

A SOCIAL AND LEGAL HISTORY OF 394 BESSERER STREET, OTTAWA

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A Social and Legal History of 394 Besserer Street, Ottawa

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Website http://househistory.tricolour.ca/

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Cover photograph: 394 Besserer, 2011 with Mike Galway, courtesy Michael Galway. Photo on page 28 courtesy Richard Briggs.

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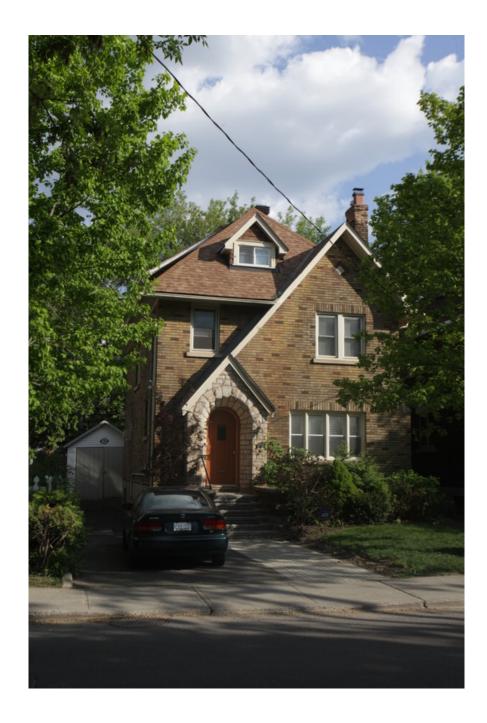
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394 Besserer Street, October 2016. [photo courtesy Richard Briggs]

Although 394 Besserer Street was built only in 1933, the lot, building and residents provide links to a City, communities and attitudes that have long since passed away.

The Neighbourhood: Besserer Place 1839

The story of Sandy Hill begins with two brothers, René-Léonard and Louis-Théodore Besserer, sons of an immigrant military surgeon who arrived in Quebec City from Germany in the 1780s. Both brothers distinguished themselves as officers in the militia of Lower Canada during the War of 1812. In particular, Louis-Théodore carried out several sensitive missions for the Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief, Sir George Prévost, and his private secretary, Dominick Daly.

At the end of the War, both brothers were awarded land grants, and René chose lot D in Concession D of the Rideau Front of Nepean Township (the area now bounded by Rideau Street, Waller Street. Laurier Avenue and the Rideau River). On his death in 1831, the land passed to Louis-Théodore, by then a prosperous notary and successful businessman in Québec, with continued close ties to Daly, now Provincial Secretary (in effect "minister of everything") for Lower Canada.

Although the property was immediately south of the townsite of Bytown, laid out by Lt-Col John By in 1826 when he began work on the Rideau Canal, Louis-Théodore did not take real interest in his new land until 1838, when he named William Stewart, a merchant and long-time resident of Bytown, as his new agent.

Stewart had the property surveyed into "Besserer Place", a name that was used alongside Sandy Hill as late as the 1920s. He extended the north-south streets of Lowertown south into the property and laid out five new east-west streets, which after consultation with Besserer, were named Besserer, for the owner, Daly, for Besserer's patron Dominick Daly, Stewart, for the agent, Wilbrod, for Besserer's eldest son Louis-Wilbrod,

and Theodore, for Besserer himself. (Theodore was later renamed Laurier Avenue when the Laurier Bridge was built over the Canal). To appeal to a better class of buyer, the lots were 66' wide rather than the 50' standard in other neighbourhoods.

NOTICE.

S HEREBY GIVEN, to all whom it may Concern, that the title to the piece of ground lately enclosed upon the SANDY HILL, "RESSERER PLACE" Bytown, and intended to be used as a Cemetery, is in the undersigned,—that he has given no authority to any one to use it for the above purpose, and that he is about Commencing an action to recover Possession of the Same. The Publicare Cantioned against Causing or allowing any Interments to be made therein.

LOUIS THEODORE BESSERER.

Quebec, 29, Dec. 1840.

Notice in the Bytown Gazette 1841-01-14 [posted on <u>bytown.net</u> "Sandy Hill"]

Stewart did his best to collect rents and clear off the squatters and other uses that stood in the way of urban development. The most controversial of these actions was the displacement of the Roman Catholic cemetery on Rideau Street, which stood on land granted by René-Léonard in 1830, but blocked the extension of Friel Street (then called Gloucester) into Besserer's lands. Despite these ef-

forts, few lots were sold, as existing areas were sufficient for what remained only a village of 1,300 residents. (Eliot 1991, p 90, Taylor 1986, app I).

In the face of business set-backs in Québec City and the death of his wife, Besserer retired from his notarial practice and moved his still-young family to Bytown in 1845. With his fine new stone house on King Street (now King Edward Avenue) at Daly Avenue he gave his attention to the development of his property.

Bytown grew substantially in the 1840s, but the real boom came in the 1850s with the signing of a free-trade agreement with the United States. New mills at the Rideau Falls and the Chaudière began producing a river of softwood lumber to feed the explosive growth of Boston and New York. However, Besserer's fortunes really changed with the Province's decision in 1858 to move the capital to Ottawa (as it had now been renamed). While Sandy Hill was too far away from the mills to attract either workers or owners, it offered government officials large lots on well-drained high land, within easy walking distance of their new offices. As the Government's actual move in 1865 in-

volved only 300 people, sales were still slow, but now steady. (DCB; RO inst RO4735; Eliot 1991 pp 88-92; bytown.net "Sandy Hill")¹.

Chapel Court, 1863-69

George-Édouard Desbarats² articled as a barrister, but chose in 1861 to join the family printing business, based in Québec and Montréal. The Desbarats had long been law printers to the Province of Lower Canada, and after the Union to the new Province of Canada.

To prepare for the pending move of the Provincial Government to Ottawa, Desbarats bought land on the south-east corner of Sparks and O'Connor Streets to house his printing works and a boarding house. This may seem an odd combination to us, but it was a sound business decision. In the days before refrigeration and labour-saving devices made it possible to live without paid or unpaid domestic help, boarding, whether with a family or in a boardinghouse, was an essential service for all unmarried people.

