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A SHORT HISTORY
OF
KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALLISTON

(A copy of the booklet issued
on the seventy-fifth
anniversary, May 19 & 26, 1935)

In sketching the history of Knox Church, Alliston, it is only fair to state that a great deal of the material used was gathered together by the Rev. W. T. Ellison at the time of the observance of the Golden Jubilee in 1912 and has been preserved in a Session Minute Book and in old copies of the Alliston Herald secured from Mrs. G. H. Ruthven. Some details were supplied also by Mr. Thos. J. D. Buyers, now living in Niagara Falls, N.Y.

The earliest records shedding any light on the very first years of the Alliston community tell us that in 1831 Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Ruthven crossed the Boyne River where the town is now situated. They made their home in Essa and thus began what has long been known as the Scotch settlement. "Sandy" Ruthven was a skilled weaver from Glasgow, Scotland. In the early days he did very fine work on his loom. Then came William Stevenson and John Turnbull who settled in Essa near Alex. Ruthven and others followed. In 1846 William Fletcher and his wife walked north-west across the township of Tecumseth and about midday had their noon meal beside a large pine stump on the south side of the river near where Knox Church Manse now stands. Then, crossing the river, they took up four hundred acres of land but built their first house on the south side of the river where Mrs. James McGarvey lives. Mr. Fletcher built a bridge over the river for his own accommodation but it was also used by other settlers on their way to the store at West Essa which was conducted by Captain Thomas Drury. For some years West Essa was a larger place than Alliston but when other settlers came in business places were opened up in Alliston. Among these early settlers we find John and William Buyers, Adam Wightman, Charles Scott, John Patterson, James Rose, William Mawhinney and John Bates.

About this time, 1860, the townline between Tos-sorontio and Essa was opened and it was a very rough road. The Fletchers built the first mill in Alliston, John and William Buyers being the carpenters. William Turnbull is supposed to have opened the first store and, if so, Joseph Rayson was a close second. Shortly after this a school was established in the same little hall in which the Methodist people held their services. Mr. Wm. Henderson was the teacher

then but, when the new school built at the Scotch line corner by the Buyers was opened, Hugh McKnight was the teacher. Then followed Thos. Egan, W. Lewis Hill, Chas. S. McMair, Thos. Henderson, etc.

In 1860 the first religious services were held in Alliston by J. K. Hislop, a student sent out by the Knox College Students Missionary Society. He arrived in the spring or early summer and remained till the opening of the College in the fall. This was the beginning of Presbyterianism in this community and it is with pride and a sense of loyalty that the members of Knox Church look back over those seventy-five years of continuous service, first to the pioneers and later to succeeding generations who held true to the principles and tenets of Presbyterianism. The first service conducted by Mr. Hislop was in John Bates' cooper shop and the text on this memorable occasion was from Genesis 48: 15. There were present with the student at this service, Adam Wightman, Charles Scott, William and John Buyers, John Patterson, James Rose, William Mawhinney and their wives and families. During the summer the services were held in this same building and in other places throughout the district. The people began to think of securing a property where they might build a Church and after looking at different locations they decided to buy a half acre plot from Henry Fields for \$80. This is the property on which the Manse is now situated. Then an acre was bought on the west side for \$110. The deeds were carefully prepared and trips on foot to Toronto and Barrie were necessary. On these deeds which are still held by the congregation are the names of Adam Wightman, William Buyers, William Mawhinney, James Rose, Charles Scott, John Patterson and John Anderson. Evidently the total monies were not paid in cash for these two lots as the congregation still have in their possession and well preserved two promissory notes both dated May 18th, 1860, the one for \$26.00 and payable to Henry Fields or order at the house of John Anderson in Tossarontio on the first day of March, 1861, the second one for \$25.00 and payable March 1st, 1862. The signatures attached are the same as on the deeds. These men composed the building committee of the first Church, the work being done by William and John Buyers.

