

House History

22 Oxford Street, Tavistock

**Plan 329 and Plan 307 ... Lots No. 3 and 4
East of William Street North of Hope Street**



Tavistock, on the boundary line between the counties of Perth and Oxford, is a fine, rising well-built village of 1200 population, beautifully situated in a magnificent farming section. It contains a large woollen factory, 150-barrel roller mill, extensive flax mill, two furniture factories, saw mill, stave factory, cheese factory, planing mills, machine shops, etcetera, besides a first-class representation in all lines of business. Two excellent brass bands, five churches, Mechanic's Institute and numerous societies are located here and the village is rapidly increasing in population. It offers good inducements to manufacturers and others to establish themselves and its convenient distance from the principal centres of the Western Province makes it a very desirable place for residence.

*Tavistock Gazette
Thursday, November 18, 1897*

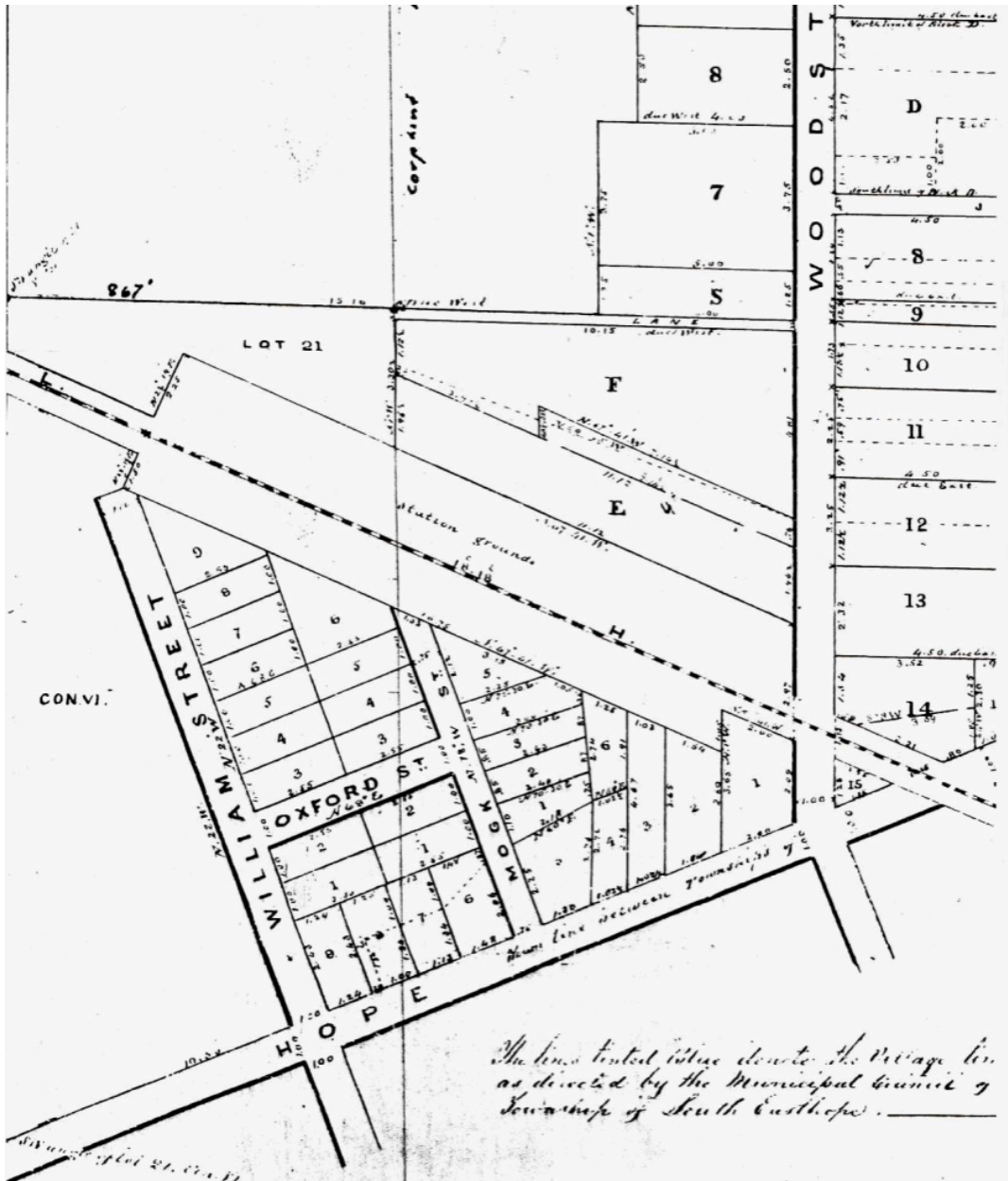
Tavistock was, indeed, a very desirable place for residence in 1897. Mrs. Elizabeth McTavish would most certainly attest to that statement. Five years earlier, in 1892, Mrs. McTavish had purchased a plot of land in a new subdivision in Tavistock and had arranged for the building of a two-storey brick house. That house and land would later become known as 22 Oxford Street.