For his own family, Desbarats in 1862 bought four lots in Sandy Hill (lots 31-32 Besserer South and 31-32 Daly North) from Richard Scott (later Sir Richard), longtime local businessman and politician: Besserer had borrowed against his land, and these lots, like many others, had been seized for debt. The Desbarats built themselves a large stone house, "Chapel Court", where they could entertain local society, businessmen and government officials, as well as the politicians who flocked into town for the few weeks that Parliament met each year.

Desbarats' role as Queen's Printer, contractor for all of the new Federal Government's printing, lasted less than two years. In April 1868 Thomas D'Arcy McGee, Father of Confederation and M.P. for Montréal was assassinated outside Desbarats' Sparks

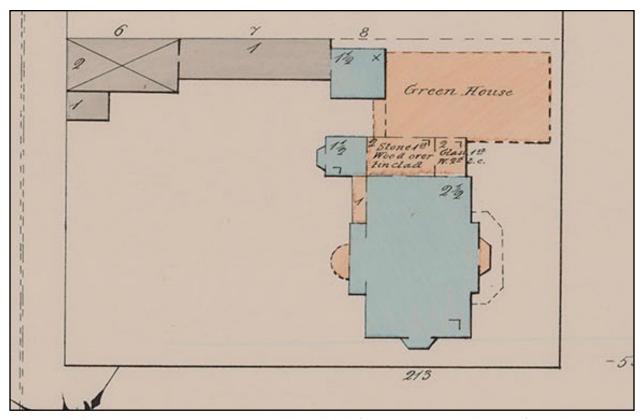
¹ For the key to abbreviations in the references, please see the beginning of the "Sources for more information" section below.

² A mixed English and French given name was not unusual in Québec at the time, cf George-Étienne Cartier.



Winterholme in 1873, the north side photographed from Besserer Street across the carriage drive and lawn. The greenhouse can be seen to the left, but the stables and sheds (also to the left) are out of sight. Despite several additions, this remained the "front" side of the house until it was converted to flats in the 1920s and the land next to Besserer Street sold off. At that time the porch was demolished and this door made into a window. [LAC PA-026478, cropped]

Street boarding house. Despite anonymous threats, Desbarats marked the site with a memorial plaque. In January 1869 as the Desbarats were hosting a ball at Chapel Court in honour of the new Governor-General, Sir John Young (later Baron Lisgar), word came that the printing works and boarding house were ablaze. The fire, like the assassination, was blamed on the Fenians, a secret society that waged terrorist attacks in support of Irish independence. Desbarats decided to abandon his government contract and focus on the firm's growing commercial printing and publishing business. He moved his family to Montréal and in February 1870 sold Chapel Court to Sandford Fleming. Desbarats continued to prosper in Montréal, pioneering the printing of newspapers and magazines illustrated with photographs rather than woodcuts and engravings, and expanding his operations into the United States. (DCB; Gwyn 1984 pp 104-109; RO instrument CR-4771)



Winterholme in 1878: the top is east. The stone house (blue) faces Besserer Street (on the left), with wooden porches front and rear. The greenhouse now connects to the house through a lower wing of stone and tin-clad wood, and is flanked by a second stone-built pavilion (perhaps housing the boiler for the greenhouse?). The wall between the two-storey and one-storey sheds on Besserer Street is roughly on the present property line between 394 and 410 Besserer Street. [Fire Insurance Map of 1878]

Winterholme and the Flemings, 1870-1925

Sir Sandford Fleming was one of the energetic polymaths who in the later nineteenth century considered Canada their base and the whole British Empire their stage. Indeed, he may be the only one of those leaders of Canadian science, engineering, education, literature, music and religion who is still remembered by the general public.

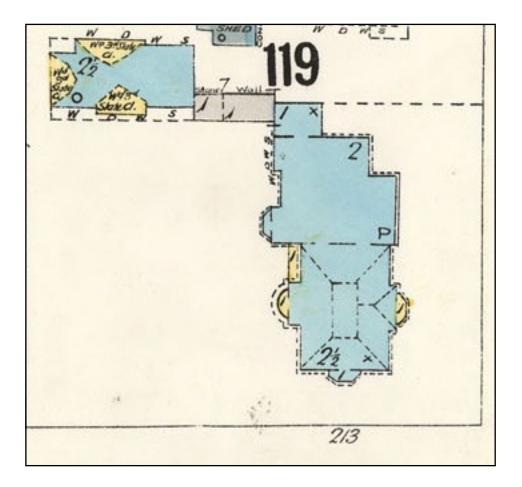
By 1870 Fleming, then 43 years old, decided that it would be convenient to follow the new Federal Government to Ottawa. Although a self-employed civil engineer, Fleming was serving at that time as Chief Engineer for construction of the Intercolonial Railway to connect Ontario and Quebec with Halifax. In addition, he had already begun a series of campaigns to lobby governments on behalf of worthy causes: a railway to the Red River and then the Pacific, Standard Time, Imperial Federation, a Pacific cable to Australia and New Zealand, Queen's University, and the professionalization of engineering.

Fleming accordingly moved his family, his wife Ann and their nine children and other assorted relatives, from Toronto into Chapel Court. As the family spent summers at a house in Halifax, Fleming renamed the house "Winterholme". The Flemings, with their wealth and connections to government, business, and the professional world in Canada, the Empire and the United States, used their formal drawing room and dining room, library and ballroom to entertain local Society and visiting international celebrities.

As built by the Desbarats, the house faced Besserer Street, and was accessed by a drive from Chapel Street (when door-to-door mail delivery was introduced in the 1870s, the house was briefly numbered 191 Chapel, then renumbered 213). A fashionable conservatory (greenhouse) was attached to the east end, where Fleming raised roses. A row of sheds and stables, necessary when cooking and heating needed wood and coal, backed onto the east property line, running from the greenhouse to Besserer Street. As this line was 20' east of the present line between 394 and 410 Besserer Street, the stables were largely on the present site of 410 Besserer, but a small shed occupied part of the present site of 394. The rest was lawn.

