

51 Decew Street

Plan 201 and Plan 307 — Lot 9, South Side of Decew Street and West of Maria Street

Houses win awards in categories labelled “best architectural feature” or “best interior design”. Some might capture “best landscaping” or “best eco-friendly space”. The house at 51 Decew Street is a serious contender in a category never seen in Better Homes and Gardens but one that resonates exceptionally well in Tavistock. This property is high on the list of “keeping it in the family” and “most number of people who died in the house”.

This property was first known as Lot 9 on Plan 201, the Mohr Survey of 1876. Adam Mohr, a local farmer, had commissioned the survey in order to sell part of his farmland for a new housing development in Tavistock. It was only in the 1950s that house numbers became commonplace. This property became 51 Decew Street.



A property history relies on a variety of records ... Registry Office records, newspaper accounts, census information, church records and occasionally family history stories.

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.

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.

Original Land Owner - Adam Mohr

Adam Mohr was born in northern Ontario in 1843 and, as a youngster, moved with his family to New Hamburg and then to Gadshill and on to Tavistock. In 1863 he married Catherine Hansuld and settled on a farm on the south edge of the village. In 1881 Adam married for the second time to Catherine Brodrecht.

In 1876 part of the Mohr farm was sold as a new housing development in Tavistock (Plan 201).

Registry Office records tell us that the majority of the lots in Plan 201 were sold on the same day ... November 4, 1876. This certainly suggests a public auction sale and, if such was the case, it was obviously a busy day as one lot was sold twice!

Some years later, in 1890, seven acres of the Mohr farmland was sold to the Tavistock Agricultural Society to serve as the grounds for the Fall Fair. A part of this parcel became Exhibition Park that we now know as Queen's Park. The Mohrs sold the remainder of their farmland in 1913 and moved into the village. Adam Mohr died in November of that same year. In his obituary it was noted that he was one of the most successful stock feeders in the country.

Frederick Jacobs ... 1876 - 1878

The first purchaser of Lot 9 was Frederick Jacobs. The lot, located on the corner of Decew Street and Mill Street, measured 1/5 of an acre.

Frederick Jacobs was born in Germany in 1825. He had a wife, Sophia and two sons, Henry and Augustus. Frederick was a cattle buyer.

Frederick and Sophia sold the property just 14 months after purchase. For reasons not known at this time, they sold it back to the original owner, Adam Mohr. Events that followed might suggest that the Jacobs built a house on the property but this cannot be proven.

Some time between the 1891 and 1901 census the family moved to Milverton. Frederick died in 1904 and is buried at St. Peter's Lutheran Church cemetery in Milverton. Burial place for Sophia is not known.

Adam Mohr ... 1878 - 1878

It didn't take too long for Adam Mohr to re-sell the lot. Ten weeks after regaining ownership he sold it to John K. Miller, price unknown.

John K. Miller ... 1878 - 1882 ownership and 1882 - 1921 lease

John K. Miller was a blacksmith, a busy trade in days of old. He was born in Bridgeport in 1849. On no known record is his middle name spelled out. Perhaps, as was common, he simply used an initial to differentiate himself from all the many other John Millers.

In 1874 John K. married Mary of the many spellings of her maiden name. In various records it is shown as Stickenerder, Strickraider, Steckenreiter and lastly, the more Anglicized name Reider.

When they purchased the property in 1878 John K. and Mary had two sons ... John and Alexander. It would seem highly probable there was a house on the property at the time.

From the Registry Office records it appears that John and Mary obtained some form of loan (handwriting indecipherable) in the amount of \$300 from a John Stackenreider (handwriting questionable).

The 1881 census shows the family, including new son William, living on Decew Street. Shown as living with them is John Rider, age 65, a widower. Almost surely this is Mary's father with yet another variation of the last name, the same person who provided the \$300 loan.

In 1882 three transactions took place on the same day. John and Mary sold the property to John Stackenreider. He leased it back to them with the provision that the lease would last their natural lives. Further, the loan was released, a term that could mean paid or forgiven.

