

1919

History of
Sharon
Church

Stellarton, Nova Scotia

—BY—

Rev. T. Cumming, D. D.

History of Sharon Church

Stellarton, Nova Scotia

At the request of the present Session of the congregation I take my pen to write a brief consecutive history of Sharon Church, Stellarton,, from its first organization down to the present time. To those still living who have been members of the Church in the earlier periods of its history, the perusal of the narrative may help to refresh their memory in regard to pastors and people who were identified with the congregation in by-gone days. To those who in their early life will come forward from time to time to take their place in the large ever-increasing congregation, they will hear with appreciation the memorable words of Scripture, as if they were spoken directly to themselves: "Remember the days of old, ask thy father, and he will shew thee, thy elders, and will tell thee." "Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."

Sixty years ago there was no Ecclesiastical edifice in the place that was then known by the name of the Albion Mines, but now better kown by the significant Latin name Stellarton, which in plain English just means **the Star Town**. The well disposed people of the Town then wended their way Sabbath after Sabbath to one or other of the churches in the neighboring town of New Glasgow. The Automobile and Electric Car were then conspicuous by their absence. The general mode of travelling then available to the good people who went to the place of public worship was the tandem that Nature gave them. The distinguished preachers of the Gospel in the four Presbyterian Churches then in New Glasgow were Dr. Pollock, Dr. Roy, the Rev. John Stewart, and the Rev. George Walker. These faithful Servants of God did not neglect the members of their respective Churches then residing in Stellarton. They

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visited them frequently in their homes, and occasionally in turn preached a sermon to them in their School-house, or in a Hall improvised for the occasion. But the time had now come for the citizens of Stellarton to be organized into separate congregations, and worship God under their own Vine and Fig tree, none making them afraid. Even before they formally severed their connection with the New Glasgow Churches, about a hundred families with commendable zeal and unanimity, erected a comfortable and commodious Church nearby the river side. At the suggestion of Dr. George Patterson, the name chosen for the new Church was Sharon. And the term Sharon, let me say, is an expressive Hebrew word which continually reminds us of the moral beauty of the character that is in harmony with the mind of Him who is symbolically represented as the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valley. At the request of the people and by the authority of Pictou Presbytery, the Rev. Alexander Ross formally organized the congregation Feb. 19th, A. D., 1866. For several months the newly organized congregation received regular supply by appointment of Presbytery. A very cordial unanimous invitation was then extended to a promising young Licentiate, Rev. Andrew J. Mowatt, to become the Pastor of the congregation. The call was accepted by him, and he was accordingly ordained and inducted into the pastoral charge of the Church by Pictou Presbytery June 15th, 1866. The popular young preacher, afterwards well and widely known as Dr. Andrew J. Mowatt, thus became the first pastor of Sharon Church.

A. D. 1866-1873

Dr. Mowatt was a native of Woodstock, New Brunswick. He was born February 11th, 1838, and was thus 28 years of age when he became the Pastor of Sharon Church. With a view to the work of the Gospel Ministry he received the neces-

sary preparatory education in the College School of Fredericton. He took the usual course in Arts in the Presbyterian College that was then located in Truro. He received his special Theological training in the Presbyterian College, Halifax, and was licensed to preach the everlasting Gospel by the Presbytery of Pictou in 1866. And, as has been already stated, he was ordained and inducted into Sharon Church June 15th, 1866. He soon became well and widely known as a grand preacher of the Gospel. He could scarcely ever trust himself to preach extemporaneously. But then what a magnificent **Reader** of the Sermons of his own composition he was! A celebrated old Scotch lady had a very pronounced dislike to read sermons as they were often read in her hearing. But she made a very decided exception in regard to the unusual method in which Dr. Chalmers read his sermons. Dr. Chalmers' reading she said in her Scottish dialect was **Fell Reading**, or as we would express her idea in vigorous Anglo-Saxon: it was incisive, persuasive, over-powering reading. And so was the reading of Dr. Mowatt **Fell Reading**. But whatever diversity of opinion there may have been in regard to reading or extemporising sermons, all who ever had the pleasure of hearing Dr. Mowatt were of one mind in affirming that he was a grand, large-hearted impressive preacher of the Gospel. And his reputation never waned, but rather increased year by year during the seven years that he occupied the pulpit of Sharon Church.