Fleming rebuilt and extended the house and its outbuildings almost continously. Between 1873 and 1878 two stone pavilions were built to flank the north side of the greenhouse (perhaps to house new boilers for the greenhouse?) and a second storey of tin-clad wood added to the pavilion between the conservatory and the house. In 1891 Fleming bought additional land east of the existing house: lots 33-34 Besserer South, and 12' of lot 33 Daly North. An extension to the eastern pavilion was built on the 12' strip of land, while part of the low wing connecting the house and greenhouse was demolished. The stables were also razed and replaced with a new coach-house facing

Besserer Street. The coach house was demolished in 1907 to make room for construction of 410 Besserer Street, but a new single-storey shed was built to connect the two houses. Sometime between 1901 and 1912, the greenhouse was demolished and replaced with a two-storey stone addition (still in place today). (RO instrument CR35726, Fire Insurance Maps of 1901, 1912)



The Fleming Estate in 1912 (top is east). A two-storey addition has replaced the former greenhouse. The new house at 410 Besserer Street is connected to Winterholme by a pair of one-storey sheds. The wooden sunporch added to the west side of 410 Besserer in 1910 can be seen. The fence (dotted line) at upper right is 12' east of the fence shown in the plan of 1878. The site of 394 is now entirely lawn [Fire Insurance Map of 1912]

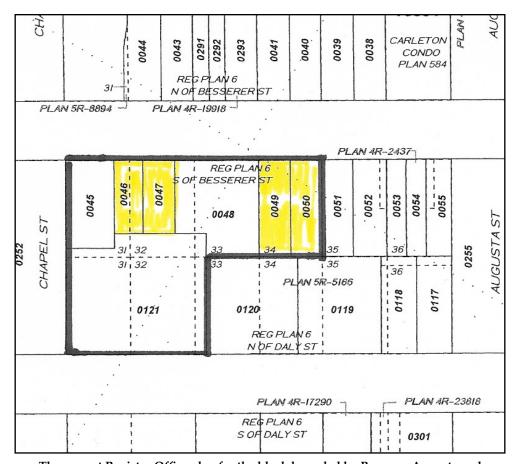
Division of the Fleming Estate, 1906-1933

Sir Sandford began the division of his Ottawa property in 1906, giving lot 34 on Besserer Street, site of the present 422 and 424 Besserer, to his son Walter. In 1907 he carved out a second lot, site of the present 410-412 Besserer Street, for his son Hugh and conveyed Winterholme itself and the remaining property in trust to his four survivingsons (Walter, Hugh, and Sandford in Ottawa and Frank in Toronto). Fleming, eighty years old by this point, continued to spend winters in Ottawa and summers in Halifax right up until his death in June 1915. (DCB; RO insts 82502, 82503, 101144)

Walter, a civil engineer like his father, never made use of his property before moving to Kingston sometime before 1926. In 1920 he mortgaged it to his sister Lily Exshaw, then living in Scotland, and sold the lot to her for the mortgage value in 1923. Lily in turn disposed of the still vacant lot to Albert W Davidson in 1930. (RO insts 157430, 169698, 200299; CD)

Hugh, a medical doctor, built the substantial stone house that still stands at 410-412 Besserer Street. In 1910 he asked his father for a further 10' strip on the west side of his lot in order to add a sun-porch. Sir Sandford agreed, but never registered this transfer. A title search in 1927 uncovered the problem that the land under the sunporch at 410 Besserer was still owned by the Fleming Estate, and that the Estate had also built a garage that encroached on the backyard of 410. All parties agreed to a mutual transfer of lands, the Estate receiving a further 10' strip at the back of 410 Besserer, and the owners of 410 Besserer receiving most of the 10' strip promised in 1910. (RO insts 164359, 164461, 196498; Census of 1901; Journal 1913-07-12)

Hugh tried to sell or rent 410 as early as 1916, finally selling in 1921 to Mrs. Clarissa Ami, who gave it to her daughter and son-in-law Marguerite and Robert Slater. The Slaters converted the house into flats, as it has remained ever since. (RO inst 164359, 164461, 196499, 268697, CD)



The current Registry Office plan for the block bounded by Besserer, Augusta and Chapel Streets and Daly Avenue, showing the Property Identification Numbers. The heavy line shows the extent of the Fleming property after the additions of 1891. The yellow shading shows the properties sold to A.W. Davidson in 1930 (49-50) and 1932 (46-47). Parcel 48 is 410/412 Besserer Street, given to Hugh Fleming in 1907. Parcel 47 is 494 Besserer Street. The corner of parcel 48 was cut out in 1927 to make room for a garage built behind Winterholme.

With the death of Sir Sandford in 1915, Hugh arranged to turn Winterholme itself into the "Sir Sandford Fleming Convalescent Home" for wounded soldiers returning home from the Great War. This was the first such facility in Ottawa, operated under the oversight of the Federal Government's Military Hospitals Commission, but furnished and funded entirely by local charities and staffed by volunteers trained by the Voluntary Aid Detachment, a charity jointly sponsored by the Red Cross and the St John Ambulance. Opened officially in February 1916 by the Governor-General, Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught, the home provided medical care and vocational training to upwards of 80 inmates at any time. Efforts to sign a long-term lease with the Federal Gov-

ernment failed in 1920 because of a dispute among the children over ownership of the Estate, and the Hospital is last recorded in 1921. (CMHC blog; Note on the MHC on LAC <u>collections.ca</u>; Journal 1915-12-16,1916-01-06, 1916-02-01, 1918-01-23, 1920-07-20, 1921-03-01)

In 1924 the three remaining brothers transferred their Trust to the Royal Trust Company, executors of the rest of Sandford Fleming's estate. Only then did the Estate begin to sell the remainder of the property. In 1927 the Trustees sold a lot 50' x 90' at the corner of Besserer and Chapel Streets (site of the present 203 Chapel Street) to Madame Marie Charlebois. The deed specified that the property was to be used "for only a single detached brick or stone dwelling, with suitable outbuildings for a dwelling of its class" and that while a medical doctor could use the house for private practice, no in-patients were to be allowed! Mme Charlebois sold in 1936 to Leon and Beckie Petegorsky, whose company, L Petegorsky Realty, later bought Chapel Court itself. (RO insts 155089, 162402, 187820, 220140)

In 1932 the Estate sold the remaining property facing Besserer Street to Albert W Davidson for \$2,800. The property line set in the 1927 agreement with the owners of 410 Besserer was carried westward, resulting in a lot that was 61' wide but only 75' deep. (RO inst 207492)

The Estate continued to own Winterholme itself, converting it into the "Chapel Court Apartments". The house was turned around: the main door on the north side was made into a window, two new doors with porches were added to the Daly Avenue side of the post-1901 addition, and dormered balconies were opened out of the attic storey. The shed connecting Winterholme and 410 Besserer was demolished and a detached garage built. It was only in 1962 that the Fleming Estate sold the building to the Petegorskys of 203 Chapel Street. (RO inst 445347; CD; Fire Insurance Map of 1956).