While our story concentrates on 22 Oxford Street, the history of the property starts long before.

This property traces back to the Canada Company that contracted land to the early settlers. It was part of a large package of land ... Lots 21 and 22 on Concession 6 in South Easthope Township ... contracted to Casper Mogk by lease in 1844 and finalized by deed in 1853.

During that same timeframe, 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 centre 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. 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 - Mogk Survey, completed in 1882 and formally known as Plan 329, covered a wide swath east and west 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 22 Oxford Street was called "Lots No. 3 and 4 East of William Street North of Hope Street" on the survey. Lot 3 faced Oxford Street while Lot 4 was situated immediately "behind" (north) to form a deep lot measuring 84' x 132'.



Extract from Plan 329 (Wilker - Mogk Survey) dated 1882

The McTavish Years: 1892 - 1908

The first transaction shown on Registry Office records for Lots 3 and 4 was in January 1892 when the then owner, John Mogk (Casper Mogk's son), sold the west half to the Trustees of Knox Presbyterian Church. Their names were Dr. Michael Steele, Adam T. Bell and James G. Field. The Trustees paid \$150 for their plot of land and proceeded to have a church built on the property. Construction of Knox Presbyterian Church (now Tavistock Bible Chapel) started in the spring of 1892.

In that same month John Mogk sold the east half of Lots 3 and 4 to Mrs. Elizabeth McTavish for \$130.

Elizabeth McTavish was born in Perthshire Scotland in 1819. Elizabeth didn't have to change her last name when she married. Her husband was Alexander McTavish, born in Perthshire in 1817. They emigrated to Canada, settled and farmed at Lot 35 on Concession 8 in South Easthope Township and raised 5 children. Alexander died in 1891 and is buried at McTavish Cemetery in South Easthope.

The newly-widowed Elizabeth elected to leave the farm and move to Tavistock. Her unmarried daughter Christena came with her. Quite courageously at age 73, Elizabeth chose not to buy an existing house but rather to purchase land in an area of the village just opening up and build. Lots 3 and 4, east half, were purchased in January 1892 and registered in April 1892. In September of that same year Elizabeth took out a mortgage for \$600, presumably to help finance the construction of the 2-storey brick home that still stands on the property today. She paid off the mortgage in just 3 1/2 years.

Elizabeth and Christena lived a quiet life, not creating any headlines or even mentions in the available editions of the Tavistock Gazette. The census of 1901 shows them living at 22 Oxford Street along with a lodger, H. M. McCulloch. This was Reverend McCulloch who was serving his first charge at Knox Presbyterian Church next door.

Elizabeth McTavish died at her home in 1907. The cause listed was simply old age. She is buried next to her husband, Alexander, at McTavish Cemetery.

It took a little while for Elizabeth's executors, children John and Christena, to put the house up for sale. Perhaps Christena needed time to decide what to do with her life. In October of 1908 the property was sold to Adam T. Bell for \$1,750.

Thus began the Bell era ... definitely long and decidedly noteworthy.

