

# Exploring Tavistock's history one photo at a time

## VINTAGE VIEWS

Tim Mosher

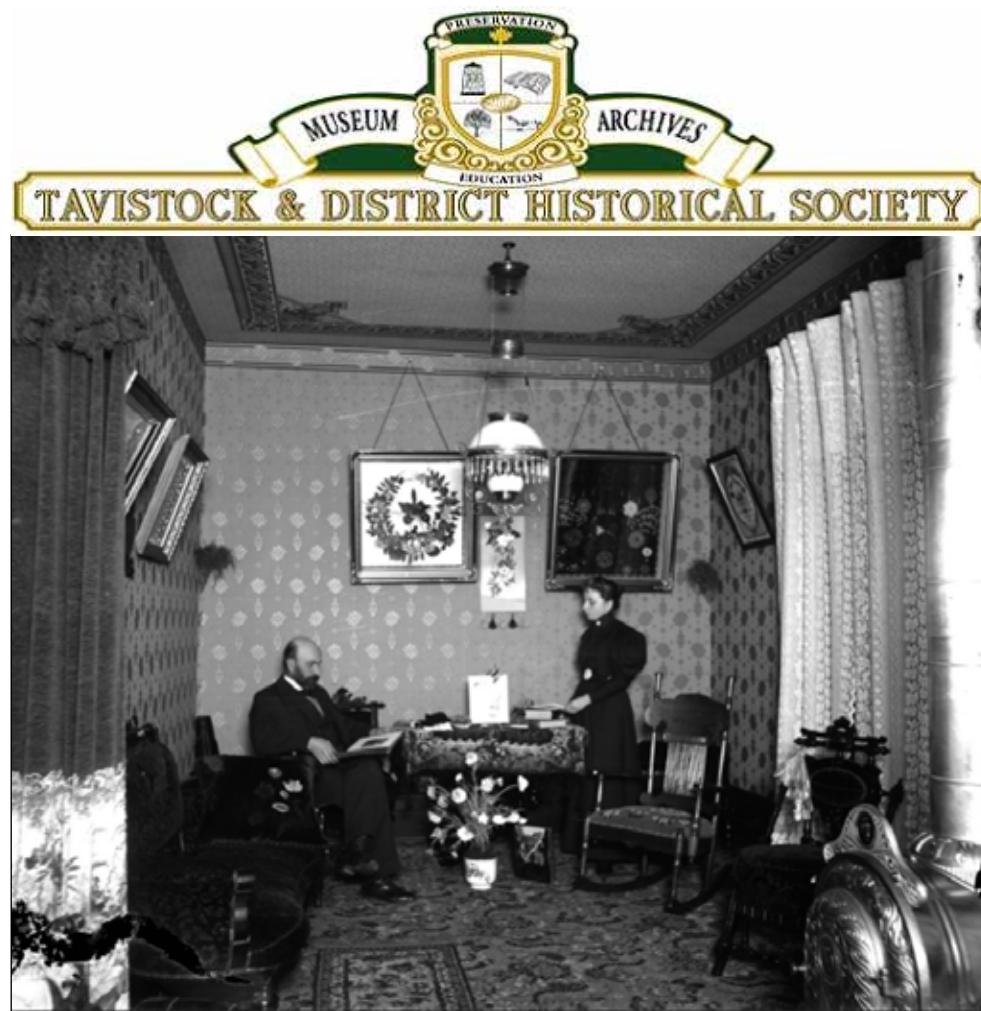
This is the first in a series of photo-articles for the Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette about the Lemp Studio Collection.

It consists of almost 4,000 pictures taken by pharmacist John Lemp and his predecessors, circa 1878-1950. They're mostly of Tavistock and the surrounding villages and a few from Northern Ontario. Most of these images have never been published before, but some are worthy of being seen again.

As a former press photographer, collector of antique photographica and longtime high school photo teacher, I recognize that a large number of these pictures are of very high quality both technically and creatively.

I first learned about photography in Grade 10 while attending Waterloo-Oxford with teacher Mr. John Buchanan, taking pictures and developing them at the school for the yearbooks in the mid-1970s. I then enrolled in the photography program at Conestoga College and this was when John Lemp's son, Lenny (my next-door neighbour), sold the pharmacy and passed on the huge collection of glass negatives to the safekeeping of the Tavistock Gazette. After more than 70 years laying undisturbed in the drug store, save for a few negatives borrowed by Carl Seltzer for his centennial year Fact and Fantasy book, they found a new home and new attention from the Gazette owner/editor Robert Gladding and his son, Bill.

