

31 Decew Street

Plan 201 and Plan 307 – Lot 6, South Side of Decew Street and West of Maria Street



It's November 4, 1876. Jacob Wagner is attending a public auction sale of lots that will become a new housing development in the village of Tavistock. As the gavel goes down and the auctioneer calls out "sold" Jacob Wagner becomes the first owner of Lot 6, now known as 31 Decew Street.

Our story starts years earlier. In 1848, Captain Henry Eckstein (the man credited with founding Tavistock) built a log house on what we now call the five corners in the center of town. The building was on the northeast corner and served as the Eckstein home and tavern where people could have a drink or a meal or stay overnight. Captain Eckstein called the new settlement Freiburg after his home in Germany. Time marched on and in 1855 the name was changed to Inkerman after a battle in the Crimean War. Then the railway came and things started to come alive. Once again, in 1857, the name changed, this time more from necessity than desire. The community wanted a Post Office and the village of Inkerman near Winchester was already using the name. The Post Office offered up a listing of possible names and Tavistock was chosen.

As Tavistock grew in size various surveys were done dividing the village into building lots. The survey called Plan 167 completed in 1868 covered much of the central part of the village. From this Plan we have Decew Street named after Edmund DeCew who was the surveyor hired for the job. A few years later in 1876 Adam Mohr, one of the community's pioneers, commissioned a survey to sell off part of his farmland for a new housing development. The Mohr Survey is Plan 201, an area bounded by Adam, Maria, Decew and Mill Streets.

The lot purchased by Jacob Wagner was located in Plan 201, 1/5 of an acre in size fronting on Decew Street. Sadly, we do not know how much he paid.

Jacob and Anna Katherine Wagner 1876 - 1899

Jacob Wagner was born in Sebbetrode in the State of Hesse in Germany in 1822. In 1846 he married Anna Catherine Steller (also spelled Scheller) and the couple emigrated to Canada. The Wagners lived in Waterloo Region before moving to East Zorra Township where the 1861 census lists the couple plus 7 children. Jacob's profession was shown as joiner and carpenter.

In 1876 when Lot 6 was purchased Jacob was 54 years old and wife Anna Catherine was 51. Three of their children were still living at home ... Adam - age 24, Elizabeth - age 20 and Sarah - age 17. Adam was also a carpenter by trade.



The Wagner Family
year unknown

inset - Sarah

front seated - Elizabeth

middle seated - Anna Catherine, Jacob and
Katie

back - Adam, John, William, Jacob

Most of the owners of the lots purchased at the Mohr auction began building homes shortly after the sale date. It would be reasonable to assume that Jacob Wagner did as well. Another reasonable assumption (based on no evidence to the contrary) is that the Wagner house is "the bones" of the house standing there today.

The Wagners sold their home on January 25, 1899. Anna Catherine died just 6 days later. Jacob moved to Berlin (now Kitchener) where he died in 1904. Both are buried at Grace United Church (formerly Zion Evangelical Church) cemetery in Tavistock.

Werner and Elizabeth Stein ... 1899 - 1924

Like so many of Tavistock's early residents Werner Stein was born in Germany ... February 12, 1835 in Breitenbach, Bavaria. His journey to Canada was quite unique.

As the family story unfolds, Germany was besieged by uprisings that resulted in a full-scale revolution in 1848. Young Werner, then age 13, would soon be eligible for military service. The family was quite religious and did not want to see their son sent off to war. They smuggled him to the port at Bremerhaven in a wooden box and from there set sail to Canada. They arrived 3 months later. For a short while the family lived in South Easthope Township before moving to a farm at Lot 34, Concession 12 in East Zorra on the outskirts of Tavistock.

In 1859 Werner married Elizabeth Homberger. They lived on the family farm and raised 3 sons and 1 daughter. Werner was, by all accounts, a very successful farmer. When it was time to retire the Steins purchased the home on Decew Street for \$800 and moved to town.

