

YESTERDAY

News from the Tavistock and District Historical Society

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Tavistock: It was 1915!

The second in a 5-part series on World War I

It was 1915 and the world was at war. World War 1 had its official start on August 4, 1914 when Britain declared war on Germany. While the British in principle appreciated help from the Commonwealth countries they weren't so enthused with the Canadian soldiers in particular. First of all, the Canadians were better paid. A Canadian fighting man received \$1.10 a day while his fellow Brit made 24 cents. Secondly, Canadians didn't maintain the stiff upper lip and British reserve. Canadian soldiers by and large liked to drink and liked to party and did both with great regularity.

There weren't any soldiers from our community with the first contingent going to war. Recruiting was enthusiastic in big cities but not so in the rural communities and especially not so in places like Tavistock that had both a strong German and a strong Mennonite background.

For most people the war at the start of 1915 was pretty much "over there" ... a major event but not something of direct concern. War news was reported in the Tavistock Gazette but mainly on the inside pages. The front page featured local items of interest. Adam Ratz, who owned a large home on DeCew Street, was looking for a general servant and promised the highest wages paid. And an ad from Fred Weston - Home Bakery asked "Why buy out of town bread for 6 cents when you can buy Weston's bread for 5 cents?"

Even the war music at the time was light hearted. A classic example is the tongue- twister "Sister Susie" whose chorus goes like this:

*"Sister Susie's sewing shirts for soldiers
Such skill at sewing shirts
Our shy young sister Susie shows!
Some soldiers send epistles,
Say they'd sooner sleep in thistles
Than the saucy, soft, short shirts for soldiers
sister Susie sews."*

A more abiding interest in the war in Europe started to grow with news of the battles at Ypres. It was the Battle of St. Julien that struck fear in the hearts of Canadians. April 22, 1915 was the first use of poison gas in the history of warfare ... 160 tons of poison gas that formed a green-yellow cloud 10 kilometres wide and a kilometre deep.

By early May one Canadian doctor serving at the front had seen so much death and destruction he felt compelled to write about it. With blood under his fingernails Lt. Col.

John McCrae penned "In Flanders Fields". It was not a poem of peace but a call to keep fighting. The horror of war appalled McCrae but he believed there are times when the right thing to do is take up arms and fight. While so much carnage was consuming Europe, life went on for people who didn't have the war on their doorstep. In Tavistock babies, weddings and funerals ... otherwise known as hatches, matches and dispatches were always of interest.

The May wedding of

Emma Heinbuch and Martin Woelfle Jr. was a big celebration. The Gazette story, page one of course, stated that the bride looked charming in a gown of cream silk with lace overdress and sequin trim.

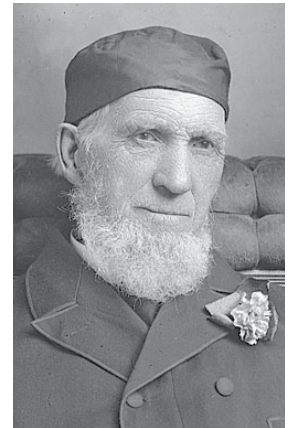
Just a few months later Tavistock mourned the passing of Rev. Levi Wildfang. Obituaries were quite elaborate in the early 1900s and Rev. Wildfang's was a good example. "Father Wildfang will be remembered for his congenial nature and as a man of staunch Christian character. Naturally of a social disposition, practical bend of mind, with a strong sense of justice, he made for himself many friends during his long life of usefulness".

In 1915 the population of Canada had just passed the 8 million mark and newspapers announced that the war was costing Canada \$1M a day. Finding

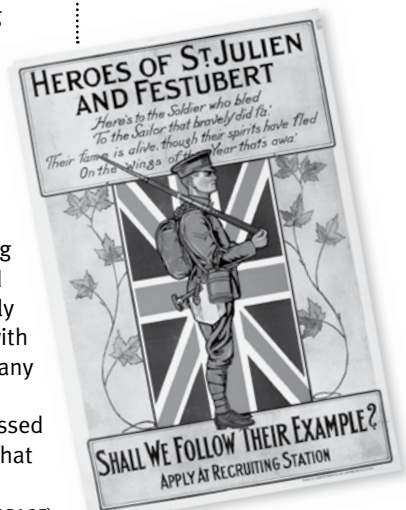
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Ratz residence, 9 DeCew Street



The Departed
Rev. Levi Wildfang
(1827-1915)



Tavistock: It Was 1915

The year 1915 comes alive with a full week of events at the Legion Hall in September.