Albert W Davidson builds 392, 394, 422, 424 Besserer

Albert Wesley Davidson was once a well-known Ottawa builder. As late as the 1950s houses for sale were advertised as "built by Wesley Davidson, a guarantee of sound construction". More recently the real estate world has chosen to focus on one of his competitors, David Younghusband.

Davidson was born in 1884, one of the ten children of Andrew and Margaret Davidson of Merivale, in Nepean Township. By 1905 he was buying and selling land and building houses, though perhaps as a sideline. When conscription was introduced after the bitter Wartime election of 1917, Davidson registered as a "farmer-builder". He was granted an exemption to call-up until 1 May, 1918, but denied the permanent exemption automatically given to those working on the land. By 1921 he was back in business in Ottawa, living with relatives on Woodbine Place in Ottawa South. After marriage, sometime in the 1920s, he and his wife Gertrude moved to City View and later to Ruskin Street near Parkdale and Carling, where he died in 1970. (Census of 1921, Journal 1895-12-06, 1905-01-05, 1917-12-31, 1935-06-01, 1970-09-08).

As background, until the 1950s, a developer, like the Besserer family in Sandy Hill, did no more than mark out lots and perhaps grade the streets. Lots were usually $50' \times 100'$, or double what was considered the standard size. The developer often sold directly to a prospective resident or landlord, who then contracted with a builder for the construction of a house on each half of the lot, or a pair of semi-detached houses or a row of three townhouses on the full lot.

Increasingly, a builder would buy a selection of lots scattered across popular subdivisions, build a few houses "on spec" as examples of his work, or for those who wanted a house at once, and sell the remaining single or double lots along with a contract to build a house to the design chosen by the purchaser. The builder had a number of plans purchased from different architects or other sources³, and the contract would

³ E.g., after 1919 the Province offered a number of house plans recommended as "modern and efficient".



Real estate ad for a Davidson house, [Journal 13 December 1953]

specify details and finish to suit the buyer. This practice allowed the builder to conduct business with a minimum of capital. It also meant that more than one builder might use the same design. A look at Davidson's houses on the block of Besserer between Chapel and Augusta (392, 394, 422, 423, 424 and 425) will show that they are all variations on the same floor plan, though with different colours of exterior finish, different roof styles, porch designs and window treatments. Equally, Younghusband and other builders often used the same plans.

Once an area began to build up, the municipality and private utilities would install services, imposing a "frontage charge"

on houses as they were built (a fee for each foot of frontage on the street, payable as a lump sum or in annual instalments amortized over a number of years). By the late 1940s the growing debt required to service new suburbs began to weigh on municipalities. As a solution they began requiring the builder to install these services when the house was built, which pushed the debt load onto the developer but also made traditional piecemeal building uneconomic. The requirement for more capital drove most small builders out of the City or out of business. The last record of a Davidson sale was in 1951. (Journal 1951-06-14)

Davidson was active in Sandy Hill during the 1920s.and 30s. On Besserer Street alone he built 423 and 425 in 1929, 422 and 424 in 1930, and houses in other locations on the street in 1931, 1937 and 1938. In May 1932 he bought the remaining land facing Besserer Street from the Fleming Estate, and split it into two lots. He mortgaged the western lot and used the proceeds to build 392 Besserer Street as a speculation, selling

the house and land together in May 1933 to Gérard Dupuis, a druggist, for \$7,000. (RO insts 207492, 207907, 209735; Journal 1929-09-05, 1931-08-06, 1937-10-28, 1938-02-04)

The eastern lot (the site of 394 Besserer) was sold vacant in February 1933 to Leon Fine for \$3,600, almost certainly along with a contract to build the house. The City's recent draft Sandy Hill Heritage survey (2007-2010) describes the house as "typical of many houses built in the 1930s...characterized by its square form, hipped roof and variegated brick. The front facade has an Arts and Crafts stylistic influence with its asymmetrically-sloped roof at the gable end and arched front door". (RO inst 209468; SHHS)

Leon Fine and Samuel Taller at 394 Besserer, 1933-1963

Leon Fine was born Riven Leib Fain in 1886 in Hertsa, near Czernowitz, capital of the Bukovina, one of the "crown lands", or major components, of the Austrian Empire. A centre of Yiddish, German, Romanian and Ukrainian culture, Czernowitz was subsequently part of Romania, then the U.S.S.R. and is now Chernivsti, Ukraine.

Leon arrived in Canada in 1907 and was certainly in Ottawa by 1910. He married Rachel (sometimes Rae) Feller in Ottawa that July. As Rachel had landed in Portland, Maine only months earlier, giving her final destination as Ottawa, it's quite possible that they had met in the old country. In the marriage registry, both Leon and Rachel gave their country of birth as "Romania". (Census 1921, Carleton County marriage register, 1910)

1910 was also the year that Leon opened his first clothing store, possibly at 186 Rideau Street⁴. Although his assets were seized and auctioned off in bankruptcy in 1915, he re-opened at 250 Rideau Street, and his business seems to have recovered quickly. In

⁴ Fine's advertisements always celebrated anniversary sales from 1910. There is a small newspaper ad from 2 September 1910 for C.L. Finn at 186 Rideau St - a possible misprint? especially as the ad emphasizes that credit is available.