The Steins were a nice quiet couple. Like others in the neighbourhood they had a big garden in the back yard. The September 1902 Gazette reported a 13" diameter sunflower growing at the Stein home.

Werner died at age 79 in his home on August 6, 1914. The medical certificate states his death was due to "old age". His obituary notes that Werner was "one of the oldest and most highly esteemed citizens of the community". The funeral service was held at the Stein home.



photo to the left - Mrs. Werner Stein (Elizabeth Homberger) holding her great grandson, Elton Krantz circa 1915

Elizabeth and daughter Annie stayed living on Decew Street. Elizabeth died in her home at age 84 on March 10, 1924. Her obituary states that she "was a devout Methodist in religion and a strict and regular member and attendant of the Zion Evangelical Church until her feebleness would not permit her to venture far from her home. She was a lovable old lady and a staunch neighbour and friend and her death has cast a deep gloom over the entire neighbourhood and filled the hearts of all her acquaintances with sorrow". Her funeral service was held at her home.

Werner and Elizabeth Stein are buried in the Grace United Church (formerly Zion Evangelical Church) cemetery in Tavistock.

Annie Stein ... 1924 - 1934

Annie was born on the Stein farm on April 9, 1864. When her parents moved to Decew Street she moved with them. When mother died the property was sold to Annie for \$1,000.

Most everything we know about Annie comes from her obituary ... single woman, lived her entire life with her parents, took care of her mother after her father died, quiet and retiring

disposition and active in her church. Annie Margaret Stein died at her home on Decew Street at age 69 on October 11, 1933. Her funeral service was held at her home with a second service at the church. Annie shares a tombstone with her parents at Grace United Church cemetery in Tavistock.

As was invariably the case in that era, the house was put up for auction sale after Annie's death. Henry Mansz, a local man who often acted as an administrator for local families, made the arrangements. The sale was advertised in the Tavistock Gazette in February of 1934.

AUCTION SALE

**of
REAL ESTATE AND FURNITURE**

of the Late Annie M. Stein Estate

on

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24th

commencing at 1.30 p.m.

of the following articles:—

2 glass cupboards, extension table, drop-leaf table, kitchen table, small tables and stands, 6 cane-bottom chairs, 2 upholstered chairs, 14 kitchen chairs, 5 rocking chairs, 3 bedroom suites, 4 beds, wardrobe, 2 couches, cot with springs, sewing machine, spinning wheel, 2 chamber sets, rug, 3 yds. x 3½ yds., home-made carpets, mattresses, bed-ticks, feather ticks, 8 coal oil lamps, 5-gallon coal oil can, brass kettle, 1 copper boiler, hand washing machine, linoleum, ladders, Electric stove and annex, crocks, pots and pans, sealers, garden tools, fire-wood and many other articles, too numerous to mention.

The House and Lot on Decew St., in the Village of Tavistock, with all conveniences.

TERMS CASH

Terms on Real Estate will be made known at time of Sale.

M. R. ROTH,
Auctioneer.

H. J. MANSZ,
Administrator,
Tavistock, Ont.

The listing of items suggests that perhaps items from a few other families were included in the sale as 3 bedroom suites plus 4 beds and 14 kitchen chairs might have been a bit too much for the Decew Street house.

An article after the sale reported that there was a large crowd in attendance and good prices were realized

The house and lot were sold to Peter Martens of Tavistock for \$1,475.

Peter and Tatjana Martens ... 1934 - 1940

In 1924 Peter and Tatjana Martens and 5 of their 6 children boarded the SS Minnedosa and emigrated to Canada. They were Class 3 passengers which means they were below deck. The Martens were Ukrainian and were leaving a chaotic time in the Ukraine for a more peaceful

life in Canada. Peter was 53 years old, not a young man for a new start. His immigration papers showed that he had \$15 to his name. Their passage was sponsored by the Mennonite Church.

Upon arrival in Tavistock Peter was hired to work at the flax mill. For someone suffering from bronchial asthma this was not ideal employment but it put food on the table.