The Bell Era: 1908 - 1961

Any description of the Bell family requires pages and more pages to do justice to their many accomplishments. One writer in a Tavistock Women's Institute Tweedsmuir book summed up their lives to perfection when she wrote "Mr. and Mrs. A.T. Bell and four daughters were one of the 'salt of the earth' families. They enriched the whole life of the community".

Adam Thomas Bell was born in August 1844 in Agincourt, Ontario. When the Bell family arrived in Tavistock in 1890 he was a highly-respected individual at the peak of his career. Adam T. Bell was a cheesemaker who had perfected his trade in a series of factories in a series of towns.

The Tavistock Cheese and Butter Factory was established in 1878 under a partnership agreement between Thomas Ballantyne and William Gillard. The original frame factory and brick house were built that same year on the site where the cheese factory stands today. In 1890 Ballantyne acquired a new partner, Adam T. Bell. Together they conducted the first Dairy School in Ontario at the Tavistock plant. In 1893 Adam T. Bell was appointed the first instructor in cheesemaking at the Ontario Agricultural College at the University of Guelph. He held that position for several years before increased activity at the Tavistock factory forced him to relinquish the position.

The Tavistock Cheese and Butter factory was a most successful operation. The Tavistock Gazette noted in 1896 that the factory shipped 435 boxes of cheese to London, England. The 1899 Annual Meeting records stated that 2,673,976 pounds of milk were received during the season. This was manufactured into 246,656 pounds of cheese and 718,491 pounds of butter. The combined receipts for the factory were \$27,249.90.

In 1908, when Adam T. Bell purchased the property at 22 Oxford Street, he was 64 years old and at the pinnacle of his professional and personal life.

On the personal front, he had married May Hughena Ross, a daughter of one of the early pioneer families in Zorra Township, in 1875. They raised 4 daughters, each of whom achieved success in her chosen career.

Daughter Jessie Margaret was born in 1878 in Embro. Jessie graduated from Stratford Collegiate where she won a gold medal for general proficiency. A few years later she graduated with honours from the University of Toronto. Jessie turned her talents to teaching school in Penetang, Burk's Falls, Kingston, Strathroy and Tavistock. While working in Tavistock she was Assistant Principal and later Principal of the Continuation School (high school). No matter where she was working, Jessie took every opportunity to return to her family home for vacations and visiting with friends. When she retired Jessie moved back to Tavistock and back to 22 Oxford Street. She was a staunch and very involved member of Knox Presbyterian later Knox United Church and the Tavistock Women's Institute. Jessie died at her home in 1950. She is buried at McTavish Cemetery.

Daughter Helen Agnes was born in 1880 in Sebringville. Her birth was registered as Helena and later often spelled as Hellen or Helen. Like her sisters, Helen had musical talent and served as the organist at Knox Presbyterian Church in 1905. Helen moved to Wyoming USA to teach music at a large school and coincidentally found a husband. She married Robert C. Watt in the parlour at 22 Oxford Street and then moved permanently to Buffalo, Wyoming. Helen died in 1951 and is buried in Buffalo, Wyoming.

Daughter Adna May was born in 1882 in Downie Township. Adna was, by all accounts, a force to be reckoned with. She taught school in a variety of cities, the longest period in Vancouver. Like her sisters, Adna used every opportunity to return to Tavistock. When she retired she moved back home full time and turned her energies to the Knox United Women's Group and the Tavistock Women's Institute. Adna lived at 22 Oxford Street until poor health caused her to move to The Maples Rest Home in 1959. She passed away in 1961 and is buried at McTavish Cemetery. Adna was the last surviving member of her family.

Daughter Annie Ross was born in 1890 in Tavistock. She was a graduate of MacDonald Institute at the University of Guelph and Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. Annie nursed in Montreal before she, too, returned home. As with others in her family, she was a devout member of Knox United Church and active in several organization of the church. Annie died at 22 Oxford Street in 1954 and is buried at McTavish Cemetery.

