

YESTERDAY

News from the Tavistock and District Historical Society

VOLUME 39

FALL 2026

Sweet Beginnings: Thanks to Frieda Neeb

by Sherrill Calder

"My aunt always smelled of almond paste." Rarely has a story had a more aromatic opening.

This is a story about a lady who decorated dozens of wedding cakes in the Tavistock community for dozens of years. Her name is Frieda Neeb.

Frieda was born in 1909 and passed away in 1986. Many people still remember her as the long-term always-helpful clerk at Wilker's Grocery. Those were the days when you could phone in your grocery order. Frieda would fill the order, ensuring that the best produce went into the paper bag. Otto or Doc Wilker would deliver the groceries to your door and often right to your kitchen counter. Other people remember Frieda for her good works at Trinity Lutheran Church. Others, many now deceased, had their best memories of Frieda as the lady who decorated their wedding cake on their very special day.

Frieda's niece, Beverly Neeb, recently uncovered an old photo album. It has black covers front and back tied together with a red cord. On the black pages inside are pictures and more pictures of wedding cakes. Occasionally a bride and groom but always a cake 69 cakes. The pictures are held in place with the old-fashioned black sticky-backed corners. If that wasn't enough there are another dozen pictures of cakes in a paper clip. Each cake is a true work of art crafted by hand by Frieda. On most but not all of the pictures Frieda wrote the maiden name of the bride. Some are familiar names. Others, like the one labelled "Mrs. Schoeck's cousin" require a bit of work to figure out.

Various people, we know not who, baked the cakes and Frieda did the artwork. Every element of the fondant icing and the intricate decorations was made by hand. ... Frieda's hand, usually in the kitchen at her home on Woodstock Street North or sometimes at the home of the bride.

We believe the photo album represents just a sampling of her work. Where wedding dates can be put to photos the range is the mid to late



Above, Frieda at work. At left, one of her special cakes.

1940s. It likely started earlier. Frieda's niece remembers seeing her aunt at work in the 1960s. There were cakes for a few special people in the 1970s.

Sadly, Frieda took all the information about her years as a cake decorator of renown to her grave. We see evidence of her remarkable talent but we don't know how it started. Did she learn from another lady in the area? Did she see a picture and decide that she could be a cake decorator? When did she start in this business? So many questions with so few definitive answers.

If you have any information about Frieda Neeb's impressive cake decorating skills or would like to see the album, please contact the Tavistock and District Historical Society.

2026 FALL FAIR THEME: PAST TO PRESENT

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MUSEUM

HOURS:

Third Saturday of
each month 1-4 p.m.

Other times
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www.tavistockhistory.ca

The Jewellers of Tavistock

by R. Paul Bartlett

The earliest record for a jeweller in Tavistock is a listing in the Sutherland Gazeeter of 1867 for an A. Reiby. F. C. Stiefelmeyer, merchant in Watches and Jewellery, is listed in the 1878 Perth County Gazetteer. The Mercantile Agency Reference Book of 1882 then has a James Péquegnat, jeweller, in Tavistock. The Péquegnat family had immigrated from Switzerland in 1874 and started a business of importing watches in Berlin (now Kitchener). Soon, Arthur Péquegnat and his seven brothers owned a chain of jewellery stores throughout Southwestern Ontario that included Tavistock, operating as a kind of family conglomerate. The Stratford Beacon reported in 1886 that Mr. Péquegnat had moved to Stratford but an Emil Bourquin was to "carry on" in Tavistock.

We know that the jewellery store of Emil Bourquin was located at 2 Woodstock Street North because an advertisement later in the 1948 Tavistock Centenary Programme stated that "the (jewellery) business was established over 60 years ago and has always been situated at the main intersection on Woodstock street north."

This store, like most jewellery stores, was the target of thieves right from its very beginning. According to a report in the Beacon in 1891, the store of Emil Bourquin was broken into and burglarized to the extent of \$500. The safe was drilled and blown open. "The noise of the explosion awoke Mr. Falk who lives upstairs. Mrs. Falk put her head out of the window and asked who was there. The reply was a bullet that whistled in close proximity to her head." Moments later, "a rig was heard driving furiously towards Shakespeare." A few weeks later, Bourquin was reported to have purchased a new \$300 safe, a "Burglar proof" safe.

