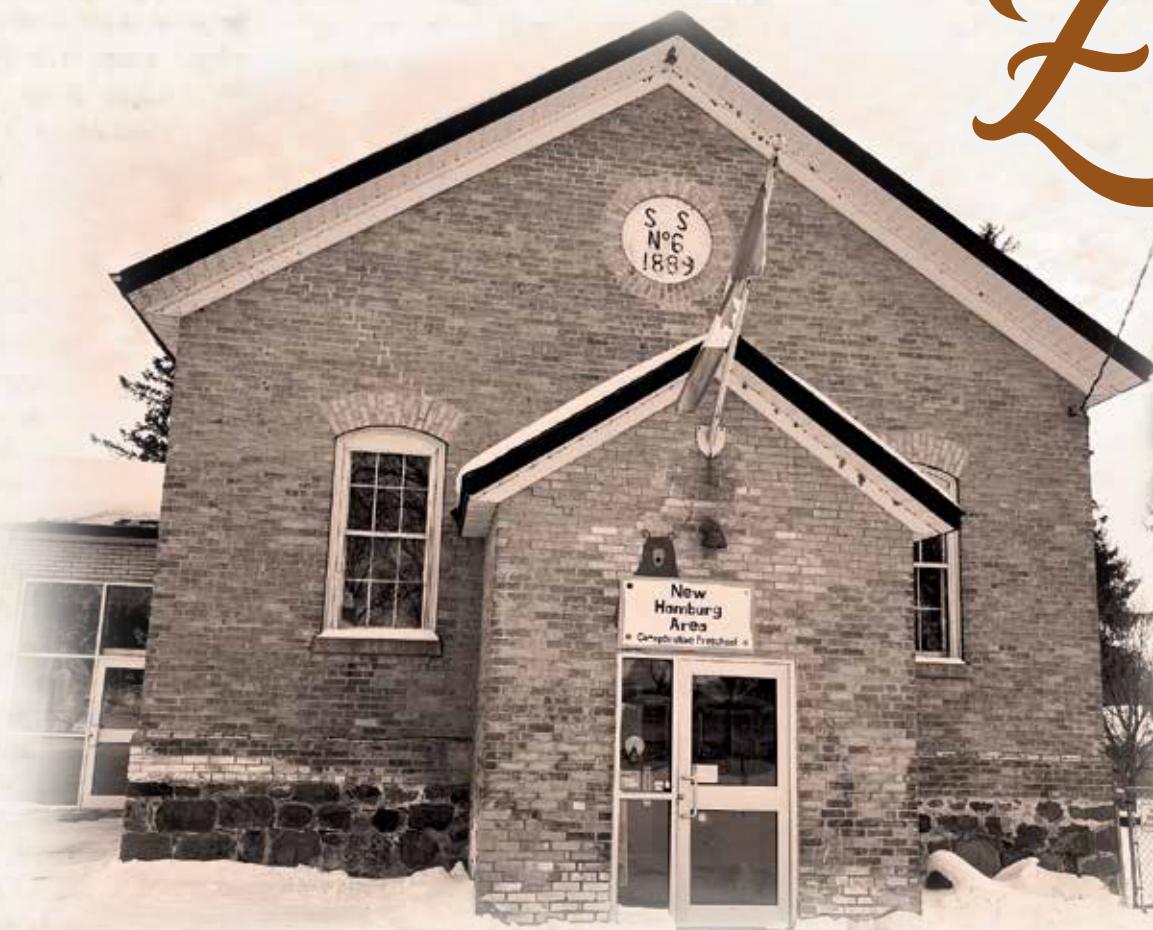




2026

HERITAGE

Edition



The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette

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Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades and Museum continues to preserve firefighting history for future generations

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

For 31 years, the Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades and Museum has been quietly preserving the history of firefighting in Wilmot Township and beyond – even if many local residents are only just discovering it exists.

Tucked beside the Baden fire station in a former salt-storage shed, the museum began with a simple idea: if no one saves this history, it will disappear.

That idea came from a small group of former firefighters – seven in total – including Blaine Bechtel, who is being honoured this week with a life membership for his decades of dedication, as well as Orland Gerber, Murray Gingerich, David Herner, Elmer Koenig, Stanley Miller and Larry Nauman.

Peter Gingerich, a former Baden firefighter with 28 years of service, joined the heritage group 29 years ago and now serves as president.

“It’s in your blood,” Peter Gingerich said during a recent interview with the Gazette at the museum. “If we don’t preserve it, we’ll lose it. It’s as simple as that.”

From the beginning, the group’s goal was not just to celebrate Wilmot Township’s fire service, but to tell the broader story of firefighting – how it evolved, how equipment changed and how communities relied on volunteers long before modern emergency services existed.

That story recently took a remarkable turn.

This spring, the museum expects to bring home an original 1948 Ford F155 Bickle-Seagrave pumper that once served the New Hamburg Fire Department. The truck, which still bears New Hamburg and Wilmot Township markings from the era of regional amalgamation, eventually made its way to Alberta after passing through several private owners.

The Alberta collector who purchased it years ago reportedly said the truck should someday return to New Hamburg. After his death, his daughter attempted to track down the New Hamburg fire department only to discover it no longer existed as a standalone entity. Instead, she found the



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTOS)

Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades and Museum president Peter Gingerich holds a chief's trumpet used in firefighting before the days of two-way radios.

New Hamburg Firefighters Association, which directed her to the Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades and Museum.

Peter Gingerich responded immediately. “We aren’t New Hamburg,” he told her, “but we are.”

The museum already holds apparatus from the Baden and New Dundee stations, and with the acquisition of the 1948 pumper, it will have preserved every motorized pump truck ever operated out of the Baden station. The Alberta truck will be transported back to Wilmot in the spring, certified for Ontario roads and added to the collection.

For Peter Gingerich, the truck’s return feels like history coming full circle.

“To us, that truck was long gone,” he said. “To have it come back like this – it’s amazing.”

But the museum is far more than a collection of trucks.

Inside the building, rows of helmets trace the evolution of firefighter safety – from early rubber and metal helmets to fiberglass composites and modern designs with face shields and ear protection. Each helmet tells a story, including the shift away from metal once electrical hazards

became more common.

Nearby, early breathing apparatus – including a 1950s-era charcoal-filter system and heavy steel air bottles – highlight how far firefighter safety equipment has progressed. Modern “pass devices,” designed to emit a piercing alarm if a firefighter stops moving, are displayed alongside early models known as “fireflies.”

Other artifacts reveal firefighting’s more human side.

There’s the original bell that once rang to alert Baden residents of a fire; a chief’s trumpet used before the days of two-way radios; a Cold War-era civil defence helmet from a time when communities prepared for the possibility of nuclear attack; and a set of black and white voting balls used decades ago to secretly approve or reject prospective volunteer firefighters.

“If you got a black one, you didn’t make it,” Peter Gingerich explained with a grin.

The museum also houses hand-drawn and horse-drawn pumps dating back to the 19th century, massive rescue nets once held by a dozen firefighters to catch people jumping from upper-storey windows and a 1953 defibrillator that required a metal plate, a sponge and a 110-volt outlet.

Even the trucks themselves reflect shifting trends. Wilmot was once among the first in Waterloo Region to adopt chrome-yellow fire apparatus for improved visibility before eventually returning to traditional red.

Beyond the equipment, the museum preserves something less tangible – family legacy.

In earlier decades, entire families served on the local fire brigades – fathers, sons, brothers and cousins. Peter Gingerich himself is part of a multi-generational firefighting family. Today, as Wilmot’s population grows and newcomers arrive from larger cities, those deep-rooted connections are less common.

“That’s why this matters,” he said. “People move here and don’t know the history. This is part of the community.”

The museum operates on donations, monthly can-and-bottle drives and volunteer labour. The building itself was once a township salt shed; the heritage fire brigades installed the floor and hydro. Space remains their biggest challenge. Some apparatus is stored off-site and larger pieces, such as a steam pumper owned by the museum, are on permanent loan elsewhere because there is simply no room.

The dream, Peter Gingerich admits, would be a purpose-built facility large enough to properly display everything – timelines of equipment evolution, full apparatus side by side, artifacts presented in context.

Until then, the Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades and Museum continues its work – quietly collecting, restoring and preserving pieces of a history that once depended entirely on neighbours stepping up for neighbours.

And this spring, when a 1948 Ford pumper rolls back into Wilmot Township for the first time in decades, it will serve as a powerful reminder that sometimes, history really can find its way home.

The Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades and Museum is open Wednesdays from 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. To arrange free tours of the museum, email wilmotfiremuseum@gmail.com or call or text Peter Gingerich at 519-572-2811.



Wilmot was once among the first fire departments in Waterloo Region to adopt chrome-yellow fire apparatus for improved visibility before eventually returning to traditional red.



Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades and Museum president Peter Gingerich points to photos on display from the township’s firefighting history.



The original bell that once rang to alert Baden residents of a fire is on display at the Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades and Museum.

Almost 50 years of community hockey in Tavistock through Arnie Schwartzentruber's eyes

JULIA PAUL

Gazette Reporter

When Arnie Schwartzentruber first stepped onto the ice as a volunteer during the 1976-1977 season, he never imagined it would become nearly five decades of service to Tavistock Minor Hockey.

"I never planned on being involved this long," he said. "The coach needed help on the ice, and once you start, one thing just leads to another."

What began as coaching soon grew into decades of volunteer leadership, including years on the board, time as president and later representing Tavistock at league and regional levels.

"I did it because I wanted kids to have the chance to play hockey," he said. "I never got that chance when I was young. We grew up on a small farm, and there just wasn't money for organized sports."

Hockey in Tavistock has been played in several buildings over the years – long before today's modern recreation complex existed.

"The really old arena was right near where the current one is now," Schwartzentruber said. "Then there was one across the tracks, and later the arena I remember most growing up. That one closed in 1996, and the new one opened that fall."

That new facility – the Tavistock and District Recreation Centre – was built after a major community fundraising effort.

"We needed to raise about \$800,000, and the community ended up raising over \$1.1 million," he said. "That's what let them add the curling club shell right away instead of later."

For Schwartzentruber, the upgrade changed everything.

"The old rink was packed every night – you couldn't get ice before 11 p.m.," he said. "The new arena opened things up and made it easier for programs to grow."

Coaching with purpose

When he coached young players, Schwartzentruber said the focus was never just about winning.

"I always believed kids should get equal ice time," he said. "They need to be allowed to make mistakes. If they're scared to make a mistake, they won't improve."

Some players stood out for their skill, others for their attitude.

"I had one kid who would get really down when things weren't going well," he said. "Then I had another kid who was always upbeat – 'Come on guys, we'll get it back.'"

"If I'm coaching, I'll take a whole team of upbeat kids over the most skilled players who give up when things go wrong."

The moments that stayed with him

weren't trophies, but connection.

"It meant a lot when someone would introduce me years later and say, 'That was my coach,'" he said. "You realize you made some kind of impression on their life."

Over the decades, Schwartzentruber watched the sport modernize – from handwritten schedules and paper game sheets to digital systems and stricter safety policies.

"When electronic game sheets first came in, I wasn't sure about it," he said. "Now I think it's one of the best things they ever did."

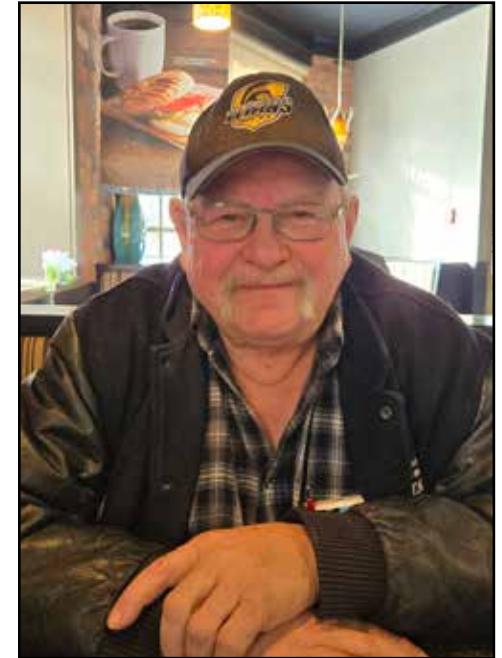
He also saw a shift in how behaviour is handled around the rink.

"There was a time when yelling at referees was pretty common," he said. "Now, there's a big push for respect – even things like the green armbands for young officials so people remember they're kids too."

"That's a change for the better. We need referees, and we need to protect them."

In recent years, the Ontario Minor Hockey Association (OMHA) has introduced several structural changes, including replacing traditional playoff series with centralized, tournament-style play-downs hosted at select arenas across the province – often in larger centres.

"When we had OMHA playoffs, the arena would be full," Schwartzentruber said. "The community came out to watch. That



(JULIA PAUL PHOTO)

Arnie Schwartzentruber becomes emotional while recalling the children and community that have shaped nearly five decades of involvement with Tavistock Minor Hockey.

support meant everything – financially and for the kids."

Another major shift came with the removal of representative hockey boundaries.

"Now with open boundaries, kids can go

Continued on page B5

Tavistock Reflections... Preserving Our Past



Photo by Lemp Studio Collection

The Founder's Cairn

Originally built in 1930 as a memorial tribute to Tavistock's founder, Capt. Henry Eckstein and located at the corner of Maria and Adam Streets. The structure was damaged when hit by a motor vehicle and rededicated in 1948 during the Centennial Celebrations.

Today, the Cairn is located at the corner of Maria and Hope Streets by the post office.

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Continued from page B4

wherever they want," he said. "A lot of the stronger players end up leaving to play for bigger centres and bigger rep teams. That's made it harder for smaller associations like Tavistock to stay as competitive as we used to be."

Because of that, he said the focus has increasingly turned to player development at the youngest levels.

"We really have to build our own players — especially when they're young," he said.

Participation hasn't always been steady. "At one point, we were around 450 kids," Schwartzentruber said. "Then we went down to about 280. This year we're back around 350."

He said that directing attention to the strong, early-development programs is the key to success for Tavistock Minor Hockey.

"We've run the First Shift program for about 15 years now, and it's been huge for us. It brings in kids who have never played before and gives them a real start in hockey," he said. "The younger groups are the most important ones. If you don't build there, you don't have players later on."

Built on volunteers

If there's one thing Schwartzentruber returns to again and again, it's the importance of community help.

"It just wouldn't run without volunteers. There's no way," he said. "We've never paid our coaches. We pay for their certification and thank them with a volunteer appreciation night, but everything runs on people giving their time."

On what makes a good volunteer, Schwartzentruber has this to say.

"You've got to be unselfish. You can't be there just for your own kids. If you're only thinking about your child, there's 300 other kids that suffer," he said. "You've got to do it for the whole organization."

After nearly five decades of involvement, Schwartzentruber said he plans to step back gradually once his current term ends — though he has no intention of disappearing completely.

"I'll always be around if they want advice," he said, "but I'm looking forward to just watching hockey."

What he enjoys most now is seeing progress.

"You watch the little kids in September, and then you see them again in March — some of them you barely recognize with how much they've improved," he said. "That's always amazed me."

For Schwartzentruber, seeing the organization continue to thrive makes the years of volunteer work worthwhile.

"It makes me proud," he said. "I feel like I gave my time for a good cause and it's still going strong."