In his first report to Synod, Dr. Mowatt represented Sharon Church as having 107 families, an average attendance of 300 at the Sabbath services, 95 communicants, 81 families observing family worship, an average attendance of 25 at the weekly Prayer Meeting, two Sabbath Schools with 20 teachers and 160 pupils. The salary of the Pastor was \$600.00 a year with no mention of vacation. The three Ruling Elders of the time were James McKay, William McPherson, and Alexander

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Munro. These three brethren with Rev. George Walker of New Glasgow as Interim Moderator, constituted the first Session of Sharon Church. It may be here mentioned that the Ruling Elders of the Session as recorded in 1880 were: William McPherson, Clerk; Alex Grant; James McKay; Duncan McKay; James Fraser; Thomas McPherson. At the close of Dr. Mowatt's faithful pastorate of seven years there were found on examination of the records, 121 bona fide members on the Communion Roll, and corresponding progress in all departments of the work of the Church.

REV. THOMAS CUMMING, D. D. 1873-1883

The writer of this brief narrative succeeded Dr. Mowatt as Pastor of the congregation. And as I thought of the remarkable ability of my predecessor as a preacher of the Gospel I said to myself in the words of the Royal Preacher: "What can the man do that cometh after the King?" And instead of attempting to answer the question in words of my own selection that would be appropriate to the peculiar situation, I tacitly acquiesced in the judicious response of Luther to the tantalizing enquiry: "What we are able to do that we ought to do; what we cannot do we must leave undone. The stone that thou art not able to lift thou must leave lying." I may, however, be permitted to say that my position as one of the Pastors of Sharon Church is altogether unique in view of the fact that I previously was, and still continue to be, part and parcel of the congregation. I had not come from any outside locality to enter on the responsibility of the Pastorate. Dr. Mowatt, as we have seen, came from New Brunswick to be the Pastor of Sharon Church. Mr. Turnbull, as we shall notice further on, came from the old Fatherland, Scotland. Dr. Tufts from Halifax, Mr. Fulton from Ireland, and Mr. MacIntosh from Cape Breton. But Thomas Cumming is a

native of Stellarton. Is that any disadvantage to me? I think not. Our Saviour, we know says: "A prophet is not without honour save in his own country, and in his own house.". And sometimes we do see that familiarity breeds contempt, and that distance lends enchantment to the view. But I never personally experienced the shadow of the shade of any disrespect or dishonour that may be implied in these oft-quoted statements. I have in my life time served the Church for long or short periods in Halifax, Truro, Scotsburn and Montreal, and in all these localities the people have invariably treated me with the utmost kindness and respect. But in no locality have I day in and day out, been treated with more lavish kindness and respect than in my native town of Stellarton. A few years ago I travelled round the Globe to see how big it is. But now, in my retirement from the public obligations of the Gospel Ministry, I can conscientiously say that in no place that I have seen, North, South, East, or West, would I prefer to spend my days than in this prosperous town by the river side where I first saw the light.

After nine years and three months of continuous service in this congregation I was called to another sphere of usefulness in the Master's Vineyard.