Emil Bourquin had an apprentice named William Kalbfleisch, a son of John Kalbfleisch, furniture dealer and undertaker. In 1891, William opened his own store in the large furniture show room of Kalbfleisch and Schaefer on Woodstock Street North. William advertised in the first issue of the Tavistock Gazette 26 September 1895 but his business was short-lived as he contracted pneumonia in 1905 at the age of 33. He left behind a wife and two small children.

The jewellery business of Emil Bourquin was purchased by brothers Ed and Moses Staebler in 1892 but by 1895 Moses had become the sole owner.

Moses Staebler was born in 1867, the son of Rev. J. G. Staebler and Ernstine (Morlock). He moved to Tavistock in 1875 and remained a bachelor all his life. He advertised in the very first issue of the Tavistock Mail 6 Sept. 1895 as a dealer in "Watches, Clocks, Jewelry, Silverware, Spectacles, Etc., Etc." Each morning "Mose" would bicycle down Woodstock Street to his store. He was known throughout the area for his ability to repair watches and he was an authority on

precious stones. He also owned an optometer and other optical instruments. Edison phonographs were his stock in trade and in 1911 he promoted "hornless" Victor Victrolas as a Christmas gift for only \$20.

Two other jewellers set up shop briefly in Tavistock while Moses Staebler was in the village. In 1908 the Oxford Jewelry Store, Jonas Jantzi proprietor, was in the Alles Block, formerly occupied by the Trader's Bank. From 1921 to 1924 Roy E. Appel conducted a jewellery store in Lemp's Block, later moving to Detroit. In October 1929, Moses Staebler turned over his jewellery business to Clayton Wiederhold. "Mose" continued to live in Tavistock until his unfortunate death on October 19, 1940.

Clayton Wiederhold had run a similar business in Baden prior to coming to Tavistock, and was moving



Moses Staebler Jewellery Store at 2 Woodstock Street North, Tavistock

into the Andrew Kruspe home (just to the east of the jewellery store on the north side of Hope Street East).

While living in Tavistock, Mr. Wiederhold was very active in community affairs. He contributed prizes annually to the local bowling tournaments, the Greenshirts hockey team and the Tavistock Men's Club and he helped with the Boy Scouts. He was on the married men's hockey team at the "Nite of Fun" at the arena in 1935. During the Second World War, he contributed to the Victory Bond campaigns and was the supplier of the watches that the Tavistock Council gave to the servicemen returning home from overseas.

The accomplishments of the Wiederhold family were also duly reported in the Gazette with numerous articles mentioning his wife Sheelah, daughters Mary and Ruth and son Donald.

In October of 1946, a large map of the Hiskerr Gold Mine in Northern Ontario was displayed in the window of Wiederhold's jewellery store. Clayton Wiederhold was listed as vice-president of the company and he was selling shares for 45 cents apiece. In the next year, ads for the mine appeared quite regularly in the Gazette in his name until two local shareholders took a trip up north in October of 1948 to actually see the mine. ➔

What's up at the Museum

The article on the jewellers in Tavistock on these two pages was prompted by an inquiry by a visitor to the Tavistock & District Historical Society (TDHS) website who wrote and asked for information about a relative who was a jeweller in Tavistock at one time.

Requests for information about family members is one of the reasons why people contact TDHS via email or visit the museum in person. Members of TDHS are always happy to help people search for information on their relatives.

TDHS also continues to receive articles and items of an historical interest to add to the permanent collection. The box (pictured below) which once held rutabagas was donated in the past year by Bonnie Kropf and serves as a reminder of the rutabaga (or turnip) waxing industry which was an important industry in Tavistock at one time.



Please visit or contact TDHS to view the extensive TDHS collection.

After that, no further mention of the mine appeared in the newspaper, no word of how the investors made out.

Sheelah Wiederhold, the wife of Clayton, died suddenly in her home in December of 1951 at the age of 52. The following year, Clayton sold his business to Ken McDougall and relocated to Dundas where he continued to ply his trade until his death in 1980.