Braves capture Southern Counties' League title in 1988



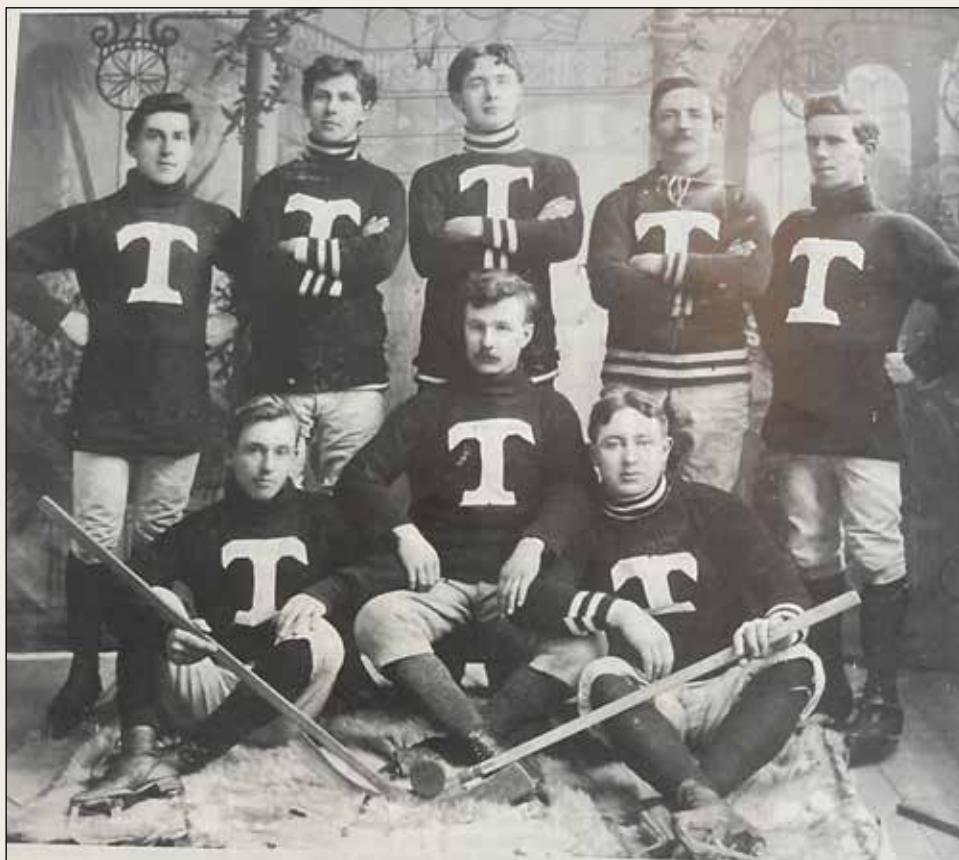
BRAVES EARN SOUTHERN COUNTIES TITLE 1988

Mark Albrecht (left) and Charlie Lupton accept the Southern Counties League first place trophy from referee-in-chief Bill Devorski.

(PHOTO FROM "RAISING THE RAFTERS," COMPILED BY R. PAUL BARTLETT IN THE HISTORY OF HOCKEY IN TAVISTOCK.)

Mark Albrecht (left), Bill Devorski, referee-in-chief, and Charlie Lupton accept the Southern Counties League first-place trophy in 1988 — a banner year for the Tavistock Braves.

Tavistock's first hockey team, 1899



Tavistock's First Hockey Team, 1899

Back row, left to right: William Schaefer, Jacob Wagner, John F. Krug.
Front row: Milton Loth, William Schmidt, Fred Krug, Fred Eckstein, Charles J. Loth.

(PHOTO FROM RAISING THE RAFTERS: THE HISTORY OF HOCKEY IN TAVISTOCK BY R. PAUL BARTLETT)

Hockey arrived in Tavistock in the late 1800s, and these eight local players formed the community's first team. Tavistock played its first recorded game on Feb. 17, 1899, taking on New Hamburg in an evening matchup that ended in a 4-1 win for New Hamburg. Front row, from left: William Schaefer, Jacobs Wagner and John F. Krug. Back row, from left: Milton Loth, William Schmidt, Fred Krug, Fred Eckstein and Charles J. Loth.

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Organized hockey thrives in Tavistock during the 1950s

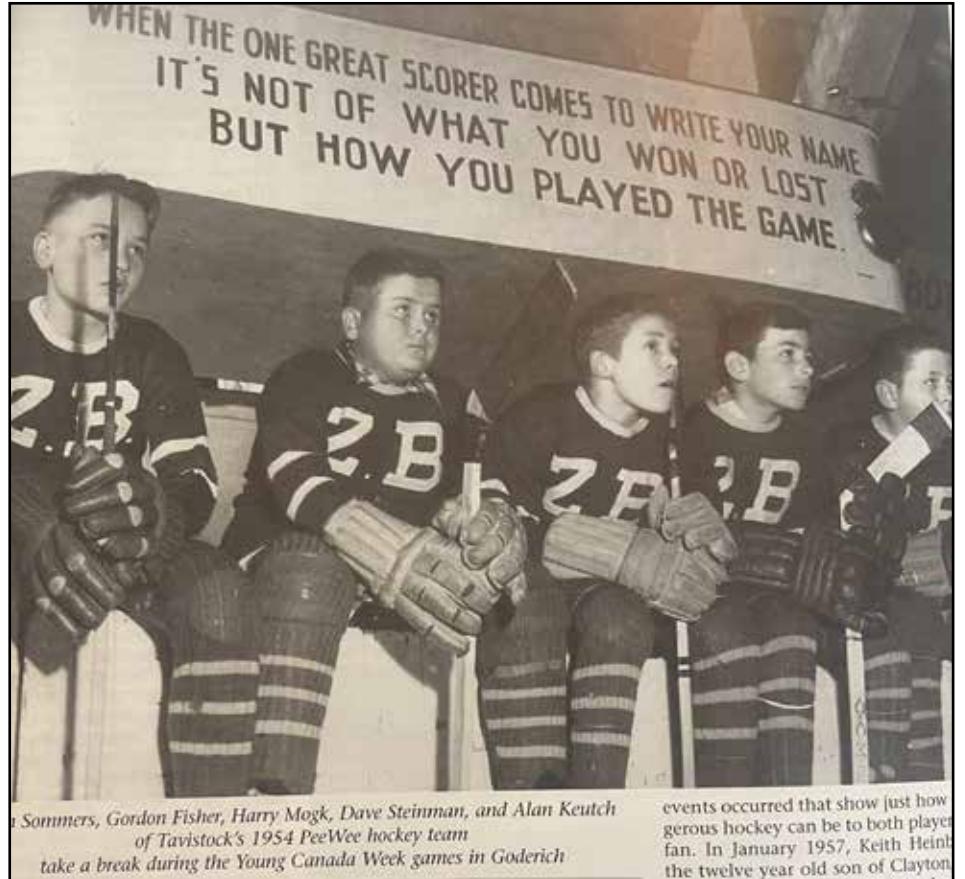


The Tavistock Y-Not Midgets - Tri-County League Champions 1958

From left to right, back row: Pat Cassidy, Ray Stock, Doug Wiffen, Frank Meisner, Ward Zehr, Ken Reibling, Jack Youngblut, Doug Albright, Barry Eckstein; front row: Ken McIntosh, John Faber, Glen Baechler, Glen Reibling, Bob Trachsel, Earl Ramseyer, Don Schmidt, Harold Mallon, David Jantzi.

(PHOTOS FROM THE HISTORY OF HOCKEY IN TAVISTOCK BY R. PAUL BARTLETT)

The 1958 Tavistock Y-Not Midgets captured the Tri-County League championship. Pictured in the front row, from left, are Ken McIntosh, John Faber, Glen Baechler, Glen Reibling, Bob Trachsel (goalie), Earl Ramseyer, Don Schmidt, Harold Mallon and David Jantzi. In the back row, from left, are Pat Cassidy, Ray Stock, Doug Wiffen, Frank Meisner, Ward Zehr, Ken Reibling, Jack Youngblut, Doug Albright and Barry Eckstein.



Members of Tavistock's 1954 PeeWee hockey team take a break during the Young Canada Week games in Goderich

events occurred that show just how generous hockey can be to both player and fan. In January 1957, Keith Heintz, the twelve year old son of Clayton

Members of the 1954 Tavistock PeeWee team competed in the Young Canada Week Games in Goderich, with an inspiring team motto displayed above them. From left are Jim Sommers, Gordon Fisher, Harry Mogk, Dave Steinman and Alan Kuetch.

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Welcome to Tavistock: The story of the Town Gates

TAVISTOCK AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Submitted to the Gazette

The Tavistock Horticultural Society was formed in 1923. In 1942, as the organization's 20th anniversary was approaching, the society considered ideas for how it might celebrate that event. The project they chose was to build stone pillars at the north entrance of the village to welcome visitors to the community.

Plans were drawn up for the proposed structure. There were to be two pillars of cut stone on either side of the roadway, the tallest ones furthest from the road and smaller pillars closer to it. It was estimated that the total cost would be less than \$100.

Henry Schlemmer, the president of the Society, and J. A. Seltzer, its secretary-treasurer, were delegated to obtain permission from the village council and from the Department of Highways to build. Once that was obtained, construction got underway.

Henry Vogel and his son, Carl, were the stonemasons hired to do the job and the Tavistock Gazette reported regularly on the progress of their work. The cement footings were poured in the fall of 1942 and the pillars themselves were constructed starting in July 1943 using stone from the surrounding townships. There was a delay in the final construction of the gates "due to the scarcity of labour" but by October of 1944, the ornamental gates



(PHOTO FROM THE TAVISTOCK AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY FILES)

Joan Hitzeroth (later Mrs. Ross Smith) and Barb Vogel (later Mrs. Bill Matthies) sit on the newly finished town gates to promote Tavistock's Centennial in 1948.

were completed. Superior Stone Ltd. and its local agent, Joseph Z. Baechler, donated granite commemorative markers to be embedded into the gates.

Originally, there were two columns on each side of the road. When sidewalks were constructed along the road, they were placed between the pillars. And then when Woodstock Street North was widened in 1960 for construction of the town's sanitary sewer system, the two innermost pillars had to be removed. They were taken

down and re-erected at the inner entrance to Queen's Park. Those pillars were dismantled a second time when the parking lot of the arena was expanded. The stones ended up in the gardens of local residents.

A granite plaque with "Tavistock" on it was originally on the small west pillar. It became part of the Queen's Park's gates and then, when those were taken down, it was placed back into the existing tall pillar on the west side of Woodstock Street North. That pillar, too, had to be relocated

three feet to the west in 1990 with another street-widening project. The eastern pillar is the one pillar of the original four that is in the same place where it has always been. On its south face is a plaque reading "Tavistock Horticultural Society 1943."

Legend has it that a time capsule has been built into one of the pillars. There is a whiskey bottle inside it. The bottle guarantees that visitors to Tavistock are in for a good time.

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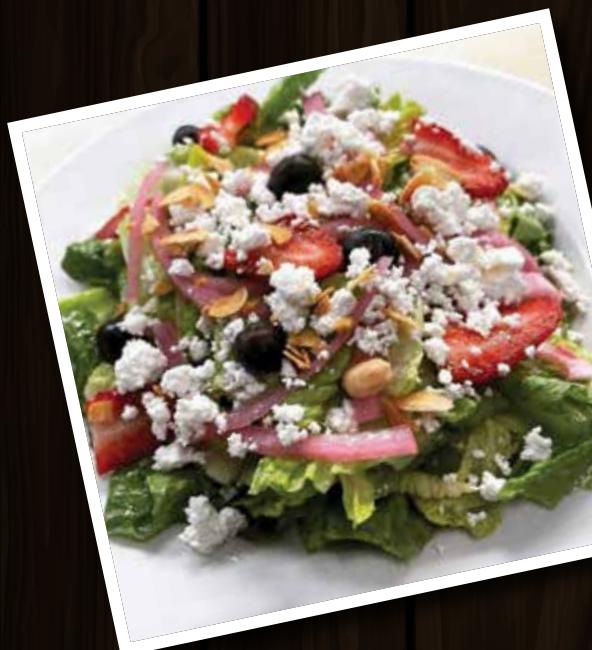
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SHERRILL CALDER

Gazette Correspondent

Hope, faith and hard work. These are the words that guided the lives of the pioneers in the 1830s in South Easthope Township.

In time, they built a simple log hut that served as both a school and Lutheran Church in the then unnamed hamlet that is now Sebastopol. A growing population soon necessitated a larger church and a larger school.

A new schoolhouse was built west of the original location. All too soon, that building was at capacity. In 1872, the Stratford newspaper reported, “The new schoolhouse is a handsome brick structure, erected on the site of the old school and will cost something like \$3,000. It is undoubtedly one of the best rural schoolhouses in the county.”

In the early years, the school was officially known as USS No. 3 SEH / USS No. 13 EZ. USS stands for Union School Section, a designation given to schools that serviced more than one township or area. In this case, it was South Easthope Township and East Zorra Township.

While Sebastopol had once been a bustling little hamlet, Tavistock was now seen as the village with a bright future and its own school. Ratepayers in SEH petitioned for a new school section to be created. USS No. 3 was dissolved and S.S. No. 8 was officially registered in 1879.

From the beginning, lessons were primarily in German with some English. For decades, many pupils learned their first English words at school. For some, English was only spoken at school, never



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HERMAN FAMILY)

Wilfred and Dan Herman stand in front of S.S. No 8 South Easthope (Sebastopol School) and Trinity Lutheran Church, circa 1920.

at home. By 1915, classes were mainly in English.

Of the many teachers at Sebastopol School, perhaps the most beloved, was Miss Katherine Kalbfleisch, known to her students as “Mother Teacher.” She began her teaching career in 1918 at S.S. No. 8. It was a different world back then. An essay prepared by Tim Mosher, then a student at the University of Guelph and a contributor with this newspaper, speaks to the differences.

“Early on cold mornings the caretaker would light the big box stove to heat the main classroom. There was a slant-topped teacher’s desk, a pump organ in the corner and great sheets of natural slate

blackboards lining two walls. At the back, between the cloak rooms by the bell rope, was a small granite cistern of well water with a single drinking cup, and behind the school were two “2- holers” (outdoor privies) for both pupils and teacher alike.

“Most of the children walked the long concessions year-round with lunch boxes under arm. Just before 9 a.m., Miss Kalbfleisch would swing the hand bell in an open doorway to have pupils assemble from the schoolyard in two lines: the girls at the east door, the boys at the west. Little Florence Berger would pump the organ and play a march as her schoolmates filed between the rows of cast iron and hardwood desks. Standing at attention ‘God

Save The King’ would be sung, the Lord’s Prayer recited and the pupils would then sit – two per desk.

“Behind the school was a ball diamond and woodshed where games of ‘Andy, Andy Over’ would be played. Sometimes, at recess, the more daring older boys would sneak off the property, run down to the corner to Feick’s Hotel, walk into the barroom and buy licorice plugs.

“They’d eat the licorice on the way back to school unaware that their blackened lips spoke volumes.

“The school week ended about 3 p.m. on Fridays. Slates would be washed and the hymn ‘Abide With Me’ was sung. The pupils filed out of the classroom, empty lunch pails under arm but nary a textbook nor scribbler for, in those days, homework was unheard of.”

