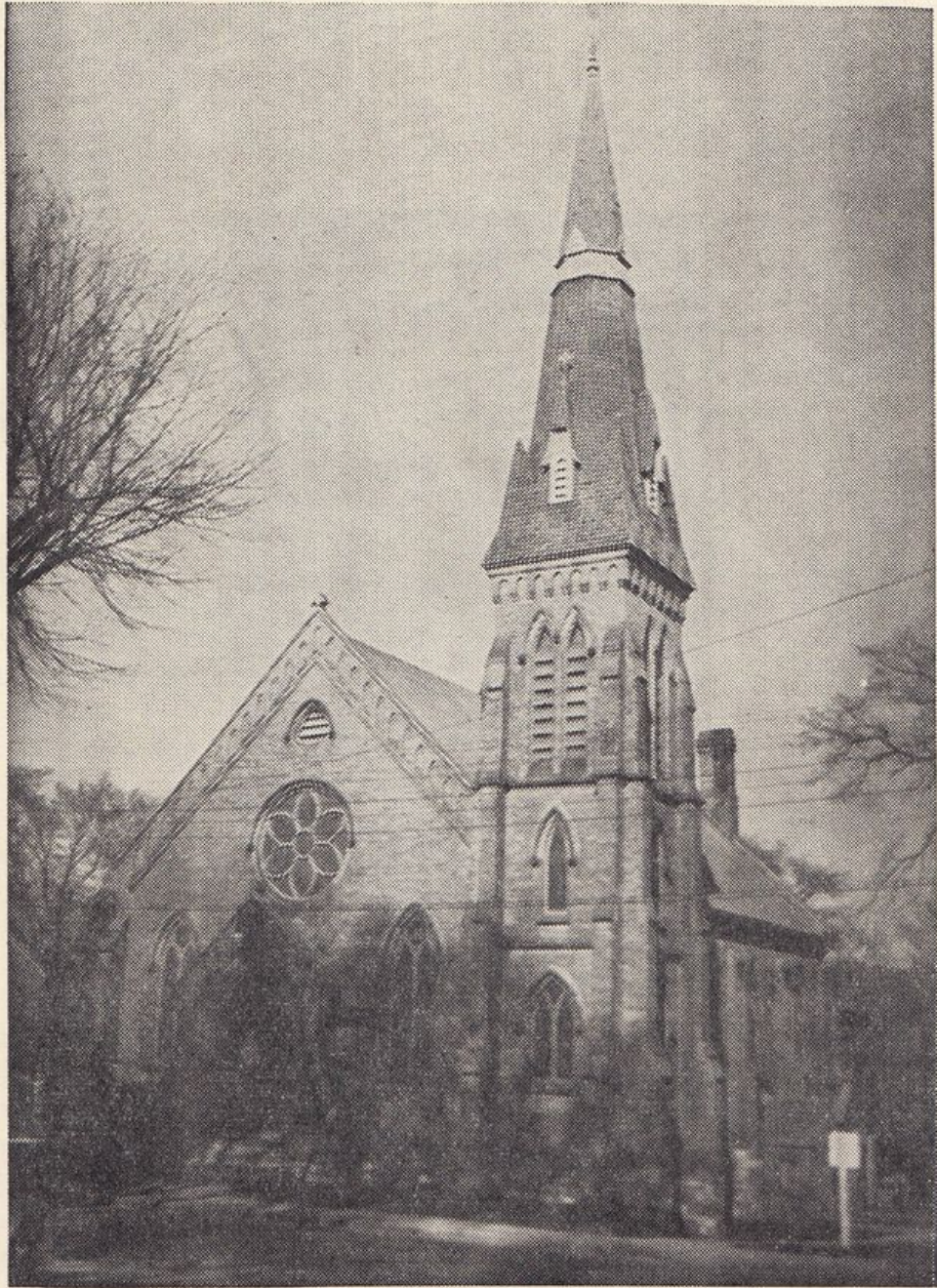


1855

**PORT HOPE
BAPTIST CHURCH**

**A
CENTURY OF
SERVICE**

1955





INTRODUCTION

The Port Hope Baptist Church, now completing a century of Christian and Denominational witness, has been fortunate in many ways. Consecrated hearts and wise minds gave of their best at the time of the Church's organization. Builders with vision and with an eye to architectural correctness were engaged for the erecting of the present fine sanctuary eighty-eight years ago. Probably, the one thing for which we are particularly thankful at this time is that similar care and foresight has been given, over the years, to the preservation of the church's records. The very earliest minutes were entered in books of good binding and those, with their successors, have been kept in a local vault, easily accessible for reference at all times. Such care and foresight have made it a rewarding as well as a delightful task to prepare the brief history of the church which follows.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

The earliest record of the existence of Baptists in the Town of Port Hope was entered in a fine hand on Page One of a well preserved minute book. The date given is June 19th, 1855; the Church Clerk's name, Morice Hay. The minute reads exactly as follows:

"Agreeably to appointment, a few Brethren and Sisters of Baptized Christians, residing in Port Hope and meeting for worship in the Chapel in John Street, met this evening in said Chapel for the purpose of considering the propriety of forming themselves into a Baptist Church; for the maintenance of the worship of God, the observance of Christian ordinances and the preaching of the Everlasting Gospel.