Typical ads for Fine's store, from March 1924 (left) and 1930 (above).

September 1925 he moved across the street to 183 Rideau, where his business stayed until it closed in the 1970s. Rachel's four brothers also ended up as clothing merchants in Ottawa.

Starting in 1924 Fine began advertising heavily, with almost daily ads in the newspapers - an unusual practice for a small merchant. Fine promoted his business as a fashionable store for ladies and gentlemen, emphasizing that credit was available. Timothy Eaton had revolutionized Canadian retailing in the 19th Century by demanding cash on purchase. It was only after the First World War that some merchants began offering installment buying (paying monthly after delivery) and lay-away (paying monthly before delivery, thus technically avoiding debt). At the same time, merchants who offered credit had to overcome the attitude that buying on credit was like mortgaging the homestead: shameful, and a sign of profligacy or at best of crisis.

In his "twentieth anniversary sale" ads in 1930, Fine noted "as little as \$2.50 down and six months to pay!" With the continued Depression by the end of the year he was advertising a special period of "no money down, credit on your terms", and later "95¢ down" became standard. In November 1943, he was fined under the Wartime Prices and Trade Regulations, which clamped down on consumer credit to ensure all

available funds flowed towards payment for the War. He then ran the same ads with the notice "credit subject to government regulations."



The staff of Jacob Freedman's wholesale grocery with Leon Fine (second from left), ca 1940. Freedman's was located at the corner of George St and the By Ward Market (present location of EQ3 Furniture). The Ottawa branch of Cassidy's, a Montréal-based supplier to hotels and restaurants, was upstairs at 43 George Street. [Ottawa Jewish Archives, photo no 1-577-01, cropped]

Fine's ads also point to other differences between the retail world "then" and "now". When Leon opened business in 1910, shopping hours were the same as office hours: 9 am to 6 pm Monday to Saturday. When offices began closing at 1 pm on Saturday, stores also closed early: it was next to impossible for any employed person to shop for themselves. In 1932 Fine's advertised that it was open all-day on Saturdays. Fines employed both regular and casual staff, but relied on experienced full-time employees. Recruiting ads from the 1940s and 1950s noted benefits such as Blue Cross (medical insurance). In 1943 Fine's became one of the many Rideau Street merchants who closed Mondays in July and August so that employees had a two-day weekend in the summer, a practice that lasted in downtown Ottawa into the 1970s.

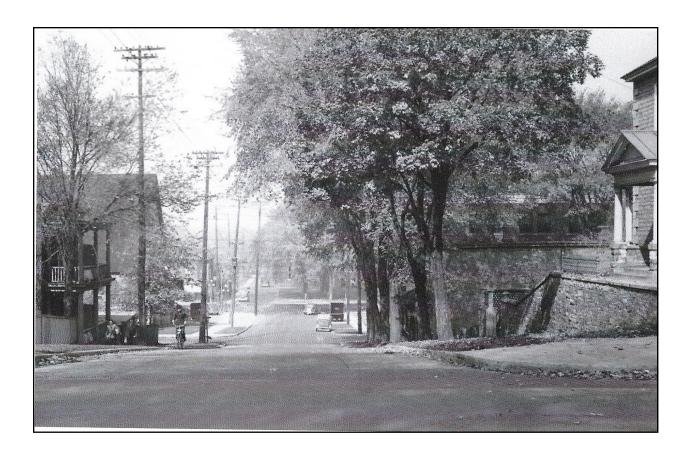
In April 1952 Leon retired and sold L. Fine and Company to Feller Brothers, Limited, the company owned by his wife's nephews. As a sign of the "goodwill" attached to the name, the new owners continued to operate the store as "Fine's" for over 20 years.

With changing times, the store placed its last print advertisement emphasizing credit in December 1957 ("first aid for Santas short of cash!") and began emphasizing savings and value for money. Print advertising virtually ended in 1959, after which it was restricted to subscribing to shared advertisements for products, such as Forsyth shirts, or for shared services such as stamps for free parking at the new garage at Nicholas and Besserer Streets, or the 10¢ shoppers bus at Christmas. The store is last mentioned in 1973, when it and other Feller stores closed to mark the funeral of Solomon Feller, junior, brother of Mrs. Fine. It is not certain when the store closed, but the City bought and renovated the property as a heritage building and sold it in 1979 to the local franchisee of Shoppers Drug Mart (it is now a Dollarama).

As well as his business, Leon also bought and sold property (as did many people in the days when there were no mutual funds and the stock market was unregulated), and seems to have held shares in Eastview Bus Lines, owned by his neighbour Leon Petegorsky, which operated public transit to Eastview (now Vanier) and Rockcliffe before 1950.

Leon and Rachel lived in what was then the heart of Ottawa's Jewish community, and also close to other clothing merchants like the Caplans, Dovers, Slovers and Lithwicks. Rachel is frequently mentioned in the press as hostess or organizer of social and charitable events for neighbours and for groups such as Hadassah and the National Council of Jewish Women. Rachel was also involved in the founding in 1930 of the Jewish Women's Liberal Club, which organized support for the Federal Liberal Party.

As an established merchant, Fine canvassed and volunteered for City-wide causes like the Patriotic Fund and the Community Chest (fore-runner of the United Way), as well as Jewish community causes and services. Leon was active in the Hebrew Benefit Society and its "helping hand fund", serving as President in 1936 and 1937. Before Provincial government guarantees enabled the insurance industry to offer medical insurance, "friendly societies" like this, which paid funeral expenses, offered small pensions



The neighbourhood when 394 Besserer Street was built: King Edward Avenue looking north from Daly Avenue, 1938. Besserer house at right, old Ottawa Little Theatre (former Eastern United Church) on the left. [Photo published in *Transforming Ottawa*, p 236. Source: Library and Archives Canada, Department of Public Works fonds e 019343829].

in cases of sickness or disability and sometimes provided nursing care, were an essential part of society. Leon also helped organize a Zionist association in Ottawa in 1932, and served on its executive for many years. (Journal 1916-02-20, 1919-03-18, 1930-05-28, 1932-02-13)

As well a house in the City, the Fines had a summer home at Britannia. In 1933 they made the still long and arduous journey to visit the Holy Land. Leon gave an illustrated lecture on the trip to a Hadassah meeting in 1934.

