

Rev. Calder Fraser

It is a well-known fact that immigration to the eastern part of Nova Scotia goes back chiefly to the arrival of two little ships. In the year 1767 the ship "Hope," sometimes known as the "Betsy" came with six families from Philadelphia, families that were originally from the Lowlands in Scotland. In the year 1773, six years later, the "Hector" arrived from Greenoch in Scotland with mostly Highlanders aboard. From then on many little ships continued to bring settlers from the old land. They had been promised free land and even supplies for the first year. Some of those promises were honoured, some not. The idea of a place where everyone would be equal certainly was very appealing to them. Many of these people were what today we would call "refugees," for events following the defeat of Charles Stuart at Culloden in 1746 made it almost impossible for them to stay on in their old land.

For some years after their coming there was no religious leadership. Rev. Mr. Cock of Truro, on a few occasions, came for a service, and some parents carried their children in their arms, or on their backs to Truro over a blazed trail to have them baptized. So appeals were sent to the old country to have a minister sent to them. The only response was from the General Associate Synod of the Presbyterian Church, and they sent out James Drummond MacGregor, later known as Dr. MacGregor, who arrived in 1786.

For nine years MacGregor was the only minister in the area, (which was still counted as part of Halifax County). But in 1795 the same synod sent out Rev. Mr. Brown and Rev. Mr. Ross. Mr. Brown soon went to the Truro-Londonderry area. Mr. MacGregor and Mr. Ross worked together, and later divided the work into two, East Pictou and West Pictou, trusting that someone would come and be stationed at the Harbour, (now Pictou Town). In 1805, Rev. Thomas McCulloch came.

Regarding church buildings, a year after Dr. MacGregor came, the people built two churches, of logs of course, one for East Pictou, and one for West. East was apparently where Mr. Ken Rumley's house is now, just back of Sobey's warehouse at Lourdes, and on the bank of the East River. West was at Loch Broom where the present replica log church is located.

In 1803 the building on the East River was relocated to what is now known as MacLellan's farm at Plymouth, ~~at Plymouth~~, then called Irishtown. In 1834 it was incorporated with the name James Church in honor of Dr. James MacGregor, who had died in 1830. In 1852 it became centered in New Glasgow on MacLean Street where First Presbyterian now stands. (In the 1860's it came back again to Stellarton with the new building called Sharon in 1866).

We have to remember that there were many branches of the Presbyterian Church in the old country. It is said that there have been thirty-four kinds of Presbyterians through the years, sometimes a dozen at a time, all with separate organizations, yet all under the banner of Presbyterianism with the conciliar system, which means, frankly, controlled by a session consisting of elders elected by the people.

From the time of the first services of Dr. Mac Gregor in 1786, the only branch of the Presbyterian church in Pictou County was known as Anti-Burgher, or General Associate Synod. Thirty-one years later another section of the Presbyterian church in the old country, the "established church," the Church of Scotland, became interested and sent out one of their ministers, Rev. Donald Allan Fraser as a missionary to this county. His first church was in MacLennan's Mountain with services beginning in 1817. Two years later, 1819, a second church was begun at Fraser's Mountain, which later was moved to New Glasgow, and was located on the site of the present St. Andrew's Church. This was, and still is referred to as the Kirk. From this came St. John's Kirk Church in Stellarton, built in 1863 near the corner of Foord Street and Kirk Avenue, and later in a new building farther south on Foord Street on its east side, near the corner of Allan Avenue.

In 1843 the important event known as the Disruption occurred in Scotland. Many of the Presbyterians, led by Dr. Chalmers, felt they had to sever their connection with the established church, the Church of Scotland, the "Kirk." The following year, 1844, the movement came to Nova Scotia.

In a way, it was unfortunate, for the causes of it were not apparent here. Chief among them, somewhat as the case earlier with the Secessionists (The Burghers, Anti Burghers, etc.) was the fact that the people who came together in 1817 wanted the "call" system, to invite their own minister, and not to accept one "appointed" or selected by the patron, the land-owner, the Laird. There were no lairds in Nova Scotia, but the movement nevertheless became very strong. Perhaps it was supported mostly by those who were descended from the Secessionists (Burghers, Anti-Burghers.) They had come together # by this time, 1817, but they refused to join with the Kirk.