Years came and went with new pupils, new teachers, home gardens, school fairs, Christmas concerts and all the joys and memories of a one-room school. By the 1960s, rural schools were being closed in favour of district schools. Sebastopol School officially closed its doors in June 1966. In September, students were bussed to Sprucedale Public School in Shakespeare.

The school was purchased by Trinity Lutheran Church. In 1970, the building was demolished. Trinity used the site to add a new educational wing to the church.

To end on a happy note, in 1976, a school reunion was organized. Twenty-two pupils from the 1920 classes enjoyed a delightful time with Miss Kalbfleisch (Mrs. Gordon Ratz). Mother Teacher, then 80, remembered all of their names.

Mike HARRIS
MPP KITCHENER-CONESTOGA

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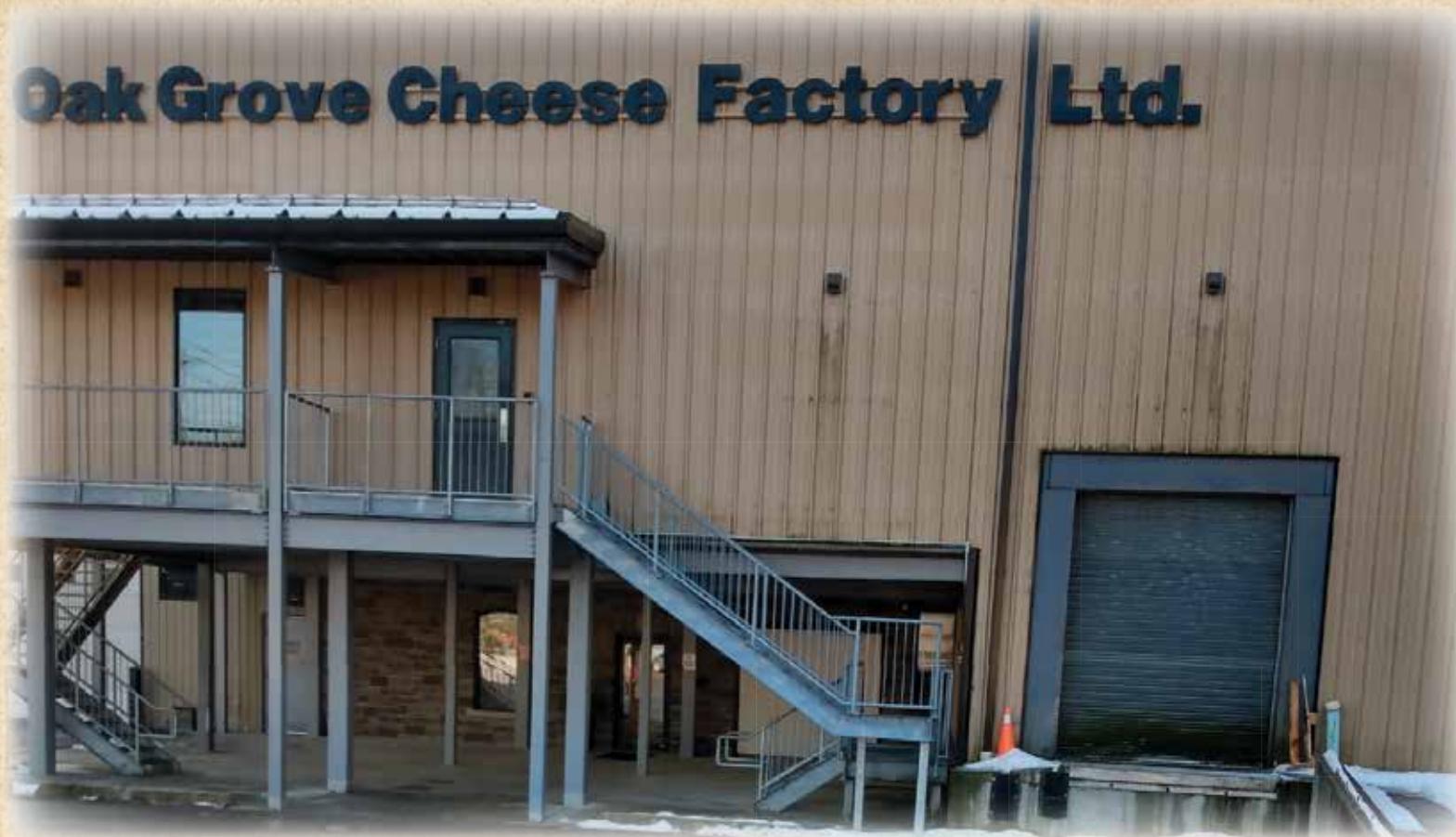
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Measles on the rise in Tavistock

TAVISTOCK AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Submitted to the Gazette

In May of 1950, 60 members of the Tavistock Teen Towners gathered to honour Carl and Ann Seltzer, their mentors, on the occasion of their recent marriage. Speeches were made, songs were sung, gifts were presented, dancing followed.

All in all, it was a wonderful evening. Unfortunately, Mrs. Seltzer, the star of the show, was unable to attend the party as she had come down with measles two hours earlier.

Measles was once an inevitable fact of life in Tavistock. Every three to five years, an epidemic would sweep through the village. Infants and children not previously exposed were the ones primarily affected. Invariably, the younger grades at the Tavistock Public School would be shut down for weeks at a time. Playoff hockey games would be cancelled.

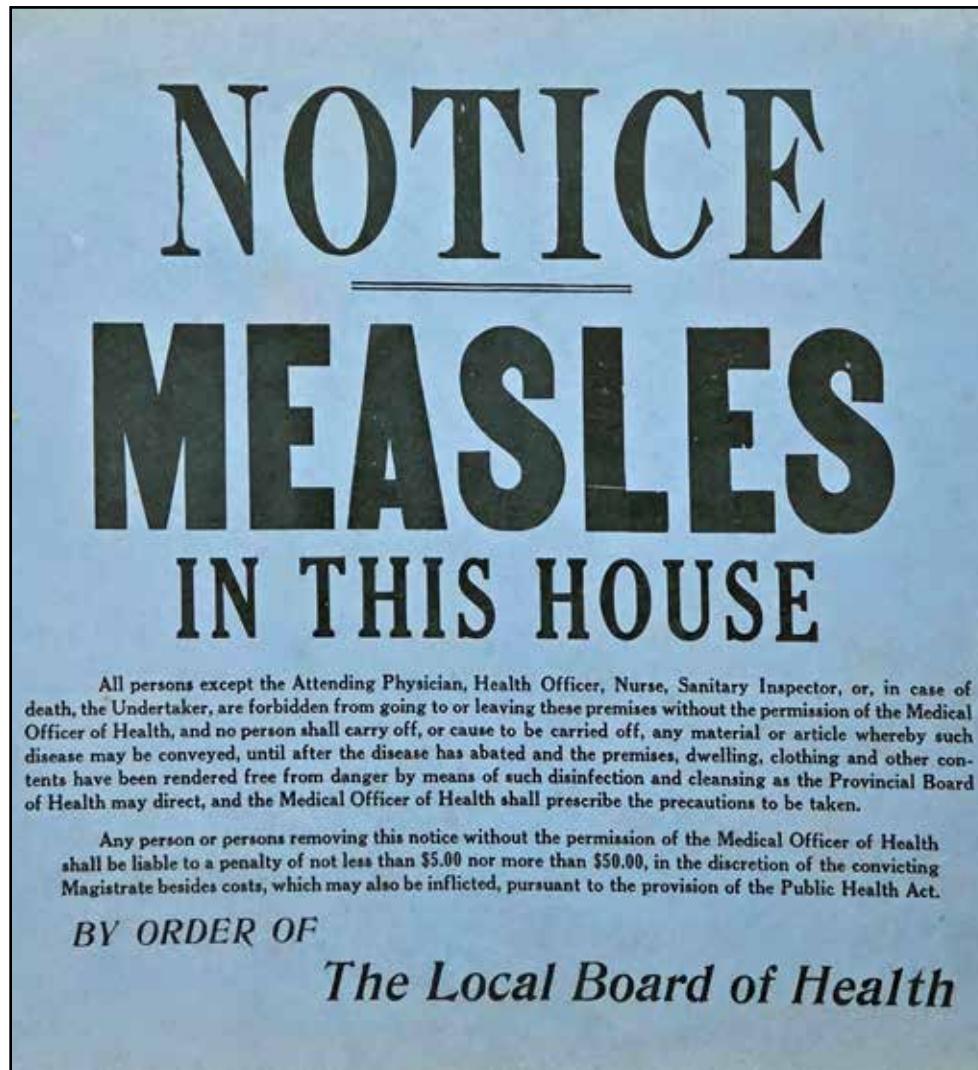
Measles was so widespread that many believed it was a normal and harmless part of childhood. But in reality, measles annually killed more children than polio, a disease that struck parents with terror. The Morgenroth family had the sad misfortune in 1921 to lose one of their small twin daughters.

"With startling suddenness," the Tavistock Gazette reported, "the little child contracted measles. Within 24 hours, the little one was no more."

In 1924, Esther Loretta Hammer, aged 12 years, 10 months and five days, "contracted measles during the mild epidemic in the village and developed complications which proved fatal."

Even adults were not without risk. In 1916, "Menno Lichti, one of the youngest agriculturists in East Zorra, died age 35 years. He had been ailing for two weeks, having contracted the measles which proved fatal. He leaves his widow, Mary Roth."

The Tavistock Gazette would often print the number of deaths in the province that month from the common communicable



(PHOTO COURTESY OF TAVISTOCK AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

The provincial government in 1912 passed a regulation stating that a placard was to be placed in any house in which measles was present. This regulation also applied to houses in which German measles, whooping cough, mumps, or scarlet fever were present. The houses were to be quarantined.

diseases. In February 1903, for example, there were four deaths in the province from Smallpox (compared to zero the year before); Scarlet fever 104 (88); Diphtheria 27 (34); Measles 7 (21); Whooping cough 7 (16); Typhoid 19 (25); and Tuberculosis 160 (177).

In order to limit the spread of these diseases, the provincial government in 1912

passed a regulation that "all cases must be quarantined. Physicians and nurses must report all cases. Houses must be placarded and children kept at home. This is a new regulation. Any official not carrying out these regulations is liable to a fine of \$25."

Elizabeth Halliday recently donated to the Tavistock and District Historical Society (TDHS) a number of these placards that had been in the possession of her

husband, the late Dr. Bruce Halliday. There are placards for red measles, chicken pox, smallpox, diphtheria and whooping cough.

In 1967, a measles vaccine became universally available and parents jumped at the opportunity to vaccinate their children. Any parent who had seen their small child suffer, even for a few days with persistent fever of 105 degrees Fahrenheit, hacking cough and delirium, would not hesitate to vaccinate as long as it could be done safely.

The School Pupils Act of 1982 required all pupils to be immunized against diphtheria, tetanus, polio, measles, rubella and mumps. As reported in the Tavistock Gazette in 1984, "Exemptions were allowed on medical and religious grounds. In Perth County, the records of almost 14,000 school children have been checked. 99.8 percent of children are now immunized: 23 pupils (0.2 percent) have a religious exemption and four (0.03 percent) have a medical exemption."

By 1996, however, those numbers were starting to slip. Oxford County had a higher percentage of religious/philosophical exemptions to immunization than the provincial average (2.2 per cent in Oxford; 0.2 per cent in Ontario). Philosophical exemptions to the measles vaccine stood at 2.9 per cent in Oxford County.

Though measles had been declared "eliminated" in Canada in 1998, in 2025, after 27 years, Canada lost its measles elimination status. A measles outbreak that had begun in 2024 continued to spread in parts of the country, primarily due to lowered childhood vaccination rates.

Worldwide over the past 50 years, the measles vaccine is estimated to have saved nearly 94 million lives. Dr. Henbest, a graduate of the University of Western Ontario, spoke to a local group in 1985 of his four years spent in rural South Africa. He saw cases there of measles, cholera, tuberculosis and malaria. He said "it was like practicing medicine of 100 years ago."

Let us hope that we are not moving in that direction again.



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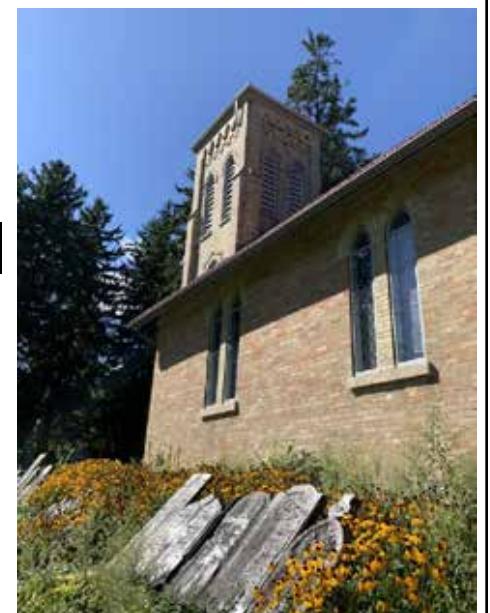


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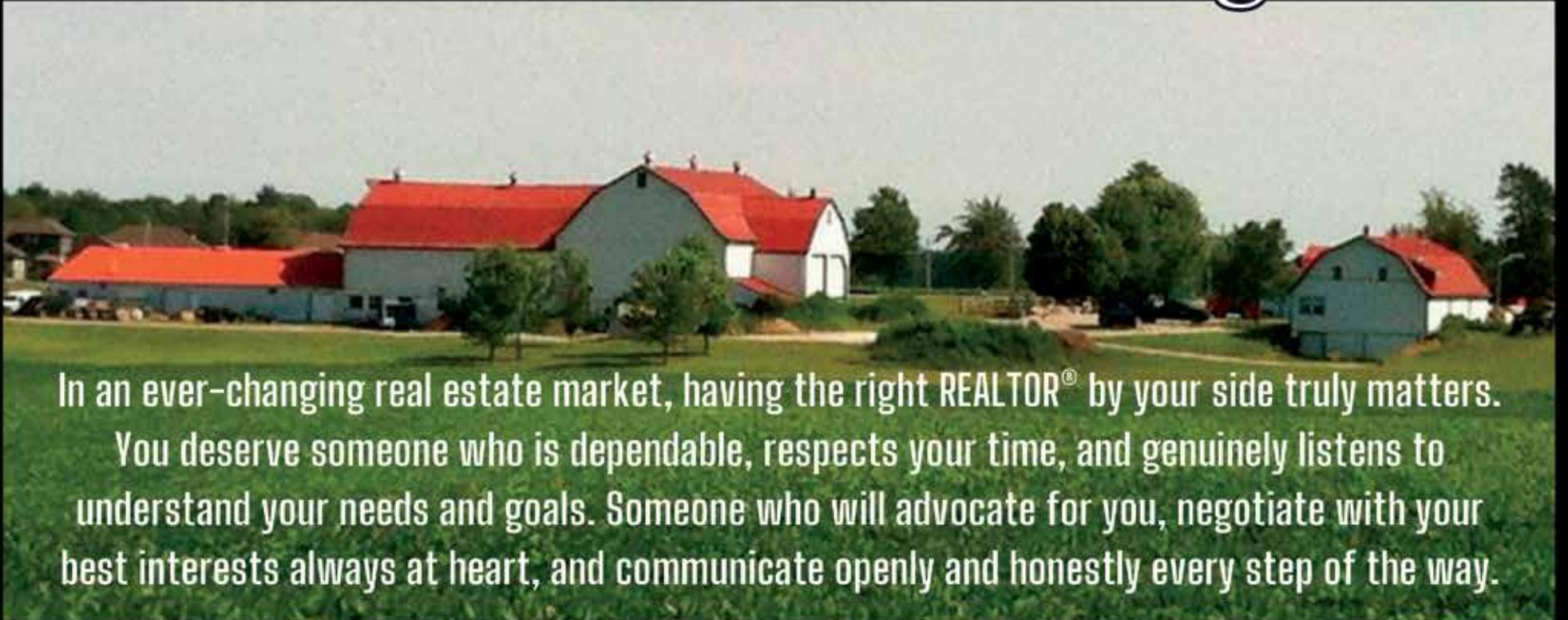
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John Galt's dream: The building of the Huron Road

PAUL KNOWLES

Gazette Correspondent

Anyone who looks at a present-day map of Wilmot Township will begin to understand the dual history of this municipality. The names of the communities in the northern part of the township denote direct connections with Germany – Hamburg, Baden, Mannheim and others. In the south, the German influence disappears and names appear that clearly have English language origins – New Dundee, Rosebank, Haysville, Pinehill and more.

