

Squirrel was on the menu at The Arlington!



VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

Tavistock and District Historical Society

First, the Royal Hotel, then the Progress House were located here on the east side of Woodstock Street North in Tavistock. In 1897, John Jacob Wettlaufer's Arlington Hotel was built on the same site. Being just a few steps north and across the road from the train station, it attracted a good quantity of travellers passing through the community in need of lodgings, lunch or perhaps a lager or two.

Carl Seltzer, in his 1967 book, *Fact and Fantasy*, on the history of Tavistock and area, recounted that squirrel was on the menu in 1911. During my international travels, I've seen dog meat (China), silk-worm larvae (Korea) and sharks' eyeballs (Laos) on the menus there, so squirrel might be a bit ordinary in comparison. I'm told it has a bit of a nutty flavour.

The photo of the barroom is replete with all the fashions of the era. Bartender, Mr. Helmuth, is wearing an armlet, vest and tie. Labatt's beer is advertised in the framed picture on the top right, Carling's on both sides of the cash register and Pelee Island wine is featured in the frame to the top and right of the "Sam Ratz" sign. The two patrons on the far right hoist their glasses to the photographer and there's perhaps a spittoon on the floor on the far right. Unfortunately, the two calendars on the wall above Mr. Ratz are too small to read the month and year.

The picture of the hotel building shows an unusual half-bowl-shaped balcony covered with scalloped shingles. The left corner is not 90 degrees like the right corner; rather it was built with a 45-degree angle and a door likely to the main bar room. Flower boxes bedeck the facade windows.

An 1898 photo of the hotel shows fancy wrought-iron cresting on the tower's top edge and a huge German flag of the era fluttering in the wind. Despite that photo being black and white, the flag's three horizontal bands' colours seem odd. This is because the flag changed to the present-day colours following World War I, 20 years after that picture

was taken.

The Men's Club held their first meetings at the Arlington in 1938 and the Rotary Club in 1948.

A succession of owners followed the 1897 construction of the Arlington:

- J. J. Wettlaufer: 1897-1898
- John Foik: 1898-1899
- E. J. Wettlaufer: advertised in 1903 the hotel was for sale with three storeys, 16 bedrooms, sample rooms, kitchen and a woodshed with a hall over it etc.
- Sam Ratz: 1904-1910
- A. M. Bald: had squirrel on the menu Dec. 7, 1911, and the property's assessed value was \$9,000
- Meier: in 1912 bought the hotel for \$5,500
- Conrad Hitzeroth and his brother-in-law, Joel Helmuth: purchased the hotel on Oct. 23, 1912
- Clarence Bollert and Charles Dietz
- Ed Millington: 1927-1948 "... a mecca for transients, his wife's generous helpings being known far and wide among the knights of the road," recounted Mr. Seltzer
- Stephan Shoeck
- Henry Hemmerich: 1948-1962
- Mica and Bozidor Todorovic: 1963; the fire was Sept. 20, 1965

Shortly after the fire, the Todorovic brothers rebuilt "... a fine motor hotel, offering all the conveniences of an up-to-date hostelry with beverage room, fine cuisine and clean and comfortable lodging in motel style," wrote Mr. Seltzer. At a later time, it became The Tavistock Pub until at least August 2023.

Today, Tim Horton's replaced the train station, the pub was converted to private apartments and local squirrels are safe once again.

The last History Mystery: The photo was of the main barroom of the Commercial Hotel with the proprietor, Otto Jung, and two male employees behind the bar.



(PHOTO ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN "JACK" LEMP, COURTESY OF JEAN HITZEROTH.)

Bartender Joel Helmuth serves Sam Ratz (rha-tzz) in the bowler hat, cigar in one hand, beverage in the other in 1918. The names of the three other thirsty patrons are unknown. "Sam Ratz" is spelled out on the sign above the cash register, centre.



(PHOTO BY CONNIE HITZEROTH)

This one-quart water pitcher is inscribed "Arlington Hotel, Tavistock." It measures 14 centimetres (5.5 inches) high and the bowl is 12 centimetres (five inches) wide. Connie Hitzeroth of Tavistock inherited it from her grandfather, Conrad Hitzeroth, who purchased the hotel with Joel Helmuth in 1912.

The question was "... what is the subtle, ironic humour in this photo" that was likely the idea of the photographer or the barmen? This was a particularly difficult question as it's opinion-based, instead of fact-based. The reader who responded with the closest to correct answer was Connie Hitzeroth of Tavistock. The subtle, ironic humour was that there are two drinks on the bar – apparently, water.

This week's History Mystery: What can you see in the Arlington barroom that dates this picture to



(PHOTO ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN "JACK" LEMP)

The Arlington was a handsome, three-storey structure with a central tower visible from a great distance. The sign over the door says "Arlington Hotel, Special Meals & Luncheons, Steam Heated Rooms, (illegible words), Modern Conveniences." Photo circa 1950.

post 1915? The first reader to answer this correctly will have their name and their community name or rural route number published

with the next Vintage Views article in two weeks. Send your answers to me at tim_mosher@hotmail.com.