At this period in its history, Sharon Church is represented in the Blue Book of the General Assembly as having 175 families, 304 Communicants, 160 young people in the Sabbath School and Bible Class, and as contributing for all purposes about \$2000.00. The salary of the Pastor was \$1000.00. During the two following years, the congregation—to use ordinary Ecclesiastical term—was said to be vacant. The next occupant of Sharon Church pulpit was

REV. J. H. TURNBULL, M. A. 1885-1896

Mr. Turnbull came to Stellarton from Fall River, United

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States as a regularly ordained preacher of the Gosepel. But from previous reliable information we learn that he was by birth a native of Scotland, and that he obtained his theological education in Monmouth College, Illinois, and was ordained in 1872 by the Presbytery with which he was connected. He had thus the advantage of several years experience in the work of the Gospel Ministry before he was inducted into the Pastorate of Sharon Church by Pictou Presbytery in 1885. And he certainly utilized his past experience, and proved himself to be a faithful earnest preacher of the Gospel, and a zealous worker in the service of the Great King and Head of the Church. By him undoubtedly, as the poet has it, the violated law did speak out its thunders. And the Apostle teaches us that the law is good if a man use it lawfully. He even tells us that the law is our School-master to bring us to Christ. A brilliant, modern writer has said: "Men might be better if we better deemed of them. The worst way to improve the world is to condemn it." And certainly of all men the Preacher of the Gospel requires to be sympathetic and optimistic in his persevering efforts to draw, not drive, the wanderers into the Church and Kingdom of God. But with all our affection for evil doers we will still find a judicious use of the law of God necessary in our efforts to reclaim them.

It is worthy of notice, however, that it was during the incumbency of Mr. Turnbull that the New Sharon Church was erected and dedicated to the public worship of God. The formal opening and dedication of the Church occurred on the 17th day of August, 1890.

The preachers selected to conduct the special services of the day were, as might be expected, the first two pastors of old Sharon Church—Dr. Mowatt, and the writer of the present narrative. At the morning services, Dr. Mowatt preached a magnificent sermon from the text: "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." (Josh. 3:4). The text for the evening dis-

course was: "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the House of the Lord," (Ps. 122:1). It goes without saying that all the services of the day, including the instrumental and vocal music by the Choir and the exercises of the Sabbath School in the afternoon were all appropriate to the memorable occasion. At both the morning and evening services the spacious well-appointed Church was filled to its utmost capacity. At the evening service it was estimated that there were 1000 people present. Quite a number of them, of course, had come from neighbouring congregations. The free will offerings of the day amounted to \$1700.00. Altogether, the 17th day of August 1890 was a red-letter day in the history of Sharon Church. It marked the commencement of a new era of ever-increasing prosperity for the progressive congregation. The Church as it stood on the day on which it was formally opened for public worship cost in the neighborhood of \$12,000. This sum does not include the price of the magnificent pipe organ which after this time, was placed in the Church. And it does not include the cost of several necessary improvements which after this time were made in several parts of the Building. Mr. Turnbull continued to be the faithful, conscientious Pastor of Sharon Church for six years after this memorable event in the history of the congregation. He was succeeded in the Pastorate of Sharon Church by

REV. W. M. TUFTS, D. D. 1896-1909.

Dr. Tufts was a native of Halifax City. And strangely enough he was the only Pastor of Sharon Church who was born in a city. He had thus the benefit of early educational advantages which had an elevating influence upon him during his whole life. After acquiring the necessary preliminary knowledge in the schools of the city he took the prescribed course in Arts in Dalhousie College, and in due time graduat-

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ed with distinction from that historical University. He prosecuted his Theological studies in Princeton Theological Seminary, and Edinburgh, and in 1888 was regularly ordained to the Ministry of the everlasting Gospel. His first Pastoral charge was Bedeque and Summerfield, P. E. I. and his second charge was Hawkesbury in the Presbytery of Ottawa. He was inducted into the Pastorate of Sharon by the Presbytery of Pictou August 13th, 1896.