The reason is rooted in history – most of the northern part of Wilmot was designated “The German Block,” and was settled by Amish and Mennonite newcomers led by Christian Nafziger, beginning in 1822. The German Block stretched the length of the present-day township, from east to west, and included everything from one lot of land north of Erb Street to one lot of land south of Bleams Road.

Meanwhile the extreme northern part of present-day Wilmot and everything south of the German Block was controlled by a group called The Canada Company, which was formed in London, England, in 1824, headed by John Galt, whose name is memorialized in the city of that name, now part of Cambridge.

Galt and his contemporaries were committed to expanding the British presence in southwestern Ontario, at least partly because the company was founded only a decade after the War of 1812-1814, and

the British wanted to make their holdings more secure against any possible American incursions. So in 1827, a surveying party spent a month travelling from Guelph through Wilmot, exploring a possible new route for an important road intended to open up the land unoccupied by European settlers – but with typical disregard of Native Canadian land rights.

The initial groundwork done, in June, 1828, construction was begun on the 12-foot-wide road – called then and now the Huron Road – which was to run from Guelph to Goderich, and passing through the entire length of Wilmot, with the village of Haysville an important way station on the route.

Building a road involved hard, manual labour. Galt himself kept a journal, which includes this description of the project.

“All the woodmen that could be assembled from the settlers were directed to be employed, an explorer of the line to go at their head, then two surveyors with compasses, after that a gang of blazers or men to mark the trees in the line, then went the woodmen with their hatchets to fell the trees; and the rear was brought up by the wagons with provisions and necessaries. In this way, they proceeded simultaneously, cutting their way through the forest.”

This was clearly not easy work, though at times, oxen were used to haul the heaviest loads. But if no oxen were available, teams of men were the only option. The Huron Road was being built through what

Galt describes as “the forests of the Huron tract.” And not only were the trees being felled to create an open route, many of them were being used in the roadway. Much of the Huron Road, especially when the route went through swampy areas, was built as a corduroy road, which guaranteed both a dryer passage and a much bumpier one.

Records show that the summer of 1828 was very rainy, which prevented any construction work about half the time, and which undoubtedly contributed to unhealthy working conditions, so much so that many workers came down with a type of malaria.

Galt, a Scottish entrepreneur and novelist, was the leader of The Canada Company, but the Huron Road project was more the responsibility of an intriguing character – Dr. William “Tiger” Dunlop, who was Galt’s right-hand man and officially “warden of the forests” for The Canada Company. Dunlop led the construction project.

Dunlop was also a writer, and a medical doctor, a politician, and a man with a fondness for practical jokes and alcohol. His personality is revealed in some of the bequests he made in his will.

For example, “I leave my silver tankard to the eldest son of old John, as the representative of the family. I would have left it to old John himself, but he would melt it down to make temperance medals, and that would be a sacrilege.”

He also bequeathed an item to his brother-in-law: “I leave Parson Chevasse the snuffbox I got from the Sarnia Militia, as a small token of my gratitude for the service he has done the family in taking a sister no man of taste would have taken.”

Eccentric, perhaps, but Dunlop – whose nickname, “Tiger,” related to his involvement in hunting expeditions during time spent in India – was also effective; the Huron Road was completed in short order, running 95 miles from Guelph to Goderich (where Dunlop lived for the rest of his days). Within about a decade of its completion, almost 6,000 newcomers from Europe – mostly, the United Kingdom – had settled in the Huron Tract.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

John Galt, who initiated the construction of the Huron Road.

The British presence is underlined by the fact that there were once three Anglican churches in close proximity – Christ Church Haysville (no longer a consecrated church); St. James, further west on the Huron Road (now a “chapel of ease” with a cemetery and occasional church services); and the still-functioning St. George’s in New Hamburg.

With the Huron Tract now open, initial settlers could receive a land grant of 50 acres on the condition they build a home and clear their land.

The construction of the Huron Road instantly made the community of Haysville an important centre. The new road became a major stagecoach route through southwestern Ontario; in the Castle Kilbride archives, there is an official stamp marked “Haysville U.C.” (Upper Canada) which would have been used by the stagecoach manager. It was identified in a Haysville home by this author and donated by the owner to Kilbride.

Today, it is not difficult to deduce that some of the larger family homes along the Huron Road in Haysville were, once upon a time, hotels and shops built to provide food and accommodation for stagecoach passengers and others travelling the Huron Road.

Records show that less than a decade after the Huron Road was completed,

Continued on page B15

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Continued from page B14

Haysville businesses included a post office, three mills, harness shops, a tannery, general stores, a shoe business, blacksmiths, carriage shops, a drug store, furniture factories, a cooper's shop (for making barrels) and a tin shop.

Many years ago, a longtime resident of Haysville shared her personal scrapbook with this writer. It included a letter to the editor (date, publication and author unknown, except by the initials J.P.) that shared a vision of Haysville in its heyday:

"In 1835, the village had the promise of a satisfactory future. It was the chief stagecoach depot on the highway from Hamilton to Goderich. Here, the drivers changed their horses and put up for the day or night. The Huron Road was alive with traffic, for the upper districts were yearly receiving thousands of newcomers with their covered wagons, or houses on wheels. Its (Haysville's) population grew to 500, with the stimulus of a flour mill and a woollen mill, supplied with power from the River Nith, provided work for a number of families."

But that all changed less than 30 years after the Huron Road was completed. In 1856, a technological revolution hit Wilmot Township – the coming of the railroad. The new Grand Trunk Railway line, running from Guelph to Sarnia – which came through Wilmot, passing through

Petersburg, Baden and New Hamburg – rendered stagecoach travel almost instantly redundant.

Growth of Haysville stopped almost completely and New Hamburg began to thrive. As the anonymous writer quoted above noted, "Then from the Haysville point of view, a catastrophe (sic) occurred. The Grand Trunk Railway surveyors elected to pass through New Hamburg. Haysville was side-tracked. Floods and fires destroyed the industries. One flood rising in its wrath swept away the bridge and even wrecked the famous Plum Tavern, as well as other properties."

With the coming of the railway, Haysville was immediately eclipsed by New Hamburg and, in terms of significant travel routes, the Huron Road was replaced by the Grand Trunk Railway.

But both of those historic routes remain today – the original GTR tracks run through New Hamburg and the other communities of Wilmot, though the trains no longer stop in any of the towns or villages. And the Huron Road exists, though its original route has at times been superseded by more modern highways to the east and west of Wilmot.

But in the township itself, the route of Galt's highway remains consistent with the road cut through the thick forests of south Wilmot two centuries ago.

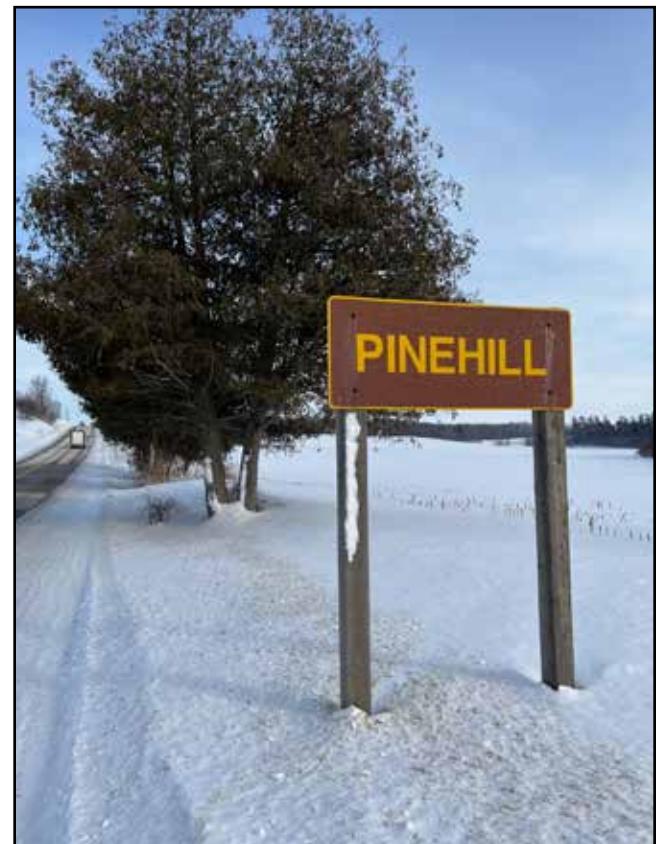


(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

St. James Chapel of Ease, originally an Anglican church on the Huron Road, west of Haysville.



SS #6 – the Haysville school located on the Huron Road.



A road sign marking a pioneer settlement, Pinehill, east of Haysville, today home to a hilltop pioneer cemetery.



One of the existing buildings in Haysville that was a business serving the busy Huron Road traffic.



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Historic Shakespeare building continues to bring community together

DIANE DANEN

Gazette Correspondent

The Village of Shakespeare was first known as Bell's Corners, named after Scottish settler David Bell, who arrived in the area in 1832. In 1852, the name was changed to avoid confusion with another settlement also called Bell's Corners.

One of the oldest buildings in Shakespeare stands at the southwest corner of the main intersection. Now more than 175 years old, the two-storey yellow brick building was originally constructed around 1850 as a hotel called The Union Hotel. At the time, it was one of three hotels on the main street since Shakespeare served as a stopover for travellers.

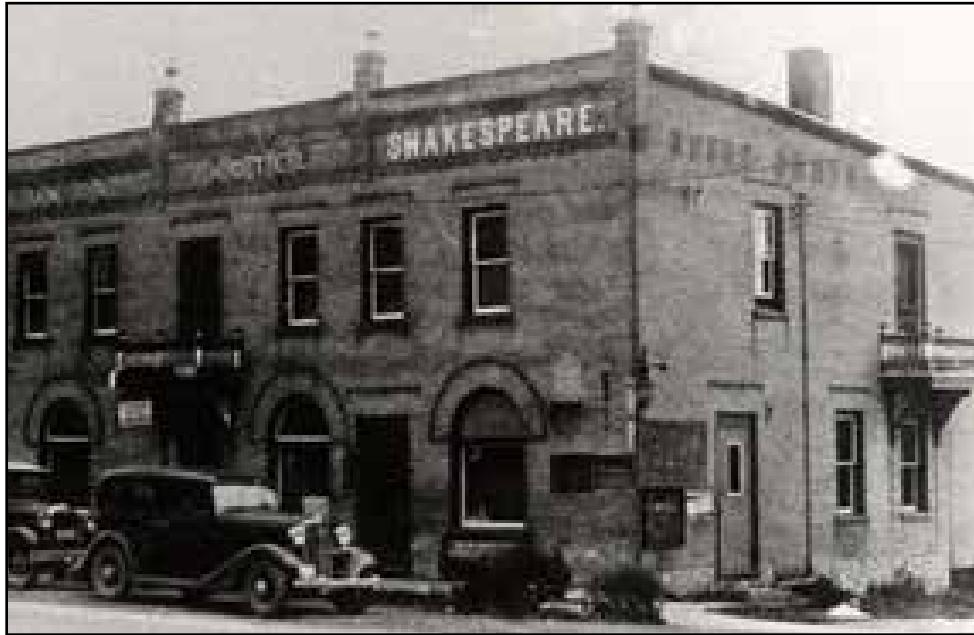
By 1870, the hotel was owned by Dr. John Irwin Flynn. His son, Sebastian Flynn, ran the hotel until it was sold in 1889. Dr. Flynn was the first doctor in the area and operated his medical practice out of his home on Concession 1, Lot 15, in South Easthope Township. He claimed to be both a medical doctor and a veterinarian.

Thomas Weiss became the owner of the property in 1889. Weiss was also a horse trader and had previously operated another hotel in western Canada before purchasing The Union Hotel. The building was sold to Vinzens Weiss in 1891 and then to James D. Weiss in 1903.

Around this time, the building underwent significant renovations. The original structure had been a simple frame building with a pitched roof. In the basement, ceiling beams were made from tree trunks, some still with bark on them.

During the renovations, the tops of the windows were rounded, the exterior was refaced with soft-yellow brick, an ornate cornice was added and the roof was flattened. The front façade featured three large windows and two doors on the ground level, while the second level had five windows and two small balconies. An addition was also built onto the back of the structure.

A barn was constructed on the property



(THIS PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE COLLECTIONS AT THE STRATFORD-PERTH ARCHIVES WAS TAKEN AROUND 1940)

The former Union Hotel in Shakespeare.

and used as an ice house. Ice was cut at Little Lakes near Stratford and hauled to Shakespeare, where it was packed in sawdust to last through the summer months.

The property was sold to Jacob V. Weiss in 1906. Before purchasing the hotel, Jacob had farmed for several years and also worked on the Grand Trunk Railway. He operated The Union Hotel until he sold it to John Sippel in 1921.

John Sippel and his wife, Anne Maria "Mary" Krantz, moved to Shakespeare from East Zorra Township in Oxford County to operate the hotel. During prohibition, The Union Hotel was allegedly a bootleg operation supplying alcohol to local citizens. Sippel also owned the Shakespeare Feed Mill from 1920-1929. Sippel rented space on the first floor of the hotel to Preston Holmes, who opened a barber shop there.

In 1935, the hotel was purchased by William Burgess and later sold to Arthur R. McKone and Isabel McKone in 1945. At the time, the couple was working at the Kroehler Furniture Factory in Montreal when they received word from Isabel's

mother that The Union Hotel was for sale. They moved back to the area and purchased the property.

Art McKone was known for keeping a bench outside at the front of the hotel, where retired men would gather to chew tobacco, watch traffic pass by and share the day's gossip. In the early 1960s, the hotel closed due to Art's poor health, but Art, Isabel and Judy continued to live there until 1971.

Mae Constable purchased the hotel in 1972 and opened an antiques business. She renovated the building and rented out rooms upstairs. On the main floor, she operated a cheese and bake shop as well as a doughnut shop. In 1976, Constable sold the business and moved to Muskoka.