In 1934 the Martens purchased the property at 31 Decew Street for \$1,475. They resided there until Peter died of a heart attack at the house on July 23, 1939. He was 70 years old. The funeral was held at his home.

Tatjana Martens moved to Kitchener shortly after Peter's death. She died on February 10, 1959 at age 80. The Martens are buried at St. Paul's Lutheran Cemetery in Tavistock.

Jacob B. and Elizabeth Wettlaufer ... 1940 - 1950

Timing is everything. Jacob B. Wettlaufer was born on a farm in West Zorra Township, spent his childhood there and all of his married life. The house on Decew Street was to be the Wettlaufer's retirement home. Jacob died there just 4 days after they moved in.



Jacob B. Wettlaufer was born on May 24, 1867. He married Elizabeth Hahn in 1898. The couple are shown in their wedding photo to the left.

The Wettlaufers raised their 2 sons and 1 daughter on the family farm.

After a lifetime of farming they decided to move to town and purchased the property at 31 Decew Street for \$1,750. That was in February 1940. They moved in October of 1941. It's likely they rented the home in the interim but there are no available records to support that possibility.

Elizabeth Wettlaufer remained in the home until 1947 when she moved to a home near Woodstock. It's presumed the Decew Street house was rented out until it was sold in 1950. Again, no records to provide proof.

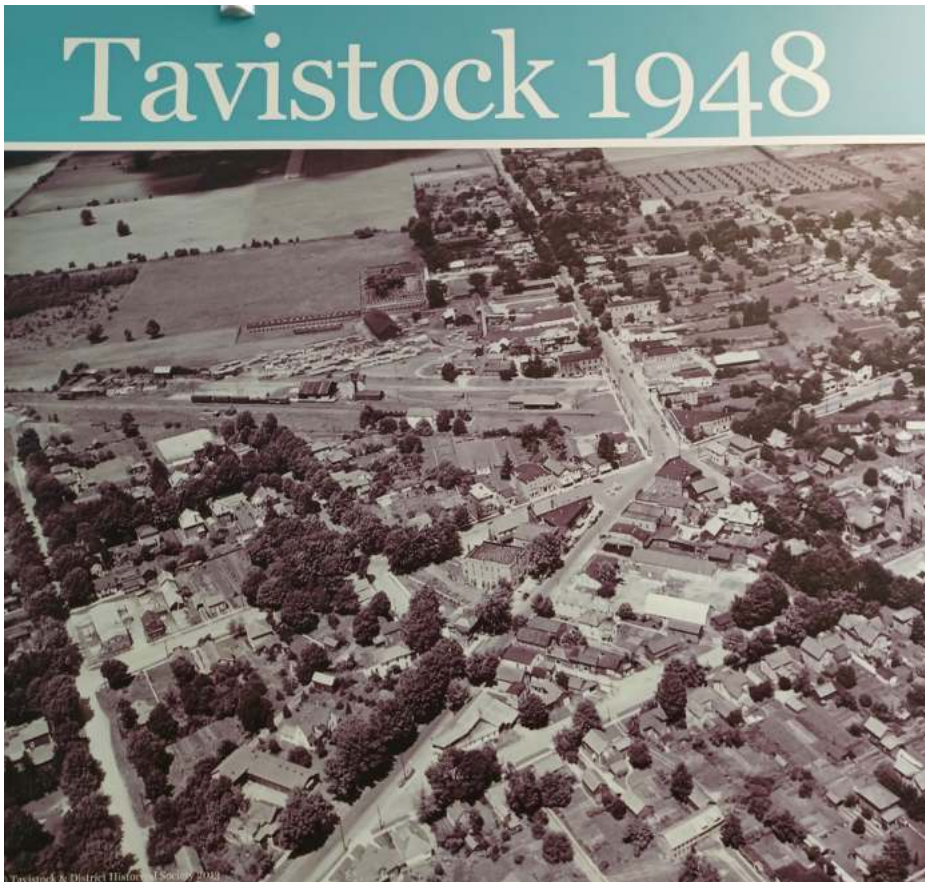
Elizabeth Wettlaufer died at age 78 in 1952. The Wettlaufers are buried at Trinity Lutheran cemetery in Sebastopol.



