

# Morningstar Mill Has Friends

BY CARLA MACKIE ■ PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF ST. CATHARINES

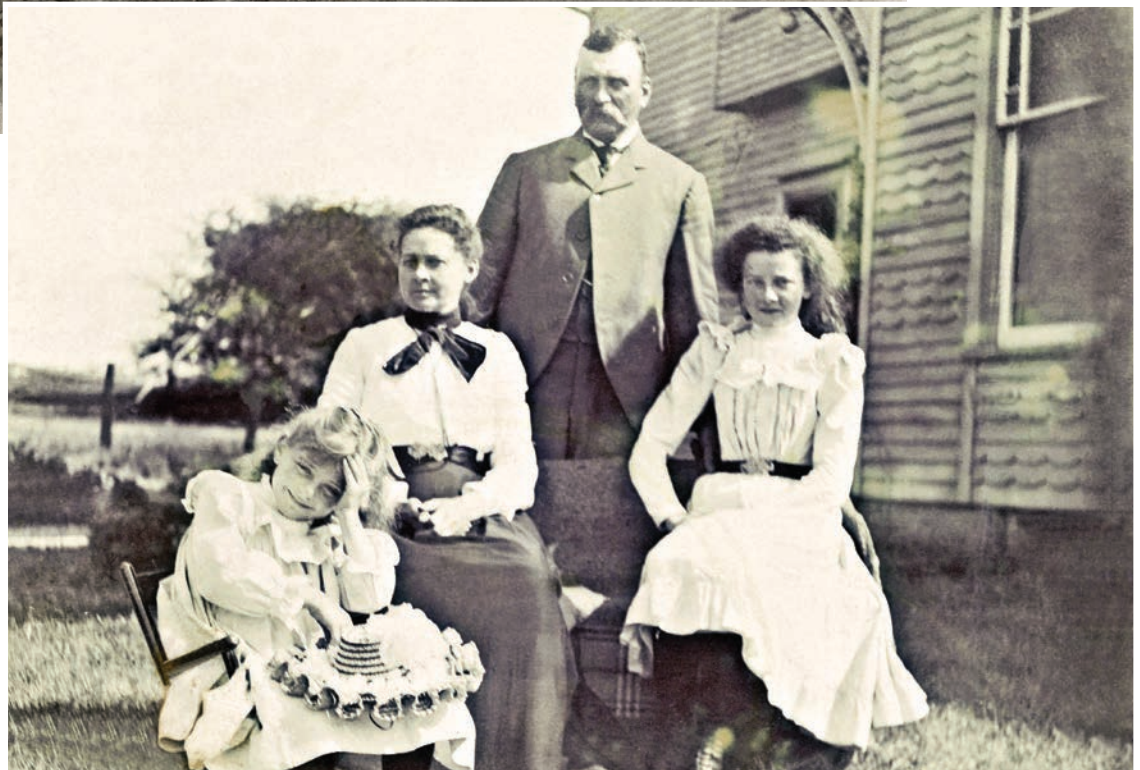
*[Editor's note] The Friends of Morningstar Mill at Decew Falls in St. Catharines are proud to share the story of their historical industrial site. It features a working grist mill built in 1872, a turbine shed, a sawmill, a blacksmith and carpentry shop and the home of the Morningstar family. The mill provides a glimpse back in time to when moving water was used to mechanically grind grain into flour. Today, the operation of the mill and the conservation of the buildings and property are thanks to the City of St. Catharines, the Friends and the community. On some days, you can visit the mill and see grain being milled. For information, call 905 688 6050. Here is some history of the mill site.*







◀ Farmers waiting for their apples to be pressed into cider, c. 1905. PHOTO FROM LORNA ROBSON COLLECTION



▶ Emma and Wilson Morningstar with their daughters, Jessie and Nora, c. 1900. PHOTO FROM LORNA ROBSON COLLECTION

◀ Morningstar Mill is open to the public.

**D**ecew Falls is just as beautiful today as it was over 150 years ago. Mary Kelsey, visiting from Michigan on July 16, 1866, writes that Decew Falls was “one of the most splendid places” she had ever seen, and that the Falls “enraptured” her sight.