Mrs. Adam T. Bell, the former May Hughena Ross, was born in 1850. She was very much a woman ahead of her time. She took an active part in the affairs of Knox Presbyterian then Knox United Church and for more than 30 years was President of the Women's Missionary Society. Mrs. Bell was the first President of the Tavistock Women's Institute and served as Secretary for 25 years. The Women's Institute decision to build the stone gates at Queen's Park was made at a meeting at the Bell home. For several years she was active in the support of the Little Trinity Settlement work in Toronto. Mrs. Bell died at her home in 1937 and is buried at McTavish Cemetery. Her obituary noted that she "possessed a sterling Christian character and a kindly and sympathetic nature" and that she "exerted a fine influence in the community".

It will be no surprise to read that Adam T. Bell was a pillar of the community. His obituary stated that "in his demise the community has lost one of its outstanding and highly respected residents. His Christian character and charming personality had endeared him to many and his passing has caused widespread regret". His work at the Tavistock Cheese and Butter Company set the stage for the continued success of the business. Mr. Bell served his community in a myriad of ways. He was an Elder at Knox Presbyterian then Knox United Church for 40 years; served on the Library Board for 30 years; was instrumental in forming the Board of Trade; was involved with the Swastika Mining Corporation; and served on the local Military Tribunal during WW1. In politics he was a Liberal and though he never sought municipal office he always took an active interest in the political affairs in Tavistock and community. Mr. Bell died at his home at age 85 in 1930. He is buried at McTavish Cemetery.



Tavistock Library Board - 1916 (LSC)

left to right: John Lemp Jr., Adam T. Bell, William Appel, Fred Krug, Ed Roth, Duncan McKellar



*Mr. and Mrs. Bell and girls, presumably daughters, enjoying time on the porch (LSC)
date unknown ... estimate 1910*





Same day as previous photo, now on the side porch (LSC)





*Construction on Oxford Street (LSC) ... 22 Oxford is on the right
Sidewalks were laid on the south side of Oxford Street in 1913.
It's not known if this picture relates to that work or is from an earlier time.*



Oxford Street (LSC) - 22 Oxford on the left



Oxford Street as seen from Mogk Street (LSC)

As noted earlier, the Bell family moved to Tavistock in 1890. It's not known where they lived before moving into 22 Oxford but it is well known from numerous mentions in the Tavistock Gazette that they were active in the community from the onset. The Bells entertained with great frequency ... everything from overnight and extended stays by friends and relatives to afternoon teas and big evening parties. The girls provided musical entertainment at various functions and attended events with a wide circle of friends.

The house at 22 Oxford seemed perfect for their lifestyle. Somewhat surprising, just 2 years after moving into their new home, Mr. Bell put it up for sale. Notices in the Tavistock Gazette in November 1910 read:

FOR SALE

That very desirable and choice village property on Oxford St., better known as the McTavish property. Two storey solid brick dwelling with all modern improvements. Exceptionally good lot with a variety of fruit bearing trees, also a never-failing well of first-class water. Apply to A.T. Bell, Tavistock Cheese Factory.

It's interesting that even though the Bells had lived in the house for 2 years it was still referred to as "the McTavish house". That was the Tavistock style then and to a certain extent, still is today in the older section of town.

The newspaper went on to say that Mr. Bell intended to move into the house at the cheese factory. Whatever precipitated the sale and planned move must have disappeared as the Bells stayed put at 22 Oxford.

“Stayed put” might be a bit of an overstatement. The Bell family travelled. The newspaper recounted many occasions where Mr. and Mrs. Bell went on a week-long driving tour or had a week’s vacation at the Preston Springs or spent time staying with family in locations near and far. Three times they embarked on a two-month trip to the Canadian and US West Coast. The girls travelled, too. Annie spent several months sightseeing in the Canadian Northwest and later in Europe. Adna spent time touring the west coast. This was anything but typical in Tavistock.

Time marched on. The senior Bells slowed down and passed away. So did the girls. The house was sold in 1961.

The Schwantz Years: 1961 - 1989

When Ken and Adella Schwantz bought the property in 1961 it, surprisingly, was not from the Bells. The Registry Office records state that the owner at that time was the United Church of Canada. At some prior point one of the Bells, quite possibly Adna, turned the house over to the Church. Logically, it makes sense. There were no children or nieces or nephews to leave it to and the church had played a large part in the Bell family lives. That transaction was not recorded in the Registry Office records. While missed transactions are not common, neither are they uncommon.