They began in the spring of 1861 and finished in the fall of 1862. The edifice then was the north half of what most people remember as the old Church. There is no record of the date of building the second part.

On September 6th, 1862, the Church was opened and dedicated for Divine worship, the sermons being preached by Rev. Doctor Robert Burns of Toronto, whose son became Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1887. The new Church was named Knox Church. Services were held in the morning and afternoon. No evening service was held on account of the great distances the people came on foot and it was necessary for them to reach home or the shelter of some friendly roof before nightfall, due to wild animals, especially bears and wolves. At the opening services the singing was led by Gilbert Innis for in those days there was a precentor instead of an organ and organist. The collections were taken by Adam Wightman and Wm. Buyers, square boxes with long handles being the receptacles. There was no social gathering or tea meeting held at this time but about Christmas of the same year one was held at which the speakers were Revs. Wm. Fraser of Bond Head, the father of Dr. R. Douglas and Dr. J. B., Robert Rogers of Collingwood, McLellan of Rosemont and Brown of Mono Centre. The offerings on Opening Day and the proceeds of the tea meeting three months later were given into the hands of the treasurer, Mr. James Rose. Shortly after the Church was completed it had a narrow escape from destruction by fire. Wm. Mawhinney had a smoke house, used for curing meats, and situated near the lumber yard to the west of the Church. When the smoke house became overheated and took fire it spread to the lumber piles and threatened the Church but the good work of the "bucket brigade" saved the building.

Mr. J. K. Hislop, who was the student missionary the first summer, 1860, returned to College in the fall. The congregation had no one to minister to their spiritual wants till the next spring when another student by the name of Mitchell served the people for the summer months of 1861. He was a delicate man and did not live many years. In 1862 J. K. Hislop completed his course and was ordained into the ministry and inducted into this charge by

the Presbytery of Toronto. The Church made good progress under the leadership of Rev. J. K. Hislop and Alliston grew as a village so that by the time of his leaving, November 20th, 1870, having been called to Avonton, near Stratford, the foundation of a splendid congregation had been established. The first decade in the life of the Church is of necessity of great importance and the success that has always attended this congregation can surely be traced back to those noble men and women who, amid the hardships of pioneering did not allow spiritual matters to become neglected.

It is interesting to know that in 1860 there were no fewer than eight separate Presbyterian groups in Ontario and eastward but these gradually united. Knox Church belonged to the Free Presbyterian Church which joined with the United Presbyterian Church of Canada in 1861, forming the Canada Presbyterian Church. Then in 1875 this group united with three other groups in the Maritimes forming one great Presbyterian Church and known as The Presbyterian Church in Canada. In 1925 the Presbyterian Church in Canada, The Methodist Church and the Congregational Churches of Canada became the United Church of Canada. Thus, in the Free Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Canada Presbyterian Church, The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the United Church of Canada, Knox Church has continued to cherish the faith and uphold the tenets and principles of her forebears in unbroken continuity for seventy five years.

Early in the history of the Church, February 19th, 1863, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was first administered. Rev. J. K. Hislop officiated and was assisted by Messrs. Spears and Canning, Elders from the townline Church. Early in May, 1863, Messrs. Andrew Mullen and John Buyers were elected to the eldership and on May 17 they were ordained and inducted into that office, thus constituting the first Session.

A Sunday School was established shortly after the Church began and it has continued in the moulding of the young life of the congregation. The first superintendent was William Wright.