Dr. Tufts was generally regarded by all who were acquainted with him as a scholarly preacher of the Gospel. With creditable attainments in other branches of learning, he had a good working knowledge of the three languages in which the title on the Cross of Calvary was written—Hebrew, Greek and Latin. As the result, his sermons were expository, edifying and—especially in his advancing years—decidedly evangelical. His attentive hearers listened with pleasure to his winsome voice, and were always amply repaid for their attention by what the learned preacher said to them. He also excelled as a Pastor as well as a Preacher. In the homes of sorrow and suffering his very presence was a benediction. His sympathetic well-timed words afforded the much-needed consolation to those who mourned the loss of friends who had passed away to the Eternal world; and especially in cases where the clouds returned after the rain. His Ministry in Sharon Church extended over a period of thirteen busy and faithful years. At his own special request he obtained leave of absence from the congregation for several months and prosecuted advanced studies in the British Museum, London, England. He afterwards received the honorary degree D. D. from the Presbyterian College, Montreal. And while still remaining Pastor of the congregation he was for several years the efficient and methodical Clerk of Pictou Presbytery.

He now rests from his abundant labours and his works do follow him.

Dr. Tufts was succeeded in the Pastorate of Sharon Church by

REV. MARCUS SCOTT FULTON, M. A., B. D., 1909-1913

Mr. Fulton was born at White Hill House, Co. Derry, Ireland 38 years ago. He acquired the knowledge of the earlier branches of learning at Coleraine Academical Institution. He had his Arts Course in Queen's University, Belfast, and his Theological course in United Free College, Edinburgh. He also had an additional year of advanced study in Edinburgh University. He obtained his M. A. degree from Princeton University, and his B. D. degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, U. S. A. He came to Nova Scotia in the full bloom of his strong young manhood and was ordained and inducted into the pastoral charge of Sharon Church by the Presbytery of Pictou, July 20th, 1909. The robust young preacher from the Emerald Isle had a genial smile and a warm hand grasp, and a kindly word for every one, youthful or aged, whom he met in the house or by the way. He was specially popular with the young people of the congregation, and the community, and exhibited to them a gentlemanly type of character and conduct that was well worthy of their study and imitation. Above everything else he was an attractive, edifying preacher of the Gospel, and was always heard with pleasure and profit by his admiring hearers. He is now Pastor of Chalmer's Church, Toronto. As an evidence of the unflinching esteem in which he is held by the congregation he has recently been with us by special request, and officiated very acceptably at the celebration of the twenty-eighth Anniversary of the dedication of New Sharon Church. It may be worthy of notice in this connection that the congregation had manifested the same appreciation of the worth and work of other Pastors of Sharon Church whom they had cordially invited to officiate

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at a previous Anniversary, or at the original dedication of the Church.

REV. C. C. MacINTOSH, B. A. 1913.

During the past six years the pulpit of Sharon Church has been ably and acceptably occupied by the Rev. C. C. MacIntosh, B. A. He hails from the Island of Cape Breton which is celebrated far and wide for the great beauty and variety of its natural scenery. Hill sides decked with foliage, fertile valleys, lakes large and small, picturesque glens, gently flowing rivers and other delightful views, impart a grandeur and diversity of natural scenery to Cape Breton not surpassed by any other part of the Dominion of Canada. Born and brought up in the beautiful rural district of Malagawatch under such inspiring natural scenery, and taught in his home by precept and example the truths of God's revealed Will as he was capable of receiving them, the boy C. C. MacIntosh, as Wordsworth phrases it, was father to the man. After passing through the schools of his native community, and the Sydney Academy, the young student took the full Arts course prescribed by Dalhousie University, and the Theological course prescribed by the Presbyterian College, Halifax, and graduated with distinction from each of these Institutions. As a further special preparation for the responsible work of the Gospel Ministry, he enjoyed the great benefit of an advanced post-graduate course in the Free College, Glasgow, Scotland. On January, 1st 1902 he was ordained to the Ministry of the Gospel by the Presbytery of Sydney. His first Pastoral charge was in Reserve Mines and his next in Baddeck, both of them in Cape Breton. In response to a unanimous cordial call from this congregation he came to Stellarton and was inducted into the Pastoral charge of Sharon Church Dec. 4th, 1913. And now during six years of untiring diligence in the service of the

Church, he has proved himself to be a Workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. By all who have the pleasure of his acquaintance he is justly regarded as one of the most earnest and forcible preachers of the Gospel in the Maritime Provinces.