Decew Falls is named after John DeCou, an early landowner who settled in the Townships of Thorold and Grantham in about 1788.

During the War of 1812, he served as a lieutenant in the Second Regiment of the Lincoln Militia, and it was to his home that Laura Secord brought news of an impending American attack in June 1813.

After the war, DeCou built a stone grist mill with an overshot waterwheel at Decew Falls. The mill and DeCou’s other businesses prospered and the area became known as Decew Town. The

construction of the first Welland Canal, however, left the mill without an adequate water supply and this prompted DeCou to sell his home and property in 1834. Over the next 30 years, the mill slowly fell into a state of disrepair.

By 1872, Robert Chappell had built a new grist mill at Decew Falls called Mountain Mills, using some of the remaining stone walls of DeCou’s mill. Unlike DeCou’s

mill which had been powered by a waterwheel, Chappell’s mill was powered by a turbine. The turbine is located at the bottom of a 40-foot pit which was blasted out of solid rock beside the falls. A stone dam constructed across Beaverdams Creek formed the mill pond, and an iron pipe directed water from the mill pond to the turbine. The spinning turbine sets the machinery inside the mill in motion.





▲ A pretty place for a summer picnic.

## The Morningstars also had a carpentry shop, blacksmith shop and a “barn, where a team of horses, a cow, chickens and pigs were kept.”

Robert Chappell’s mill was successful from the start; however, in 1875, the City of St. Catharines began work on their new waterworks and Beaverdams Creek was dammed just above Decew Falls. To prevent damage claims for loss of water supply, Mountain Mills was purchased by the St. Catharines Waterworks Commission. With the completion of the third Welland Canal, a consistent flow of water to the mill was restored, and Mountain Mills was sold to Wilson Morningstar, which accounts for the mill’s alternate name today, Morningstar Mill.

Wilson Morningstar operated Mountain Mills from 1883 to 1933. The grist and flour mill is constructed

from locally quarried stone and features a gabled roof with wood shingles. Inside the mill, the wooden floors, beams, grain and flour elevators, and the roller milling equipment date from 1893. The mill features a two-break three-reduction Greey Roller Mill system for making white flour, a grain cleaner, a corn cob sheller, an oat roller, an attrition mill for chopping grain for animal feed, and a traditional millstone which was installed around 1911.

### **Morningstars’ Home**

Decew Falls was also home to the Morningstar family. Wilson’s granddaughter, Lorna, recounts... “On the 3.6 acres of the property, there was more activity than just that at the

saw mill and grist mill... across the stream where the saw mill stood was an orchard of apples, cherries, pears and peaches, and a large vegetable garden.”

The Morningstars also had a carpentry shop, blacksmith shop and a “barn, where a team of horses, a cow, chickens and pigs were kept.” The simple late-Victorian era house, which features scalloped clapboard siding and ball and spindle gingerbread, was built about 1895.

By 1930, Wilson had gradually shut down his flour milling business. After Wilson died in 1933, Wilson’s family continued to produce animal feed occasionally for local farmers until the turbine seized.

Wilson Morningstar and his wife, Emma, occupied

the house throughout their lifetimes. When Wilson died, Wilson’s oldest daughter and her family moved back into the house, and her children, Wilson’s grandchildren, lived in the house until 1991. Wilson’s granddaughter bequeathed the contents of the mill and house to the City of St. Catharines in 1994.

The mill and house are open to the public by appointment or chance. For information on public demonstration milling days, watch the mill’s website, [stcatharines.ca/morningstarmill](http://stcatharines.ca/morningstarmill) or the Morningstar Mill Facebook page. **NEV**

*Carla Mackie is the historical services co-ordinator for the City of St. Catharines.*





▲ Interior of Morningstar Mill showing choppers and the 1911 millstone. On certain days, grain is milled into flour that is available for purchase.

▼ Interior of Mill showing roller milling equipment and grain elevators, part of the 1893 industrial process.

