

## House History

176 Hope Street East, Tavistock

Plan 307 - Lot 115 ... South Side of Hope Street and East of Fuhr Street



It was 1908. Edward VII was King and Wilfred Laurier was Prime Minister of Canada. South of the border Model T's were rolling off the assembly line at Henry Ford's plant in Detroit. Girls everywhere were entranced with the newly-published novel "Anne of Green Gables". For those adults into the the music scene "Take Me Out To The Ball Game" was a home-run hit.

Here in Tavistock J.G. Field advertised quality material to make girls' Confirmation dresses and offered to take butter and eggs in exchange. A farm of 100 acres with a stone house, good barn and an orchard sold for the princely sum of \$8,000. The Oxford Hotel, built just two years prior, was doing a landslide business as were all the other hotels. At the hotels and shops, in the factories and mills and in many private homes villagers were taking sides on a hot debate. Should Tavistock become an Incorporated Village with its own local government or should it remain under the jurisdiction of the Townships of East Zorra and South Easthope.

In at least one household another issue was absolutely taking precedence. Henry G. and Lavina Wilker were about to take a very big step and make a very big purchase. They were about to buy land and build a house.

For as long as anyone could remember most of the east end of Tavistock was the Fuhr farm. Over the years portions were sold for various purposes. When Henry Fuhr Sr. died in 1908 the administrator of his estate decided to sell the property registered as Lot 115, now called 176 Hope Street East. The buyer paid \$215 for 1/5 of an acre. That buyer was Henry G. Wilker. Be sure to remember the initial G as there were a few Henry Wilkers in the area at the time.

Henry George Wilker was born on March 28, 1875 in East Zorra Township, a son of Conrad Wilker and Elizabeth Mogk. In 1906, at the age of 31, Henry married a pretty 25-year-old lady named Lavina Yause. Lavina's parents were Daniel Yause, Reeve of South Easthope Township and his wife, Maria Dietrich. Over the years the name Yause, also spelled Jause and Youse, has become Yausie.

In November of 1907 Henry G. and Lavina welcomed a baby boy they named Harold. At some point Harold became better known by his nickname "Doc". It was definitely time for this family to establish some roots and make some memories.



Henry G. and Lavina Wilker  
circa 1922

We are ever so fortunate to have Henry and Lavina's grandson, Craig Wilker, tell us the story of the Wilker family and the house at 176 Hope Street East. Craig is the son of Henry and Lavina's second born, Otto and his wife Dorothea. Craig's narrative, written on October 7, 2020 is featured *in italics*. Periodically there will be a break, in regular print, to expand upon an item, showcase a photo of which many are Craig's family photos or add further explanation obtained through other research.

### **The Wilker Era ... 1908 - 1964**

**written by Craig Wilker**

*The house was built by my Grandfather Henry G. Wilker in 1908. While being built, he and his recently-married wife, Lavina Yausie, rented living quarters upstairs in the house directly across the road. Their son Harold (Doc) Wilker was born in that house in 1907.*

*As the story goes, Henry got up at dawn each day and spent time digging, by hand, the foundation of the house before he went to work at his regular job of labourer and machine operator at the Tavistock Milling Company — the 'Flour Mill'.*



The Tavistock Milling Company on Maria Street. For many years the flour mill ran 24 hours a day; served as the market for all wheat grown within a 25-mile radius of the village; shipped coast to coast in Canada and had an export business to Scotland.

Photo from the Lemp Studio Collection



Tavistock Milling Company - Owners and Staff - 1910 - Lemp Studio Collection  
Henry G. Wilker is in the front row, second from the left

*The concrete foundation work for the house at 176 Hope was done by Joseph Yausie and his men. Joe was long known in town as the go-to, and only, cement contractor around. In the spirit of keeping it all in the family, Joe was Grandma Lavina's brother.*

*Certainly all the concrete was mixed by hand on site. One very interesting fact is that the many hundreds of concrete blocks of which the house is constructed were also made 'on site'.*



The concrete blocks would have been formed in a block-making press similar to the one on the left. Joe Yausie most likely had his own presses, perhaps purchased from a mail order catalogue. Typical cost for a block-making press was \$60.

A damp concrete mixture would be tamped into the box and pressed into shape. The best blocks were cured for 5 days while being kept slightly damp. They were then aged for 3-4 weeks before installation.

This was a popular alternative to brick in the early 20th century as it was stronger and more affordable.





The presses had interchangeable face plates to create various surface textures. The plates used at 176 Hope Street produced rock-faced blocks which were also known as rusticated concrete blocks. The presses also turned out plain blocks.

