

House History

90 Jacob Street East, Tavistock

Where to begin? That's always the question when dealing with the history of a property in Tavistock. This story starts before Tavistock came into existence.

The property at 90 Jacob Street East traces its history back to the Canada Company that contracted land to the early settlers. The property was part of a large package of land ... Lots 19 and 20 on Concession 5 in South Easthope Township ... contracted to Peter Wilker in 1836. The deed for Lot 20, of primary interest in this house history, was granted to Henry Wilker in 1851.

Just a few years earlier, in 1848, Captain Henry Eckstein had built a log house on what we now call the five corners in the center of town. The building was on the north-east 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. Then the railway came and things started to come alive. Once again, in 1857, the name changed, this time to Tavistock.

As Tavistock grew in size various surveys were done dividing the village into building lots. The Wilker Survey, signed in 1882 and formally known as Plan 329, covered a wide swath of land east of Woodstock Street and north of Hope Street. Some houses had already been built on this tract. The survey formalized the lot sizes and provided the official plan for further development. What we now call 90 Jacob Street was called "Lot 9, South side of Jacob Street" on the survey.

At the time Plan 329 was completed Tavistock was considered one of the most enterprising and prosperous hamlets in Western Ontario boasting a woollen mill, flax mill, flour mills, stave and barrel factory, planing mill and furniture factory, cheese factory plus general stores, tinsmiths, tailors, shoe makers, carriage makers, blacksmiths, bakers and the list goes on and on. Let's not forget the many hotels. Tavistock has always liked its beer!

The first transaction shown on Registry Office records for Lot 9 was in November 1876 when the then owner Jacob Wilker sold a quantity of land (size not given) to Andrew Kaufmann for \$175. In February 1887 Andrew Kaufmann sold 1/4 acre to George Reidt.

It's with George Reidt that our story starts to take shape. The Reidt family owned this property for 39 years.

George Reidt was born in Germany in 1845. He married Elizabeth Martin and the couple had three children ... Anna, Catherine and Henry. According to census data, George and the children emigrated to Canada in 1883. Elizabeth had passed away a few years earlier.

By 1887 George was a property holder in Tavistock, having purchased the 1/4 acre Lot 9 South side of Jacob Street for \$85. At the same time he took out a mortgage for \$150.

The Assessment Roll for 1887 states that the 1/4 acre Lot 9 was valued at \$300. Given the large discrepancy between the purchase price and the assessment value plus the substantial mortgage, we might surmise that George either built a house on the property or enhanced an existing house in some noteworthy manner. Certainly with three children, George needed a roof over their heads.

And he soon found a new wife. In 1888 George married Augusta Umlauf. Augusta was born in Germany in 1850 and came to Canada when she was 31 years old. Their marriage certificate was signed by Reverend Veit of Trinity Lutheran Church in Sebastopol. The certificate notes that George was a blacksmith. One of their witnesses was Augusta's brother-in-law, August Matthies.

George and Augusta soon welcomed a baby boy, Frederick, born in 1889. Daughter Elizabeth was born in 1890.

At about the same time George's grown children from his first marriage found partners. Catherine married John H. Quehl in 1887. Anna married John Quehl in 1888. Henry married Augusta Walter in 1894.

By the time of the 1901 census Frederick was in school and was the only person in the family who could read and write. Elizabeth, known as Lizzie, did not appear on that census, a not uncommon occurrence at the time. It was noted that the family spoke German at home.

In December 1905 for reasons not provided, the ownership of Lot 9 transferred from George to Augusta. Transferring title to a spouse was not uncommon at the time. Neither were the sale terms ... \$1 for love and affection.

Then some years passed in a somewhat predictable manner. George continued his work as a labourer with Augusta as the homemaker. Their children grew into adulthood. Daughter Lizzie died at age 23 in 1914. Frederick married Emma Schmidt in 1915 and moved to Wellesley.

In 1917 Augusta died of apoplexy, what we would now call a stroke. George died in 1925 of chronic myocarditis. The Reidts are buried at Trinity Lutheran Cemetery in Sebastopol. They do not have a gravestone.