Ken and Adella and their two children, Christine and Carl, had been living in a very small house in Tavistock. Christine, a young girl age 6 at the time, remembers that the new house was absolutely huge. The price tag might have seemed huge to her parents \$5,000.

Christine has most kindly shared her memories of 22 Oxford Street where her family lived from 1961 to 1989. Best of all, she’s shared pictures. To understand the stories and the pictures, you first have to know about the family and the family business.

Kenneth George Schwantz was born in Tavistock in 1914 and lived in the village his entire life. In 1946 he married Adella Yecny. Adella was born in Esterhazy, Saskatchewan in 1925. Together they raised two children, a daughter Christine who is now Mrs. Bruce Riddle and lives in Capreol and son Carl who lives in the Newmarket area.

The Schwantzes owned K&A Refrigeration and Schwantz Ice Products and operated the businesses from 22 Oxford Street. The house will most likely be called “The Ice House” until the last of the many customers has died and perhaps a few years after that.

The ice business was a follow-on from Ken’s refrigeration business. With the switch to ice there were 3 machines for ice cubes located on the porch at 22 Oxford along with a big insulated cabinet and a freezer. Anyone who needed ice simply helped themselves and left their money. Those were the days when the honour system worked. The very few times it didn’t work didn’t get past the watchful eyes of the neighbours. In the early days a 10-pound bag of ice cubes cost 50 cents. Customers needing ice for parties or companies needing large quantities of ice for whatever purpose bought in 50-pound bags.

The ice business grew and a garage was built to serve as a walk-in deep freeze and the location for 6 or more ice machines. Ken delivered to various locations and owned machines in still other locations. Locally, Ken and his firm are credited with installing the first artificial plant in the Tavistock arena in 1968.

Adella had her own business. She was known as “The Avon Lady”, selling their products for many years.

In his personal time Ken was a member, Past Master and Treasurer of the Tavistock Masonic Lodge #609 AF & AM.

The Schwantz family lived at 22 Oxford Street for 28 years, selling the home in 1989 to Dennis and Louise Longmire. Ken passed away in 2001 and Adella died in 2009. Their ashes are interred at Oxford Memorial Park Cemetery in Woodstock.



The Schwantz family celebrating Ken and Adella's 45 wedding anniversary in 1991 (CR)

*left to right (front row) Ken Schwantz, Christine Schwantz Riddle,
Theresa Riddle (Christine's daughter), Carl Schwantz, Adella Schwantz
left to right (back row) ... Deborah Schwantz (Carl's wife),
Bruce Riddle (Christine's husband), Michael Riddle (Christine's son)*

Now that we know a bit about the family and the business, let's return to their time in the house.