The Brethren having adopted a summary of "Articles of Faith", published by S. Colby of New York, as the Articles of their faith, resolved on recognizing each other as a Church of Christ, with Brother Hoyes Lloyd as Pastor and Morice Hay, Clerk. The following persons gave to each other the right hand of fellowship: Hoyes Lloyd; Robert Morton; Helen Morton; William Craig; Hannah Craig; Lancelot Younghusband; Benjamin Ginn; Mary Ginn; William Kennedy; Agnes Kennedy; by letter, Morice Hay, Peter Randall and Mary Helm."

For obvious reasons it is necessary here to produce the proofs that this small group of Believers attained official recognition as a Baptist Church; and, surely,

no church could claim to be more firmly grounded, denominationally, as these brief extracts reveal:

"June 20th, 1855 . . . Resolved that we apply to the Haldimand Association for admission as a Sister Church."

"June 21st, 1855 (things were moving rapidly) This Evening the public recognition services were held in the Chapel, with Rev. J. Pyper, D.D., of Toronto, Moderator and Rev. Wm. Hewson of Beamsville, Clerk."

The weeks and months that immediately followed must have brought heart warming and encouragement to our earlier brethren. Clear evidence came to them that the Town and its surroundings were ready and waiting for the witness of such a group. Barely a Sunday passed that did not bring new applications for baptism and church membership. Every member of the small congregation found himself pressed into the work of interviewing the constant stream of applicants.

The book keeping of the Church's finances was simply, but it would appear also, meticulously attended to. The Treasurer reports his first balance as Eleven Shillings and Fourpence. As if to be sure, however, that no feature of a normal church should be lacking in this infant movement, he hastens to report a few days later a deficit in the sum of Twelve Shillings and Sixpence.

While the financing of the Church was, theoretically, based on the principle of freewill offerings, our Brethren had an interpretation of the phrase all their own, but doubtless best suited to their needs. The penalties for being behind in one's "freewill" offerings were varied. He might receive a reminder that his subscriptions were "in arrears". If this failed, a deputation might wait upon him. The waiting method must have been expertly carried out, for only rarely was the supreme penalty imposed of having one's name "struck off the roll for lack of interest in the Church."

As finances improved, a consciousness of stewardship was born in the Church. Like the Church at Antioch, there was a healthy desire to share the blessings of God with people in other parts. "This day," writes Rev. J. Dempsey, the Pastor-Clerk, "was sent by express to B. Bell at St. George \$101.25, being the contribution of the Church to the Missionary Convention for the current year." It is noteworthy that the dawning of the Church's missionary awareness was coincident with the period of its own greatest expansion.

EXPANSION

The year 1867 was a historic one and it is fitting that the date should have been carved in stone above the porch of the present building. It was at this time that the greatness of soul of those early brethren made itself manifest. In thankfulness to God for His marked blessing upon their undertaking and with the problem of limited space restricting further development, the erection of a new and larger church building was decided upon. This would involve everyone in untold labour and in a financial undertaking which must, at first, have seemed impossible.

With great souls to lead, however, and with faith in such leadership the people rose cheerfully to the challenge and, by all appearances, found a growing joy in its fulfilment. The following entry is worthy of a place here:

"Deacon W. Craig spoke for some time about the erecting of a new chapel. He had bought a new site for \$800.00 and had given it to the church. He recommended entering upon subscriptions at once Brother Randall went round with a subscription book and the following sums were subscribed." (Gifts from eighteen subscribers and amounting to \$875.00 are here recorded.)

In 1867 the work of erecting the present church was begun. The period of erection of the new chapel was one of great spiritual and social enjoyment for the entire membership. A series of what were then called "love meetings" was inaugurated. A similar type of meeting was proving at that time, according to Brother Craig, to be of great benefit amongst the Baptist brethren in Germany and had "their scriptural example in the conduct of the early disciples."

To read about those love meetings is a heart warming experience even at this distant day. They were held weekly and followed a fairly uniform pattern. After tea, to which young and old sat down, and which was served at the family tea hour, whatever business required attention was seen to. Most of the business at that time had to do with the new church, the rising walls of which were lovingly watched by all. Then came a number of brief addresses by the laymen of the church upon a surprising variety of subjects. In the course of the evening there might be one or even two twenty minute recesses, after which all would return to their places to hear Brother Craig on "The Nature of Christian Power"; or Brother Dr. Chisolm on "Sociability, the Proof of Prosperity"; or Brother C. R. Randall on "The Value of a little of that Commodity called Nonsense."

