

# YESTERDAY

News from the Tavistock and District Historical Society

VOLUME 27

SPRING 2015



*Constable Ron Rudy with his shoulder flash collection in 1979.*

*Photo courtesy of Kitchener Waterloo Record Photographic Negative Collection, University of Waterloo*

*K-W Record photo by Brian Clark, April 19, 1979*

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2015**

**Theme: Tavistock Police Service - 1909-1999**

# Ron Rudy: Tavistock's longest serving police constable



## *Police badge collection surpasses description*

When Retired Senior Constable Ron Rudy started collecting police shoulder flashes and hat badges he didn't dream his hobby would become so extensive. His collection of possibly more than 1,500 items is too large to display in his home, so he agreed to share it with the community at the 2015 Annual General Meeting of the Tavistock and District Historical Society. The one day exhibit will be held on Saturday, March 28, 2015 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Tavistock Museum and Archives at 37 Maria Street in Tavistock.

Constable Rudy has been the subject of many newspaper articles over the years for his collection. Although his collecting has slowed over the years, his vast collection of colourful reminders of long disbanded police forces across the continent and around the world still brings a great deal of joy.

His hobby first began when he became an auxiliary police officer with the Woodstock OPP. Several officers were trading badges and Mr. Rudy thought it would be a good hobby to get involved with. He started writing letters to other forces and collect badges from police forces that had been disbanded. He even stopped by to personally meet a retired chief in the village of Hastings to persuade him to give up a badge that was sought after by many collectors. He came home with the badge.

Moving to Tavistock in 1978, the police office was two doors away from funeral director Bob Krug, who became fast friends with the officers. Mr. Krug was also a persuasive letter writer and through his efforts managed to add many more badges to Constable Rudy's collection.

Among his collection are badges that are both colourful and large. An Alabama State Trooper's badge tells the long history of the original 13 British colonies. Along with these beautifully embroidered shoulder flashes are many more cap badges, most brilliantly polished, and most from outside Canada. One badge also included the bobby hat that it was worn on when the English officer visited Tavistock in July of 1989 to donate the item in person. Mr. Rudy has three bobby hats in his collection along with two white helmets worn by police in the Barbadoes and Grenada. There is also another unique section of about 60 flashes from native reserves.

But probably the shoulder flashes that bring the most emotion aren't from far flung corners of the world. They are the ones from Tavistock and Embro. The Tavistock Police Force was amalgamated into the Oxford Community Police in 1999 and the Embro Force gave way to the OPP in 1958.

Mr. Rudy was born and raised in Embro and attended high school at Woodstock Collegiate

Institute in Woodstock. Following graduation in 1956, he enrolled in a 5-year apprenticeship program with the Provincial Institute of Trades in Toronto, working at Brenneman Chev-Olds in Embro. He earned his Class 'A' Mechanic's Licence and then began work with Ross Smith & Son Chrysler in Embro.

During his years at the garage he came into contact with many police officers, checking plates and vehicle registrations, towing cars, etc. At some point he became interested enough in the work of the Woodstock OPP detachment, that he signed on as an auxiliary constable working approximately 50 hours a month. He worked in this capacity for 12-1/2 years before making police work his second career.

At the same time he was a volunteer with the Embro & West Zorra Fire Department where he earned his 25-year long service medal. Over the years he wore his police dress uniform with both police and fire service medals proudly displayed on his chest.

Ever since Tavistock Police went to the 3-officer system, from a single officer/chief in 1976, Constable Rudy had been serving the local community. He began working with Chief Peter Grant on May 16, 1974, replacing Constable Tom Tack. He completed his 12-week training course at Aylmer over the next two years and formed the 3-man team with Chief Alex Balazs and Constable Rick Walker. They served the community until amalgamation with Oxford Community Police Service (OCPS) on January 1, 1999.

Constable Rudy continued to serve on court duty and with prisoner transfer until retiring in 2011.



### **Constable Rudy recognized for 20 years of service.**

*from the Tavistock Gazette, June 15, 1994*

*Constable Ron Rudy (centre) accepts a commemorative plaque from Tavistock Police Service and the Ontario Police Association for 20 years of service with the Tavistock Police from Chief Alex Balazs (left). At right is Constable Rick Walker.*



### **Retired Senior Constable Ron Rudy received a gold watch in July of 2000 after 25 years of police service.**

*Photos courtesy of the Tavistock Gazette*

## YOUR DRIVER'S LICENCE

### THE TAVISTOCK CONNECTION

What's the first question a police officer asks when you are pulled over? Show me your licence and registration?