As it is the primary intention of this short historical sketch to tell of the pioneer days in particular, it naturally follows that we must pass hurriedly over

many years that tell of the devotion and zeal of many who spent themselves in furthering the interests of the Kingdom of God in the congregation. The records prove very interesting reading. Perhaps the most important event following the Opening and Dedication of the first Church in 1862 is that of the Golden Jubilee on October 27th, 1912, and during the ministry of Rev. W. T. Ellison. We find a very full minute of this very important event in one of the Session Records which is as follows:

"When the history of Alliston is related a few decades hence one of the outstanding events to which not a little prominence must be given will be the Jubilee Anniversary of the Presbyterian Church. It was celebrated on Sunday and Monday and a most auspicious occasion it was. There was nothing to mar the pleasure of it. The weather was fine through both days and no disappointments on the part of singers or speakers were experienced and no sudden illness intervened to cause any anxiety on the part of those who wished to enjoy all the features of the unique occasion. Denominationalism in the town and country was suspended and the congregations of several Churches helped their Presbyterian brethren celebrate the half century of progress. The ministers in the Methodist and Anglican Churches withdrew their evening services and Rev. A. P. Addison (Wesley) and Rev. C. L. Bilkey (St. Andrew's) were in the Presbyterian Church, the former on the platform and the latter in the choir. The congregations were very large and in the evening the Church was packed long before the hour of service. The Methodist Church was thrown open and here Rev. H. D. McCuaig of Tottenham conducted an overflow service. By half past seven this Church was filled and many, disappointed in not getting into Knox Church went home. Comments on the preaching, the singing and the Jubilee spirit of the congregation must all be made in the superlative degree. This happy occasion will long remain a bright spot in the memories of all who enjoyed the services. Not only to the Presbyterian Church will it bear fruit but there is a civic aspect which stands out prominently in that the people of three denominations fraternized most cordially to the unquestioned promotion of higher morality and citizenship in the community at large. To the Pastor of the Church, Rev. W. T. Elli-

son, fell the happy lot of directing the Sabbath services. The Preacher of the day was Rev. A. Gilray, D.D., of Toronto, who entered into the spirit of the celebration by reason of the fact that he had, when a boy, passed through Alliston when his parents were migrating into Grey county to be numbered with the pioneers there. At the morning service his subject was, "God's love to the world," and his text the familiar passage, John 3: 16. In the evening he preached on, "The Incarnation," finding his text in John 1: 14. The choral portion of the services is worthy of special note. The choir rendered a couple of high class anthems with fine effect and solos were sung by Miss Lillie White of Toronto and by Mr. E. C. Shaffer of Hamilton."

"In the afternoon a largely attended Sabbath School rally was held. Of the superintendents since its organization, Mr. James Aitkin was the only one of the former incumbents present. Special singing was furnished by the boys and girls under the direction of Mrs. Malcolm. Addresses were given by Mr. Joseph Perrott, the present superintendent, Rev. Dr. Gilray and Rev. W. T. Ellison. Mr. William Mahwinney, the first superintendent was in town at this date but owing to his age and health was not able to attend."

"On Monday evening a high tea and entertainment was given in the municipal buildings, the supper being served in the market hall and the program was given in the opera hall. The attendance was very large and the tables were filled many times from five o'clock till after eight. All who patronized the supper did not gain entrance to the hall upstairs. At eight o'clock there was not an available seat in the place and standing room at the rear was also very scarce. While the audience was gathering upstairs the early comers were entertained by a gramophone operated by Mr. A. H. Lawrence. When the Jubilee cake was placed on its stand and its fifty candles lighted and the members of the Church choir took their seats, the ladies dressed in white, there was hearty applause. The Pastor, Rev. W. T. Ellison, occupied the chair. The opening chorus was followed by a prayer by Rev. T. J. Thompson of Collingwood. A historical sketch of the congregation was read. Among those of the early members still living in these parts are John Rose, John Patterson, Mrs. John

Strachan, Mrs. Wm. Kinler, Mrs. Smiley and Miss Jane Gallagher. The musical part of the program was chiefly vocal, Miss White, Miss Donnelley and Mr. Shaffer, and the choir under Mr. W. A. Austin rendered anthems. Piano solos were contributed by Miss Thompson of Toronto and Miss Leila Preston, a ten year old "musical wonder" of Alliston. Pithy addresses were made by Rev. T. J. Thompson (Pres.) of Collingwood, who brought greetings from the Presbytery of Barrie, Rev. H. D. McCueg (Pres.) of Tottenham, Rev. J. A. Wilson (Pres.) of Hamilton and a former boy of the congregation, Rev. E. R. James (Ang.) of Craighurst, Rev. C. L. Bilkey (Ang.), Alliston, and Rev. A. P. Addison (Meth.), Alliston. At the close Rev. Mr. Ellison announced that the proceeds of the Jubilee would amount to \$1,100.00 and since then further offering have increased the amount to nearly \$1,200.00."