The first known picture of the house is circa 1944.

Lorne Krug, in his WW2 uniform, is standing on Decew Street with 31 Decew in the background on the left.

The house, at this point in time, has a veranda. You can see an addition on the back.



1948 marked the 100th anniversary of the founding of Tavistock.

To mark the occasion this aerial photograph of the village was commissioned.

An inset showing the Decew Street area follows on the next page.



The red arrow points to 31 Decew Street. Note the roofline and the large structure between 31 Decew and 25 Decew (the house to the right). Note, as well, the large garden plots behind all the houses on the street.

The red star is included as a point of orientation. In 1948 this was the Oxford Hotel. Today it is the Tavistock Public Library on Woodstock Street.

The blue star is Jack and Rebecca Krug's home at 47 Woodstock Street South prior to moving to Decew Street. The property fronted on Woodstock Street and extended through to Decew.

John (Jack) and Rebecca Krug ... 1950 - 1972

Location. Location. Location. Jack and Rebecca (nee Stock) Krug began their married life in 1915 in the house at 47 Woodstock Street South. It was their place of business and their family home.

Jack had chosen death as his life's work. He established the Krug Funeral Home operating first out of the furniture store that he built in 1915 (51 Woodstock Street South) and then out of

their home. Rebecca was a piano teacher certified with the Royal Conservatory of Music. She taught piano to generations of local children, was an accomplished seamstress and an excellent embalming assistant for Jack. The couple raised 3 children Lorne, Marie and Robert (Bob).

In 1948 Jack and Rebecca sold the funeral home and furniture store businesses to son Bob and his new wife, Beatrice (nee Kaufman). They wanted to stay living in the neighbourhood and set their sights on the house at the end of the driveway ... 31 Decew. There was just one problem. It wasn't for sale. They moved in with daughter Marie and her husband and 2 sons at 25 Decew Street and patiently waited.

The Tavistock Gazette reported in the April 12, 1950 edition that "John A. Krug has purchased the property of Mrs. Jacob Wettlaufer and has taken possession". The purchase price was \$3,500.

Rebecca set her piano in their new living room and her sewing machine by the kitchen window and was in business.

Jack put his carpentry skills to good use. A sunny yellow insulbrick was chosen to cover the frame siding. The front veranda was removed and a cheery closed-in sunporch added, perfect for entertaining and watching the goings on in the neighbourhood. The extension at the back of the house was removed and a smaller extension was added as a workshop for Jack. The large structure between the houses in the aerial picture earlier was razed and small garages were added to each property. There were undoubtedly changes made to the interior. Family members as of this writing remember only the addition of a small washroom off the kitchen and, typical of the time, layers and layers and more layers of wallpaper added over the years.

In the photo below from 1953 they are shown at the front of their home with 3 of their 4 grandchildren ... Graham Kaufman, Sherrill (Krug) Calder and baby John Krug.



The Krugs were an active couple in the community and in their church. On retirement Jack continued his affiliation with the local Masonic Lodge, volunteered his skills with projects around the village and helped son Bob with his business. Rebecca kept up her work with the Trinity Lutheran Ladies Aid quilting, catering, altar guild and playing the piano for meetings and special events. Her music pupils came to the house for lessons almost every day. Summertime was garden time with vegetables covering most of the big back yard and flowers planted around the house. Jack and Rebecca had a wide circle of friends and loved to dance, especially the eight-some reels that were popular at dances years ago.

That changed in 1957 when Jack had a stroke. He recovered well enough but life was different. No longer able to climb a long flight of stairs, he slept in the dining room and in his later years spent his days either on the glider in the sunporch or puttering in his workshop. Jack died in 1969 at age 84. Rebecca had taken care of him for all those years and had kept up the busy life she had always enjoyed. In 1971 she had a stroke and spent her last months in the local nursing home looking sadly towards her former home.