George's Last Will and Testament included a provision for the Lot 9 property to go to son Frederick. Frederick kept the property and presumably rented it out as he did not live in Tavistock at the time. In November 1926 Frederick sold Lot 9 to Louis Roi for \$1,000.



90 Jacob Street - photo taken during the Reidt era

The 1909 and 1917 Assessment Rolls recorded a value of \$600 for Lot 9, split \$150 for the land and \$450 for the buildings (house and barn in back). According to the 1921 census the house is of wood construction and at the time had six rooms.

The people in the photo are believed to be the Reidts, perhaps Augusta and son Frederick but most unfortunately, neither names nor a date are available for this Lemp Studio Collection photo.

The next owner, Louis Roi (sometimes spelled Roy) was a bachelor. Louis was born on Lot 26 Concession 13 of East Zorra Township in 1866. Louis stayed on the farm, first helping his father and after his father died, running the operation with his brother Joseph. In November 1926, at the age of 60, Louis bought the property at 90 Jacob Street for \$1,000 ... still 1/4 acres, still a six-room house.

It's not totally clear just when Louis moved to his home in Tavistock. He may have rented out the house for awhile as the Tavistock Gazette in 1933 states "Mr. Louis Roi came into the Gazette Office and told us that he has corn over 8 feet in height". By 1935 both Louis and brother Joseph are shown on the Voters List in Tavistock. The two bachelors didn't create any headlines or even any minor mentions during their time living at 90 Jacob Street. Louis sold the property in April 1947 to Frank Merklinger. Joseph died that same year. Louis passed away in 1955 and is buried in the East Zorra Mennonite Church cemetery on the 16th line of East Zorra Township.

And so began another long-term family era at 90 Jacob Street. The Merklingers lived there for 69 years.

Frank Merklinger was born in Waterloo in 1919 and moved with his family to Tavistock at a young age. In 1941 he signed up for active duty during WWII, serving as an Able Bodied Ordinary Seaman and in the Military Police in Canada. Frank was discharged in 1946. That same year in October he married Verda Herman at the Trinity Lutheran Church parsonage in Sebastopol. Verda was born in South Easthope Township in 1925.

Frank and Verda purchased the property at 90 Jacob Street in April 1947 for \$1,100. Together they raised three daughters ... Frances, Wendy and Nancy. The Merklinger family was well known in the community. Frank worked at Zimmerman's in Tavistock and wood-working jobs in Woodstock. Verda worked at the J.G. Field & Company Woollen Mill, McConnell Nursery and Lemp's Pharmacy. The Tavistock Gazette features many mentions of the girls and their achievements.

Over the years the property increased in value. Still 1/4 acre in size and still six rooms, the Assessment Roll for the year 1953 records a total value of \$800; 1970 value \$1,475; and 2000 value \$97,000. Exact property measurements were shown for the first time in 1955 ... 64.3' x 198'.

For ever so many years the deep back yard was mostly vegetable garden ... potatoes, cabbage, beans, peas, onions and carrots along with raspberries and rhubarb. Spring was planting season. As with most every family, there were the annual debates about what would be planted where and whether the lines were straight. Summer was tending including the never-popular job of weeding. Fall was harvesting the products of their labours and canning. At the Merklinger home, like so many others in Tavistock, the garden put food on the table. By late fall jars of canned goods lined the basement shelves to be used and enjoyed throughout the winter. Over time the vegetable garden gave way to lawn, flower garden and trees.



left - Verda and Frank Merklinger outside their home in 1965



right - The Merklinger girls ...Frances, Wendy and Nancy ... by the side fence and garden in the 1960s

The six rooms in the house in the Merklinger days comprised kitchen, bathroom (a spare room had been converted for this purpose), dining room and living room on the main floor. Upstairs were two bedrooms. There was no attic but rather a crawlspace under the eaves. Someone of reasonable height could stand up straight in the basement, a bit of a rarity in older homes. The basement housed the washer and dryer.