Two more sons, Albert and Edward, would be born in the Decew Street house. Son Albert, many years later, would purchase the home next door at 43 Decew.

Time passed and in 1918 John K. died in his home at age 69. The funeral service was held at the house with burial in Zion Evangelical Church cemetery (now Grace United) in Tavistock. Mary stayed living in their home. She died there three years later in 1921 and joined John K. on the church cemetery. The Miller sons sold their family home in 1921.

Christena Wenzel ... 1921 - 1930

Christena was born in North Easthope in 1846. She married George Wenzel in 1887 and farmed with him in Wallace Township. They had no children. George died in July 1921 and is buried at the Zion United Church cemetery in Listowel.

A few months after George's death Christena moved to Tavistock where she purchased the property at 51 Decew Street. Perhaps a good part of the attraction of the property was the fact that her sister, Catherine Homberger, was living next door at # 43. Sadly, Catherine died a few months later.

Christena paid \$1,600 for the property. A small notation in the Gazette in 1921 noted the assessment figures for the property were \$800 for buildings and \$150 for land.

Christena remained in her home until her death there in 1929. Her funeral service was at the house followed by a service at Zion Evangelical Church (now Grace United) in Tavistock with burial in Lingelbach Cemetery, South Easthope Township, with her Homberger family.

Her nephew, John Stein, was her executor and responsible for selling the property.

Henry Leinweber ... 1930 - 1935

Activity at 51 Decew Street ramped up noticeably when Henry and Elizabeth Leinweber bought the property in 1930.

The Leinwebers had farmed in South Easthope for many years before moving to Tavistock in 1925. They were an active couple in ever-so-many ways.

Upon moving to Tavistock Henry operated a food storage plant. He continued his involvement with the Agricultural Society and Fall Fair day saw many red ribbons going to wife Elizabeth (nee Emke) in a wide variety of categories. Henry served on the South Easthope Township Council first as a Councillor then as Reeve from 1928 - 1940. He was an agent for the South Easthope Farmers' Mutual Fire Insurance Company. Both Leinwebers were active in their church. Henry was superintendent of the Sunday School at Zion EUB (now Grace United) for 20 years and Elizabeth was a Sunday School teacher.

The year 1934 was an interesting one for Henry. He purchased the Glasgow Warehouse property (now Home Hardware) with the intent of establishing a shirt and wearing apparel factory. The idea gained wide community support and went so far as to establish a Provisional Board of Directors. Sadly, it wasn't to be. Perhaps Henry's disappointment was alleviated when his family and friends threw a surprise 56th birthday party for him at the house. From all accounts it was quite a gala night with games and music and presents including a handsome cane and kid gloves.

The following year another party made the news. Henry and Elizabeth celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary with a family dinner and party that continued into the next day when the entire Leinweber clan got together for a reunion that ended, you know where ... at Henry and Elizabeth's house.

In 1935 the Leinwebers sold the property to Rev. George F. Brown. Their purchase price had been \$1,050 and five years later their sale price was \$600. This seems unusual but perhaps was influenced by the family connection. The new owner's son was married to Henry's sister.

Henry and Elizabeth Leinweber moved to another home in Tavistock and in 1947 moved to Kitchener. Henry died in 1962 at the age of 83. Elizabeth died the same year.



In this Lemp Studio Collection photograph Henry is featured on the far right. Sister Lydia is second from the left in the back row.

The date and reason for the photo are not known.



This photo from "Country Roads - The Story of South Easthope" is of the Leinweber family ... daughter Dorothy, wife Elizabeth and Henry ... believed to be circa 1917.

Rev. George F. Brown ... 1935 - 1950

Rev. Brown was a minister in the grand old tradition of changing parishes every few years. He was born in Crediton in 1863. At the age of 25 George entered his chosen life's work and served in the Evangelical Church ministry for 57 years before retiring in Tavistock. In those years he had 13 parishes including Tavistock Evangelical United Brethren Church (now Grace United) from 1921 - 1925. The photo below is from the church files.