The new owners, Michael and Roxanne Jervis, renamed the building "The Townsend" following the British tradition of naming a building rather than assigning it a number. They made their home on the second floor and, in 1977, opened the Harry Ten Shilling Tea Room and Gift Shop on the main floor. The name Harry

Ten Shilling comes from Henry IV, Part II by William Shakespeare.

In 1997, the family celebrated 20 years in business and were busier than ever. Though they were open only from March through December and closed one day a week during the summer months, they served approximately 33,684 people in 1990.

The business was purchased in 1998 by Lynn Barber, who remains the current owner. The tea room continues to operate under the Harry Ten Shilling name. Today, Barber's daughter, Mikaela, oversees the day-to-day operations of the tea room.

Guests are invited to enjoy afternoon tea served in the back of the tea house. The experience includes a selection of finger sandwiches, house-made desserts and a large scone served with jam and Devonshire double cream. Each tiered tray is accompanied by unlimited tea from an extensive selection. A light lunch menu is also available, though visitors are encouraged to take in the full afternoon tea experience.

Special themed experiences, including Valentine's Day, Easter, Mother's Day and even Harry Potter-inspired teas, are offered throughout the year.

Also located within the building is The Kin Cabin, a multi-purpose studio space created by Samantha Weber. The studio functions as a photo and branding space, while also hosting creative workshops, small-business education sessions and social gatherings.

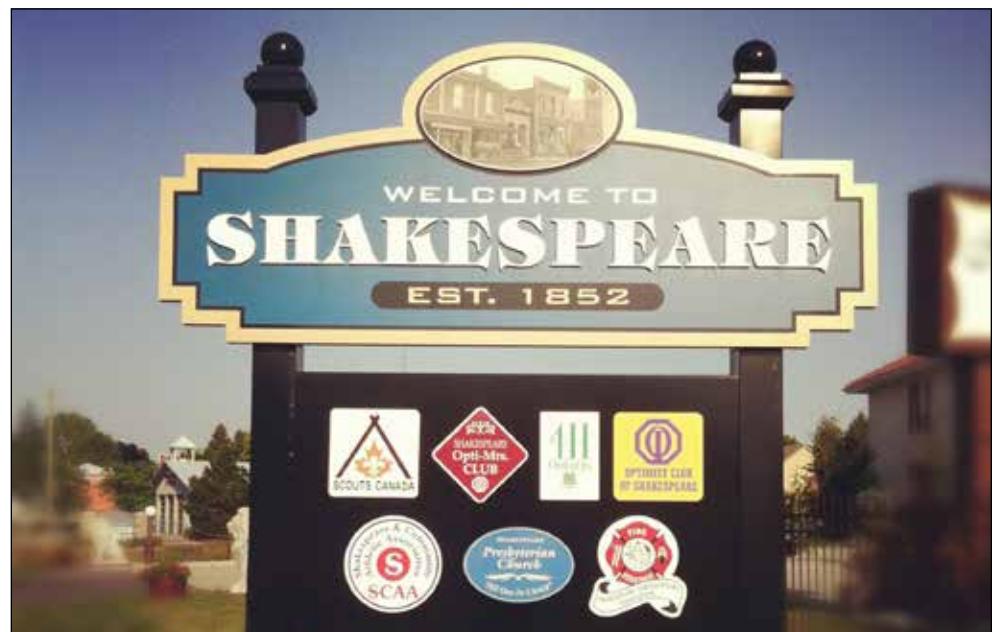
Much like the character, Harry Ten Shilling in Henry IV, Part II by William Shakespeare, a symbol of resilience, perseverance and strength found in kinship, the historic building shares that same spirit. Built more than 175 years ago, it stands in the heart of Shakespeare, serving as a welcoming place where the community can come together.

Much of the information contained in this article was borrowed with gratitude from an article written by Jennifer Georgiou, and updated as necessary.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A summertime view of the building now known as the Harry Ten Shilling Tearoom.



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The village, originally called Bell's Corners, was renamed Shakespeare in 1852.

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Celebrating 175 Years of Plattsville: Be part of our story

PLATTSVILLE AND DISTRICT HERITAGE SOCIETY

Submitted to the Gazette

On Saturday, June 20, our community will mark an incredible milestone – Plattsville’s 175th Anniversary.

For nearly two centuries, this village has been shaped by hardworking families, local businesses, volunteers and neighbours who care deeply about one another. This celebration is a chance to honour our past, celebrate our present and invest in the future of the place we call home.

Plans are underway for a full day of events that will bring our community together – heritage displays, family activities, music, storytelling and opportunities to welcome home those with roots in Plattsville. The day will start with a breakfast hosted by the Plattsville Fire Department and end with an 18-minute drone light show. Everyone is welcome to join us; whether you have deep roots here, are new to the community, or from a neighbouring community, this celebration belongs to all of us.

To celebrate Plattsville's 175, we are creating a Community Mural Mosaic that will be permanently displayed at the arena. This mural will be made up of four-inch by four-inch individual tiles that, when painted, will form one large, collaborative work of art. Community members, families and

businesses are invited to purchase a square to paint at home or during one of our community paint events. Each square becomes a small piece of a much bigger picture representing the people, creativity and pride of Plattsville.

It will become part of a lasting-legacy mural that tells the story of our community coming together to celebrate this milestone.

The following includes excerpts from an article by Jeff Culp, The Community

Shopper, Dec. 7, 1991, "Presenting Plattsville," and the Plattsville Echoes 1808-1968 compiled by the Plattsville Board of Trade.

The story of Plattsville is unlike any other community in Oxford County, and different from most stories of villages anywhere. Plattsville's greatest growth came as the result of industry.

The village is called after a man by the name of Platt. Most histories record this Platt as Samuel Platt, even though Samuel was not the first man of that name to contribute to the community. Edward Platt was a miller and one of the first settlers in the village arriving in 1811.

Growth in the community did not really occur until 1851, when the other Platt, Samuel, built his first mill and laid out the village lots. Platt had come to Canada six years earlier and worked for a while in nearby New Dundee. In short measure, Samuel had constructed a flour mill, woolen mill and sawmill, all located with his residence on Victoria Street. In 1855, he also became the village's first postmaster.

At about the same time, a remarkable steam factory and cabinet shop were constructed. T. Workman had built what would become the Canada Sand Paper Company – an endeavour that would put Plattsville on the map. But sandpaper was still some

Continued on page B19



(IMAGES COURTESY OF THE PLATTSVILLE AND DISTRICT HERITAGE SOCIETY)

look at the way things were



Postcard courtesy of John Gieske

Let it flow

This flowing well in Plattsville, Ont., had a capacity of 2.5 million gallons of water daily.



PLATTSVILLE'S FLOWING WELL IN 1915— (Courtesy Of Mrs. Miriam Pfohl, New Dundee)



THE CHICK HATCHERY YORK STREET

Original age unknown.

This century old home was operated by Mr. John Hilderly and was known as the Plattsville Chick Hatchery. Hatching was done in 1936 in this home. Then in 1939 chicks were hatched in the basement of the Mill in town, and also in what is known as the McKie house, from 1940 to 1948.

In 1940 property was purchased from the mill where once stood a barn. This was converted into a chicken and brooding house. In 1948 the hatchery was moved from the mill to this location on York street until its closure in 1959.

From The Ayr News Photo Archives 1913 - 2013



In 1954 volunteer workers of the Plattsville Board of Trade converted the Flowing Mineral Well into a children's wading pool. Checking out the pool are (left to right) Randy Koehler, Wayne Davidson, Jimmy Quandt, Terry Harmer, Alex Bryans, Ruth Love, Sandra Love, Sandra Koehler

From The Ayr News Photo Archives 1913 - 2013



FOUR JIMS MAKE THESE TWO PICTURES — In the 1960's Jim Gordon (right on left picture) gets a hand from Jim Schmidt to peddle some gambling money. Probably from bets made on ball games, hockey or football games or maybe helping an organization sell their raffle tickets to a hockey game or a trip to Scotland. In the picture on the right is a Jim taking a picture of Jim Fergusson, long time postmaster in Plattsville as he hands the books to Cam Shantz, who was taking the postmaster job. The post office at that time was in Fergusson's Hardware Store. A new post office was built soon after.

Continued from page B18

time in the future. Plattsville's mills were doing very nicely manufacturing woollens and flour. In 1862, the woollen mill employed 40 operators and turned out 1,200 yards per week. The flour mill produced 300 barrels a week and, in 1873, won first prize for its product at the World's Fair in Paris, France.

At the end of the 1860s, Plattsville's population had swelled to 1,000. The Plattsville Echo was first published in 1887 and kept the residents up to date with news of the day and the advertisements of local businesspeople.

In 1865, the Plattsville Carriage Factory was making buggies, carriages, wagons, cutters and sleighs. Before cars came on the scene, Mr. E. Gatzka owned a livery stable with 15 horses. He drove the "stage" to Bright to take passengers to the train and to carry the mail. There were six trains a day in 1891 at Bright and the stage went twice a day. Incidentally, before that time, Bright was known as "Plattsville Station."

There were several grocery stores in the early days; Mr. Lautenslager operated a store in 1874. Records show there was a Plattsville Excelsior Cheese Factory making 400 pounds a day and employing 10 men.

In 1886, Plattsville was the location of Oxford County's first telephone located in the Veitch & Neil's Apothecary. The rate for a short conversation was 20 cents for a 20-word message to anyone within 150 miles.

The Brickyard was an active place in the early days. In 1899, a cyclone hit the village and wrecked the brickyard as well as causing a great deal of destruction in the village, and the brickyard was closed. In the early 1900s, Charles Pratt restored the kiln.

In 1917, the first garage was opened by Melvin Lachman and later sold in 1924 to the Ellis Bros.

Plattsville's first street lighting was car-bide in 1900. The lights were ignited by a long lighting stick early in the evening and snuffed out before midnight. Hydro first came to the town in 1910 and lit the streets first, and the following year, 12 homes installed hydro.

The first decade of the 1900s was considered a golden age for Plattsville. A group of entrepreneurs invested \$500 to drill for oil and eventually produced a well that gushed 2.5 million gallons per day. The gusher did not produce oil, but foul-smelling water. The first well was struck after drilling 150 feet, and the second at 125 feet. The Plattsville Flowing Wells were somewhat of a tourist attraction. In 1954, volunteers from the Plattsville Board of Trade converted the Flowing Well into a children's wading pool. In 1995, Peter Etril Snyder was commissioned by the Plattsville-Bright Optimist Club to paint a moment in history when the overflowing wells were a dominant feature in our community.

Albert Charles Siebert, known as "Babe," broke into the National Hockey League (NHL) in the mid 1920s, winning a Stanley Cup with the 1925-1926 Montreal Maroons, was named to three All Star teams and won another cup with the 1932-1933 New York Rangers. He won the Hart Trophy in 1936-1937 and was named to the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1964.

By 1970, the population of Plattsville had dropped almost in half to 500. Over 50 years later, Plattsville has a population of almost 2,000 and continues to grow with the development of two additional subdivisions. We are all part of Plattsville's history.



To mark the 175th anniversary, community members can participate in the creation of a Community Mural Mosaic.

The Plattsville 175 celebration is a community day and it will take all our community partners to pull it off. The Plattsville and District Heritage Society is also celebrating a milestone in 2026. It has been

25 years since we were incorporated with the Ontario Historical Society. We will be hosting our 12th annual summer exhibit with the history of holidays and celebrations that bring us together.

Plattsville is Our Home

A POEM BY HILDA HILDERLEY

Submitted to the Gazette

Though Plattsville is but a village small,
And, to a lot of folks, Plattsville means
nothing at all.

But to the ones who have made their
home here,

The village of Plattsville is indeed dear.
Highway No. 97, through Plattsville does
run,

And the Nith River, where we fish and
have fun.

People have come from far and from near,
They have come to make their new home
here.

Their old home forgotten, they must
make friends anew,

The friends they are seeking dear people,
are you.

On the outskirts of Plattsville in a grave
without fame

Lies sleeping the man who gave
Plattsville its name.

Though he is forgotten, his name will live
on,

Unchanged like the seasons, or the days
with their dawn.

The one big attraction in Plattsville, we
all know,

Is the Sand Paper factory where we earn
our dough.

Take warning, folks, take warning, take
heed,

Without it, Plattsville would be a ghost
town indeed.

Inside those huge walls of the factory, we
see

People at work, each as busy as a bee.

The rumbling, the clatter, the machines
steady click,

Some womanly gossip, whispering she
makes me sick.

The men and their boasting of the things
they have done,

Though we do have our troubles, we also
have fun.

Through the years we have seen many
changes in places,

Changes in work and changes in faces.

We come and we go, it can be no other
way,

We know not in the eve if we'll return
again next day.

Yes, Plattsville is but a village small,

No different from other villages at all,

But there's one thing that makes
Plattsville different, you see,

Plattsville is home, home to you and to
me.

For no matter how distant the highways
we roam

We'll be returning to Plattsville, for this
is our home.



This 1872 hotel was totally restored from
2014-2016 and now contains 12 elegant one-
bedroom apartments for seniors; the main floor
features commercial space for A Portuguesa
Bakery, Peel Street Beverages [Brewery],
Imperial Market & Eatery and Stonetown Travel.

Sebben family farm part of North Easthope's early rural history

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

In the early 1900s, dairy farmers in North Easthope Township, like John Sebben, relied on determination, hard work and strong backs to build both a livelihood and a family on acreages that would be considered small by today's standards.

Sebben was raised alongside three brothers and later served his country as a trooper in the Second World War from 1942-1945. After returning home, he married Florence in 1950. Together, they raised five children: Dorothy (1952), Allan (1953), Ruth (1955), Stanley (1957) and Joan (1969).

Tragically, John died of cancer in 1969, within 24 hours of his 49th birthday. His youngest daughter, Joan, was just two months old at the time.

Joan credits her mother for raising the family with strength and grace after her father's passing. Over the years, she has come to know her father through family stories, photographs and treasured keepsakes that document life on the farm located on the eastern edge of Stratford in North Easthope Township.