**Wednesday,
September 16
7:00 p.m.**

In Flanders Fields
The Story of John McCrae
Keynote Speaker:
Bev Dietrich,
Curator of McCrae
House in Guelph
Display:
Tavistock in 1915



**Saturday,
September 19
11 a.m. - 4 p.m.**

Display:
Tavistock in 1915

**Sunday,
September 20
2:00 p.m.**

An afternoon of
WW1 songs with
Ted Cominsky and
his band along with
the display:
Tavistock in 1915

FREE ADMISSION
to all events.

All events are at the
Tavistock Legion Hall,
Branch 518,
223 Hope Street
West, Tavistock



(CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

money to pay for the war effort was already becoming difficult. Our village got a bit of a black eye when it was reported in the Woodstock newspaper that Tavistock failed to contribute at all to the Oxford Patriotic Association.

We did our bit in other ways. Dr. Steele, our local doctor and MP, got the young men busy canvassing for subscriptions for a machine gun and reported splendid success. A wiener and pumpkin pie supper in Andrew Kaufmann's bush in Sebastopol was sponsored by the ABC Tennis club with proceeds going to the war effort. The Gazette urged everyone to "Send the boys what they really want. Tobacco will win the war!"

And, significantly, local boys were starting to sign up. The Gazette featured the story "Tavistock Boy Now At The Front" about Lieutenant Valentine Stock, the son of Valentine Stock, general merchant and former MPP. Lt. Valentine was a surgeon at the Toronto Hospital For Sick Children when he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps. Interestingly, the article specifically stated that Lt. Stock is of German descent and a splendid type of the loyal German

Canadians found in and about Tavistock.

By October battlefield news had moved to the front page and recruiting meetings were suddenly a hot topic. So were Tavistock Village Council meetings. The Village Clerk, J.G. Field of woollen mill fame, was dismissed for working against Council orders. Joe Duval was dismissed as Police Constable. Several Councillors resigned. Reeve Appel was first accused of conflict of interest in a business transaction and then accused of being an enemy alien (defined as someone who is not a British subject). With Appel, the charge was that he was German. Reeve Appel resigned but he didn't do so quietly. He made his views well known in the Gazette which, coincidentally, he published and therefore controlled what was said both for and against him.

An election was called and Appel won by a fine majority. The enemy alien accusation continued and a short time later he resigned again. The case went to court. First he was found guilty and then not guilty. It was, as some of the big newspapers claimed, the worst municipal tangle ever heard of in Canada ... and it happened in Tavistock.

By November weather became a major factor on the battlefield. Long gone were the heady days of 1914 when the standard line was "Home for Christmas". In 1915 that had changed to "Doing My Bit".

In spite of the realities of war or perhaps because of them, more local men signed up. One of them was Thomas William Wharf, a British homeboy who had lived with Minnie and John Wettlaufer Jr. where he worked on the farm and where he learned to read, write and speak German.

On December 13, then in England for basic training, Wharf wrote a letter home.

"Dear Christian Friends

Well, I suppose you are having pretty cold weather by this time. That's what we experienced today after a duration of about 17 days of steady rain. The ground was like bricks but full of hollows and ruts, making it terrible rough to drill on. I sure would like to be in Sunday School now with you. That was always my main objective when I was home and will be when I get back and pray God will spare me to get back to tell you of the experiences of this terrible life. I'm sure it's a privilege for every man to show what he can do for his King and Country but believe me, this life is not for me. In the first place it is too rough and murder-like, too many temptations to sin into which nearly every man can enter but with the King of King's divine power I'll try to hold my share of the good. If I return safe I'll be sure to come back to dear old Tavistock, the best little village in Canada or in the whole world."