So we have the continuing dissension. Dissension? But they felt called by God to be independent of the state, though the state for them was just the owner of the land, whose land they worked and rented. It is note worthy that the Highlanders were mostly for the Kirk, because they were not just tenants, keepers of parcels of land, but followers of the "chief," who was also the owner. Instead of working his land they fought for him in their numerous clan battles, and # and called themselves the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia.

were often his close relatives. This had been the situation up to the time of Culloden in 1745, but it still continued a hundred years later with the church in a way taking the place of the clan, and the minister taking the place of the chief, as far as loyalty was concerned.

The dissension did not last forever. On October 4 1860, "the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia" and the "Free Church" came together with the title "Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces."

In 18~~72~~⁷⁵ there was an even larger union, which this time included the Kirk, and this union became known as the Presbyterian Church in Canada." (Saltsprings did not join it till 1907).

Getting back to the situation in our own town of Stellarton, by the year 1845 a number of the citizens were not Presbyterians at all, but folk from England, who were mainly Methodists or Anglicans. In that year Methodist services were being held with ministers coming from Wallace and River John. It was made a circuit in 1861, with Rev. J. Cassidy appointed as minister. New Glasgow Methodists were part of this mission until 1880 when they obtained their own circuit.

The Anglican Church first began in Pictou town in 1826, and their church was consecrated there in 1829. Once a month their minister came to Stellarton till their services became regular, and their church, known as Christ Church was built in 1851 making it the oldest church building in this town still in use.

With the union in 1860 of the Free Church and the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia in the Church of the Lower Provinces, it was desired by the people of Stellarton to have again a church building of their own. So, in 1866, the church called Sharon was built by the Riverbank, as the lower end of what is now MacKay Street was known. (There was no King Street then). The site was about where Mrs. Cumming's home is now. In 1895 the location for this was changed to the corner of Acadia Avenue and Stellar Street. This beautiful building was destroyed by fire in 1924, and replaced in 1926 by the present building.

It is well to remember that while Sharon Church was being replaced after the fire, the Canada-wide vote was taken in each congregation of the Presbyterian Church to decide if they should unite with the Methodists and Congregationalists in a United Church of Canada. All the churches in New Glasgow voted against, while both Presbyterian churches in Stellarton voted for the union. It came particularly hard on the Sharon people because they were raising as much money as they could for their new building. Those who had voted against union

withdrew their support and eventually built the First Presbyterian Church on Foord Street. They were joined of course by those with dissenting votes from St. John's Church.

The Methodists throughout Canada became part of the United Church, decided by elected representatives to their General Conference and local congregations were not asked to vote. Perhaps that was the better way to do it, as it might have avoided the disagreements with which those of Presbyterian heritage have been blessed, or cursed through the years.

(In the counties of Kings, Annapolis, Digby, Yarmouth, Shelburne, Queens, all the Presbyterian churches came into the United Church along with the Methodists and Congregationalists.)

Perhaps it would be wise to mention that in the Methodist Church there were many divisions just as there had been with Presbyterians. They did not very much affect Pictou County though, as most of them had come together through the years preceding the arrival (from England) of those who had been Methodists. By the time of 1861, when Stellarton was made a circuit of the Methodist Church, they had joined together in the Methodist Church of the Nova Scotia Conference.

Regarding Congregationalists, it was not an important issue in this county, with no churches in the county and only twelve in Nova Scotia. They had been the main Protestant church in western Nova Scotia ever since the coming of the Planters from New England who took up the farms of the Acadians expelled in 1755, and the Loyalists who had come because of the American Revolution. But due to the influence of Henry Alline they became New Lights and, later, Baptists, though Alline himself was not a Baptist.

Our term "General Council" comes from those who Congregationalists until 1925.

The word Council - from Congregationalists
 Conference - from Methodists
 Presbytery - from Presbyterians