Rebecca died at age 81 in 1971. More specifically, she died at 11 am on November 11. The mantle clock that she and Jack had received as a wedding present was still sitting in the dining room on Decew Street. It stopped at exactly 11 am on the day she died. Despite repeated attempts by many skilled clock repairmen, it would run for a day or maybe two and then stop again as though there was no reason left to continue telling the time.

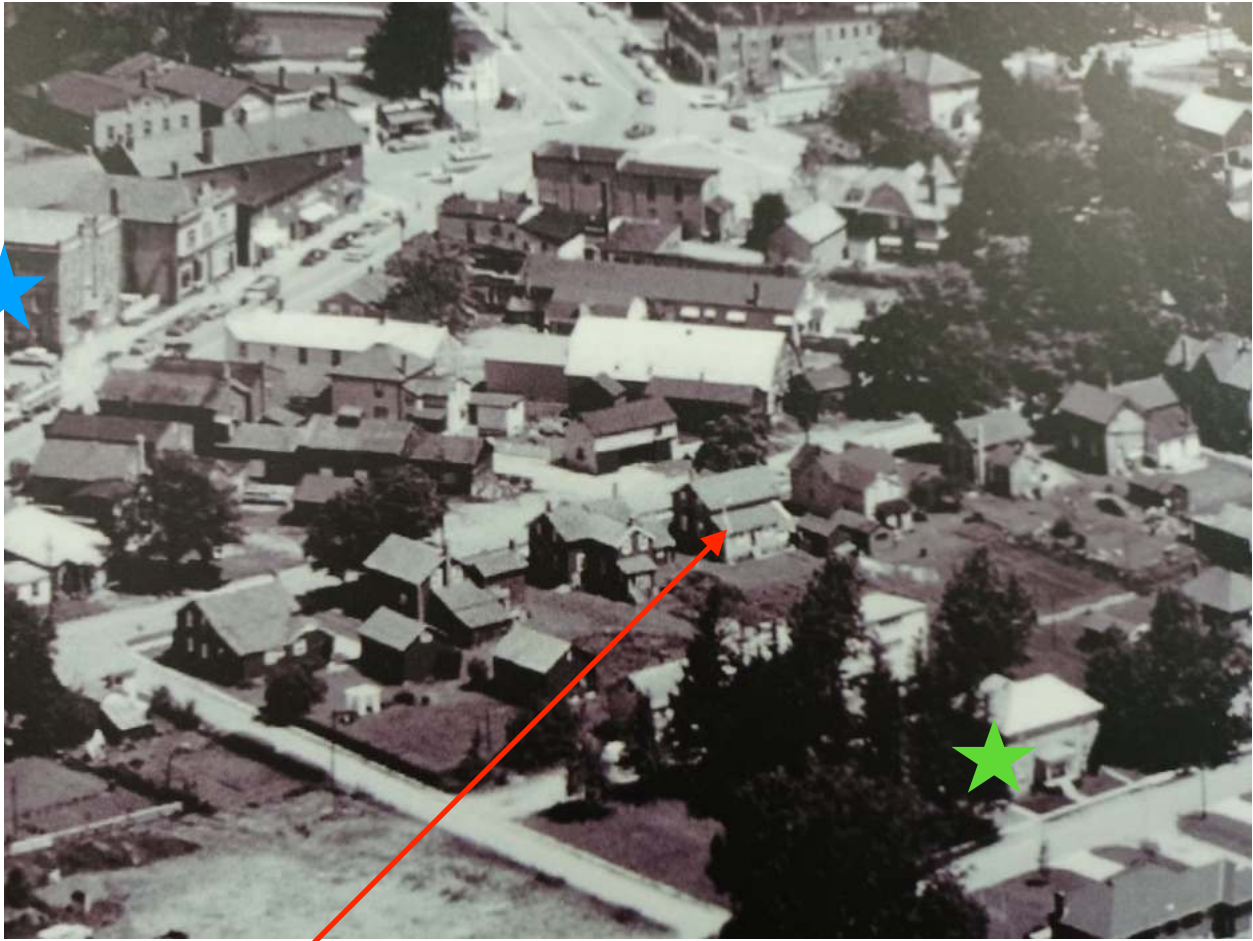
Jack and Rebecca Krug are buried at Trinity Lutheran Church cemetery in Sebastopol.



