

## REFLECTIONS ON OUR PRESBYTERIAN HERITAGE

The ship Hector arrived in Pictou from Scotland, with its many passengers, on September 15, 1773. In 1774 five of these same families took up residence along the East River, from Lourdes to about River Street.

In 1786, twelve years after their arrival, the residents of Pictou County appointed a committee to secure a minister. A letter was sent to Scotland and was read to the General Associate Synod meeting of the Presbyterian Church. As a result, the Rev. James MacGregor, then only 27 years of age, accepted the invitation, and set out almost immediately for Pictou. He arrived in Halifax and then came on to Pictou, arriving July 21, 1786.

The records speak highly of this young man, of his dedication and commitment to Christ and the church. In one place it says that he was a good scholar, and a sound theologian. His knowledge of Gaelic was accurate and his mastery of the language complete, as may be seen from his Gaelic poems and hymns.

Mr. MacGregor preached his first sermon at East River, a little below what later became Albion Mines (Stellarton), on July 30th, 1786. For nine years he was the sole minister in Pictou County - preaching, visiting, travelling on snowshoes in winter and by canoe in summer.

During the month of July, 1787, a log church - 40'x 30', without a pulpet, or heat, was built on the site of the old Duff Cemetery. It was replaced in 1803 by a larger frame building at Irishtown, or Plymouth as it is known today. It was here that Dr. MacGregor built a house made of brick and lived there until near the end of his life.

For 44 years, James MacGregor lived and worked in Pictou County. He died March 3, 1830, forty-five years after he arrived here from Scotland. He lived to see the congregation, of which he originally was the sole Pastor, grow and develop into six congregations, with settled Pastors.

### ST. JOHN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

St. John Presbyterian Church, the Kirk, had its origin when it was organized at Albion Mines (Stellarton). It was an "off-shoot" of St. Andrew's church in New Glasgow, and was located on the East side of Foord St. near what is now Kirk Avenue. The first minister, the Rev. William Phillips, was inducted in 1863. The people of St. John Presbyterian church continued to worship in that building until 1888, when the decision was made to move to a new location farther up Foord Street.

It was in 1926 that the Methodists of Stellarton joined with the St. John Congregation to become St. John United Church. They continued to worship in that building until 1934.

Nine ministers served St. John Presbyterian church from 1863 to 1934.

#### SHARON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Sharon Presbyterian church was formally organized February 19th, 1866, by the Rev. Alexander Ross. The first minister to be inducted in to the church was the Rev. Andrew Mowatt, on June 15, 1866. Incidentally, the Rev. Andrew Mowatt is the Grandfather of Mrs. Ruth Boothroyd, whose husband was Minister of Sharon St. John from 1954 - 1963. Sharon Presbyterian was a "child" of James Presbyterian (called after James MacGregor) in New Glasgow.

The original Sharon Church was built on the lower side and North end of MacKay St. and was dedicated October 2, 1864. It was about where Mrs. Marjorie Cummings house is now. The congregation continued to use that building until 1889, when the decision was made to relocate on Acadia Avenue. It was here that the second Sharon church building was erected.

Unfortunately this beautiful, stately building was destroyed by fire on February 24, 1924. It did not take the congregation long to come to the decision to build the third Sharon church. In 1925 a brick building was built on this present site and dedicated on February 21, 1926. This is the building we continue to worship in today. Six ministers have served Sharon Presbyterian church from 1866 to 1934.

#### REFLECTIONS ON OUR METHODIST HERITAGE

The history of Methodism in Pictou County began with the opening of the coal mines in 1798. At first the spiritual requirements of the English coal miners were met by itinerant ministers from Wallace, River John or from Truro. In 1845 at the request of the mining company the Rev. Richard Weddall came to Albion Mines. At first services were held at homes, or halls and not until 1862 did they have a church building. It was built on Foord St. near Allan Ave. , and the first minister was the Rev. John Cassidy. It is interesting that until 1888 the New Glasgow Methodists came here to worship. The original Methodist church building was destroyed by fire, but the manse, a very beautiful building, still stands.

In 1925 the Methodist congregation joined with the St. John Presbyterian Church to become the St. John United Church. The Methodist Church Was then used as a church hall. It later burned.

It is difficult to think of the Methodist Church in Stellarton without thinking of the Mission Hall. It was built by the Methodists in 1919, near Kirk Avenue. The work actually began about 1916, to fill the needs of the French and Belgian people employed by the General Mining Association. Many of them could speak little, or no, English, so they were deprived educationally and culturally. Miss Susan Sylvester was the first Deaconess.

In the ensuing years the Mission Hall served as a social centre for both men and women of the area, as well as a Sunday School for their children. Records show that in 1918 as many as one hundred children attended Sunday School. The children looked forward to the annual picnic when merchants of the town would transport the children to the seashore in their cars and treat them to ice-cream.

For many years the Mission Hall was used as a Kindergarten. Its last use was as a day-care centre for children. It was in 1970 that one of the Sunday School teachers, Mrs. Verna Gass, realized the need for pre-school training for four year olds, so she, assisted by Mrs. Betty MacKenzie, initiated a headstart program which became the "Happy Times" pre-school.

In 1975 the Mission Hall was damaged by fire, and later sold.

Fourteen ministers served the Methodist Church, from 1861 to 1926.

#### REFLECTIONS ON OUR CONGREGATIONAL HERITAGE

Though the Congregationalists were the least numerous of the three partners in the Church Union of 1925, their influence has been felt as individual congregations have developed, and strong traditions and lay participation has increased.

There were no Congregational Churches in Pictou 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 over the farms of the Acadians expelled in 1755, and of the Loyalists who had come because of the American Revolution. The term General Council comes from the Congregational Church.

#### REFLECTIONS ON THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA 1925 - 1934

Years of planning and negotiating culminated on June 19, 1925, when the United Church of Canada was born. A ceremony and Communion Service in Mutual Street Arena, Toronto, attended by 7,646 persons marked the union of the Methodist Church of Canada, the Congregational Union of Canada, and about sixty-two per-cent of the members of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. It was the culmination of many years of discussions among the uniting churches.

The Minister of Sharon Presbyterian Church at the time of union in 1925 was the Rev. C. C. MacIntosh. The Minister of the Methodist Church in Stellarton at that time was the Rev. Harry I. James. The Rev. D. M. