

Heritage Property – Devitt-Voelker House



36 Young St. W.

Built by Barnabas Devitt, 1849

Designated Aug. 29, 1977: bylaw 77-161, “The Voelker House”

The Devitt-Voelker House was built in 1849 by Barnabas Devitt, the adopted son of Abraham and Magdalena Erb. Shortly after Abraham’s death in 1830, Magdalena deeded 310 acres of land to Barnabas. Devitt and his wife, Magdalena Shoemaker, built a farmhouse on the lands and moved their family from the [Erb-Kumpf House](#) to the new house in 1849.

The house Devitt constructed has elements of the mid-19th-century Victorian Gothic style in which the romantic replaced the formality of the earlier Georgian style. Features were borrowed from various styles and traditions, including Greek, Roman and medieval. Among those elements are the “gingerbread” bargeboards and tall finials on the south and west dormers, the broken arch of the gable’s window, and the tripartite windows on the front façade.

Devitt and his family lived in their 1849 farmhouse for only two years. In 1851, Devitt, in partnership with Elias Eby, purchased the former Shoemaker Mill in nearby Bridgeport ON. To support his new venture, Devitt sold the house to Elias Snider and moved with his family to Bridgeport.

The property changed hands a number of times until Dr. Philip Voelker and his wife Viva (Curly) purchased the farmhouse in 1940. Initially in disrepair, the Voelker family carefully restored, renovated and maintained the house. In 1977, the house was designated as a heritage landmark.

Under the Voelkers' ownership, the house became known throughout the community as '[The Christmas House](#)' for its upper-balcony, brightly-lit 10-foot balsam Christmas tree. Dr. Voelker, who served as a R.C.A.F. Flight Lieutenant and physician during WWII 1942-1946, started the tradition when he erected a Christmas tree in 1943 on an upper balcony of [Auchmar](#) (known during WWII as R.C.A.F. Young Division Convalescent Hospital for airmen). Upon returning home to Waterloo, he began erecting a Christmas tree on the second storey porch of his own home. The Voelkers, with the assistance of family and friends, continued the tradition until Mrs. Voelker's death in 2017.