By 1954, McDougall had purchased the entire building (the "Roth Block") from its owner Stefan Schoeck. At the time, that building at the corner held his jewellery business, the general store of Emerson Weitzel, the hardware store of Bill Appel, and a business called Deluxe Photography. The McDougall family lived in an upstairs apartment.

Ken McDougall had run a small jewellery store in Toronto before coming to Tavistock. Here he offered Bulova watches for sale for both men and women, clocks, jewellery and costume jewellery, chinaware and Tudor silverware. McDougall was also active in the community and in 1955 became chair of the finance committee that was formed to fund the proposed Memorial Hall. He was also a member of the Tavistock Rotary Club.

A Stan Schofield took over the jewellery business of Ken McDougall in April 1957. Schofield came with many years of experience, having worked for prestigious firms like Birks and Ostranders in Toronto. He apparently was also an accomplished musician, playing some 13 instruments well with the cornet his main instrument. He planned to commute back and forth to London where he lived with his wife and six children. Schofield placed an ad for his business in the 1957 Christmas edition of the Gazette but the next (and last) mention of his name in the paper was an odd note of May of 1958. "Several articles," it read, "have been left with Police Chief S. O. Melbourne from the jewellery store of Mr. Schofield, including a number of men's pocket watches; a lady's wrist watch; two necklaces, and a signet ring with initials "W.S.V." The articles can be had upon identification."

Kathe and Heinz Riedel opened a laundromat at #2 Woodstock St. N. in 1966 and so ended almost 80 years of a jewellery store in that space.

When Neil Bakelaar established his watch repair business in Tavistock in 1960, he initially operated from offices above the Bank of Commerce building on Woodstock Street South. Neil learned the trade from his father, a watchmaker and optometrist in the Netherlands, who later immigrated with his family to the Ingersoll area.

In the fall of 1960, Neil relocated his business next door to a larger space in the former Glasgow Warehouse, between Krug's Meat Market and Neeb's

Shoe Store. The premises had previously been occupied by the Elite Beauty Salon. The expanded showroom allowed him to display an extensive selection of watches, clocks, fine English china, and original Hummel and Royal Doulton figurines in addition to offering expert watch and clock repair services.

In 1963, Bakelaar moved his business once again, this time across the street to the narrow building

between Wilker's Grocery Store and Morgenroth Insurance, a location later occupied by the Bank of Nova Scotia.

While operating his business in Tavistock, Neil achieved one of the highest professional distinctions in his trade. In 1965, he earned the designation of Master Watchmaker, a qualification that also enabled him to teach at technical schools.

Neil frequently shared his expertise with local organizations. Speaking to the Men's Club and the Board of Trade, he explained, "There are watches today that are waterproof, shockproof, and resistant to magnetism. The newest watch is the electronic watch, activated by a tiny battery coupled to a tuning fork. The electronic watch was developed primarily for the space rocket program."

He later told the Rotary Club, "The latest watch is an electronic one; the old ticking sound has been replaced by an electronic hum."

In 1967, Neil Bakelaar offered his Tavistock business for sale. Following its purchase by Carl Beynon, Neil and his family relocated to Listowel, where the next chapter of the Bakelaar family's distinguished history in the jewellery and watchmaking industry continues today with his son Tim Bakelaar.

Carl had come from Ajax. He and his wife Rosemary had been through the area on their honeymoon and liked it so much they decided to make the move here. Many people in Tavistock today will remember Carl for his quiet unassuming manner. His full and interesting life story was the subject of a front-page article in the Gazette 28 July 1999. Carl moved his business to New Hamburg in 1971 but continued to service Tavistock residents. After closing his shop in New Hamburg in 1981, he carried on doing watch repairs

from his home until he retired fully in 1999.

Carl Seltzer, the author of Fact and Fantasy, had collected some notes about the jewellers in Tavistock and wrote, "our village has been fortunate in having among its citizens at least one jeweller throughout most of its history to keep us on time." With the closure of Carl Beynon's business in 1999, that statement can no longer be said to be true. In these days of digital watches and Artificial Intelligence, clockmakers like the dodo bird are a thing of the past.