George married Matilda Kruspe in 1888 in Sebringville. They had three sons ... Emerson who was killed in WW1, Bertram and Wilford who we will read about later .. and one daughter Miranda.

The Browns enjoyed a quiet retirement with family and friends and remained active in church life. George is remembered as being musical and humorous.

Rev. George Brown died in his home in September 1945. He rested at home with the memorial service held at Zion Evangelical United Brethren Church (now Grace United) and burial in the church cemetery. Mrs. Matilda Brown remained at 51 Decew Street and died there in 1949. She is buried with her husband.

Wilford L. Brown ... 1950 - 1979

Ownership of the property went from Brown to Brown in 1950 at a purchase price of \$2,500.

The second set of Browns, Wilford and Lydia, rented the house to Fred and Ruth Mutch for two years prior to taking possession.

Wilford (often spelled Wilfred) was born to Rev. and Mrs. George F. Brown in 1889 when Rev. Brown was serving in Pembroke. His obituary tells us that he was employed by the Canadian

Imperial Bank of Commerce in Toronto before moving to East Zorra Township and becoming a farmer. Quite a change! Wilford married Lydia Leinweber Pfaff in Tavistock in 1923.

Lydia was born in 1893, a sister of Henry Leinweber who you read about earlier. Her first husband was George Pfaff. They had one daughter, Olive. George died in 1919 during the Spanish Flu epidemic. After George's death Lydia and Olive moved to Tavistock where Lydia became one of the local telephone operators. In 1923 she married Wilford Brown and moved to the Brown farm between Tavistock and Hickson. Sons Howard, Clare and Harry were born and raised on the farm.

Wilford and Lydia were both active in community and church life. Wilford was a trustee of School Section #15 in East Zorra and trustee and treasurer at Zion EUB Church. Lydia belonged to the United Church Women, the Anna P. Lewis Women's Institute and the Tavistock Senior Citizens New Horizons Group. Both enjoyed their family and their friends.

Wilford died in hospital in 1966 and is buried at Grace United Church cemetery in Tavistock. Lydia remained in their home and died in hospital in 1977. She is buried with Wilford.

One might have thought the Brown story stopped at this point. Not so. Wilford and Lydia's daughter-in-law Jean (Mrs. Clare) Brown ... 90 years old with both an amazing memory and an ability to tell a good story ... added many previously unknown facts and colour commentary.

Jean fully described the interior of the house in the Brown era living room to the west of the front door, dining room to the east, kitchen behind the dining room with a small bedroom and bathroom (toilet and sink) rounding out the main floor. Two bedrooms and a bathroom with tub were upstairs. Like many houses at the time, the basement was a basement (not living quarters) most likely complete with coal bin. The side entrance used today was used in the Brown's time.

What was most decidedly different was the colour of the house. Jean's house photos were a complete surprise. The house was red!! Someone at some time painted over the yellow brick.



*A snowy winter's day
1971-1972*



*Olive Compagno
(left) and mother
Lydia Brown*

July 1971

The house at 51 Decew had a full front porch at the time.

The porch was covered in insulbrick, a shingles-like material commonly used as siding.

Insulbrick's popularity waned in the 1950s and was rendered obsolete with the advent of aluminum and vinyl siding.



*left to right ...
Miranda Brown,
Aileen Ratz and Lydia
Brown*

September 1971

Jean Brown's ability to surprise didn't stop with photos. While it was well known that many people had died in the house, she added one more ... Bertram Brown. Bertram, son of Rev, George and Matilda, was a soldier in WW1 who saw action overseas late in the war. He was never quite the same and spent time at the Veterans' Hospital. On a nice June day in 1959 he came to visit his brother Wilford and sister-in-law Lydia and other family members. Bertram hung up his coat in the closet off the dining room, sat down in the nearby rocking chair and died. While his sudden demise caused some commotion in the house, there was some consolation that he died surrounded by his family.