Did those meetings have as their purpose other than mere social enjoyment? It would be difficult to say. Some of the brethren, however, appeared to be alive to the financial potential of the heightened social mood. Subscriptions for the new church climbed rapidly. At the close of one such meeting (Jan. 1st. 1868) the treasurer of the building committee reported that subscriptions had risen to within \$1,300 of the \$4,600 required.

All of the foregoing notwithstanding, the first interests and responsibilities of a Christian Church were never lost sight of. At the heart of this physical and social development lay a never ceasing attention to the spiritual aspects of the Church's work. Applications for baptism and church membership were pouring in. Attention to such applications and the interviewing of the many candidates had precedence over all other matters.

The official opening of the new Church did not take place until Sunday, June 6th, 1869. It was a day of great rejoicing and marked by the blessing of God. Strangely enough, the two special preachers engaged for the occasion were both unable to be present. Dr. Caldicott of Toronto was ill and Dr. Fyfe missed his train connection at Hamilton. Three memorable services were held, nevertheless. Rev. Joseph King preached morning and evening and, in the afternoon, the Pastor,

Rev. John Dempsey preached from Psalm 26:8: "Lord I have loved the habitation of Thy house."

From those early days until the present, the story of the Port Hope Church's life is similar in many ways to that of sister Baptist Churches throughout the Convention of Ontario and Quebec. An unbroken witness has gone forth through the years and, at the time of this writing, the church enjoys a place of prestige and confidence in the Town of Port Hope and its surroundings. Her sons and daughters have obtained for themselves honourable mention in many phases of public service.

In the first and second world wars as well as in the more recent Korean struggle the church was well represented on the field of battle. This was doubtless true of the South African and other campaigns, although we have no record of these. The names of those who served and of those who made the supreme sacrifice are perpetuated by the Honour Rolls which occupy a permanent place in the Church Sanctuary.

Besides many who have acquitted themselves with distinction in other fields of service, the Church is honoured by her sons who have gone into the Christian Ministry. These are: Rev. George Arthur Clarke, who has occupied prominent pulpits in Canada and United States and who is the author of many valuable books upon the subject of our Christian Faith; Rev. H. C. Wilkinson, who served a number of our churches before entering upon his present important duties as General Secretary of Grande Ligne Mission; Rev. R. F. Sneyd, who since the year of his ordination, has served one of our prominent Toronto churches, namely Calvary Church. Mr. Sneyd also served as a Chaplain in the Canadian Forces during the second World War, attaining the rank of Major and being otherwise honoured for distinguished service overseas.

It should be said here that for some years the Port Hope and Bewdley Churches worked in conjunction and shared the same Minister. This arrangement was continued until the decision was made to close the Bewdley Church. The fellowship of those days, however, is still enjoyed because of the fact that some of the former Bewdley members are now with the Church here.

Some Interesting "Firsts"

The first sermon preached was from 2nd. Peter 3: 14

The first convert: Mrs. Davies on June 27th, 1855

The first Treasurer's balance: Eleven Shillings and Fourpence

The first deficit: Twelve Shillings and Sixpence

The first baptisms: June 29th, 1855, five persons were baptized in Lake Ontario.

The first baptistry installed, October 21st, 1855

The first organ: December 19th, 1861, Brother McLennan appointed to raise subscriptions for a melodian for the church.

The first choir: December 19th, 1861, it was moved and carried that some pews be removed to make room for Singers' seats.

THE CENTENARY

Several years ago plans began to take shape for the marking of this important Anniversary. In these days of highly expensive church building projects and, indeed, of not a few churchless congregations, a feeling of gratitude has become widespread among our people toward those of an earlier day from whose hands we received our fine church home. They had built well, with vision and with the interests of succeeding generations in their thoughts. Now, our minds looking back with thankfulness to those, passed on, and looking forward with hope to those who will continue the work of the church in years to come, it was decided that a work of complete interior refurnishing be undertaken. When completed, the renovated Church would, at this Century mark, be again dedicated to the Glory of God, as a Memorial to the Pioneer Baptists of Port Hope and as our gift to Port Hope Baptists yet to be.

As the plans for this Centenary have unfolded we have been conscious of the blessing and guidance of our Heavenly Father. There has been cause for gratitude in the hearty response made by many of our people and also by former members and friends of the church, resident and non-resident.

The oversight of the work of renovation was undertaken by a large Centennial Committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Harry van Everdingen. This Committee, working in close contact at all times with Jackson Brothers Ltd., the Contractor, has completed a task which will earn its own praise now and in days to come.

We enter upon the second century of our Church's life humbly conscious of the strategic point in its history that finds us in occupation. Our desire is that in some little measure we may prove ourselves worthy successors of those gone before. Our prayer also is that the work we have tried to do at this time will be deemed acceptable by those who shall succeed us and be used by them for the Honour of our Saviour and to the Glory of God.