I did the initial sorting of the glass images in 1977 and Bill and Roy Erb then scanned 2,676 of them. Bill published 100 photos between 1978 and 2006 in the Gazette, which many subscribers clipped as keepsakes. The collection was passed on to the Tavistock and District Historical Society (TDHS) in 2006 where they play



an important role in this volunteer community group established in 2002. Bill's son, Luke, built the society's website where the photos were uploaded for all to see. Key in "Tavistock & District Historical Society" and then click on "Lemp Studio Collection" to access all 2,676 images.

Now, almost 50 years after sorting the negatives, I'm just as excited to work with this archaic medium as I was as a college photo student.

The technology that created these historic photos long predates today's popular cell phone cameras but also predates the previous method of picture taking: light-sensitive roll film. The original Lemp Studio Collection is all on sheets of glass measuring from four-by-six to eight-by-10 inches coated with a light-sensitive chemical that, after being inserted one at a time

into a camera, captured a latent image when the photographer opened the shutter.

It was then developed using liquid chemicals in a darkroom, dried and pressed onto light-sensitive paper and exposed to light. This paper was also developed in a similar set of chemicals, dried and then usually mounted on a decorative cardboard mat as a positive image. Sometimes, the photographer's name was embossed on a corner of the mat as this was the final product.

By the 1880s, hundreds of photographers were employed in this 30-year-old medium across Canada. There were few hobbyists in the early days as it was so labour intensive. By 1910, new black-and-white cellulose-roll film became popular and the huge cameras that required tripods using glass negatives slowly disappeared, replaced by small hand-held box cameras made for the masses. John Lemp's photo business then waned, his studio with its large skylight window that illuminated innumerable local people, livestock, products and trophies, became a storeroom by the late 1940s. John's son, Lenny, took over the pharmacy where I left my rolls of film as an 11-year-old. Lemp's store sent customers' rolls of film to Kodak for processing. Today, mostly people older than 40 would be familiar with this type of analog photography.

A few of the pictures that you'll see printed in this ongoing series were published decades ago but most have never been seen since they were first taken almost 150 years ago. So, this edition starts the series of the best of the collection.

### A puzzle in every picture:

To make this fun for young people, there will be a history mystery with every photo. Bill Gladding started this in the 1980s but read on to discover a new twist.

I'll ask a question about every picture and then children or teens can email one answer per person to me. The more difficult puzzles will be for anyone up to age 17 and the less challenging mysteries will be for up to age 14. The first person to email the correct answer will have their name, age and their community's name or rural route number published with the next Vintage Views photo, when a new question will be asked.

### Photo #1: A pretty parlor.

This is a rare indoor domestic scene very likely taken by J.C. Sutherland, one of Mr. Lemp's predecessors around 1885. There are two unusual things about this picture: the people are not looking at the camera, as was the custom of the time, and it appears to be a nighttime photo because there's no light around the curtains. Photographers of this period relied on sunlight almost exclusively to illuminate their subjects, so there are very few outdoor pictures taken after dark. Curiously, Mr. Sutherland didn't rely on sunlight to illuminate this well-to-do parlor setting.

There appears to be fresh flowers, an oil lamp and a papered ceiling. The wood stove in the bottom right had to be well-stoked to keep this home comfortable in winter with such high ceilings. There are no electric fans because electricity was not widespread yet in rural communities. The photographer asked the man and woman to hold still for perhaps three seconds as his glass plate needed time to register the image. If they had a dog or cat in the parlor, it was not included because of how they move at will. The sideways shadow behind the woman indicates that the scene was likely lit with magnesium flash powder and a match on a metal pan held by the photographer behind the camera.

There is no record of the names of these people, or the location of this home.

**The history mystery question for this first photo is for anyone up to and including age 17:** What is the reference to death in this picture? One answer per person emailed with your name, age and what community you live in, or your rural route number to [tim\\_mosher@hotmail.com](mailto:tim_mosher@hotmail.com).

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