The Fines do not appear to have made any major changes to 394 Besserer Street from the time they moved in in 1933, but they did build the detached garage sometime before 1948. In 1957 they sold the house to Samuel and Bessie Taller, and moved to an apartment at 240 Stewart Street, where they were still living in 1972. By 1979 they were

living at Hillel Lodge, where Leon celebrated his 93rd birthday on 28 August 1979. Rachel died two months later, and Leon in 1982. (RO inst 369190, City file)

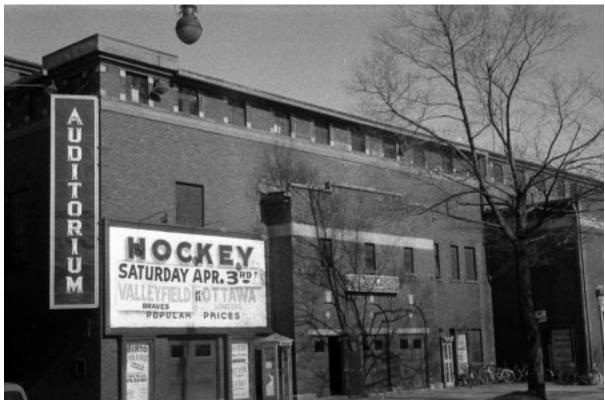
Samuel Taller was born in Ottawa about 1915, the son of Hyman and Eva Taller, recent immigrants from the Russian Empire. The 1921 Census records Hyman, a cabinet-maker, Eva and their three children (Jack, Samuel and Carol) living at 492 St. Patrick Street.⁵

Sam married Bessie Cantor from Boston in July 1939 at the old Talmud Torah Hall at 121 George Street (now the parking lot at the corner of George and Dalhousie Streets). The wedding was attended by Bessie's family as well as guests from Montréal, New York and San Francisco. The new couple settled at 721 Albert Street, and Samuel and Bessie operated "Taller's Cut-rate Meats", a butcher and sundries shop at 723-725 Albert Street (on the north side just east of Booth Street, demolished along with the rest of Lebreton Flats in the 1960s). In 1945 or 1946 Samuel moved the family to a duplex at 84 Friel Street, where they lived in one apartment and rented out the other. (CD; VL 1945, 1949-1963, Journal 1939-07-31, 1944-05-20)

Sometime before 1955 Sam sold his business and took a job as the manager of maintenance for the Ottawa Auditorium ("The Aud"), eventually becoming over-all manager. After the First World War, various groups promoted a civic centre, auditorium and concert hall as a War Memorial, but the City was unwilling to raise the taxes necessary to fund such a big project. A group of businessmen associated with the Ottawa Electric Railway, who were also managers of the Ottawa Hockey Association, promoted a private company to build the Auditorium, on Argyle Avenue at O'Connor Street (the present location of the YM/YWCA). Opened in December 1923 the centre contained both a 7,500-seat arena and a 750-seat concert hall with its own grand piano. The arena featured something entirely new - a rink with artificial ice from December to March, a season judged to be at least three weeks longer than that possible on natural ice.

In 1959, Samuel was caught up in a police crackdown on charity bingos, charged with various gambling offences after the Aud was rented by a Veterans' association to hold a bingo to raise funds for crippled children. It's not clear what was the actual issue

⁵ The Census-taker misspellt the name as "Tallar". The Census also records another Samuel Taller, born in 1912, living with his parents (Jacob and Ethyl) in Mechanicsville.



The Ottawa Auditorium, date unknown. [via Google]

at question, or how it was resolved, but the charges were transferred from Samuel to a representative of the owners before the trial took place. (Citizen 1960-01-21; Journal 1960-04-23)

By 1960 the Aud arena was in sad shape, and the concert hall had long been converted into a dance hall. The YM/YWCA bought it as a site for replacement of their two existing buildings at the corner of Metcalfe and Laurier. Samuel left the Aud at this point, describing himself in 1963 as a "merchant", and later going to work at the Ottawa Board of Education. The Aud itself survived a few more years: after concern over the loss of the City's only large hockey arena, the Y kept it open until the City opened the Civic Centre at Lansdowne Park in 1967. (CD, VL 1963, 1980)

Before moving into 394, the Tallers hired a builder named René Goulet to make major renovations. In the kitchen they installed new cupboards and flooring and built in a breakfast table and bench. A wall pierced by an archway dividing the living and dining rooms was removed and partially replaced with a modern birch-wood console with glass shelving. The closet in the master bedroom was enlarged, and a finished rec room



394 Besserer Street in the context of the south side of Besserer Street looking east from Chapel Street, February 2006. [Ron J Roy for the draft Sandy Hill Heritage Study]

with wet bar and ensuite washroom was installed in the basement. Sometime later they added a deck at the back, angled to fit allow passage into the backyard between the deck and garage. (City File)

Later Years, after 1962

After only four years of residence, the Tallers moved and put the house up for sale. It appears that while waiting for the house to sell, they rented it to the newly married couple of Hyman and Marlene Burack. When the house sold in 1963, the Buracks moved to an apartment on Meadowlands Drive. However, the new owner, Hédard Robichaud, a long-time New Brunswick M.P. who served as Minister of Fisheries in Lester Pearson's governments of 1963-1968, did not plan to live in the house, and the Buracks

were soon back in residence, buying the house in 1965 with help from a mortgage from Marlene's parents. (VL 1962, 1963, CD, RO insts 460356, 493625).