The Sebben farm once stood at what is now the corner of Perth Road 111 and Highway 7/8, the current site of Bethel

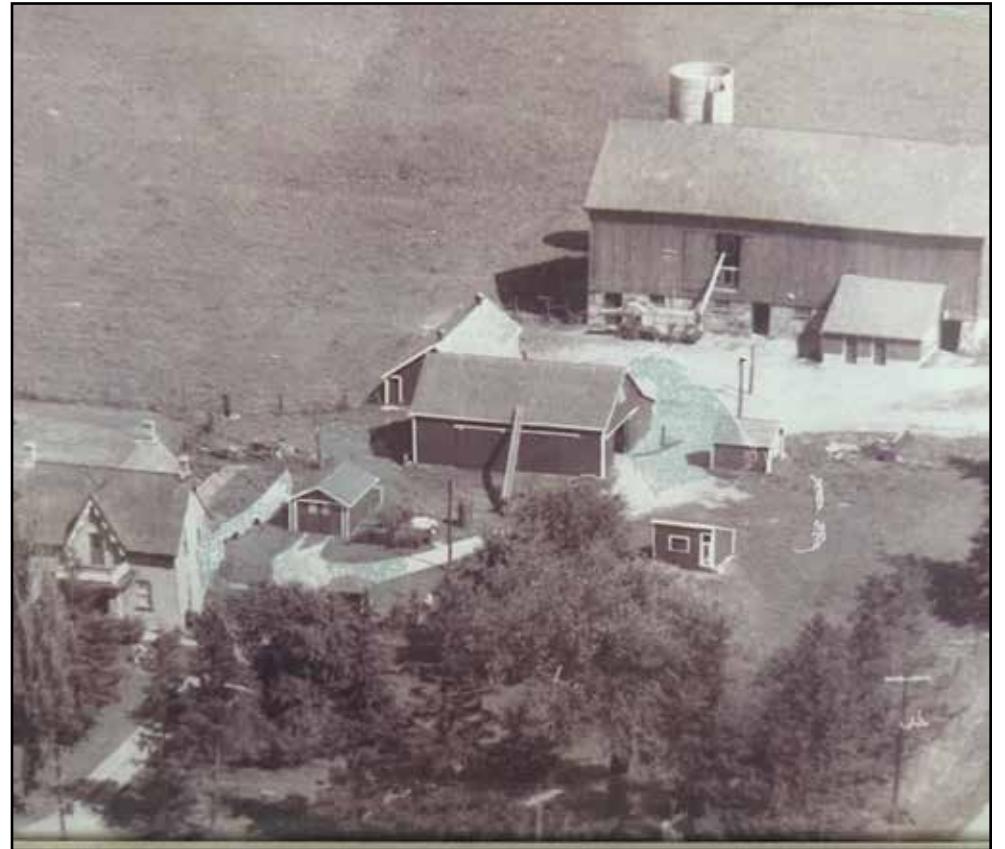
Pentecostal Church. The original farm buildings have since been demolished, but memories of the property remain vivid for family members.

Historical photographs show John Sebben plowing with a team of white Percheron horses and a single-furrow walking plow – a skill that required patience and precision. In one notable competition at the Perth County Plowing Match, held on the farm of Charles Bell in Downie Township, Sebben won the "Best Finish" class in the boys under-20 division, a testament to his craftsmanship in the field.

Other photos capture John Sebben's Holstein heifers heading to summer pasture on land he owned near the Stratford airport. Joan believes the cattle were likely driven along the sideroad now known as Perth Road 111 to reach the pasture.

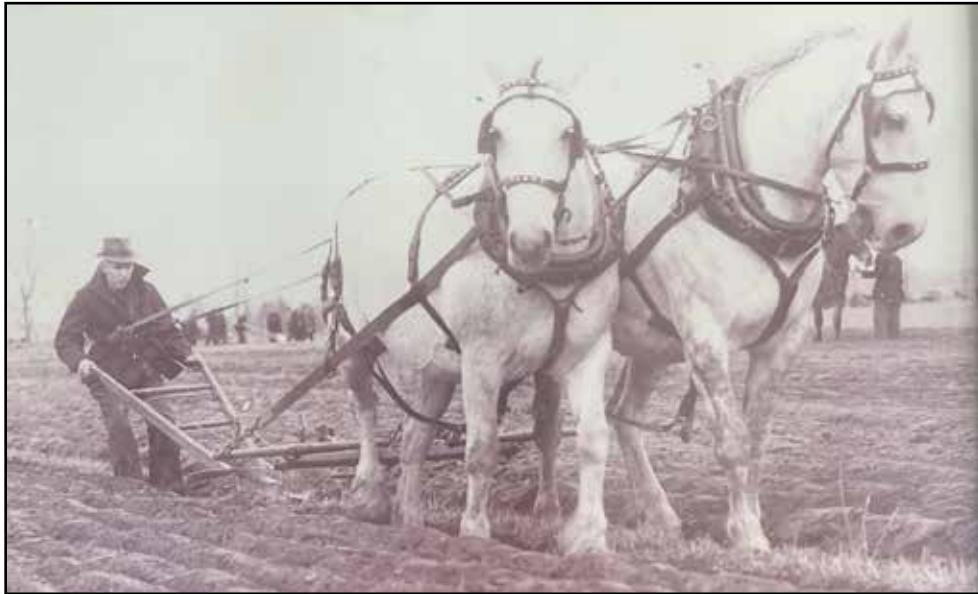
A particularly cherished image shows a young Joan, just three years old, learning to skate on the frozen front lawn beside the family farmhouse – a simple but lasting reminder of rural life in another era.

Through photographs and shared memories, the Sebben family farm remains an important part of North Easthope's agricultural heritage and of one family's enduring story.

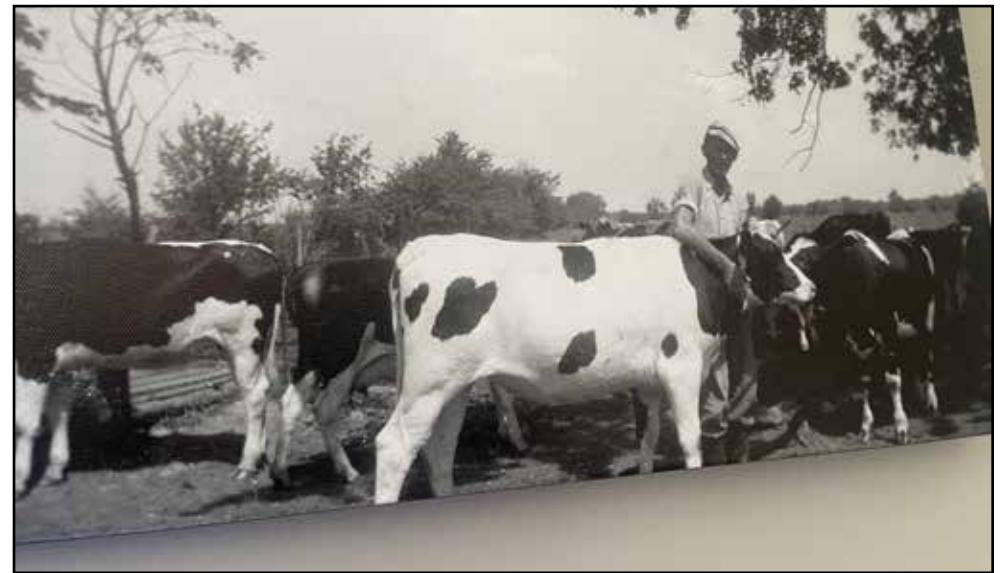


(PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOAN SEBBEN)

The John and Florence Sebben farm in its early years at the eastern edge of Stratford, now the site of Bethel Pentecostal Church at the corner of Perth Road 111 and Highway 7/8. The original farm buildings have since been demolished.



John Sebben plows with a team of white Percheron horses and a single-furrow walking plow. He won the "Best Finish" class in the boys under-20 division at the Perth County Plowing Match held on the Charles Bell farm in Downie Township.



John Sebben with his Holstein heifers as they head to summer pasture near what is now the Stratford airport. Joan Sebben believes the cattle were likely driven along what is now Perth Road 111.

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New Dundee Emporium still offers a sense of comfort and welcome after nearly 140 years

AMANDA NELSON

Gazette Reporter

Kavelman's Store, now known as the New Dundee Emporium, is located at 169 Front St. in New Dundee and was built in 1887, with a rear addition completed in 1888.

Entrepreneur Mark Harrison and chef Danny Duchesne purchased the building in 2003 and brought the neglected building and business back to life again. The pair offer high tea on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. and adjacent to the restaurant, they have a boutique that sells clothing, jewelry, housewares, purses and shoes.

In 1985, the building was designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act for its architectural and historical significance. The act requires municipalities to maintain a municipal heritage register of properties with cultural heritage value or interest. The register helps the township and property owners identify heritage value and determine how properties can contribute to community heritage planning objectives.

The building was originally constructed by Gottlieb Bettschen, a prominent early resident of New Dundee and the son of the township's first reeve, Jacob Bettschen. In addition to being an early property owner, Bettschen was the first vintner to introduce Concord and Delaware grapes to the area and was also the organizer of the Farmers' Institute of South Waterloo and the New Dundee Library Association.

In 1886, Bettschen purchased several lots on Front Street but found the roads too narrow and altered his architectural plans



(SOURCE: WILMOT TOWNSHIP ARCHIVES.)

Members of local history groups on Facebook have shared early business district images – some identified as being from Herman Kavelman's own photographic collection in the archives.

to set the storefronts back 12 feet. This included the block designed for what would become the Emporium.

The block was named the Jubilee Block to mark the 50th anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign. Some of the materials used to construct the Jubilee Block came from a demolished schoolhouse in Pinehill.

Though Bettschen owned the building, he never operated any of the stores. Instead, he leased the spaces to a number of merchants, beginning with J.U. Clemens, a merchant in both New Dundee and Kitchener.

Bettschen later leased the property to Jacob Kavelman, one of the town's best-known residents, who eventually purchased the building in 1915 and operated

the store until 1974.

Kavelman was said to have been born in Penzlin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany, and immigrated to Canada around 1883. He began working in the store in 1899 as an apprentice, earning \$30 a year plus room and board. In 1910, he took over store operations and later purchased the building.

Kavelman was not only a business owner but also the town's fire chief and librarian, with the library located in the back of the store. He was also a member of the Musical Society Band. In 1921, he converted the upper level of the building into an apartment.

Under Kavelman's stewardship, the store became a central part of village life.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

The New Dundee Emporium's current owners, Mark Harrison and chef Danny Duchesne, offer high tea on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays and have made the right side of the building into a fashion boutique offering everything from clothing and handbags to sun hats.

It operated as a general store, selling groceries, dry goods and hardware, and also repaired clocks. It was also a social hub, where residents gathered around the stove in the dry goods section to catch up on local news. The store remained a cornerstone of New Dundee for more than 60 years, making it one of the longest-running general stores in the area.

The building still offers a sense of comfort and welcome as you walk through the doors today, much as it would have felt in the late 1800s.

Pictured with pets in Wilmot

SHERRI GROPP AND TAYLOR HYNES

Castle Kilbride

The Archival Collection from the Township of Wilmot and Castle Kilbride hold many important historical treasures.

One of the most significant resources is the various photographic collections. The photos capture places and faces that sculpted Wilmot Township.

The ones that capture our hearts but aren't necessarily the ones that come with a lot of context are those that feature an owner and their "pet." Here are a few of our favourites.



Photo from the Schumm Collection (Baden): Three men by the water pump with a dog seated loyally in front.



(PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASTLE KILBRIDE)

Glass plate negative from the Howling Collection: A puppy that likes boating in New Dundee on Alder Lake. Arthur Lautenschlager with sister Lily and her daughter, Emma Zinken.



Glass plate negative from the Howling Collection: Sailor the Horse with owner Charles Doll, decorated in prize ribbons.



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The early history of the New Hamburg Fire Department

AL JUNKER

Gazette Correspondent

The organization of what became the New Hamburg Fire Department can be traced back to 1858 when New Hamburg became an incorporated village.

Originally known as the New Hamburg Fire Company, it was a semi-autonomous body governed by a bylaw passed by the village council. The establishment of the fire company and subsequent reorganizations over the years were often the result of petitions received from the public and, in some instances, were in response to major fires.

One of the first orders of business for the council of the Village of New Hamburg was the organization of a firefighting service. In response to a petition from William Hunter and 50 others on Jan. 23, 1858, the finance committee of council recommended on Feb. 9, 1858, that Reeve Titus G.S. Nevills and Councillors Frederick Merner and George Morley form a committee "to purchase the Fire Engine."

On March 1, 1858, the committee reported to council that "they have arranged for the purchase of (a) fire engine and necessary apparatus belonging to the New Hamburg Fire Company for the sum of Three Hundred and Thirty Three Dollars on the second day of March, and Thirty Four Dollars on the 1st January 1859 and Three hundred and Sixty Eight Dollars on the 1st January 1860," for a total cost of \$735.

Since the village was newly incorporated, it did not have a system in place to collect revenue. To finance the new hand-powered pump fire engine, villagers paid by subscription. Sixty-four subscribers pledged a total of \$448.89 to help pay for the engine and apparatus. Pledges ranged from one dollar to \$54. It is interesting to note that Reeve T.G.S. Nevills pledged \$35; Coun. Frederick Merner \$22, Coun. Joesph Hartman \$11.25; Coun. George Morley \$10; William Hunter (the petitioner for the fire engine) \$54; and 20 of the 44 men appointed to the fire company had pledged a total of \$173.99. The pledges were to be repaid to the subscribers

by the village treasurer on Jan. 1, 1860. An exception was made for four individuals who were to be repaid a portion of their pledge in 1858.

The captain of the fire company was instructed on March 29, 1858, to provide a list of "his officers and men" to council. On April 17, 44 men were appointed as fire men. Their names were included in the motion passed by council. The clerk was directed to notify them of their appointment and to inform them to attend a meeting on April 23 to choose their officers. Members of the fire company included Coun. Frederick Merner, Jacob Seyler, the village clerk, and William Hunter. Several prominent businesspeople along with a number of tradespeople were appointed.

Since the fire engine was a hand-operated pumper, it required two teams of four to six men pumping on handles to operate the engine and, therefore, a large number of firefighters were required.

There were other costs associated with the new engine. These included hose couplings, nozzles and fire hooks. On June 19, the clerk was directed to order 520 feet of best quality fire hose at \$1.17 per foot and couplings at \$6 per set from Ernst Kraft of Hamilton. In July, the clerk was directed to order 270 feet of hose, three couplings and one half-inch nozzle from George Perry of Montreal. John P. Nessler was engaged by the clerk to clean the fire engine and hose at the rate of 50 cents per time. The clerk was told to investigate getting fire hooks "made the cheapest" and he engaged Frantz for \$21 to supply them.

The work to outfit the fire company continued into 1859. It appears the fire men may have been appointed on an annual basis as members were appointed on Feb. 26, 1859. In April, an attempt to provide the fire men with uniforms paid for by the village was defeated as it did not comply with the village's bylaw. A month later, in response to a petition from William Hunter, Andrew Ross, John Kleine and John Nopper on behalf of the fire company, Reeve T.G.S. Nevills and Coun. Frederick Merner were appointed to look into the cost of "dresses and hats" for the fire men.

The committee reported back on June 17

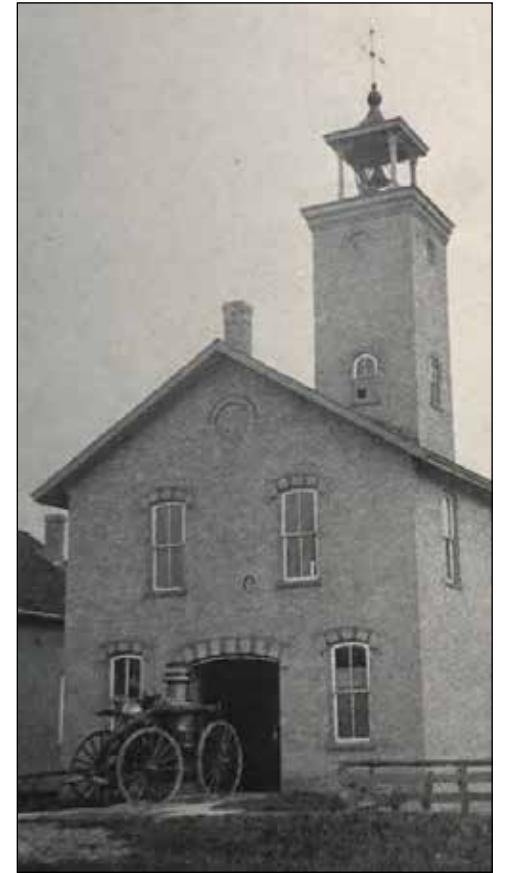
that the cost to supply each fire man with a hat, belt and coat would be \$6.50 with a total cost of \$260. It was recommended that no action be taken for the year due to the village's financial constraints. The committee noted they would be "highly pleased to see the Fire Company in proper uniform" and they hoped the fire company would "cordially agree with the report."