Each block measured 8" x 8" x 16".

By the 1930s the demand for this type of block had dwindled.



*When I was a kid I recall seeing all the receipts and bills for the construction of the house, and the total cost was surprisingly low – even by the monetary norms of the early 1950's. The lot was purchased for \$215, and I vaguely recall the entire cost to build the house was in the range of \$1800, which was a huge sum in 1908.*



*A major feature of the interior was the remarkable woodwork trim throughout – all clear-varnished white ash. The grand staircase in the front hallway and the two large 'pocket doors' into the front 'parlour' from the front hall and from the 'dining room' adjacent were particularly striking. There's a possibility that Adam Fuhr did the woodwork, as he had done similar woodwork in several churches in town.*

*Hard to believe that Henry could afford to build such a large and elaborately finished house for his growing family, with his job as a labourer at the Flour Mill but they were, as were most, I suppose in those days, very frugal with their money. Money was meant for saving, not for spending. I know they always had a very large garden in the back yard, dug each spring by*

hand, for vegetables and potatoes. There were apple, pear and cherry trees on the property as well as rhubarb, horseradish, raspberries and currants.

I clearly remember shelves from floor to ceiling stocked full of canned fruit and preserves in the basement. There was also a large 'potato bin' in the back cellar for storing both potatoes and carrots which were buried in layers of dry maple leaves to preserve them for the winter. Cabbage from the garden was made into sauerkraut, usually two 10 gallon crocks each year.



Left - Lavina Wilker and son Otto who was born in 1913.



Right - Son Harold "Doc" Wilker who was born in 1907 as a young boy dressed up as "Indian Doc".



Left - Otto standing at the front of the house with Lavina's prize flowers in the background.

*Both my Father, Otto (1913) and his younger sister Doris (1922), were born in the house. One story oft retold was once, when Otto had to look after baby Doris, he actually tied her to a tree*

*and went off to play with the boys. Apparently there were fireworks when Grandma got home because it's said she had quite a temper. My Grandmother's Mother lived in one of the upstairs bedrooms periodically, as aging parents normally stayed with their children in those days, rotating to the next offspring every six months or so.*

*When I was growing up there was a structure at the back of the property we called 'the barn' which housed a horse and wagon in the early days, and later served as a garage when Henry could finally afford a car. Legend has it that he was a terrible driver, and I recall hearing stories of one quite serious accident that occurred somewhere in North Easthope, and having to do with the steep hills and a hidden intersection in that area. My Aunt Doris, just a kid at the time, had lifelong scars from that accident.*



Left - Doris and brother Otto standing by Henry's car.



Right - Doris, later Mrs. Langford Brown. This photo is from the Tavistock Continuation School (high school) 1937-1938 yearbook.

*Upstairs in the 'barn' they kept a flock of chickens. The 'barn' also housed the outhouse — a genuine two-level 'two-holer' which was quite warm and comfortable being sheltered in the barn. The main house did not have any plumbing 'facilities' until my parents, Otto and Dorothea, moved into the upstairs of the house in 1943 after they were married. So the story goes, installing indoor plumbing facilities was a condition of accepting the marriage proposal. (Can't blame her for that I guess.) So prior to 1943 the only 'plumbing' in the house was a hand pump in the small 'wash-stand' room at the bottom of the back stairway which drew rainwater from the large cistern in the basement. The eavestroughs of the house could be set to discharge into the cistern when water was needed there.*



*The house, like all houses in the east end of town, had a 'spring' which ran continuously and provided cold clear drinking water year round. The water ran down into a 'well' and from there into the basement and into a wooden trough where milk and other perishables were placed to keep cold. The overflow from that ran into a drain underneath the concrete floor, and exited the front of the house into, I assume, the street drain.*

*For heating, there was a large coal furnace in the basement, and also a large coal bin in the same room. Off the furnace room was a back-room piled full in the fall with firewood. Keeping the furnace going day and night in the cold months was something always on one's mind in those days. The warm air from the coal furnace was naturally circulated by convection — no fan-forced air like we have today. For supplemental heat and cooking there was a 'cook stove' in the back kitchen — with two ovens. The stove-pipe went up through the floor into the chimney above so it also provided heat for the upstairs back bedroom. Later, when we lived upstairs, that back bedroom was our kitchen, and a heating stove (Quebec heater style) was installed there. Usually a coal fire or a wood fire was kept burning in these two stoves as well during the winter.*



wedding photo  
excerpt from the Tavistock Gazette 1943

On Sunday afternoon, March 21, the chapel of St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Kitchener, was the setting for a quiet ceremony when Miss Dorothea Gropp of Milverton was united in marriage to Mr. Otto Wilker of Tavistock.