That wasn't the only surprise. Jean's next story was all about a home invasion, Tavistock style, in the late 1960s. Wilford and Lydia's son Harry employed boys from "the delinquent home" (most likely the Guelph Reformatory) to work on his farm. One such lad was somewhat desperate to return to his home in Brockville. Knowing that Lydia Brown was visiting her daughter in California and the house was empty he broke in, stole her car and proceeded north to Brockville. One can only imagine the look on Jean and Clare's face when they arrived to check on the house to find it had been entered and that the car was missing. The fugitive was caught, his employment terminated and it all ended up making for a good story.

Ron and Joan Ferguson ... 1979 - 1990

Real estate agents come in all forms. Some are newly-minted with the ink barely dry on their professional papers. Others are veterans with scores of sold homes to their credit. Tavistock has always boasted “agents” best described as “family and friends who know a good deal when they see one and work to make it happen”.

Such was the case when Ron and Joan Ferguson purchased the property at 51 Decew Street in 1979. The opportunity spotter was Joan’s mother, Lyla Wilhelm.

Ron and Joan were married in November of 1978 and began their married life in a large apartment in the heart of the village. Mothers always want what’s best for their children. Mother Lyla knew about the house at 51 Decew and talked to Clare and Jean Brown who were longtime friends and in true Tavistock tradition, relatives. We spoke earlier about keeping it in the family and once again, this held true. The Browns and the Lienwebers and Joan’s family, the Herlicks, are all found in the Michael Wilhelm family tree. It’s somewhat unbelievable and definitely confusing to outsiders but it certainly works to advantage here at home.

It worked to advantage in this property transfer. Lyla clinched the deal before a For Sale sign could be staked in the ground. The Fergusons were the new owners at a purchase price of \$38,000.

It was a busy time for the young couple. Ron embarked on a plumbing apprenticeship with Groff and Associates (Waterloo) in the summer of 1980 and as the calendar turned to 1981 Joan began what would be long-time employment with Famme & Co. (Stratford).

New life was breathed into the old house in ever-so-many ways. Construction projects ranged from the very big job of digging out the basement to moving the bathroom to putting up a new wall so Joan could have a dedicated sewing room. The old knob and tube was replaced and hydro service was upgraded up to 100 amps. Decorating took many forms from refacing kitchen cabinets to removing old wallpaper where much of the lath and plaster wall came away along with the wallpaper. Joys of an older home.



Can you imagine the water that seemed to rush non-stop during this project? Proof positive that Tavistock was built on swales and springs.

Excavating the basement was a mammoth task. Can you spot the two men in the basement at the back of the house in the picture below?



The most noticeable change happened on the outside. The red chalk paint that covered the yellow bricks had done its duty. Ron and Joan restored the exterior to its original colour. The brick needed to be sealed but still allowed to breathe. Ron had a special recipe perfectly suited for the job at hand 1 gallon of Lepage's white glue mixed with 10 gallons of warm water and applied with a weed sprayer. Don't laugh. It worked. The old insulbrick porch was removed and replaced with a new wooden porch that complemented the size and character of the home.

At the Ferguson home new life literally meant new life. Ron and Joan welcomed baby son Jay in 1984. Twins Kendra and Dan arrived in 1986. As the children grew the big back yard was a wonderful place to play. So was the front yard and the driveway and indeed, the entire neighbourhood. Children roamed in those days because they could. Ron's commercial construction work meant he was frequently out of town for days at a time. No worries about Joan and the children at home as their neighbourhood in particular and the village in general was a safe space.



Above Left

Announcing the arrival of twins in 1986. The new front porch was a work in progress.

Below Left

Circa 1988. The porch was done and windows replaced.



The stop sign (back showing) marks the corner of Decew and Mill Streets. Still an official street at the time, Mill Street was subsequently closed.



Playtime for the Ferguson children ... Jay, Dan and Kendra ... in the photo above and dressed perhaps for a party or Sunday School in the photo below.



Time brings changes and a new housing development in Tavistock offered the opportunity for Ron to build a new and larger home for the family. The house was put up for sale in 1990.