A committee was appointed in October 1859 to find a suitable place to house the fire engine. On Nov. 11, they reported they had rented a building from Frederick Tappie for a three term at \$12 per year and that necessary renovations had been completed at cost of \$4.75. The village's first firehouse was located on Peel Street just past the intersection with Church Street.

In March 1860, the council's finance committee recommended the fire men receive an annual stipend. Their recommendation came in response to a petition from Alexander Thomson and others. The stipend was for \$4 per year for each fire man. Bylaw 24 was passed "granting reward for services at fires." At the same meeting, council appointed 26 men as members of the fire company and the clerk was to notify them to meet on March 28, 1860, "for the purpose of organization and other matters." The rate of the stipend was determined on an ongoing basis annually.

Each year, the fire captain was instructed to provide a "certificate" which showed the members had attended all meetings and practices during the year in order to be paid on Jan. 1 of the following year.

The issue of uniforms for members of the fire company was finally resolved on April 25, 1860. The clerk was authorized to order 26 hats and 25 belts from Ernst Kraft. The cost was \$91.95. At the same time, the clerk was to procure "two pieces of scarlet flannell (sic) suitable for Coats for the Fire Company at fifty cents per yard and a sufficient quantity of blue flannell (sic) to trim



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

The steam pumper in front of the New Hamburg Fire Hall.

the same." The total cost was \$47.30.

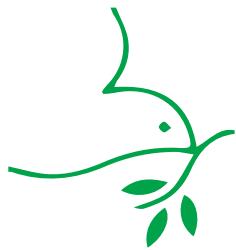
The fire company was reorganized in 1870 following a devastating fire on Oct. 27 which destroyed the Dominion Hotel. The Dominion was located at the corner of East and West (Huron) and Mill streets, a site occupied by the Imperial Hotel today. A public meeting was held on Nov. 28. Following the meeting, it was decided to form two firefighting companies: a hose company and a hook-and-ladder company.

The hose company consisted of 40 men whose job was to provide manpower for

Continued on page B23



The Ronald Steam Pumper at Doon Heritage Village.



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Continued from page B22

the hand-powered fire engine. Two to three men on either side of the engine would pump the handles up and down to operate the pump. Men would rotate in to relieve the “pumpers” as they tired. These men were under the command of Frederick Merner, the head engineer.

The hook and ladder company consisted of 19 men. Their officers were Capt. William Young; 1st Lt. Henry Nafe; 2nd Lt. F.T. Zingg; and secretary treasurer F.H. McCallum.

A major change to the fire company came in 1879 when it was determined the hand-powered pumper purchased in 1858 no longer met the needs of the village. Following a public meeting in June, the village council began the process of issuing debentures on July 7. A bylaw was introduced to raise \$3,500 by loan to purchase a steam fire engine. On Aug. 15, council accepted “the offer of Mr. Ronald to purchase from him a Steam Fire Engine for the sum of Three thousand Dollars including Hose Cart he accepting Debentures for that amount of said Three Thousand dollars said Debentures to bear Interest at the rate of seven percent as per agreement.” Bylaw 149 was passed on Aug. 18 to raise \$3,500 to purchase a steam engine.

Additional equipment was required for the new steam pumper. One thousand feet of “Extra heavy Hemp Hose” was purchased for the new engine. Reeve T. Wilson was sent to Toronto to procure the couplings required for the hose.

Alterations and repairs were made to the fire house for \$142.10 to accommodate the new engine. To facilitate the operation of the new pumper, two concrete cistern tanks were installed at different locations in the village. The cisterns measured 12 feet by 12 feet at a total cost of \$161 and served as reservoirs of water to supply the pumper.

The Ronald Steam Pumper would remain in service until February 1935 when it was replaced by a gas-powered Bickle fire truck. Currently, the steam pumper is on loan to the Doon Heritage Village and is located in the firehall at that site.

In 1882, a new firehall was built on East and West streets to accommodate the steam pumper. It included a tower for drying the fire hose and a bell mounted on top to summon the fire men. The upstairs served as the village’s council chambers. The firehall remained in service until 1969 when it was torn down and replaced by the current firehall.

Sources consulted for this article include the Council Minutes of the Village of New Hamburg 1858-1879; the Canadisches Volksblatt newspaper; the Berlin Chronicle, the Berlin Telegraph, Ernie Ritz’s New Hamburg as it really was..., Douglas Mannen’s New Hamburg Images and Reflections and the New Hamburg Women’s Institute Tweedsmuir History Books.

Editor’s note: Spelling and capitalization in quotations within this article are reflective of the way they appeared in the council minute books.

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The land where Dolman Eyecare is located was originally part of Ray Baechler’s property at 225 Huron Street, where his barn stood before he sold it to Ted Stock, who built a creamery and grocery store on the site in 1963. The property was later purchased by Frank Erb and Merv Roth and became Erb’s Eggs, an egg grading station, until it was destroyed by fire in 1987. Afterward, the building was renovated, and in 1993 the rear portion was converted into an optometry office. In 1994, Drs. Howard and Kim Dolman purchased the clinic, and they continue to provide eye care services to the community today.

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Abe Gingerich: A thoroughly modern and traditional Amish Mennonite

GLENN BUCK

Gazette Correspondent

Abraham (Abe) Gingerich spent his life in Wilmot township; his gravestone is in a cemetery near Wilmot Centre. He is renowned for his innovations, but his church disciplined him for adopting modernizations. He drove a car, he used electrical power in his home and business, he read local and national newspapers and listened to the radio.

Abe's Amish roots can be traced to the Alsace region of France. Around 1812, Abe's grandfather, Jacob, built a coach for Napoleon's invasion of Russia before emigrating. Amish and Mennonites are perceived as conservative, dressing in clothing styles typical of the 19th century. They prefer to live on farms. Some travel by horse and buggy and avoid modern methods of communication. The use of electrical power in the home is frowned upon.

Abe was dedicated to his Amish-Mennonite roots but was one of the first residents of rural Ontario to have electrical power on their farm with equipment he built and maintained himself. Abe's life was a contradiction in terms – a thoroughly modern man striving to live in a community dedicated to preserve traditions and attitudes.

Abe and Leah (Roth) were members of Cedar Grove Amish-Mennonite congregation near Wellesley. They raised six children on their 50-acre farm on the fringe of the Baden Hill. Abe saw potential in the fast-flowing spring which ran all year.

The family worked their 50-acre farm using horses to work the land. Leah toiled in the house preparing meals, washing clothes to keep the household functioning. She also tended the garden upon which the family depended for produce, which Leah canned and preserved to be consumed over the winter, or sold in the Kitchener Market.

Leah and Abe, like most in their community, were most comfortable speaking a dialect of German, called Pennsylvania Dutch (Deutsch). Church services were conducted in Pennsylvania Dutch, but Abe was also conversant in English, which he

needed when he drove his buggy to the Kitchener Market. He was a very active individual and kept his mind active reading the Globe and Mail daily along with local papers.

He took time every day to read his bible as he tried to read the entire Bible each year. Many Amish Mennonites preferred the High German translation of the Bible, but Abe had a copy of the Douay Bible which was written in English and included the Apocrypha. He kept a series of notebooks in which he scribbled his thoughts and insights.

Abe's workshop had a walk-in cooler for food storage cooled by ice cut from the Baden pond. He developed a butchering business in which he cut meat to take to the Kitchener Market. For many years, early in the morning, Abe drove a horse and wagon to take garden produce and meat to the Kitchener Market. The trip would have taken an hour and a half on a good day. Abe also transported coal from the rail yard to homes and businesses in the area.

Castle Kilbride, residence for the Livingstone family, required two train carloads to heat it for the winter. Abe and Leah's daughters, Sarah and Almeda, worked as house maids for the Livingstone family. When gravel was needed to improve roads in the area, Abe and his sons delivered gravel with horses to the work crews to improve the roadbed. The bottom of the wagon had a board which, when pulled, allowed the gravel to run out.

In the early years of the 20th century, Abe would have read about the hydroelectric generating station in Niagara Falls, the brainchild of Sir Adam Beck, a former resident of Baden, a member of the provincial legislature. Abe would have heard of cities being connected to the grid, and houses being lit with electricity. Kitchener received electrical power in 1910; New Hamburg and Baden in 1911. Abe became familiar with the labour-saving electrical motors being developed. He traveled to Niagara Falls to learn how they were using water to generate electricity and is reputed to have been in conversation with Adam

Beck who encouraged him to wait until electrical service came to his farm.

That was not soon enough for Abe, so he enlarged the pond on his farm and built a channel to direct and regulate the flow. He purchased and installed a turbine attached to a generator. He taught himself the basic principles of electrical wiring and prepared his shop accordingly. In 1912 Abe began producing electricity with 10 kilowatts for his shop but was disappointed it was restricted to the shop. He began to build a water wheel to provide a stronger, steadier flow of electricity which would allow him to supply current to the house.

Abe with the help of his eldest children, Reuben and Adeline, built an 18-foot waterwheel to generate enough electricity to power the house. The angle iron frame, held together with nuts and bolts with boards affixed to form chambers to contain the water which flowed from above. Water entered the wooden chambers close to the top of the wheel; gravity pulled the chambers to the bottom where it escaped to the tail race. The waterwheel powered the generator with a pulley and belt.

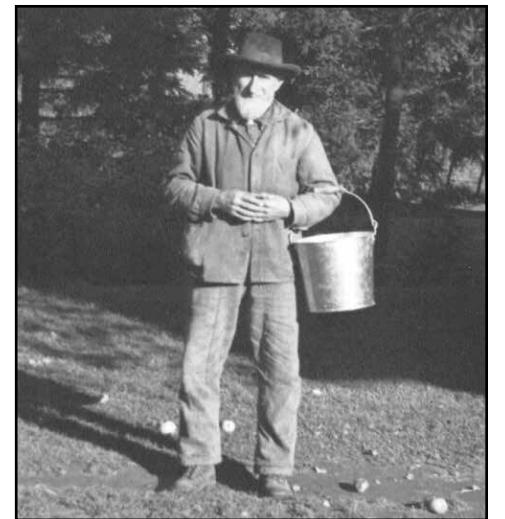
Abe switched from the turbine to the waterwheel to power the generator in 1921. He generated electricity for his farm from 1912 until 1927 when he was able to connect to the grid. When the farm was connected to the grid, he acquired a compressor to refrigerate the walk-in cooler, negating the need for ice cut from the pond. Abe sold the waterwheel – its location is unknown.

Automobiles were becoming more common in cities by the 1920s, but few rural people owned one, especially Amish-Mennonites. Abe was convinced a Model T was necessary for his businesses because it reduced the travel time to the Kitchener Market. He later purchased a Model A Ford and still owned and drove a 1928 Model A Ford when he died (it was sold by auction for \$60 when he died).

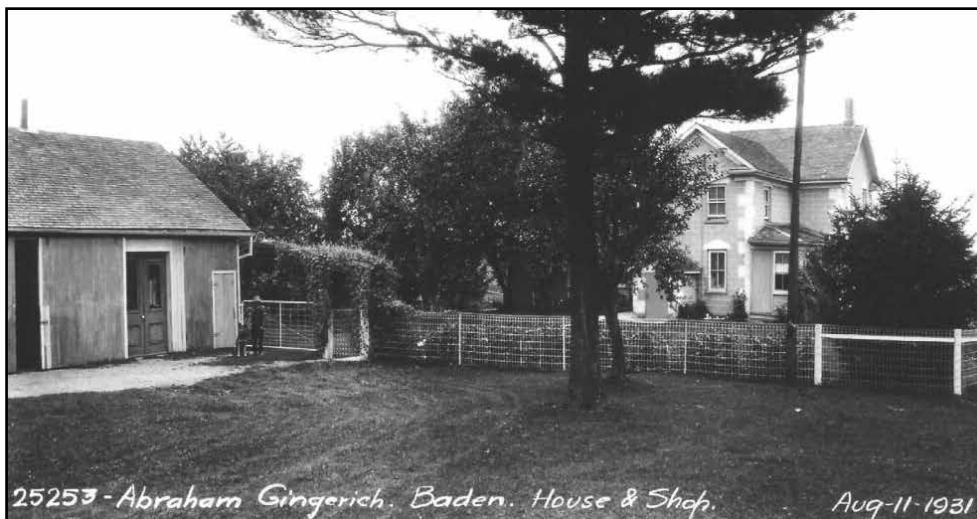
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(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

Abe Gingerich's 18-foot waterwheel, built with the help of his eldest children, generated electricity for the family farm near Baden from 1921 until the property was connected to the hydro grid in 1927.



Abraham "Abe" Gingerich, a Wilmot Township farmer and inventor whose early adoption of electricity and automobiles set him apart within his Amish-Mennonite community.



The Gingerich family farmhouse on the fringe of the Baden Hill, where Abe and Leah raised six children and became one of the first rural families in the area to generate their own electricity.



Inside Abe Gingerich's workshop, where he wired his own electrical system, powered machinery and operated a butchering business that supplied meat to the Kitchener Market.

Continued from page B24

Owning a car set Abe at odds with Bishop Jacob Lichti who was adamantly opposed to automobiles. He was allowed to drive the car to the meeting house but had to park down the road and walk the rest of the way. Eventually, Abe's membership privileges were revoked from the Cedar Grove congregation. He was allowed to attend worship services but was prohibited from positions of leadership or take communion. Interestingly, many of the congregation acquired and drove automobiles soon afterwards. Abe was never

shunned but he chose to attend congregations that were more progressive in their views.

In 1941, at age 67, Abe broke his hip, which prompted him to sell their farm in 1947 and buy a small house in Wilmot Centre where he and Leah lived until his passing in 1957. During those years, he refused to "retire" and remained active; like many of his generations he feared stopping or slowing down. At age 73, he went to work at the Linseed plant in Baden, but left when the volume of work diminished. He then became the night watchman at the lingerie factory in New Hamburg. He was

always energetic and loved to work.

Abe's genius was demonstrated in the construction of the system he developed to generate electricity on his farm but is further demonstrated by his ability to run the wires to bring power to the various motors and appliances. All of this was accomplished by a man who had never been trained as an engineer or an electrician. In 1931, Ontario Hydro recognized Abe's achievement and brought a series of officials to see his creation. They interviewed Abe and took many pictures which they published.

Abe and Leah lived in Wilmot Centre until he passed away following a heart attack at the age of 83 years. Leah began

living with her sons and daughters on their farms and passed away in 1966 after suffering a hip fracture.