The young couple were attired in black tailored suits of similar material, the bride wearing a silver fox cape, the gift of the groom.

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Following their wedding Dorothea and Otto made appropriate renovations and moved into the second floor at 176 Hope. Henry G and Lavina lived downstairs. Many years later, when Henry G. passed away, they chose to remain in their upstairs apartment.



Lavina Wilker with baby Craig



Dorothea and Craig on the front steps  
at 176 Hope Street



Dorothea, Craig and Otto Wilker at 176 Hope Street





Christmas 1949  
Otto, Craig and Dorothea



Henry G. Wilker with grandchildren Craig and Marilyn, daughter of Doc and Ruby Wilker - 1951



Craig on the wash-line stoop of the back porch with the family cat, Boodie - 1954



Henry in the parlour - 1954

*My Grandmother Lavina died in 1951 and as was the custom then, the funeral visitation was held in the house with the casket on a stand in the front parlour. I clearly recall having to be extra quiet during the days of visitation.*

*My Grandfather was my best buddy when I was a little boy, and taught me many things. I still have the old platform rocker that he used to rock me in when I was a baby. He was having severe stomach pains one night. Dr. Taylor was summoned, and subsequently the ambulance was called. As they wheeled him out on a stretcher, the last words he said going out the door were 'Say goodbye to Craig'. He passed away in November 1958 when I was 13, and I remember that sad day well. I believe visitations were held in the Funeral Home by then.*

*So after my Grandparents were gone, Mom, Dad and I continued living on the second floor. That meant I had the entire downstairs main floor all to myself. When I was 15, I got my Amateur (Ham) Radio Licence and built and set up a radio station in the 'dining room'. I had constructed a dipole antenna which ran from the maple tree on the street out front, all the way to the wash line post at the back end of the lot.*

*At one point I hung a four foot florescent light bulb from the end of the antenna in the maple tree – handy for indicating optimum antenna tuning. As I was transmitting Morse code this light would flash in its characteristic bluish light. Well, one night about 10pm came a knock on the door. It was the Chief of Police, Peter Grant. Turns out the boys down the street at the 'Woollen Mill' were taking a smoke break on the west end second floor fire escape, saw this flashing in the trees, thought it was the electric wires arcing, and called the cops. I had to be less conspicuous with my radio operating after that.*



right - Craig, age 14, and his radio

*Speaking of the Woollen Mill, in the early days of electricity, the steam engine at the mill powered a dynamo which provided electricity to the town for lighting during the evening hours. On the front dormer window in the attic of the house you can still see the fixture where the wires from the street entered the house. Not many of these are around anymore.*

*There's one story that must be told to set the record straight. For some reason there was a rumour floating around that there was once a fire in the house or that it actually burned down. Not true. Here's what happened. My mother, coming from 'a long line of tinkers' by her own admission, and very frugal as she was wont to be, decided to make an inexpensive charcoal barbeque out of an old iron frying pan with holes drilled in the bottom for air. One evening she barbequed some hot dogs for supper. When the wieners were done, she foolishly set the frying pan with the still hot coals directly on the metal which covered the wooden floor of the second story balcony. After supper I grabbed my bicycle – I think I was 14 at the time – and headed out to meet the 'boys'. I got to the front of the house and noticed smoke coming out from the*

*second story balcony. I ran upstairs, hollered for my Dad to throw up the hose, grabbed a hammer and chisel, tore a triangular-shaped hole in the galvanized metal floor and extinguished the smouldering boards underneath. Close call. In ripping the metal up, I severely cut my thumb which required 4 or 5 stitches. I still have the scar to prove it. And I'm sure the now-sealed hole in the metal floor covering is still there on the west side upper balcony as well.*

*We lived in the house until 1964 when Mother Dorothea decided she wanted a new house. Having put up with living with her in-laws since her marriage, I guess she was entitled to that. The property was sold to Carrie Herman and her siblings Wilfrid, Daniel and his wife Maud in February of 1964. When we moved to the new house in September of '64, there was a large auction sale on the front porch and front lawn to liquidate all of my Grandparents effects and antique furniture. I knew my Dad was reluctant to leave the house he was born in, grew up in, and lived his entire life in up to that point. It broke his heart to see all those things go. I still have the mantle clock that stood on the top of the china-cabinet in the dining room.*