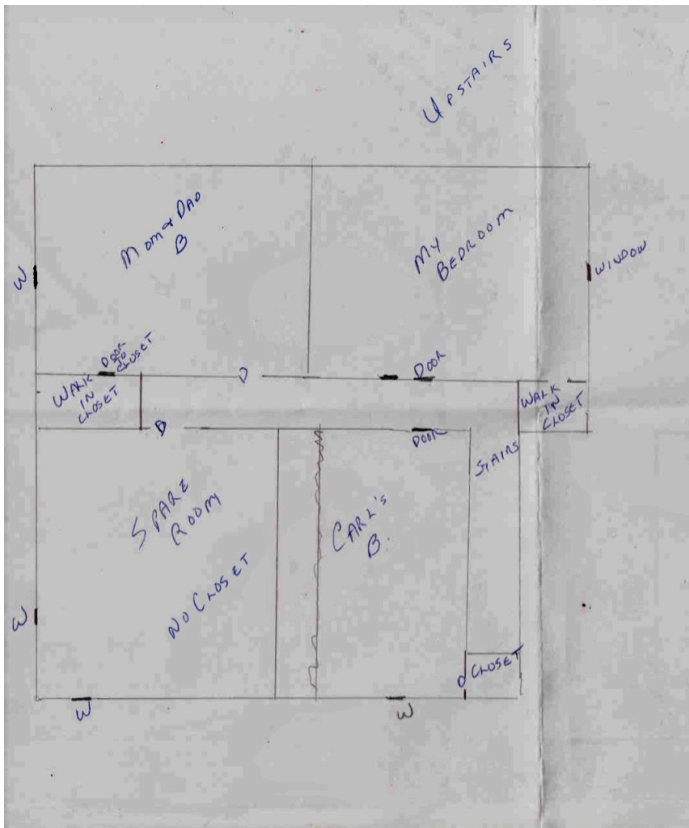
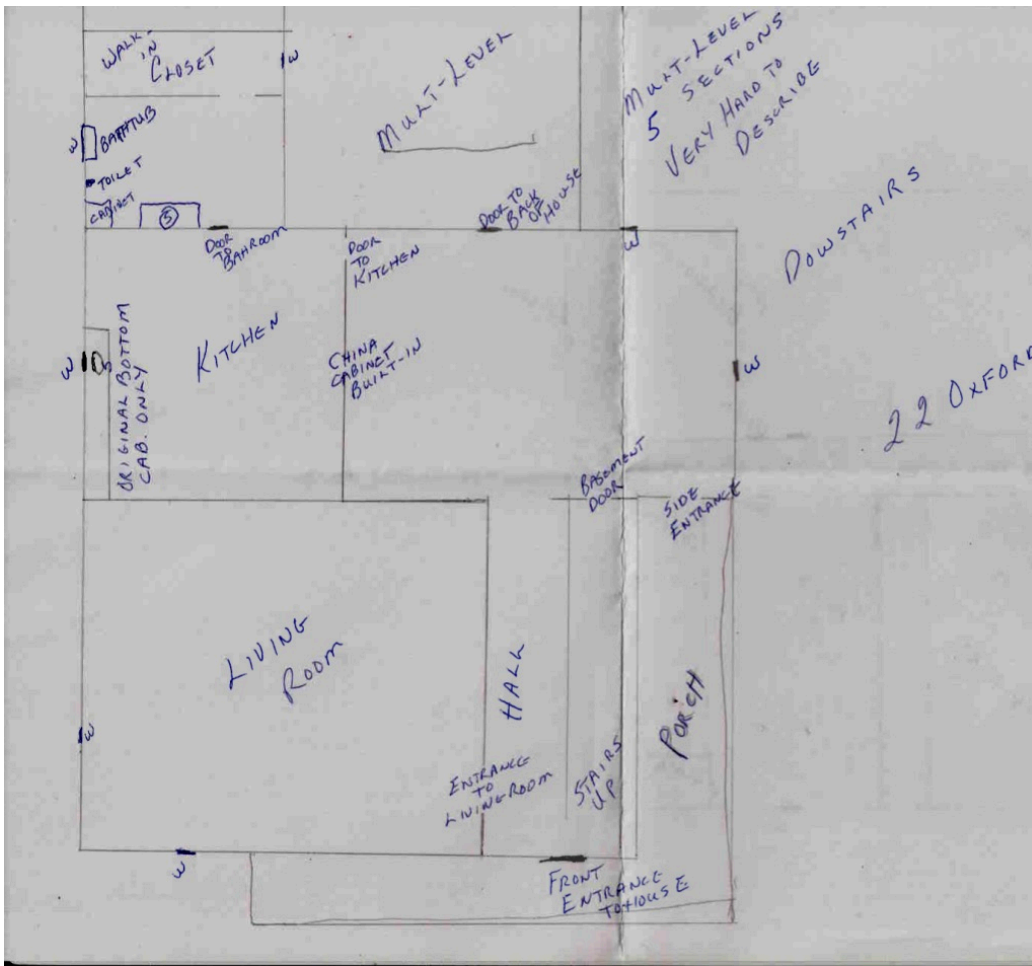
To say that the trees and shrubs around the house were a tad overgrown when the Schwantzes moved in would not be an understatement. In absolute fact you couldn't see the house from the street or the sides or the back. There were huge evergreens as high as the house on all 4 sides. They came down over the course of a few years. When the strip between the Schwantz house and the Wilkers next door (to the east) was removed Clara Wilker had to sew curtains.