It's interesting to note that such a fundamental part of policing within the province was initiated right here in Tavistock. South Perth Liberal MPP Valentine Stock of Tavistock introduced a Bill in the Legislature in February of 1911 to force drivers of motor vehicles to carry their licence or permit with them at all times.

"The Act stated that if a driver is arrested and brought before a police magistrate or justice of the peace he/she must produce a permit or license. Where the conviction is the first one the magistrate must endorse upon it the date and a short, signed statement of conviction. Upon a second conviction within a year the police magistrate shall retain the license or permit, write "cancelled for second conviction" across it and forward the same to the Provincial Secretary. The Act covers both owners and professional drivers. The former are required to carry the permit issued with respect to the automobile, while the driver must carry his license."

# Tavistock Police History

## Town Constables 90 years on the beat

Exactly 100 years after the first Tavistock police constable was instructed on how to carry out his duties by the new Town Council the local police service was disbanded.

According to research by historian Carl Seltzer in *Fact & Fantasy* (1967), "As early as May 20, 1909, Constable Henry Feick had been instructed to enforce the law about bicycles on the sidewalks and the council had decided that the quotation of \$45 and \$48 for cell doors was too expensive; where was he to put his arrestees if he did enforce their ruling? On June 23, 1910, Charlie Mohr was appointed assistant constable, but the chief still lacked handcuffs and a lock-up. Policing the village has never been too arduous a task, owing no doubt to the law-abiding nature of the citizens and the fact that most of them are property owners, anxious to maintain the good name of the community."

Tavistock was founded in 1848 when Henry Eckstein built the first tavern on the corner of Hope and Woodstock Streets. As the town grew, bordering on Perth and Oxford counties, it became clear some sort of law enforcement was needed. Tavistock reports in the Stratford Beacon as early as 1874 complained that the nearest magistrates were in Shakespeare and Zorra. In 1889 Constable Conrad Eichenauer was mentioned for South Easthope Township and in 1892, Sebastian Flynn was appointed constable for Oxford County.

Henry Feick was the town constable after incorporation of the village in 1909. Later, many served in the position with Stan Melbourne taking over the duties after WWII. Chief Peter Grant started in the fall of 1961 and retired when Chief Alex Balazs took over on November 12, 1975. Constable Ron Rudy began with the force on June 1, 1974 replacing Constable Thomas Tack. Rick Walker was a part-time constable in 1975 and was hired on full-time on March 21, 1976. These three officers served until the force was amalgamated in 1999.

The Tavistock Police Services Board caused quite an uproar in the village in the early 1990's when they suggested getting rid of the local police. At an East Zorra-Tavistock Council meeting on December 19, 1993, it was decided to investigate the costs of policing by the OPP or the City of Woodstock police services. A community campaign to keep the local police ensued and the question was finally put to a vote on the November 1994 election ballot. The result was 952 to 52 in favour of keeping the three-

man force - Chief Balazs and Constables Rudy and Walker.

But because of the rising costs of policing and new regulations it took only five years before the community had to give in to the reality. The Oxford Community Police Service (OCPS) was formed in 1999, an amalgamation of police forces taking charge of the City of Woodstock and the Townships of East Zorra-Tavistock, Blandford-Blenheim and Norwich. This was the entire east half of Oxford County with a population of 57,500 and with an area



Police Chief Peter Grant

## TAVISTOCK'S POLICE CHIEFS

Henry Feick 1909-1917

Werner Weitzel - 1918

Henry Feick 1919-21

Harry Schaefer - 1922

John Schippling - 1922-23

Leslie Harris - 1923-25

John Schippling - 1926-38

Bill Currah - 1939-45

Cliff Weitzel - 1945

Stan Melbourne - 1946-61

Peter Grant - 1961-75

Alex Balazs - 1975-1999

twice the size of Toronto.

Patrol zones were established and at least one officer was put in each patrol zone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Police Service started with 75 officers plus support staff and expanded to 81 officers.