top left ... Christmas circa 1959. The living room wallpaper at the time featured yellow roses.

top right ... Jack and Rebecca celebrate their Golden Wedding Anniversary in 1965. You can see Rebecca's piano in the background.

bottom left ... Jack and Rebecca with Rebecca's sister Freda, circa 1965



In 1966 another aerial view of Tavistock was commissioned. In a portion of that photo, seen above, the Decew Street neighbourhood is decidedly more recognizable.

As with the earlier aerial, the blue star marks the Oxford Hotel (now the Tavistock Public Library on Woodstock Street) as a point of orientation.

The red arrow shows 31 Decew Street. The rooflines have changed and now reflect the main house and Jack's workshop at the rear. Part of Rebecca's big garden is showing albeit not in prime growing season.

The green star shows the then-current home of the next owners of 31 Decew ... Tom and Shirley McCall-Hanlon.

Tom Hanlon and Shirley McCall-Hanlon ... 1972 - 2018

Big changes happened at 31 Decew starting in 1972. For the first time in its long history there was the happy sound of children's laughter, little feet running up and down the stairs and busy parents heading out to work each day.

Tom and Shirley McCall-Hanlon bought the property for \$14,100 at an auction sale on a chilly day in January of 1972. The young couple and their two small children were renting on Adam Street, almost in the back yard of their new home. The new house offered more living space, a bigger yard and perhaps most important of all, ownership and equity.

Tom Hanlon was a Tavistock boy, well-known and popular in the community. Shirley McCall grew up on a farm at RR # 3, Lakeside and moved to Tavistock when she married Tom in 1965. Son Greg and daughter Kelly turned the twosome into a family. The Hanlon family is shown in the photo below, circa 1981.



In 1972, when 31 Decew was purchased, Tom was working for The Ministry of Transportation and Shirley was in a newly-created job at The Maples Home For Seniors. This was a stepping-off point in what would be a productive and sometimes ground-breaking career and the start of her role as a community activist.

A feature story in the Tavistock Gazette in December of 2000 captured many of the highlights of Shirley's career to that point in time. Excerpts from that story follow.

Earns VON National Award of Distinction

Shirley Hanlon of Tavistock was presented with the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) Award of Distinction at the Annual General Meeting in Ottawa on Thursday evening, November 16th. She is one of seven persons honoured across Canada for their contribution to the VON organization in the areas of volunteerism, clinical work, education and in administration positions.

As the Community Support Services Manager at VON Perth-Huron, Shirley is well aware of the impact VON programs have on residents and is dedicated to the continued identification, growth and development of support services within the county.



SHIRLEY HANLON: vision and phenomenal energy toward development and expansion

This prestigious national VON award comes as no surprise to those who know Shirley. In 1984 she was honoured with the Bicentennial Medal for Service to the Community. She was a leader with the Anna P. Lewis 4H for 5 years and on the executive of the local Home & School Association. Shirley was the Sunday School superintendent and youth advisor at Trinity Lutheran Church for 11 years and along with Marie Schultz and the late Ron Seltzer collected, identified and set up a permanent display of the church's confirmation classes. She worked with Mr. Seltzer and Jean Porter in cataloguing cemetery records for the Oxford Genealogical Society and served on the Oxford County Housing Authority from 1984 to 1989. She started the Arthritis Society fundraising campaign and awareness program in Tavistock and for the past fifteen years has been the local contact.

Shirley was the first Activity Director at The Maples Home For Seniors, developing a solid base for programs over her nine years in that position. One of the many driving forces in the community's bid to keep nursing home beds in Tavistock, Shirley helped secure a positive result and then moved on to her position with the VON.