*After the Hermans moved in they periodically had 'visitors' showing up thinking it was still their home. Our cats, Boodie and Willie, had grown up with our family living upstairs in the house. They were adept at climbing the trumpet vine on the trellis to the roof of the porch and then climbing a small ladder to end up on the window sill of what was then our kitchen window. Year round, both cats would be let in and let out via that window to do their prowling around the neighbourhood. After we moved in 1964 the Hermans would find Willie at the second floor window meowing to be let in. It took several months to get the 'home' setting on his CAT-GPS adjusted to the new address.*

*It was a grand and proud house to grow up in.*

*Signed — Craig Wilker*

Otto and Dorothea Wilker will long be remembered for their active participation in and many contributions to community life. A longtime businessman, Otto managed Wilker's Grocery for 43 years. His love of music and aptitude on the trumpet played out in many different ways. Otto was a decades-long member of the Tavistock Citizens Band and four other local bands. He and Dorothea were instrumental in organizing 25 years of Band Tattoos in Tavistock, each one a memorable night in our village. Dorothea was a pianist, often playing at local events. For many years she was active in the Tavistock Home and School Association. For many more years Dorothea was the historian for the Conrad Wilker family and an ardent supporter of history in Tavistock. Otto belonged to the Tavistock Men's Club and Dorothea's name was often found on the organizational roster for local good works. The Wilkers belonged to Trinity Lutheran Church in Sebastopol. Otto served on Brotherhood, the mens' group at Trinity and Dorothea was a favourite leader at Weekday Church School. Otto passed away in 1996 and Dorothea in 2016.



Wilker's Grocery, second store on the left, on Hope Street West ... circa 1950s



## The Herman Family Years ... 1964 - 1984

In 1964 the property was sold to the Hermans ... Caroline (Carrie), Daniel, Wilfred and Maud ... with Carrie's name on the Registry Office records. The purchase price was \$10,500.

Carrie, Dan and Wilfred were siblings born on the family farm on the Sebastopol Road (now Line 29). They remained on the farm for their adult lives. Wilfred was the only one to marry and his wife, Maude, made it a tight-knit foursome. Maude was always known by her nickname Pussy.



The Herman Family circa 1920s

from left - father Andrew and sons Wilfred, George and Dan

mother Louisa, an unknown lady and Carrie



Stooking Corn On The Herman Family Farm circa 1920s

from left - father Andrew and sons Wilfred, George and Dan

Photographs from "Country Roads: Story of South Easthope"

The Hermans lives revolved around their successful farming operations and their church, Trinity Lutheran in Sebastopol. Carrie was a Sunday School teacher, the only Sunday School teacher in the history of the church to have a perfect attendance record for 20 years.

When it came time to leave the farm the foursome moved to town and settled into the big house at 176 Hope Street. They were good neighbours who largely kept to themselves. Dan had kept bees on the farm and continued his honey sales in the village.

Carrie died in the house in 1983 at the age of 82 years. Wilfred and Maude needed care and moved to the Bonnie Brae Long-Term Care Center. Wilfred died in 1989 at age 92. Maude passed away in 1990 at age 82.

Dan remained in the home, firmly holding out for a private room at a nursing home. In a somewhat unusual move the Strantz family, who had been living next door, moved in with Dan until a room became available for him. Frank Strantz has fond memories of celebrating Dan's 90th birthday in the house. Dan died in 1991 at age 97.

### **The Strantz Years ... 1984 - 1989**

The Strantz years saw some needed and some desired changes at 176 Hope Street. Frank worked for B&B Contracting and used his considerable construction and carpentry skills to build an addition on the back of their house, create a laundry room upstairs in the former kitchen, close in a stairwell and build out a few walls. Adding insulation was a key part of the renovations. The house exterior walls were not insulated ... just concrete blocks, lath and plaster. New copper piping rounded out the upgrades. Fortunately, the original slate roof on the main part of the house was still holding fast.

Frank, along with wife Donna and children, added zip to the house after the quiet Herman years. Donna was active with Baby Band, served as Chairman of the Block Parent Association and was a leader in the local Brownie group. Son Kevin was big into T-Ball and belong to the local Cub troop. Daughter Natasha was a Brownie and played baseball.

In 1989 it was time to move on.

