

# 'If it be man's work, I'll do't.' – Shakespeare



## VINTAGE VIEWS

By Tim Mosher

*Tavistock and District Historical Society*

William Shakespeare had it right in his play, *Macbeth*, when he mused about labour. Four hundred years later, these photos from the Lemp Studio Collection, housed at the Tavistock and District Historical Society, illustrate a mixture of clothing styles, tools of the trade and approaches to taking pictures of working people.

The staff photo of the milling company is rich with details as it captures the men and women in their work attire in a carefully arranged, professional studio picture. Three men and two women in the front row no doubt were employed in the front office, hence the formal clothes and no hats.

The other 16 employees are all dressed for their labour jobs in the mill wearing various hats to keep the flour out of their hair, akin to bakers' caps. One man is particularly dapper in the centre on the far right as he's wearing a tie, vest and a white news boy cap leaning against the wall. The man in the centre and the co-worker on his left hold, respectively, a small, difficult-to-see wrench and a heavy pipe wrench.

What made them think to bring these tools to this photo studio upstairs a few streets away from the mill? I don't know, but what great initiative!

I didn't put photo credits under any of these pictures because it's difficult to say who the photographer(s) were. This is because they're in the transition period between Tavistock's earliest group of photographers, all short term and some itinerant, from 1875-1905 and John "Jack" Lemp, the village photographer who built his own studio and captured local life for four decades starting in 1905.

It's possible, too, that when Mr. Lemp first set up his drug store and photo business, he used one or perhaps both of the earlier photographers' two studios on Woodstock Street. Later, he constructed his own studio at the back of his drug store, upstairs, on Hope Street a short distance away.

Despite the massive number of glass negatives being called "The Lemp Studio Collection," the photographers who pre-date Lemp and a few post-Lemp picture takers make up part of the 4,000-strong trove of analog images. It appears that among the early photographers, each one acquired the negatives of his predecessor and their predecessors.

"Jack" Lemp's negatives are by far the most numerous in the collection, hence it's named after him. His son, Lenny, took over the pharmacy but not the photo business but, very importantly, kept the entire collection of negatives in his store attic from about 1950 to 1977. If a fire or tornado destroyed the Lemp building, the village's photo history would be a paltry shadow of what it is today. Hats off to the saving habits of these generations of businessmen!

Not many small communities can say they have an archive of original photo material that goes back almost 150 years. Tavistock is very fortunate.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the six small photos is the question, "Why were they taken?" All of the workers are not at their jobs. Rather, they had an appointment with the photographer, had to make their way to his studio, climb the stairs and pose, but they're not typical advertising pictures, nor are they formal due to their grubby work ware.

What does one do with a posed photo of people set against an artificial, painted background and often dressed in their everyday, soiled work clothes? It's not exactly something that you'd have framed and sitting on the mantel for the visiting parson to admire over a cup of tea.

The purpose of the group photo of the 21 mill workers is evident though; it's either a for-the-record type of picture or perhaps used in advertising.

I looked carefully for photos of women in scruffy work wear in the Lemp Studio Collection; alas there are none.

Maybe all these photos were

taken by multiple photographers or maybe just one, with a single purpose or vision that today we can only guess. In *Hamlet*, the character, Horatio, was skeptical, suggesting the world has mysteries beyond our understanding.

**The last History Mystery:** The question was, "What can you see in the Arlington (Hotel) barroom that dates this picture to post 1915?" The first reader to answer this correctly was Marilyn Pearson of Tavistock. She wrote, "Hydro power was finally brought into Tavistock from Stratford in 1916," so the three electric lights hanging from the ceiling clearly date the photo to after 1915.

**This week's History Mystery:** In the photo of the Tavistock Milling Company staff, what hint says this group photo was not taken in John "Jack" Lemp's photo studio at the back of his Hope Street pharmacy?



The staff of the Tavistock Milling Company gathered for this group photo in a Tavistock photographer's studio. A collective fashion shot spanning overalls to wing-tip collars and a toy horse. **Back row, left to right:** ?, Elton Krantz, Arthur Ratz, Sam Ratz, John Pfeiffer, Bill Ratz, Charlie Mohr. **Middle row:** ?, Henry Wilker, Jake Lingner, John Keutsch, John Hahn, Adam Davis, E. Bowman. **Front row:** Jack Phillips, Clarence Kaercher, Christina Ratz, manager Adam E. Ratz, Mabel Ratz, Bert Ratz, J. Raun.



Unidentified labourers in work boots, coveralls, gloves and pipes in place. The man on the right is wearing two pairs of pants and his hat is cocked at such a rakish angle that it gives him a slightly roguish look.



This is an unusual portrait because men didn't typically wear a suit to deliver milk! Only his dusty shoes might be fitting for this position. The bowler hat and stiff linen add-on collar lend an odd formality to this unidentified man.



This dour looking unidentified man holding a trowel, wearing work pants and sporting a chin curtain beard looks as though he doesn't enjoy having his photo taken. He's sitting on a late Victorian East-lake-style parlor bench.



Two unidentified men, again, not in their Sunday-go-to-meetin' clothes. The weather and the studio were likely cool, considering their thick layers. The fur rug and painted backdrop are in a number of photos from this period.



Henry Schmidt poses as you might expect a milk delivery man to be dressed on a cool day. The leather satchel hanging at his side no doubt had his list of customers and cash to use for change. His horse, carriage and ice box await him.



Again, two men – possibly brothers – pose with pipes in mouths, coveralls with cuffs turned up, rubber boots, caps and gloves against the same backdrop as Henry Schmidt, the milk man.