Marlene Zelikovitz, a native of Ottawa, went to Montréal to train as a Registered Nurse at the Jewish General Hospital. In Montréal she met Hyman Burack, a businessman and recent commerce grad from Sir George Williams University (later absorbed by Concordia University). They married in 1962 at Beth Shalom synagogue on Chapel Street at Rideau (closed and demolished in 2015) and made their home in Ottawa. Hyman continued in business, while Marlene raised the family and worked with the City's Department of Social Services, eventually becoming office manager. Marlene was also active in the National Council of Jewish Women, serving on the Board of the Ottawa branch, and ran her own business for a few years.⁶

The Buracks replaced the deck (eliminating the angled edge) and added the small mudroom at the back door in 1979. They, or possibly the subsequent owner, also installed central air conditioning, added a bedroom in the basement and did some finishing work to the room in the attic. (City File)

In 2007 the property was reviewed for the draft Sandy Hill Heritage Study. The Study rated the house as "group 3", i.e. of no special heritage value, but typical of dwellings in the neighbourhood and compatible with the other houses on the block. The rating gave high marks for architectural integrity, and moderate marks for development context, stylistic detail and community context. The reviewer noted that some windows (presumably the new window in the front gable) and the roofing material were not in keeping with the originals.

In 2009 the Buracks sold 394 Besserer to Linda Smail-Crevier, who may have carried out some of the renovations listed above. In 2011 she resold it to the present owner, Michael Galway, a professional engineer at the National Research Council.

⁶ We were unable to contact Mrs Burack, although she still lives in the City.

Appendix 1: 394 Besserer in the News

Traffic Court

For failing to stop at a red light: J. A. Pounder, 82 Ossington avenue; \$4 and costs.

For travelling the wrong way on a one-way street: W. J. Noffke, 255 Harmer avenue; Henri Masson, 70 Spruce street; \$4 and costs.

For obstructing traffic: Kenneth Paynter, 130 Fairmount avenue; \$4 and costs.

For failing to stop at a through street: Levi Thoms, 116 Strathcona avenue; \$4 and costs.

For parking offences: Leon Fine, 394 Besserer street; V. C. Holt, 865 Bronson avenue; Bernard Dorion, 335 Booth street; Lawrence Butler, 268 Powell avenue; Eric Hehner, 40 Julian avenue; Cecil Morphy, Rockcliffe; \$2 and costs.

LOST AND FOUND.

DOLL CARRIAGE and doll lost from 394 Besserer. 4-2964.

Couple Honored.

Honoring Miss Rose Miller and Samuel Friedman, Phm. B., whose marriage takes place this month, Mr. and Mrs. Leon Fine and Mr. and Mrs. Harold Leikin entertained at dinner on Sunday evening at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Fine, 394 Besserer street.

The popular couple were presented with some lovely silver flatware from Mr. and Mrs. Fine and Mr. and Mrs. Leikin.

Covers were laid for 10, the table being daintily adorned with white brocaded linen and centred with a crystal bowl of yellow baby chrysanthemums.

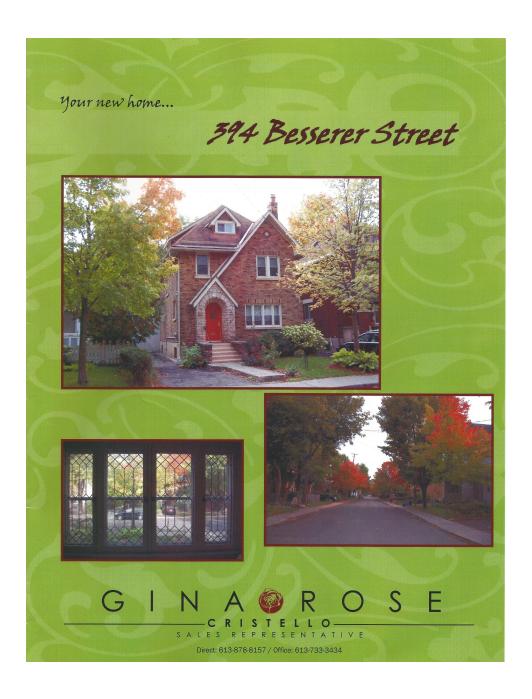
Newspaper articles mentioning 394 Besserer Street, all from the Ottawa Journal:

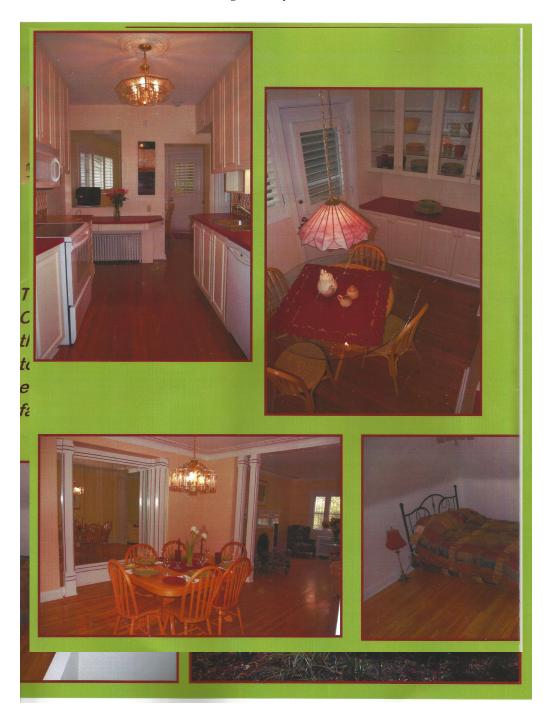
Top left, Traffic Court report of 26 October, 1946

Top right, classified ad of 28 June, 1945

Middle right, Social pages of 7 December, 1936

Appendix 2 - Prospectus for 394 Besserer Street, 2011







Deep Baseboards all lovingly maintained to preserve the history of the home.