The house at 22 Oxford was a series of separate rooms that Christine has drawn on the pages following. Each room, upstairs and downstairs, boasted 11' tall ceilings and 12" high baseboards. You could stand up easily in the attic and also in the basement provided you weren't over 6' tall. The basement walls were 2-3 feet thick.

Water for the house came from a big steel tank (like a cistern) located upstairs.



*1962 - Christine Schwantz and playmate Faye Matheson
who lived at 2 Oxford Street (CR)*



floor plan for 22 Oxford Street when the Schwantzes lived in the home

drawn by Christine Riddle

For some reason, now lost in time, everyone slept downstairs for the first winter or two. Perhaps it was because the only bathroom, complete with a big old clawfoot tub, was on the main floor. A bathroom was installed upstairs in 1980 using part of a bedroom and some closet space.



Ken in the back yard in 1964. On the larger original, if you look very closely, you can see the outhouse still in place at the home at 54 William Street. (CR)



Adella and Christine at the front of the house on the day that Christine was confirmed in 1967. (CR)



Adella and Christine on Christine's wedding day in 1972. (CR)

The decorating style at the time was wallpaper with one wall done in a feature print. The feature wall here is black and white flocked paper with gold flecks. It was totally in vogue at the time.

The woodwork in the house had great promise but you had to work to find the beauty. Adella spent years stripping as many as 8 coats of paint to find the natural wood underneath. A good example would be the staircase. The handrail was cherry. The spindles were mahogany. The rest was oak. There was a beautiful design along the side. Underneath the carpet was 2-3" of solid oak.



Adella peeking around the hardwood door frame (CR)



Michael by the stairs in 1983 (CR)

One unique element and one which has stayed prominent in memory is the china cabinet. It opened in two ways ... to the dining room on one side and to the kitchen on the other.



Adella and Michael in the kitchen in 1973. (CR)



Adella and Theresa in the kitchen in 1989. Some redecorating had been done but the bottom cupboards were still from the Bell days. (CR)

The beautiful and fragrant orange-blossom tree in the back yard - 1971 (CR)



Outside, there was an increasing need to keep the elements at bay on the porch and the best way to do that was to close it in. Ken used the storm windows on the back of the house for that purpose.



The last picture of Ken and Adella on the porch before leaving their home in 1989. (CR)

And so ends the Schwantz years.

The Longmires: 1989 - 2013

In 1989 the house changed ownership again. Dennis and Louise Longmire and their children were just the fourth family in the house in 97 years.

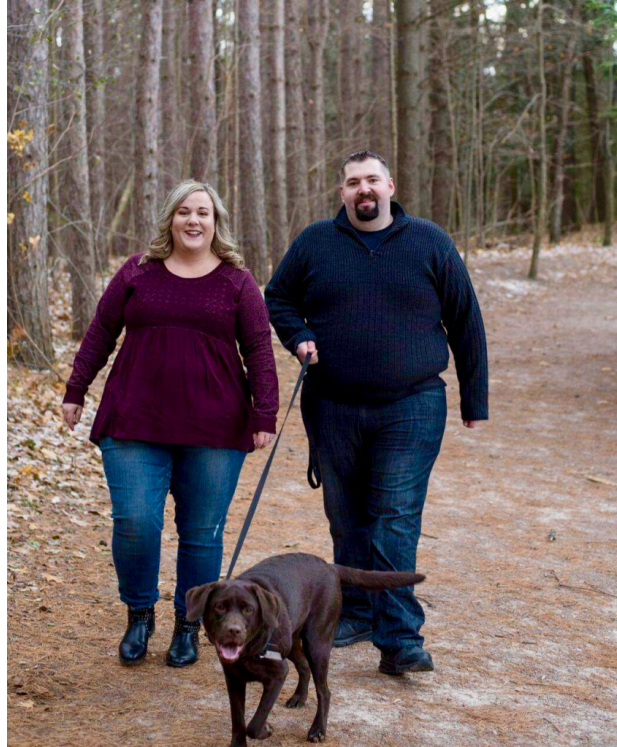
Dennis and Louise are remembered as quiet neighbours. Their children seemed to grab all the attention in the Tavistock Gazette. Son Roy was written up several times for academic awards. Son Joe was a star player in pretty much every hockey game he played. Daughters Abbi and Gabrielle scored newspaper print for events and activities at school. Abbi was a Fall Fair Ambassador contender in 2012.