Shirley's involvement in the community has continued in many ways. She was the first Chairman of the Tavistock Community Health Centre, an important role at a critical time in our community and part of the group that raised over \$1M to keep the medical clinic functioning in our village. When the stone gates at the entrance to Queen's Park needed restoration work Shirley lead the fundraising charge. Those gates are now called "The Pillars of Our Community". More recently Shirley spearheaded a valuable asset to the people, past and present, of Zorra Township. The Heroes of Zorra website (heroesofzorra.ca) provides a lasting and meaningful tribute to the people of Zorra who served in the military from 1860s to present day. Never one to sit on her hands, Shirley has just completed an update to the cemetery records at Trinity Lutheran Church that she began decades ago.

Busy people get things done. In addition to a busy work schedule, busy community involvement and busy raising two active children, much work was done at 31 Decew.



One of the first changes was to the exterior ... new white siding, ornamental brickwork on the sunporch, brown trim to add some pop and a new front porch.

The upstairs "porch" remained as a character element. An important spot in the days when housewives used it to shake out dusters and mats and the like, daughter Kelly laughingly remembers that "for some reason Mom didn't want Greg and I going out there."



Major work was done to the interior.

The workshop at the back of the house was removed and a large well-appointed sunken family room was added.

The kitchen had a total upgrade to add both functionality and overall appeal. The wall between the kitchen and dining room was removed to provide a sunny spot for work at home.

In the living room the hardwood floors that had been covered by carpet shone once again. A new fireplace added a cozy feel.



Shirley found the back yard, all cultivated into garden, a bit overwhelming. The first spring at the property saw about a third of the back yard sown with grass to become a play area for the children. The garden got smaller and smaller and, as time marched on, the children's play area was no longer needed. As seen in the photos above, the yard transformed into a lovely oasis, a perfect spot to start the day with a cup of coffee on the patio or finish the day soaking up the sunshine and admiring the many colourful flowers.

By 2018 the house had become just too large for one person. It was time to move on.

James and Elisha Graine ... 2018 - present day



Just when you think there is nothing left to say about a house that is 140+ years old, along come new owners who ... wait for it ... made history at 31 Decew Street.

James Graine and Elisha Fisher were married at their new home. How good is that!

James and Elisha were renters in Kitchener. Both wanted the small town country feel and started looking for houses in Tavistock.

Elisha was raised in an early 1900's farmhouse near Dorking. Her only request in the house-hunting search was old charm and character. New builds were definitely out. James, who comes from the northern community of Smooth Rock Falls, was definitely on board. The house on Decew fit their needs to perfection.

An at-home wedding on a beautiful day in 2018 certainly sealed the deal in so many ways.

The young couple wasted no time putting their own stamp on the property. Always careful to preserve as much history as possible, layers and layers and more layers of wallpaper were painstakingly removed along with layers and layers of flooring.

The 3 upstairs bedrooms were perhaps the biggest undertaking. To quote Elisha “we now know why it was so refreshingly chilly upstairs our first winter in the house”. When stripping the walls in the bedrooms lath and plaster ... loads of dusty horse-hair plaster ... was revealed and not much more except for a little bit of shavings and the odd shredded newspaper. The remains of former chimneys poked through, adding another element that needed attention. Months of labour later, the original floors shine, the walls and trim are painted and the rooms are comfy cozy.

The main floor was also part of the reno plan with yet more stripping of wallpaper, coats of paint in light bright colours and a new bathroom.



What a transformation in the bedrooms from downright daunting to starting to show some promise to a beautiful finished room.



left - The bedroom closets were layered with wallpaper of many different vintages, even on the ceiling..



right - Honestly, we don't even want to think about the amount of work needed to take this stripped-down starting point in one of the bedrooms to a modern finished room fit for a young family.



above left - After serving countless decades as a dining room, this bright airy room is now a pass through to the upstairs.



above right - Eight coats of paint later and the sunporch is now white. Young families always have lots of friends and in the summer they sleep over on the pull-out couch in this room, waking up to lots of sunshine.

right - Wherever possible the old hardware has been polished and put back in its original place.