- Tastefully renovated kitchen with gorgeous backsplash has tons of storage
- · Bright and Cheerful Breakfast Area
- Stunning main level with high ceilings, gleaming hardwood floors and decorative fireplace
- Arched Entry Door with Air-Lock Entry, French Door and Security Alarm
- Finished basement includes an Entertainment Room, with Wet Bar, Bedroom, 3 Piece Bathroom and Laundry Room
- Large Master bedroom boasts his and hers closets
- Third Floor loft Retreat is perfect for a bedroom or as a place to get away from it all
- Attic Space with built-in wardrobes perfect for additional storage



Lot Size	32.68 x 75
Property Taxes	\$5633.12 / 2010
Heating/Cooling	Radiator Heat With Energy Star Condensing Gas Fired Wall Mounted Combination Boiler, Central Air Conditioning—Hydro Bills Averages Approx \$215 / month
Recent Upgrades	Central Air Conditioning (June 2010); Basement Bedroom; Deck; Roof on Shed; Hardwood in Kitchen and Breakfast Area, Landscaping
Inclusions	Refrigerator, Stove, Freezer, Dishwasher, Built-In Microwave, Washer, Dryer, Light Fixtures, Custom Blinds, Security Alarm. KELLER WILLIAMS

Sources for more information

Abbreviations used in footnotes

CD - City Directories

CMHC - Canadian Museum of Health Care

DCB - Dictionary of Canadian Biography

LAC - Library and Archives Canada

MHC - Military Hospital Commission

RO - Ontario Land Registry Office no 4

VL- Voters Lists for Federal Elections (accessible through <u>ancestry.com</u>)

Sources

Ancestry.com - a database of family-related information from multiple sources (directories, newspapers, census, birth, marriage and death records, etc.) In some cases records (e.g. census, marriage registers) have been posted as a whole, in other cases individuals post information they have come across. Access by subscription. The institutional version can be consulted without charge at the City of Ottawa Archives.

Canadian Museum of Health Care -blog at <u>museumofhealthcare.wordpress.com</u> "Voluntary veil: the Canadian Voluntary Aid Detachment in the First World War".

City Directories - published annually (or more recently biennially) can be consulted on microfilm at the Ottawa Public Library, or in paper at Library and Archives Canada. The Directories list the names of adult residents house-by-house. Older volumes also indicate occupation, sometimes age and relationship, and whether the resident was an owner or renter. Especially in later years, Directory information is not always reliable.

City of Ottawa file on 394 Besserer Street. *A fee (currently \$65) is charged for consultation. Documents can be copied for a further fee. The file currently contains the building permits from 1958 and 1959.*

City of Ottawa "Sandy Hill Heritage Study", draft report June 2010. The Descriptive Sheet for 394 Besserer Street has been included with the electronic version of this document.

Dictionary of Canadian Biography (available online without charge), articles on Louis-Théodore Besserer, George-Édouard Bourinot, Dominick Daly and Sandford Fleming.

Elliott, Bruce Nepean: the City Beyond. Nepean: City of Nepean, 1991 - A history of the former City of Nepean. useful because much of the former City of Ottawa was at some point within the municipality of Nepean, and much of the development of Nepean was an extension of or response to the growth of Ottawa.

Gwyn, Sandra *The Private Capital*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984. Focuses on the personal and home lives of prominent residents of Ottawa from 1865 to 1911, including the Desbarats and Flemings.

Library and Archives Canada. The website <u>collections.ca</u> provides access to those parts of the collection that have been digitized, as well as introductions to their other collections of material.

Miguelez, Alain *Transforming Ottawa*. Ottawa: Old Ottawa Press, 2015 - *Uses a selection of photographs prepared by Public Works in 1937-1938 to discuss the Gréber Plan for Ottawa in the context of contemporary ideas of urban planning*.

Military Hospitals Commission - see introduction provided in Library and Archives Canada collections.ca

Ottawa Citizen - articles from the Ottawa Citizen newspaper are in the Google News Archive, and can be searched through Google, or through a link at the site "ottawahh.com" which provides a better interface.

Ottawa Journal - articles from the former Ottawa Journal newspaper can be searched on Newspapers.com, a subscription-based service which can be consulted without charge at the City of Ottawa Archives and the Ottawa Public Library.

Ontario Land Registry Office 4, Judicial district of Ottawa-Carleton, located at the Court House on Elgin Street. *Abstract records trace all instruments (deeds, mortgages and other contracts) registered against a property. All records before the mid-to-late 1990s can be consulted without charge on microfilm. More recent records are online: instruments can be consulted without charge, but a fee is charged to consult the abstracts.* 394 Besserer is part of lot 32, Besserer Street south, Registered Plan 6. The relevant instruments are:

RO 4735 seizure of the lot for debt, 1850

RO 19712 sale to Georges Desbarats September 22, 1862

CR 4771 sale to Sandford Fleming March 1, 1870

CR 207492 sale of land under 392, 394 Besserer to A.W. Davidson May 13, 1932

CR 209468 sale of lot under 394 Besserer to Leon Fine February 21, 1933

CR 369190 sale to Samuel and Bessie Taller July 17, 1957

CR 460356 sale to Hédard Robichaud May 31, 1963

CR 493265 sale to Marlene Burack May 11, 1965

OC 1939034 sale to Linda Mary Smail-Crevier October 9, 2009

OC 1222913 sale to Michael Galway April 7, 2011

Taylor, John Ottawa, an Illustrated History. Toronto,: Lorimer, 1986 - a work with more of a focus on themes of urban history in Canada that the Elliott history.

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Other Ottawa house histories by Marc Lowell and partners

Available for reference in the Ottawa Public Library Main Branch, Ottawa Room Posted online at http://househistory.tricolour.ca/

"Caplans in the Capital": the Caplan family

Centretown

- 46 Cartier St (former Carmichael Inn and Spa)
- 25 Gilmour St
- 43 Gilmour St (Clarke House)
- 45 Gilmour St (Fagan House)
- 59 Maclaren St (Harris House)
- 660 Maclaren St (available online through johnkingteam.com/blog)
- 18 Queen Elizabeth Driveway (Haydon House)
- 25 Somerset St W (Addams House)
- 300 Somerset St W (Mamma Teresa's Ristorante)
- 110 Waverley St
- 117 Waverley St (available online through johnkingteam.com/blog)

Lowertown

507 and 509 Clarence St

518 Clarence St

524 Clarence St / 102 Wurtemburg St

18 and 20 Rockwood Ave

78 and 80 Wurtemburg St

New Edinburgh

113 Crichton St

Sandy Hill

- 585 Besserer St
- 633 Cumberland Street
- 89 Daly Ave (Gasthaus Switzerland)
- 27 Goulbourn Ave (available online through johnkingteam.com/blog)
- 27 Sweetland Ave (available online through johnkingteam.com/blog)

McKellar

842 Byron Ave