



## Did you know?

At one time the Tavistock Council paid Jacob Lingner \$24 per annum in rent, at what is now 33 Hope Street East, for the use of his barn to store the fire department's hose reel.