The Ferguson imprint on 51 Decew is still present in many ways, the most showy being the big butternut tree. When the butternut was just a small sapling it was carefully moved from Joan's childhood home on the farm by her dad, Harry Wilhelm. Harry was a tremendous tree lover and knew this butternut would add value in so many ways. Today it is a defining feature of the back yard.

Jeff and Chris Schultz... 1990 - present day

Very often the best person to tell the story of a house is the current home owner. This is especially true when a house that was considered a “starter home” becomes a “forever home”.

Jeff and Chris Schultz’s story about 51 Decew Street begins just before they were married. Let’s read the story written in Chris’s own words.

My dad suggested that we keep an eye out for a house to buy as renting was like throwing money away. So the search began. We knew we wanted to settle in Tavistock as it was midway between our families who lived in the country on different sides of town. That was something that people did 30 years ago. Venturing too far from home was never something that many people thought about doing.

Jeff and I started the hunt and went through four houses. This house seemed like the right fit. After two house tours, one by ourselves and one with our parents, we were ready to put in an offer. It was a private sale between ourselves and the Fergusons. The purchase price was \$120,000. The interest rates at the time were up over 13%. Yikes!

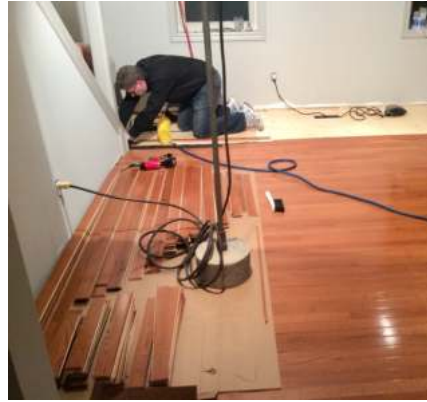
We took possession of our home on December 30, 1990. Jeff moved in and I joined him after our wedding in July 1991.



On our wedding day we toured around town in a car built by Ron Ferguson. Here we are 30 years later. Fashions and hairstyles have certainly changed but we’re as happy as we were when we were just starting out.

At the time of our marriage Jeff had completed his apprenticeship as a licensed mechanic at Hickson Motors and was working at Canadian Tire In Kitchener. I was working at Aldaview in New Hamburg. We never dreamed that our first home together would become our forever home. Renovations came about over the years in the form of updating wallpaper, resurfacing cabinets, changing some flooring, knocking down a wall between the front of the house and

the kitchen to make the area a larger space for entertaining and a dining room, paving the driveway, updating windows and reconfiguring the front porch to make the home feel more inviting.



Anyone who has been through home renos knows it's a constant battle with fuss and muss and dust and areas that are off limits. Clearly the worst part was arriving home one day and discovering a hole in my floor with a clear view to the basement.

Our son, Ryan, was born on November 19, 1993. It was as I was getting ready to go back to work after a four-month maternity leave that Jeff became unhappy with his work situation. He wanted to open his own business, a small-town business where people care about people. He started Schultz Automotive working out of the D&D Electric building on the south side of Tavistock.

On the home front we realized that if we were going to have another child we needed another bedroom. We hired B&B General Contracting to build a 28x12 foot bedroom over top of the back half of the house above the kitchen. The work was done for \$16,000 and was finished shortly before the birth of our second son, Shawn, on June 12, 1996. I became a stay-at-home mom with our two busy little boys.

Jeff seemed to have a talent for making huge changes at work coincident with huge changes at home. In 1998 he partnered with Bruce Bechtel and Brett Schultz to purchase property at 27 Woodstock Street North. Their new building would house Schultz Automotive, Schultz Plumbing and Crescent Ridge Services. Our daughter, Kirsten, was born on July 24, 1998 right in the midst of construction.

Let's talk about one more big change. Our house was located at the corner of Decew Street and Mill Street. Mill Street was a narrow old street that had largely outlived its purpose and was largely unmaintained. A flood on Adam Street and the need for a bigger drain on Mill Street led to discussions amongst the four landowners bordering Mill. The end result saw the landowners purchasing the "street" from the Township / County and dividing it up appropriately. The cost was legal fees only plus an agreement to an easement / right of way in the event work was needed on the drain. We gained more space in our already big back yard and some much-appreciated privacy.