Clayton Wiederhold



Neil Bakelaar



Carl Beynon in 1999

The Heritage of Hickson

by Marilyn Pearson

Who would have thought that a six-week Hickson and Community 4-H Club project in 2016 on the Heritage of Hickson would get new life ten years later in a new initiative of the Tavistock and District Historical Society (TDHS) in collaboration with the 4-H club?

In 2016, the Hickson 4-H Club under the leadership of Shonna Ward completed a project in which the members explored the history of Hickson. They learned about the railroad through Hickson, the bank and the library, the fire department and the United Church. They learned of the service clubs in the village, the sports teams, and of prominent people in the community. Even the development of the township office was presented.

The information gathered by the 4-H members came from the Women's Institute Tweedsmuir scrapbooks, from TDHS files, and from interviews with long-term residents of the area. After their intensive six-week search, they created 14 Display Boards and compiled a binder of photos, newspaper articles on each subject.

For the past few years, TDHS has been placing display cases in various locations around Tavistock, the items and themes in the cases changing depending on the time of year and occasion. The administrative staff of East Zorra-Tavistock was approached to see if one of these cases could be set up in the Administration building at 89 Loveys Street in Hickson and permission was quickly granted. The history of Hickson was felt to be an appropriate theme for the first displays and Shonna Ward kindly agreed to partner with TDHS by loaning the complete 4-H project on the Heritage of Hickson.

For the first display, it made sense to feature the Hickson Railroad as the theme as the village of Hickson was founded in 1876 when the Port Dover and Lake Huron Railway was constructed on route to Stratford and beyond. A new village quickly developed at this whistle-stop. Sir Joseph Hickson, the general manager of the Grand Trunk Railway at the time, requested that the station be named after him.

The second display told the story of the township office. After locating in Hickson in 1905, it became the centre of the social life for the community. For not only was township business done there but so also were dances, parties and family get-togethers. It is said that at some of the winter dances, it would get very warm and the men would pick up the stove and carry it outside.

The Library display recounted the episode in 2005 when Hickson learned that the County of Oxford was closing their library. Unhappy with the news, a group of community volunteers took it upon themselves to keep the library open by running it themselves. Books continue to be available through an agreement with the Ox-on-the-Run Mobile Library.

The Hickson Bank was the scene of an armed robbery in 1946 and the fascinating accounts of the customers in the bank



Shed and Township Office built 1905

employees and the unwitting driver of the getaway car were part of the display about the bank. This display was followed by ones on the Fire Department, the Public School and the Post Office. Future displays will be about various businesses in the community, the Lions Club, the Hickson park, the United Church and more.

The current display on sports features team photos and newspaper articles of numerous Hickson baseball and hockey teams and includes an account of a contentious football match against a team from Braemar. Many of the artifacts on display are on loan from Jim Hostetler who has a life-long passion for baseball as a Hickson player, batboy, collector, historian and enthusiast. Also presented are five baseballs on loan from well-known pitcher, "Strike-Out King" Keith Wagler. Keith has a cherished collection at home of more than twenty baseballs that he saved from each of his famous "no-hitter" games.

The display boards and artifacts in the Township of East Zorra-Tavistock administration building at 89 Loveys Street in Hickson are changed on a rotating basis to provide the community with an excellent opportunity to learn and reminisce about the great heritage of Hickson. Please bring your family (young and old), neighbours and friends and drop in to see the results of this wonderful collaboration between the Tavistock and District Historical Society and the Hickson 4-H club.

A BRIEF NOTE: I know Keith Wagler from Tavistock. YES, we played against Keith several times. My brother Glen and he were the pitchers of note. Every game ended up 1-0 and the best game was a 21 inning game we won. I was the only player on my team to hit Wagler - I had 2 doubles and a single that game. Those were solid hits I might brag. Wagler had a terrific riser. Great times those were and Tavistock had to be the best team we ever played against. I'll have to check this display out and Thxs a lot for the heads up. - Al Moffat