Brent and Jocelyn Dietrich: 2013 - present

An ever-so-nice young couple live at 22 Oxford at the time of this writing.

Brent Dietrich, then a single young man from St. Agatha, purchased the property in 2013. Quite coincidentally, his younger sister purchased a home in Tavistock the very same weekend.

There were many aspects of 22 Oxford that Brent admired and many elements that showed great promise. High on the list of “admired” elements was the large garage as it was the perfect place to store his fishing boat. Overall, the house held great promise. One of Brent’s first tasks was taking up the carpets to reveal the beautiful original oak flooring underneath. A keen admirer of natural hardwood, Brent has spent many an hour painstakingly working on the stairs to restore the original lustre and shine.



right - Jocelyn & Brent Dietrich and Lola

Brent’s wife, Jocelyn, shares his love of older homes, their character and their history. Brent met Jocelyn Muir in November of 2015. One year later they were engaged and one year following, in November of 2017, they were married at St. Agatha Roman Catholic Church. Jocelyn moved from her hometown of Cambridge to to live in Tavistock.

One of the joys of an older home is that there is always work to be done. So far, Brent and Jocelyn have made some minor renovations that include turning the upstairs far bedroom into a guest bedroom; making an office out of a small storage room; finishing a few updates to the upstairs bathroom with more to come; and adding a hot tub outside. They have installed some cabinets and a counter in the bathroom/laundry room for some extra storage. Major future plans include opening up the front porch again and expanding on to the back of the house.

An immediate priority is building a wooden fence around the property so that their new and energetic chocolate Labrador, Lola, has a place to play.



Exterior architectural elements installed most likely when the house was built or very shortly thereafter add to the overall appeal of this old home, most particularly the cornice and cornice moulding and the fretwork design over the front door.

Photos taken October 2018. (SC)



22 Oxford on a beautiful autumn day in 2018 (SC)



**Registry Office Transaction Listings for
Tavistock, Lots No. 3 and No 4 East of William Street North of Hope Street**

Instr-ument	Date	Registry Date	Grantor (Seller)	Grantee (Buyer)	Quantity	Price
Bill of Sale	9 Jan 1892	13 Jan 1892	John Mogk	Michael Steele Adam T. Bell & James G. Field - Trustees Knox Presbyterian Church	W 1/2	\$150
Bill of Sale	15 Jan 1892	13 April 1892	John Mogk	Elizabeth McTavish	E 1/2	\$130
Bill of Sale	2 Oct 1908	3 Oct 1908	John McTavish & Christena McTavish Executors for Elizabeth McTavish	Adam T. Bell	E 1/2	\$1,750
**	**	**	missing one transaction	missing one transaction		
Grant	15 Nov 1961	11 Dec 1961	The United Church of Canada	Kenneth G.A. Schwantz & Adella Schwantz	E 1/2 & other land	\$5,000
Grant	15 Nov 1969	12 Jan 1970	Trustees of Knox United Church	Trustees of Grace United Church of the United Church of Canada	W 1/2 & other land	\$1
Grant	8 Sept 1980	18 Sept 1980	Trustees of Grace United Church of the United Church of Canada	Trustees of Tavistock Bible Chapel	W 1/2	\$2

*** end of the Registry Office records available at the Tavistock & District Historical Society

1989 sale - Ken & Adella Schwantz to Dennis & Louise Longmire

2013 sale - Dennis & Louise Longmire to Brent Dietrich

history prepared 2019