Another important milestone in the history of Knox Church must be briefly mentioned. About the time of the Jubilee services in 1912 it was felt that the original Church had served its day and a new building should be erected. Consequently the congregation began to plan for the removal of the old Church and the erection of a new and larger edifice in which to carry on the work so well begun. During the period of building services were held in the town hall through the courtesy of the Mayor and Council. There appears in the Session Minute Book a description of the Opening and Dedication of the new edifice which is copied.

On Sunday, October 3rd, 1915, occurred an epoch-making event for Alliston Presbyterian Church. It was the opening of the new Church building, erected during the summer of 1915. Favorable weather prevailed and people came from far and near to see the beautiful structure.

On the 28th day of March 1915, Rev. M. F. Cree preached the last sermons in the old Church. The texts were, "David serveth his day and generation"—Acts 13: 36, and "One sows and another reaps," John 4: 37. The following morning the work of demolition of the old Church was begun. On May 1st the corner stone was laid, the honor of doing this fell to the pastor, Rev. M. F. Cree. Mr. Joseph Perrett presented the stone and Mr. James Allen the silver trowel. Rev. G. Hanna of Cookstown was pres-

ent as representative of the Presbytery and made an address. Rev. G. N. Gray of the Methodist Church, Rev. B. M. Defoe Wagner of the Anglican Church, and Rev. Andrew Wilson were present and brought greetings. The new Church was but six months in construction. Rev. Principal Gandier of Knox College was the preacher on the opening Sunday. Rev. M. F. Cree conducted the services and Principal Gandier preached. In the morning the text was from Ephesians 4: 11, "Till we all come . . . perfect man," in the evening I John 3: 14, "A Loving Sacrifice." The Choir was assisted by Mrs. W. A. Gunton of Toronto and Mrs. Malcolm of Welland. The Church was filled to utmost capacity. On Sunday, October 10th, the preacher was Rev. J. A. Wilson of Hamilton. The subject of the morning service was, "Going a little farther." At the conclusion of the sermon the ceremony of Dedication was performed by the Pastor, Rev. M. F. Cree. The text in the evening was from Nehemiah 3: 30, "Individual Effort."

On Monday, October 11th, the Thanksgiving tea was held and for the first time the ladies used the new basement and pronounced it beautiful and serviceable. After tea was served a good program was rendered in the Church. Rev. G. N. Gray and Hon. James Duff, Minister of Agriculture, and Rev. G. Hanna of Cookstown gave addresses. Rev. M. F. Cree gave a history of the building operations.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was observed on Sabbath, October 17th, in the morning. Once again the members sat down to the Table of the Lord feeling deep gratitude within their hearts for the way in which the Lord had led them. At the Preparatory Service twenty six united with the Church by profession of faith and one by certificate. On October 11th a Sunday School Rally was held in the afternoon at which Rev. J. A. Wilson and others gave addresses to a large gathering.

X Following the building of the new Knox Church the congregation continued to grow and to maintain the spiritual traditions of the past. During the first decade nothing of an unusual nature took place but in 1925 Knox Church along with all the congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Canada was forced to face the important question of entering the United Church of Canada. When the vote was taken 144 favored the union and 63 were opposed and the

majority of these withdrew their membership. The loss of so many was undoubtedly felt but the people realized that the glory of the Church lies in the path of sacrifice and they have carried on successfully with an ever growing congregation until in this year of the seventy-fifth Jubilee there is a total of 159 resident members and 15 non-resident.