Abe and Leah Gingerich were typical members of an Amish Mennonite community. They spoke Pennsylvania Deutsch, dressed modestly in black, lived in a home with minimal conveniences and adornments. They were hard working. Family life was paramount and church involvement a prerequisite. When Abe saw how electricity would improve the life of his family, he began generating electricity on his own. When Abe saw how an automobile would improve the life of his family, he bought one even though it set him at odds with his faith community.



The Gingerich family kitchen, the heart of the farmhouse where Leah prepared meals, canned produce from the garden and supported the daily work of a busy farm household.



The Gingerich family circa 1950. Back row, from left: Rudy, Malinda, Adeline and Reuben. Front row, from left: Almeda, Abraham, Leah and Sarah.

Forest Glen Public School celebrating 50th anniversary of first three graduating classes

EMILY STEWART

Gazette Correspondent

The first-ever graduating class of Forest Glen Public School will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in a reunion this June, but a year after the monumental occasion.

"It kind of came and went without us really noticing it, and then a friend of mine who had also gone to school with us had mentioned that it was coming up and we looked it up and it had already happened, so we're actually a year late in putting this together," said organizer Kenneth Brown.

Forest Glen Public School alumni who graduated in either 1975, 1976 or 1977 are invited to attend the 50th reunion at the New Hamburg Legion Hall at 65 Boullee St. on June 6 from 1-5 p.m. Brown is looking forward to reconnecting with his classmates in-person for the first time in several years.

"We've been doing a lot of Facebook things trying to get people together. After 50 years, it's virtually impossible and so many people have changed their names and moved three or four times and that sort of thing. It's been a real challenge," he said. "So, I'm looking forward to it, and I know an awful lot of other people are, too, with simply reconnecting and figuring out where everybody's been and what they've been doing."

Brown said that while he grew up with

his classmates throughout childhood, his time at Forest Glen Public School was quite short and with few memories. The school wasn't ready in early September of his graduating year and didn't open until late 1974.

"It was interesting because what they had to do was more or less at the last minute they broke up the graduating classes into different groups and sent them to different schools, and then we blended within their population for that period of time," Brown said.

The first Forest Glen Public School graduating class spent just six months at the school. Brown is hoping to connect with more alumni. Between 120 to 125 people were contacted out of the 215 from the graduating classes.

"Once we figured out who these people were and we said, 'Hey, it's such and such' and it was you're off to the races as far as people saying 'Oh, I remember that and I remember this and that's a blast from the past,' and so on and so forth. We're really looking forward to it. I think it's going to be a lot of fun," Brown said.

Any former students or staff interested in being part of the reunion can either send an email to kbphotoent@aol.com, call or text 226-930-4466, or reach out to the Forest Glen PS (New Hamburg) 2026 Reunion Facebook page.



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The Old Curiosity Shop

TAVISTOCK AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Submitted to the Gazette

Everybody loves to show off their collections.

In 1967, the Tavistock Home and School Association held an antique show in the school as its Centennial project. The event was originally supposed to run for five days but it proved to be so popular that two more viewings were added. Hundreds attended the show.

Plans for the antique show had started months before. Articles for display came in disappointingly slow at first but then one family agreed to allow the display of their treasures, and it was just the right spark to start the ball rolling.

By the time of the opening, there were over 1,500 objects on display. There were more objects offered than there was space for. There were sets of coins and post-cards, dinosaur bones, arrowheads, lace and embroidery, toy steam engines, books, ladies' unmentionables, chamber pots and hat pins.

"The list is innumerable," reported The Gazette. "For the young it was truly educational; but for many it was a time for reminiscing."

The show in 1967 was neither the first nor the last to be held in Tavistock. In 1943, shortly after it formed, the Tavistock Men's Club thought the time was ripe for an antique show. The members organized an exhibit called "The Old Curiosity Shop" and over 280 articles were displayed. The event was held for a week and over 800 attended. There were old musical

instruments, snuff boxes, tooth pullers, bed warmers, flint guns and Chinese artifacts. A lap organ won the prize as the most interesting article, the owner receiving \$4.45 worth of Frosst's Neo-Chemical Food from John Lemp's Drug Store.

The success of The Old Curiosity Shop prompted residents of Tavistock at the time to ask, "Should not a permanent collection of historical articles be established in Tavistock?" Those sentiments were asked again following the Historical Display at Tavistock's 150th Anniversary celebrations in 1998. Local service clubs, sports teams, churches and businesses set up displays at the event. There were family histories and scrap books, agricultural implements, stamps and old mail, quilts, wedding dresses, crokinole boards and antique toys.

The support and interest shown in the historical exhibits in the 1998 celebrations prompted the Tavistock Rotary Club to spearhead the formation of the Tavistock and District Historical Society (TDHS), which became a reality in 2004.

These curiosity and antique shows held in Tavistock have proven to be very enjoyable and have sparked a lot of interest. As such, TDHS is planning to have another one this year at the time of their annual meeting in April. People are being asked once again to bring out their unique items and collections and put them on display for all to see.

As John Lemp said in 1943, "The exhibit will be most unique, as well as being educational and instructive for old and young."



(PHOTO COURTESY OF TAVISTOCK AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

The snare drum in this photograph of the Tavistock Band of 1884 was the first item to be donated for display in the "The Old Curiosity Shop" exhibition put on by the Tavistock Men's Club in 1944.

Wellesley North Easthope Fall Fair stays innovative while preserving agricultural history

EMILY STEWART

Gazette Correspondent

Joanne Stewart, past president of the Wellesley North Easthope Agricultural Society, remembers the stories her father told her about fall fairs in their early years.

The events began as school fairs and expanded into the greater community to showcase agricultural and culinary talents. Schools and businesses would shut down for residents to enjoy the fall fair.

"It was a great event to, what we would call today, network, meet up with your neighbours and hear the latest things," Stewart said. "It was educational pieces for them, so it was very beneficial for the whole community."

The Wellesley Township Fall Fair, entering its 173rd year this August, has been significant to the township since 1873. Still highlighting the town's agriculture, the Wellesley North Easthope Agricultural Society has made some changes to adapt to an evolving society with businesses now open seven days a week, for example.

"We had to look, as a community, what

would work for our community and also be able to sustain the fair for the future and attract the community back to us," Stewart said.

The fall fair moved to its current home at the Bill Gies Recreation Centre in 2024 and, in 2025, the annual event moved from a mid-week event in September to a weekend event in late August for the first time. Moving forward, the Wellesley Fall Fair will take place the fourth Friday and Saturday in August, before Labour Day weekend.

Stewart said that the decision was based around ensuring there would be no conflicts with other events in the area like the Tavistock and New Hamburg fairs, as well as the Wellesley Apple Butter and Cheese Festival and the fair ambassador competition at Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition (CNE). Most exhibitors stayed amid the change, with a few unable to make it. Though there were some volunteers who had prior commitments and could no longer make it, they told Stewart they would make it a priority to volunteer at the fair for 2026.

The horse show was also moved to Saturday in 2025, which saw an increase

in new participants. Mary Litch-Neeb, secretary and treasurer of the Wellesley North Easthope Agricultural Society, said most of the exhibitors these days work full-time to be able to afford to participate in horse shows.

"It is not an inexpensive hobby to have and most of them are hobby that have it," she said.

As the fair is now in August, the first reminder for children to start creating materials for the children's exhibitions and competitions goes out the June prior. The organization is keeping the dairy education portion of its programming in September so students in grades three and four have a chance to learn about dairy farming.

"We decided to move it to a week later, so it gives teachers the opportunity to arrange their courses to include the dairy-ed. portion because they feel it's a very important part of the curriculum to the school. Our dairy community has adapted that program very well," Stewart said.

The Wellesley North Easthope Agricultural Society is coming up with new ideas and changes to preserve the fair and keep its history going. As the 175th

anniversary will be in 2028, the successful Scarecrow show will be shelved until then.

The agricultural society is also unable to host a midway, as the space does not have the concrete necessary to do so without sacrificing necessary parking space, so other programming will feature talents such as musicians, face painters and jugglers.

In the previous edition of the fall fair, zucchini races and remote mini-cars were introduced and were a big hit. The Agriculture tent, featuring educational pieces on rural living and farming, was also a big hit and will be a highlighted feature of the fall fair's programming.

"We're trying to adapt, and I think by adapting and growing in those areas, we're able to continually grow as a fair because over the years, there were a lot of fairs in the community and now there's only three in Waterloo Region," Stewart said.

The 173rd annual Wellesley Township Fall Fair will take place on Friday Aug. 28 and Saturday Aug. 29. More information can be found online by visiting wellesleynehfallfair.ca.

Beer and cheese: Local staples of life for almost two centuries

PAUL KNOWLES

Gazette Correspondent

Historians suggest that humans have been drinking beer for anywhere from 7,000 to 13,000 years, and sources indicate that we've been chomping on cheese for somewhere between 4,000 and 7,000 years.

So, it's rather pleasing to discover that a business still operating in New Hamburg has played its own historic role in the creation of these two consumables. The building that once housed the Rau Brewery, and today is home to Oak Grove Cheese, may not have been around for millennia, but it has done its duty since the 1840s, only about one decade after the founding of New Hamburg.

The brewery was founded on Bleams Road on the banks of the Nith River by Sylvester Frank in 1843. The official address is 29 Bleams Rd. E. An 1854 map of New Hamburg – then known as “Hamburg” – shows the brewery directly across the road from a tannery. Nearby is a bridge – eventually known as the Rau Bridge – spanning the Nith. At that time, before Highway 7/8 bisected Bleams, it was one continuous roadway.

The tannery is long gone and the bridge was washed away by one of the many Nith River floods (though a footbridge is now located in roughly the same place), but the building remains as an important example of local architectural heritage.

Early in the 1860s, the brewery was purchased by Stephen Rau and it became the Rau Brewery. It remained in the Rau family – subsequently owned and operated by J&J Rau and then Joseph F. Rau – until prohibition killed the business and it closed in 1916.

By 1928, a new business, Oak Grove Cheese, occupied the building. The popular local cheese factory and shop are still in operation today, and two years from now, will have the rare opportunity to celebrate its 100th birthday.

But back to beer for a moment. In 1908, the Berlin Daily News carried a somewhat florid article praising the people and the product of Rau Brewery (Berlin was the



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

Almost two centuries of entrepreneurship: this building on the banks of the Nith River has housed a brewery and two cheese factories since the mid-1800s.

name, at that time, of the city we now call Kitchener, and that's another and rather sordid, tale). One might conclude that the anonymous writer was provided with complimentary samples of the Rau products, for this was his assessment:

“To have been first is sometimes merely a sign of antiquity. It is so with the mummy whose lifeless body we view after the lapse of centuries. He is but a corpse. How vastly different with the business which, while its origin dates back a long period, yet still grows and flourishes, waxing stronger each year. Such a business is the Rau Brewery. It was founded in the early '50s by Sylvester Frank but has been in the Rau family most of the time since. From its founder it passed successively to Stephen Rau, to J. & J. Rau and then to the present proprietor, Jos. F. Rau. It has been under the present management since 1892 and it would seem that its celebrated Bavarian, Champagne, Export Lagers and Cream Porter grow more popular day by day. The firm undoubtedly enjoy an ever-widening

circle of patrons, a fact which is not a mere accident – there are no trade accidents – but which must be ascribed to the fine quality of the beer. Mr. Rau is a practical brewer himself and pays close attention to every detail of manufacture which accounts in a large measure for the uniform excellence of the Rau Lager. The plant is an extensive one, located at the east end of the town. Pure artesian water pumped by the firm's own plant is used and the strictest cleanliness is observed through-out. Epicures should ask for Rau's beer. They'll find it right. Mr. Rau is a public-spirited gentleman and is chairman of the Public School Board at the present time.”

Joseph F. Rau was the son of John and Mary Rau, and nephew of John's brother, also named Joseph. The brothers were partners in the brewery and were succeeded in ownership by Joseph F.

When the brewery closed, Joseph F. Rau stayed in New Hamburg, taking the role as local postmaster, a position he held until his death in June 1926. The June 11, 1926, edition of the New Hamburg Independent carried this rather detailed death notice:

“Throughout his life the last Mr. Rau took an active part in the affairs of the town. He was a Councilor (sic) for several years and a member of the Public School Board for over twenty years, and gave his assistance wherever he could for the welfare of the village. He was a member of the Library Board, and president of the New Hamburg Ring Co. at the time of his death. A lover of true sport, Mr. Rau took great interest in amateur sports and was an enthusiastic curler and bowler as long as his health permitted. He was a congenial companion and always showed a kindly spirit towards his fellowmen. A large circle of friends mourn his passing.

“The deceased was a faithful member of the Kitchener Knights of Columbus lodge. In politics he was a staunch Conservative and former Vice-President of the

South Waterloo Liberal-Conservative Association.

“Mr. Rau's father, the late John Rau, died in 1881, and an only sister also passed away at the age of 7 years. His mother died in 1917 and since the death of his mother he made his home at the Commercial Hotel, where he passed away.”

Within a couple of years of his passing, his former brewery had been transformed into its second incarnation as Oak Grove Cheese.

Today, Oak Grove is owned and operated by Mark and Pat Langenegger. The couple is carrying on a long-held family tradition. Their cheese factory was founded in 1928 by Zito Baccarini. The business was soon under the ownership of Zito's niece, Piera Langenegger, and her husband, Gottfried.

Their son, Tristano – always known in New Hamburg as “Tutti” – and his wife, Reta, took over from Tristano's parents and operated the business for many decades. In fact, when Tristano passed away in 2014, his obituary included this simple history:

“Tristano and Reta along with their two sons Tony and Mark owned and operated Oak Grove Cheese Factory in New Hamburg for his lifetime.”

Tony passed away in 2012. Pat and Mark have owned and operated Oak Grove Cheese since Tristano's passing.

The history of the name and local cheese-making enterprises is slightly more complicated. In the late 1800s and perhaps into the first years of the 20th century, there was a company called “The Oak Grove Cheese and Butter Company” owned by George Cousins and operating out of a factory further east on Bleams Road. As well, in the period between the closure of Rau Brewery (1916) and the opening of the new Oak Grove Cheese Factory (1928), Pat Langenegger says another owner named Roth made cheese for some years in the former Rau location which was bought by Zito Baccarini in 1928. But today's Oak Grove Cheese owners do not believe there is any direct connection between Oak Grove and either of these historic cheesemaking companies.

The owners of Oak Grove Cheese are proud of their heritage and continue some of the cheesemaking traditions of their forebearers. For example, a Wikipedia article about Limburger cheese – a cheese you either love or abhor – notes that “Limburger was also manufactured in Canada, where it was a German-Canadian cultural marker, by the Oak Grove Cheese Company in New Hamburg.” That's almost correct, except for the tense – Oak Grove still produces Limburger.

Another traditional product that inspires lineups outside the Oak Grove shop is “cook cheese.” In fact, a few years ago, CBC Radio thought this significant enough that they reported, “There is still cook cheese (koch kaese, made to preserve extra dairy) made at Oak Grove Cheese in New Hamburg.” Just one more detail in the history of a multi-faceted business that has operated on the banks of the Nith River for almost two centuries.



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

A weathered keystone from the Rau Brewery still sits atop the entrance to the Oak Grove Cheese shop.



(PHOTO COURTESY MILLER & MILLER AUCTIONS)

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