### **The Laliberte Years .... 1989 - 1991**

June and Ben Laliberte needed a house in a hurry. They were in such a hurry that they made the offer to purchase sitting in a car late in the evening outside of Quehl's. Why the rush? The family was moving from Quebec to commence work in the area and time was a-marching. For the adults 176 Hope Street served a purpose. It was large enough to easily accommodate their family of four children—Natalie, Genevieve, Katie and Alex — and it was immediately available. The children, however, were decidedly enthused with the house. They thought it was a mini mansion.



The Lalibertes were a busy family who participated fully in community life. At any given point in time you could find one or more of them placing entries at the Tavistock Fall Fair, flicking crokinole disks, playing soccer or T-ball or baseball or skating.

June is remembered as the lady who did face painting at Baby Band and the Fall Fair. She plied her artistic talent on a far grander scale in the artwork completed in the house. The kitchen floor that her sister painted with interesting designs is still, all these years later, the talk of the neighbourhood. The floor was part of a kitchen renovation.

While June never planned to own her own business, she did just that in a prime space right on the five corners. The store was called Magpie's Delight and what a delight it was ... antiques, collectibles, books, vintage clothing displayed on a mannequin and lots more.

All too soon it was time for the Lalibertes to move on to a new community. Even though their time in Tavistock was short, June has fond memories of our village. Local people have fond memories of her.



above - the front room





above - the dining room  
below - the den



right - the front hall and staircase

below - the renovated kitchen



above - daughter Natalie at Magpie's Delight

right - children Alex and Genevieve and a young friend in the back yard of their home



**The Lewis Years ... 1992 - 1994**

When Kevin and Ilya Lewis were looking for a home they may well have perused the real estate listing shown here.

**P.H. Hiller Realty Limited**

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*Sept 7/1992*

176 Hope St. E. Tavistock. MLS 2-1003R  
 Fri. 6:30-8:00 p.m. Danny Hunter\*  
 Come and see this lovely home just a short  
 drive from Stratford. Only \$159,900.

WELCOME TO

176 Hope St. East.  
 Tavistock

LOT SIZE	63.4*132	HOUSE	2500 SQ.FT.
PRICE	\$159,900	TAXES	\$1578.11
CONSTRUCTION	BRICK/CONCRETE	DRIVEWAY	SINGLE/PAVED
ROOMS	11	BEDROOMS	4
BATHROOMS	2	DEN	10*13
LIVING ROOM	15*13	DINING ROOM	14*16
KITCHEN	13*14	BEDROOM	12*12
BEDROOM	12*15	BEDROOM	10*12
BEDROOM	10*15	REC. ROOM	11*12

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**FEATURES** Beautiful mature trees. Many updates completed without  
 disrupting the original character of this spacious home.  
 Central air. Dishwasher. Deck. Fenced yard.  
 -----

For more information on this or any other M.L.S. listing :

CALL : Danny Hunter  
 273-6915 residence  
 273-1650 office



Many of the elements of the listing for 176 Hope Street East were appealing .... 2,500 square foot house with 11 rooms, a notation that many updates were completed without disrupting the original character of the home, a lot measuring 63.4 feet by 132 feet with beautiful mature trees and an asking price of \$159,900.

Perhaps it was the old favourite “location, location, location” or perhaps it was a particular feature. Whatever the reason Kevin and Ilya Lewis and their children took possession in 1992.

Moving in and then moving out somewhat quickly was starting to be a bit of a pattern. In 1996 the house was up for sale again. A bit of the Lewis years still remain in the house. The names of their children are written on the edge of the stairs.

### **The Kimpel Years ... current owners starting in 1996**

When Scott Kimpel and Julie Yungblut were married in 1995 they probably thought that finding a home would be a fast and easy process. Not so.

When the couple first considered 176 Hope Street East the house had been listed for 2 years. The asking price was \$189,000. That seemed a bit steep so they considered other places or perhaps building a house. It must have been kismet. The price dropped to \$147,000 and the Kimpels closed the deal on November 29, 1996. Twenty-four years and two children later, they are still calling it home.

Scott was an out-of-towner and Julie grew up on Hope Street near where they are living today. Julie truly is a local girl in pretty much every respect. Her career began at South Easthope Mutual Insurance in Tavistock and, after a series of increasingly responsible positions, she's still there as Senior Auto Underwriter and IT Coordinator. She started entering exhibits at the Tavistock Fall Fair as a young girl and she's currently President of the Tavistock Agricultural Society overseeing all aspects of our local fair. Julie's family has long strong ties to St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in East Zorra and Julie is continuing the tradition, having served 6 years on Church Council.

The Kimpels have been in the home for 34 years. Only 22 more to go before they rival and beat the Wilker family record.

\*\*\* history dated December 2020