It goes without saying that the services of Mr. MacIntosh, as Pastor of the congregation, have been as highly appreciated as his impressive messages from the pulpit. He has particularly brought comfort and hope to many homes in which the clouds have returned after the rain.

In the last report of his predecessor, Mr. Fulton, to the General Assembly in 1913, Sharon Church is represented as having 245 families, 242 pupils in the Sabbath School, and as paying a salary of \$1500.00 to the Pastor, and contributing \$5844.00 for all purposes.

In the report of Mr. MacIntosh to the General Assembly for 1918 Sharon Church is credited with having 280 families, 415 pupils in the Sabbath School and Bible Class, as paying a salary to the Pastor of \$2100.00 with the free use of the Manse and four weeks vacation, as contributing \$2790.00 for Missionary purposes, and a grand total of \$9429.00 for all purposes. These significant figures eloquently proclaim the remarkable progress that Sharon Church has made under the successful ministration of Mr. MacIntosh. It is right, however, to remember in this representation that in recent years Stellarton has largely increased in population and material resources. All the same, it is very gratifying to Pastor and people to be assured that the religious activities and attainments of the congregation have far outstripped any material progress that has been made by the growing Town of Stellarton.

In view of the creditable progress which Sharon Church has made during the eventful history of more than half a century, we may well say with overflowing gratitude to God: "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." But before concluding

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this brief historical sketch, there are two or three characteristic features in the congregational life of Sharon Church which I think, are worthy of special mention.

In close connection with the Preaching of the Gospel to which we have been referring, we must assign a very high position to the Service of Praise as conducted in Sharon Church. The poet says with a spice of sarcasm: "Some to the Church repair, Not for the doctrine but the music there." And even admitting that some may be attracted by the luxury of the sound rather than by the religious significance of the service, it is still true that the sacred music of the sanctuary has a spiritualizing, inspiring influence on all the true worshippers of God. Even in old Sharon Church in which hymns and organs were unknown, the late John Culton and musical members of his family and other well-trained singers constituted a choir that was unsurpassed by any similar organization at that time in Pictou County. But that was only the day of small things in the musical part of the service, in the history of Sharon Church. Now we have a first class pipe organ that is almost made to speak in strains as sweet as Angels use by the dexterous manipulations of the Organist, Miss Gunn. And now we have a noble band of well trained singers, ladies and gentlemen, befittingly surpliced and unerringly led by Mr. Henry Ross, constituting a choir that would be a credit to any congregation in our great and growing Dominion. Members of the Choir of Sharon Church, let me assure you that your services are highly appreciated by the whole congregation.

Fidelity in regard to financial affairs has also been a noteworthy characteristic of the congregation. The financial obligations of the people to the Pastor have always been punctually and promptly implemented. At first the promised salary was comparatively small, only \$600.00 a year, with the free use of the Manse. In the course of the following years it became \$800., \$1000., \$1200., \$1500., \$1800. and now \$2100 with the free

use of the Manse and four weeks vacation. But whether at any particular time the promised remuneration has been large or small, it has invariably been punctually and promptly paid by the good people of Sharon Church. Carefully read the records of the Church from its first organization to the present day and you will find no mention of arrears due to the Pastor of the congregation. The gentlemen who are at present entrusted with this indispensable department of the work of the Church—call them Managers if you will—are entitled to the gratitude of the whole congregation for the faithful and efficient discharge of this part of the work that devolves upon them. Other obligations devolving on these office bearers were as fully implemented as the means at their disposal enabled them. And it is worthy of special notice in this connection that in all their indispensable sphere of usefulness in the work of the Church they were greatly encouraged and assisted by the generous, praiseworthy efforts of the energetic Ladies' Guild of the Church.

