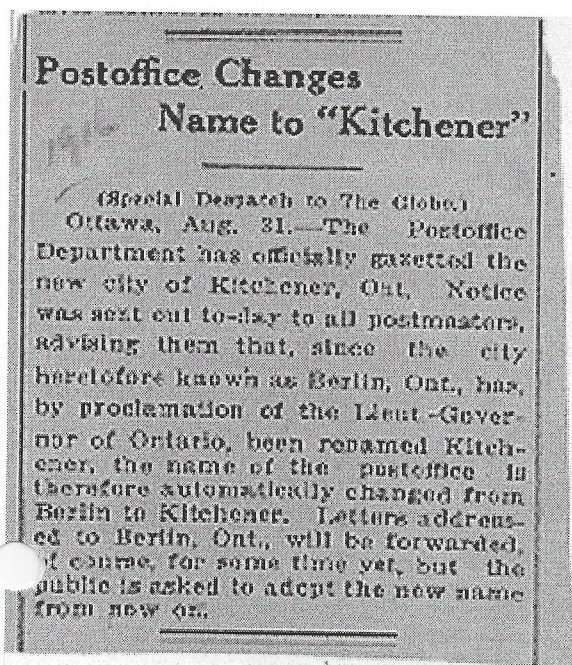
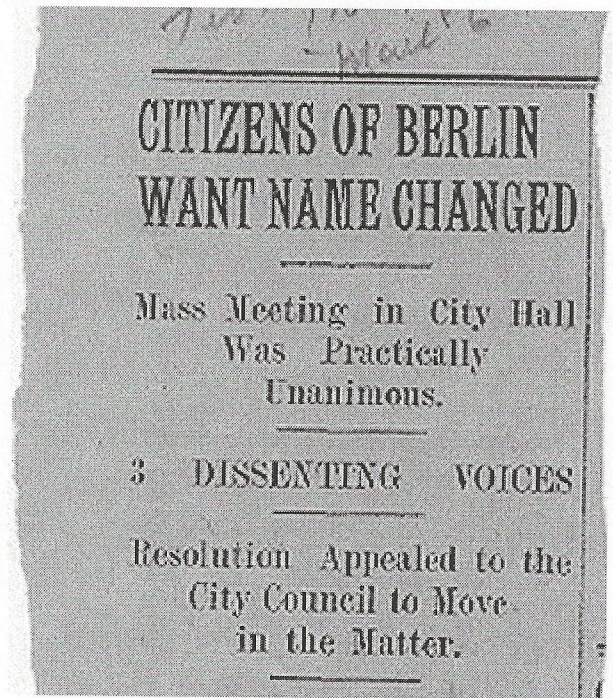


Changing Identity – Berlin, Ontario

- Through the latter half of the 19th century and into the first decade of the 20th, the City of Berlin, Ontario, Canada, was a bustling industrial centre celebrating its German heritage. However, when World War I started, that heritage became the focus of considerable enmity from non-German residents within the city and throughout Waterloo County.
- Most of the original settlers of Berlin were not directly German, but were Mennonites from Pennsylvania, which led to problems because of their refusal to join the war effort (because of their pacifism).
- The slow pace of recruitment for the local regiment (118 Battalion) led to suspicions of disloyalty.
- A bust of Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, set up in Victoria Park long before the war (appropriate given that Wilhelm II was Queen Victoria's first-born grandchild), was thrown into Victoria Lake (the main lake in the park) twice, and then vanished forever, possibly melted down to produce guns.



- In 1916, a movement began to change the name of the city. It did not have the support of the wider community. A contest was held to choose a new name and the results were ridiculed. When news hit that Britain's Minister of War, Lord Kitchener, was killed in action off the Orkney Islands, his name was put forward as a possible replacement, and the whole matter was put up to referendum.
- The referendum itself did not give Berlin residents the option of maintaining the status quo, and anybody who spoke up against this process was viewed with suspicion.

- Unable to oppose the change, the community stayed home. Only 892 people bothered to vote (Berlin's population at the time was over 15,000) and of those, just 346 were enough to change the name of the city to that of Kitchener. Following the referendum, a petition of 2000 names was sent to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to try to stop the process, but they were turned down.



Oktoberfest in Kitchener is the largest of its kind outside of Germany