Plans for the back yard include more sunflowers, more vegetables in the garden, a new shop for some added storage and renovating the chicken coop.



Yes, the chicken coop. Nothing beats fresh eggs everyday, especially when your chickens have names that are just too much fun. Meet Princess Lay-a, Amelia Egg-hart, Cluck Norris and Martha Stewart.



The future for James and Elisha looks as promising as the rainbow in their back yard.

James is a Production Supervisor at Demtool Inc. in Petersburg. Elisha is currently on leave from Avon Maitland District School Board. They will soon be welcoming a third child.

Their neighbourhood has seen many changes in recent years. New people from different places, young professionals, babies, busy children and major household renos all combine to give it a refreshing new look and feel.

31 Decew and the surrounding houses have long histories but thanks to people like James and Elisha, they also have exciting new chapters with much more to be written in the years to come.

House History Notes

A property history relies on a variety of records.

Registry Office records are a wonderful piece of history telling us who purchased property, when, how much land was involved and sometimes but not always in the early days, what was paid. For many years all the records were written by hand based on a variety of inputs. Input was invariably correct but there were times when wrong data was entered or transactions missed entirely. Reading the handwriting is often the biggest challenge. Last but not least, Registry Office records do not, most unfortunately, tell us when a house or other buildings were constructed or improvements made.

Assessment records are a valuable source of information providing names of renters and information on property improvements. Unfortunately, most of Tavistock's old Assessment records have been lost or destroyed.

The Tavistock Gazette provides obituaries and quite often interesting snippets of news. Sadly, the early issues of the paper were lost in a fire. Copies from 1900 on are available.

Old census information is good but sometimes needs to be tempered. There were two qualifications to be a census taker. You had to be English and you had to possess good penmanship. English-speaking census takers asking information of people whose first language at the time was German often produced questionable answers and spellings.

Church records are always excellent sources. Records on databases like Ancestry often provide information not generally found elsewhere.

Family stories, the best input of all, round out the sources of information used to write house histories.



The Mohr Survey - Plan 201

Lot 6 - 31 Decew Street

Note - Mill Street no longer exists



Registry Office Transactions for 31 Decew Street

**Plan 201 (Mohr Survey) and later Plan 307
Lot 6, South Side of Decew Street and West of Maria Street**

Transaction	Date	Registry Date	Grantor (seller)	Grantee (buyer)	Quantity	Price
Bill of Sale	Nov. 4 1876	Feb. 16 1877	Adam Mohr & wife	Jacob Wagner	1/5 acre	
Bill of Sale	Jan. 25 1899	Jan. 28 1899	Jacob Wagner	Werner Stein	1/5 acre	\$800
Grant	Aug. 6 1824	Aug. 26 1824	Executors for Werner Stein	Annie M. Stein		\$1,000
Grant	Mar. 5 1934	Mar. 6 1934	Henry Mansz - Admin for Annie Stein	Peter Martens		\$1,475
Grant	Mar. 2 1939	Apr. 3 1939	Peter Martens	Tatjana Martens		\$1
Grant	Feb. 19 1940	Nov. 7 1940	Tatjana Martens	Jacob B. Wettlaufer		\$1,750
Grant	Mar. 27 1950	Apr. 4 1950	Executors for Jacob B. Wettlaufer	Rebecca Krug		\$3,500
Grant	Feb. 17 1972	Feb. 24 1972	Executors for Rebecca Krug	Thomas A. Hanlon & Shirley I. Hanlon		Value Cons. \$1 **

** The Hanlons purchased the property through an auction sale. The sale price was \$14,100.

Registry Office records available at the Tavistock & District Historical Society stop in 1987. The current owners, James and Elisha Graine, purchased the home from Shirley McCall-Hanlon in 2018.

