

# Rare old photographs to go on display in Wellesley

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Rarely before seen photographs of Wellesley have made their way to the Wellesley Township Heritage and Historical Society and will be on display in the historical room in conjunction with Heritage Week starting Feb. 15.



Photographs of Wellesley taken by Charles Ottmann Jr. in the early 1900s show many rarely-before viewed scenes, like the building of a bridge in Wallenstein and construction on what is now Nafziger Road. They're on display at the Wellesley Township Heritage and Historical Society's Historical Room, which is open on Family Day. [Submitted]

The historical room is open the last Saturday of every month to the public, but they'll be opening it specially for Family Day to give families a chance to see some 40 photos of the township taken by Charles Ottmann Jr. in the early 1900s.

"A descendant in B.C. was doing his family history online and he came across our site incredibly," said curator Nancy Maitland. "On our family history page was a picture of his family, of the Ottmann family. He was quite excited and emailed us and said he had these photos and thought we might be interested."

He scanned an album full of photos to be displayed in the historical room, which were taken between 1902 and 1906.

Ottmann's father was a saddler and harness maker in Wellesley. Charles Jr. was listed in the 1901 census as a saddler. Shortly after that he became ill and had to give up the heavy work of making saddles, instead turning to photography.

Some of his photos were made into postcards, which he sold in his gallery. He photographed a variety of subjects, including lots of views of Wellesley Village.

"We've only got one example of his work outside the village. That's building the big railway bridge that was going in Wallenstein about 1905. That was published. He was trying I think to get some commercial work. He was advertising in the Wellesley Maple Leaf that he would take portraits of children or any photos that people wanted. I do have some references of him taking a couple of wedding photos. And then he did a lot of family photos," Maitland said.

There are several photos of people in the album, which she guesses are his family. Another one which has been published before shows the Ottmann family at a butchering bee with a large pig on a table and people standing around with cleavers, carcasses and all sorts of things.

One photo shows the school, another a horse auction.

"There's one of a great big group of men and some of them are even blurry with people moving. It's taken from a little bit high up and it's a horse auction outside the saddle shop. There's men in big fur coats and big fur hats and it's really delightful. I think he was being a little experimental taking a group like that," Maitland muses.

Some of them aren't posed shots, but rather of people doing things. One of them is a group of people putting up a new chimney. Other shots show Nafziger Road torn up, near where the Schmidtsville Restaurant is. You can see the old factory very faintly in the distance with some men working and others looking at the camera.

"It's just a moment caught in time. They really are wonderful scenes," Maitland said.

She says the photos will be of interest to many local people who know the village, but for people who study photography it will also be interesting because there's very little known about Ottmann. He died in 1906 at the age of 27.

“There are a lot of people who studied photographers. For instance in Kitchener/Berlin and Waterloo people have done a lot of work on those photographers. They know from this year to this year this was their address. When people have photos they can kind of date them because people have done a lot of work on when photographers were active and where their studio was. These photos were often imprinted in the corner with the name of the photographer or studio,” Maitland explains.

He started first as Otter Portraits and then his later work has the Charles Ottmann Jr. imprint as he expanded his work.

She’s hoping families will come check out the photos on Family Day, to get a sense of what Wellesley used to be like more than a century ago.

The historical room will be open Feb. 15 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and is also open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the last Saturday of every month except December. It’s located in the Wellesley Branch Library on Henry Street.

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