Early in 2002 we decided that our little family was outgrowing our home and we should check out houses for sale in Tavistock. We went through many homes but the things we loved about our home on Decew Street we would have had to give up in order to gain other things. We loved the size of the lot and the location close to the school, the park, the arena and uptown. We really liked our neighbours. The best decision was to add a big addition to the back of the house and open it up to the main house.

There were a lot of moving parts in our household in 2002. Jeff's mom passed away: my dad was diagnosed with cancer: I started back to work with the Thames Valley School board as an Educational Assistant: and Wettlaufer Home Improvements was starting to build a big addition on our home.

We gained an additional 600 square feet of floor space to serve as a large family room on the main floor and an equal-sized room underneath. At the time this cost \$65,000.



With older homes there is always something more to do. Once our children were on their own we tackled another major renovation, our kitchen.



In 2018 Wettlaufer Home Improvements along with Roylyn Cabinets worked to give us a beautiful efficient new kitchen.

While the interior of our home has undergone massive changes to both decor and functionality, the good vibes we felt when we first considered it are still present. Now we have good vibes and good memories.

In the spring of 2022 we will be tearing down and rebuilding our garage. We're hoping this is the last of the major renovations.



Wherever did the time go? It seems like just yesterday that our children were skating on the rink that Jeff built every year in the back yard. Now they are all grown up and starting their own very bright futures.



Above Left - Kirsten, Shawn and Ryan bundled up for fun in the snow. Above Right - All grown up and still best friends.



*A very happy and proud moment celebrating the first wedding in our family.
From the left Jeff, Chris, Ryan, Delaney, Kirsten, Shawn and Alexia*

We're looking forward to spending our "forever" here... enjoying our big beautiful lot and comfortable well-appointed home, spending time with our awesome neighbours, entertaining our friends and introducing a new generation of Schultz's to life at 51 Decew.

Registry Office Transactions for 51 Decew Street
Plan 201 (Mohr Survey) and later Plan 307
Lot 9, South Side of Decew Street and West of Maria Street



Trans- action	Date	Registry Date	Grantor (seller)	Grantee (buyer)	Quantity	Price
Bill of Sale	Nov 4 1876	16 Feb 1877	Adam Mohr & wife	Frederick Jacob	1/5 acre	
Bill of Sale	Jan 22 1878	28 Jan 1878	Frederick Jacob & wife	Adam Mohr	1/5 acre	
Bill of Sale	12 April 1878	3 May 1878	Adam Mohr & wife	John K. Miller	1/5 acre	
Bill of Sale	30 Sept 1882	1 Nov 1882	John K. Miller & wife	John Stickenerder	1/5 acre	
Lease	30 Sept 1882	1 Nov 1882	John Stickenerder	John K. Miller & Mary Miller		valid during Miller's lives

Grant	24 Oct 1921	? Dec 1921	Albert S. Miller, ??, John Stickenerder, John Miller, ?? Miller, William Miller, ?? Miller	Christena Wenzel	\$1,600	
Grant	14 ? 1930	14 ? 1930	John Stein & Chrisena Wenzel	Henry Leinweber	\$1,050	
Grant	27 Nov 1935	24 Dec 1935	Henry Leinweber & wife	George F. Brown		\$600
Grant	10 Jan 1950	16 Feb 1950	Administrators for Matilda Brown	Wilfred L. Brown		\$2,500
Grant	8 Dec 1966	13 Dec 1966	Executors for Wilfred L. Brown	Lydia Brown		\$1
Grant	1 May 1979	2 May 1979	Executors for Lydia Brown	Ronald H. Ferguson & John A. Ferguson		\$38,000

Registry Office records available at the Tavistock & District Historical Society stop in 1987. The property at 51 Decew Street was purchased by Jeff and Chris Schultz in 1990 for \$120,000.



History prepared 2021