Ten years later another big change was in the wind. According to the Tavistock Gazette of October 21, 2009: "At 07:01 Monday morning, October 19, 2009 the Oxford OPP took over policing jurisdictions for the Township of East Zorra-Tavistock. Following a long process of negotiations, since the Township Council voted to opt out of the Oxford Community Police Service (OCPS), the (OPP) police service is now operating here."

The Oxford OPP, commanded by Inspector Jack Goodlett, became

the Oxford County OPP reassuming jurisdiction of all areas contained within the Townships of Blandford-Blenheim, East Zorra Tavistock and Norwich Townships. These jurisdictions were in addition to the Townships of South-West Oxford, Zorra Township and the towns of Tillsonburg and Ingersoll already serviced by OPP.

Out of the 24 officers assigned to the new jurisdiction (21 constables and 3 sergeants) 17 officers began training in Orillia, 14 constables and 2 sergeants having transferred from OCPS and a new recruit from the Peel Region. They started their assigned service schedule on November 8th.

In 2015, Council voted to renew their contract with the OPP and keep their local Police Services Board. A reporting station remains in the village, the offices as part of the Tavistock fire station.



Maurice Howard Bell,  
1st Special Service Force,  
2nd Canadian Paratroop  
Battalion Sgt. Technician

# Special Service Force receives US Congressional Medal of Honor

A former Tavistock man killed in action during the Second World War was part of the First Special Service Force, a military unit composed of volunteers from the United States and Canada, whose surviving members received the Congressional Medal of Honor on February 3, 2015.

About 175 surviving members of the force were awarded at a special ceremony in Washington, DC. The First Special Service Force was activated in July 1942 at Fort Harrison near Helena, Montana.

The Force was initially intended to target military and industrial installations that were supporting the German war effort, including important hydroelectric plants, which would severely limit the production of strategic materials used by the Axis powers.

From July 1942 through June 1943, volunteers of the Force trained in hazardous, arctic conditions in the mountains of western Montana, and in the waterways of Camp Bradford, Virginia.

The combat echelon of the Force totalled 1,800 soldiers, half from the United States and half from Canada. The Force also contained a service battalion, composed of 800 members from the United States, that provided important support for the combat troops.

A special bond developed between the Canadian and United States soldiers, who were not segregated by country, although the commander of the Force was a United States colonel. The Force was the only unit formed during World War II that consisted of troops from Canada and the United States.

In October 1943, the Force went to Italy, where it fought in battles south of Cassino, including Monte

La Difensa and Monte Majo, two mountain peaks that were a critical anchor of the German defense line.

During the night of December 3, 1943, the Force ascended to the top of the precipitous face of Monte La Difensa, where the Force suffered heavy casualties and overcame fierce resistance to overtake the German line.

After the battle for La Difensa, the Force continued to fight tough battles at high altitudes, in rugged terrain, and in severe weather.

After battles on the strongly defended Italian peaks of Sammucro, Vischiataro, and Remetanea, the size of the Force had been reduced from 1,800 soldiers to fewer than 500.

For 4 months in 1944, the Force engaged in raids and aggressive patrols at the Anzio Beachhead.

On June 4, 1944, members of the Force were among the first Allied troops to liberate Rome.

Sergeant Bell was born November 28, 1916 in Stratford and attended Tavistock Public School for a time. Upon graduation he worked at the Galt textile Mill. He enlisted in London in January of 1942 and joined the Force to train in the US. He served at Kiska Island in the Aleutian Islands and was killed in action on December 6, 1943 during the fierce battle at Monte La Difensa, Italy as a Sergeant Technician in the 2nd Canadian Paratroop Battalion. He is buried at the Cassino War Cemetery in Italy.

*Compiled from notes by Randy Boswell of PostMedia News and files of the Tavistock & District Historical Society.*



US House and Senate leaders (right) awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to surviving members of the First Special Service Force, also known as the Devil's Brigade, for bravery that helped to end World War II. The ceremony was held in Washington on Tuesday, February 3rd, 2015.

Photo courtesy of Business Wire

## Tavistock & District Historical Society

37 Maria Street,  
Box 280, Tavistock,  
Ontario, Canada  
N0B 2R0

### Executive:

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