It is fitting that we should remember that while we observe the seventy-fifth anniversary of the beginnings of Knox Church, we also celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the tenth Anniversary of the United Church in Canada.

At the Annual Congregational meeting early in the present year, 1936, plans were made for the fitting observance of the seventy-fifth Jubilee Anniversary to be held in May. A committee was named, consisting of Messrs. G. A. Wilson, A. F. Merrett, John Dunn, David Nicol and Mesdames J. J. Graham, Jas. Rose and A. F. Merrett to make plans joint'y with the minister, Rev. W. M. Lee, M.A. This was done and a long list of former members of Knox Church was compiled and invitations sent out to them to attend the Jubilee Services and the social function. Arrangements were made for the services on Sunday, May 19th, with Rev. Gilbert Wilson, B.D., Ph.D., of Toronto as guest preacher and Mrs. C. C. Johnston of Meaford as the soloist for the day. For Sunday, May 26th, Rev. R. S. Laidlaw, D.D., of Toronto was engaged as guest preacher and Mrs. Wm. Huckle, a former member and now of Bracebridge, as soloist. On the Monday evening following, May 27th, a supper and program was planned at which greetings were extended from former ministers, a representative of Simcoe Presbytery, the other ministers of the town and His Worship the Mayor. These addresses were interspersed with selections by the choir, the male quartette and solos by Mrs. Huckle. Every effort was put forth to make this occasion a day to be remembered by all who are interested in Knox Church.

As the congregation looks back over the past seventy-five years with humble pride, acknowledging the goodness of God to their forebears and recognizing with gratitude the service that has been rendered through the years, and then also looking forward into the future with the same courageous faith and implicit trust in the providential care of the Father

of all, it is only fitting that they should join in the singing of that old Scottish paraphrase to the tune "Salzburg," so familiar and so dear especially to the hearts of those who have been nurtured in the faith of their progenitor, John Knox, from whom the congregation takes its name:

O God of Bethel, by whose hand
Thy people still are fed;
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Hast all our fathers led:

Our vows, our prayers, we now present
Before Thy throne of grace;
God of our fathers, be the God
Of their succeeding race.

(All right reserved.)

List of Ministers who have served Knox Church:

J. K. Hislop, a student from Knox College, summer of 1860.

Mr. Mitchell, a student from Knox College, summer of 1861.

Rev. J. K. Hislop, returned in 1862 and was ordained and inducted by Toronto Presbytery, remaining till November 20th, 1870.

Rev. R. E. Knowles, 1872 to September 28th, 1875.

Rev. J. R. S. Burnett, January 23rd, 1877 to 1904.

Rev. J. A. Dodds, stated supply in 1905.

Rev. Samuel F. Sharp, January 17th, 1906, to July, 1909.

Rev. W. T. Ellison, November 18th, 1909, to September, 1913.

Rev. Matthew F. Cree, B.A., January, 1914, to August 29th, 1920.

Rev. E. F. McL. Smith, B.A., October 29th, 1920 to August 26th, 1925.

X Rev. A. B. Irwin, November 20th, 1925, to June 30th, 1932.

Rev. W. M. Lee, M.A., July 4th, 1932 —

List of Elders with the year of their Induction:

Andrew Mullen and John Buyers, 1863; William Mahwinney and James Rose, 1865; Isaac McDonald and James Aitken, 1878; William Mitchell, John McCallister, John Strachan and J. G. Hood, 1886; Henry Gilmore, W. J. Sproule and Joseph Perrott, 1903; R. J. McKinley, Wm. T. Reid, W. J. Wood, W. F. Kinsey, 1906; W. A. Austin, J. S. Reid, J. R. Dickson and John Dickey, 1913; William Irwin, Seymour Newell and Allan Hill, 1917; David Nicol, Robert Scott and W. H. Ludlow, 1925; G. A. Wilson, 1929; and A. F. Merett, 1932.

Presbyterian Church, Alliston, Ont.