It goes without saying a second time that the congregation, in its united capacity has contributed systematically, and with equal generosity to all the various so-called schemes of the Church. It is thus evident that fidelity in regard to financial affairs has been a noteworthy characteristic of the congregation in all periods of its history. In this connection special mention must be made of the remarkable ability and never-failing accuracy with which Mrs. Hannah Cameron for seven years has faithfully performed the duties of the Treasurer of the congregation to the entire satisfaction of all interested parties.

Then what a noteworthy example of never failing devotion to the noble cause of Missions we have in the Ladies' Missionary Society of the congregation. In the early years of the congregation, like the members of other Churches of the time, the ladies were scarcely aware of the magnitude and import-

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ance of the great Missionary enterprise. As the result, their contributions to this department of our work were comparatively limited. But the Macedonian cry for heralds of Cross reached their ears from many lands, and deepened their sympathy for the perishing heathen and intensified their zeal and energy in spreading abroad the good tidings of salvation to our Home Mission Fields, and among all the nations of the world. As the result their monetary contributions increased from year to year until we find in the last report of Sharon Church for the current year 1918 that the annual contribution to the Missionary enterprise by the Ladies' Society amounted to the creditable sum of \$874.00. Of this amount the members of the Young Ladies' Branch—to their credit it be said—contributed a fraction over \$89.00.

Last, but a long remove from being least, the great and good work of the Sabbath School, is worthy of special mention. At the very commencement of the history of Sharon Church the Sabbath School was organized, and became a fruitful Nursery for the growth of the congregation. Later on we learn that William McPherson, Dr. Kennedy, and Alexander Grant, became in turn Superintendents of the School. In their time, aided as they were by an ever-increasing band of energetic teachers, the Sabbath School made rapid progress. And now for well nigh twenty years, Mr. T. J. Reid with commendable zeal, and never-failing punctuality has conducted the School successfully to the entire satisfaction of the scholars, the teachers, and the whole congregation. We can scarcely over-estimate the importance of the work of the Sabbath School as an aid to the obligation of parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Many of these young people in due time enter into the full membership of the Church and become active workers in the service of Christ. And even before they reach that stage in the religious life, they contribute regularly for the mainten-

ance of the Sabbath School, and have their monthly offerings to help send the Gospel on its world-wide mission.

But we have recalled enough of the past history of Sharon Church to cause our souls to overflow with gratitude to God for what He has done for us, and for what He has enabled us to do in His service. By His good hand upon us, the lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea we have a goodly heritage. We have not yet attained. We are not yet perfect. The ideal congregation looms up before the eye of our mind, and we would all be delighted to see the Vision actualized. "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Our past experience warrants to look forward hopefully to the future.

"The Lord of us hath mindful been
And He will bless us still."

We are living in eventful times in the history of the world.

"We are living, we are dwelling
In a grand and awful time,
In an Age on Ages telling,
To be living is sublime."

In looking forward hopefully to the future the special requirements that we need as a congregation are:

The manifested presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

A large, living, mid-week Prayer Meeting.

A Family Altar of the olden type in every home of the congregation.

Unwavering faith in the promises of God which assure us of the ultimate triumph of Christianity in all the world.

The deliberate determination to do with our might what our hands find to do in the Service of God.

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Deep-toned spirituality in all the Acts and Exercises of Religion, private and public.

“Therefore brethren be ye steadfast immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

The members of the Session of Sharon Church at the present date are:

Rev. C. C. MacIntosh, B. A., Pastor.

J. B. McKay, Clerk.

T. J. Reid.

James Fraser.

Charles L. Briggs.

Samuel MacKay.

J. W. Sobey.

James C. MacKay.

John C. MacDonald.

H. D. Munro.

Colin R. Fraser.

John S. Whyte.

Stellarton, N. S., December, 1919.