In time the girls left home to establish families and careers of their own. In 1971 the back shanty was demolished to make way for a cozy sun room, a perfect gathering place for family and friends and an ideal spot for Verda to watch the birds in the back yard.



right - The back shanty that became the sun room. Frances and Wendy enjoying the snow with mom Verda in the doorway.

Frank passed away in 1975. Verda remained in her home until 2016. She died in 2018. Verda and Frank are buried at Trinity Lutheran Church cemetery in Sebastopol.

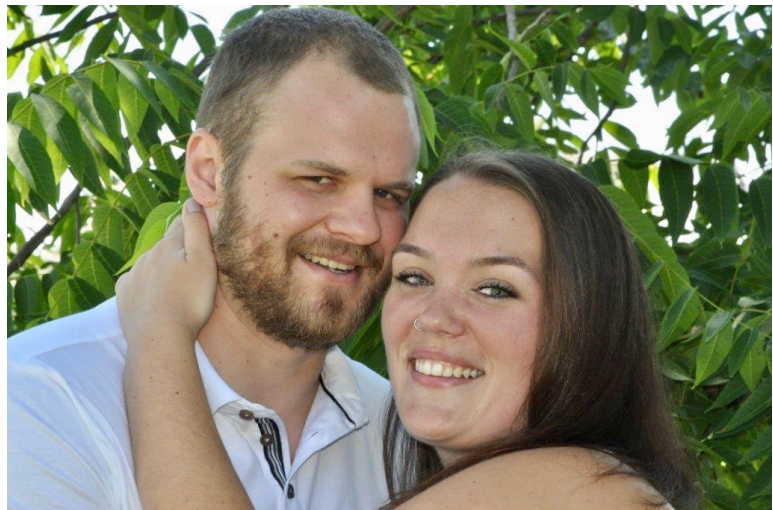
In August 2016 Mackenzie and Travis Lapointe, a nice young couple, purchased the property. As young couples so often do, they added their own touches to the old house. Still the original six rooms but with new flooring, new kitchen, new paint, new piping in the basement and a new upstairs location for the laundry. Very best of all, a new baby in 2018. Jameson Lapointe is the first baby in this home in 64 years. His mom proudly says “He’s brought lots of love and laughter into our little house on Jacob Street!”



Mackenzie & Travis Lapointe with baby Jameson - 2018

The next young owner, Corey Tuffnail, will be taking possession in March 2019. The property owners have run a predictable pattern long stay (Reidt), short stay (Roi), long stay (Merklinger), short stay (Lapointe). Time will tell how long the property ownership remains as Tuffnail.

Corey Tuffnail and partner Breanne Croxon





*90 Jacob
street view, rear view and back yard photos taken July 2018*



**Registry Office Transaction Listings for
Tavistock, Lot No. 9 on the South side of Jacob Street**

Instrument	Date	Registry	Grantor (Seller)	Grantee (Buyer)	Price
Bill of Sale	4 Nov 1876	17 Mar 1877	Jacob Wilker	Andrew Kaufmann	\$175
Bill of Sale	14 Feb 1887	16 Feb 1887	Andrew Kaufmann	George Reidt	\$85 - 1/4 acre
Bill of Sale	9 Dec 1905	16 Dec 1905	George Reidt	Augusta Reidt	\$1 love and affection
Agreement	20 Feb 1918	23 Feb 1918	George Reidt	Frederick H. Reidt	
Will	20 Feb 1918	27 Aug 1926	George Reidt	Frederick H. Reidt	
Grant	27 Nov 1926	13 Dec 1926	Frederick H. Reidt & wife	Louis Roy	\$1,000
Grant	1 Apr 1947	19 June 1947	Louis Roy	Frank M. Merklinger	\$1,100
Grant	5 Jan 1976	18 Mar 1976	Executors for Frank M. Merklinger	Verda Merklinger	\$1

*** end of the available Registry Office records

4 Aug 2016	Verda Merklinger	Mackenzie & Travis Lapointe
March 2019	Mackenzie & Travis Lapointe	Corey Tuffnail