Thomas William Wharf

The way we were

Old photograph captures life in 1902



Maxwell Binders were delivered to the J.W. Lingelbach implement warerooms on Friday, March 14, 1902 and Tavistock photographer A.O. Murray was there to record the event.

This copy of the photo came from the late Omer Baechler.



A record of the opening of the J.W. Lingelbach warerooms is recorded in this Lemp Studio negative #659.

There are many mysteries within the Lemp Studio Collection of nearly 4,000 glass negatives rescued from the attic of the Lemp Pharmacy back in 1977. It is only with the help of the public that many of these photographs can be identified. Sometimes it's by comparison to other existing photographs in personal collections that these details come to life.

With the renovations at the former Bonnie Brae nursing home on Woodstock Street North in Tavistock it's interesting to take a look back at the buildings that were there before.

Originally the site of George Malcolm's Mill (1866), the "old mill" was purchased by the Canadian Order of Foresters (Court Martin Number 88 COF) in November of 1887. A report in the Stratford Beacon stated that they "intend to make it into a "court house". The club has 50 members at present." The hall was publicly dedicated the following January.

Known as Forester's Hall for many years thereafter, the property was purchased, enlarged and re-bricked by Jno. Kalbfleisch. A report in the Tavistock Gazette on May 24, 1900 stated: *The Forester's Hall, which Mr. Jno. Kalbfleisch is overhauling and re-modelling, will soon be unrecognizable. There are a number of men working at the building now. When finished, the ground floor*

will be occupied by August Schaefer as a feed store and by Adam Diehl as a liquor store. John Ratz will occupy the whole of the second floor as a tin shop. Then the third floor will be used as a public hall, it will be quite a size, too, for the building is to be extended back for some distance, and when completed will be full three storeys high, with dimensions of 75x38 feet.

A newspaper report on July 18, 1901 stated that "J.W. Lingelbach opened implement warerooms at rear of Kalbfleisch's new block."

Then, on February 20, 1902, the Gazette article states: **MAXWELL DELIVERY.** —Mr. J W. Lingelbach had his delivery of implements on Friday afternoon last. The roads were exceedingly bad, and no doubt kept many farmers away. At any rate many implements were sold that did not appear in the procession. Those who removed their goods on Friday were John H. Bender, mower; Urias Cressman, mower; J. C. Capling, mower; Jos Garner, binder; Jesse Haynes, roller; Geo A Hyde, mower; Alex Hastings, binder; Geo. McCollum, mower; Con Wettlaufer, mower; Jac. Martz, binder; John Olies, mower; Jac Pfreunter, mower and rake; H. H. Paterson, binder; W. E. and John Patterson, binder; John Weitzel, mower and binder; Menno Ropp, mower; John Risk, tiller; Alex Scott, binder; Con Sipple, binder and mower; Paul Schaefer, mower rake and binder; Wm Stein, roller.

That there might be a souvenir of the event A. O. Murray mounted the balcony of Bauer's Hotel to photograph the assembled outfits. He ducked his head under a black cloth that hid the rear of his photographic machine, looked critically at the vehicles and horses that were sinking in the mud of the G.T.R. yards, then called out in his own authoritative way. "Don't get so close together. A little more to the west Whoa! Now move up a little. Get onto that grass. Turn your horses heads a little to the south. Up a little farther. That'll do. That's far enough." By this time every roan, horse and vehicle was looking as pretty as a picture. "Tommy" had secured an elevated position with his big straw hat and was trying to look as if he didn't know that all eyes were on him. By this time there was another duck beneath the dark cloth. A little adjusting, and the command was given, "All ready!" Click! And the trick was done.

If anyone has an original copy of this photograph, please contact any member of the Historical Society.

Tavistock & District Historical Society

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Ontario, Canada
N0B 2R0

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Treasurer – Bob Rudy

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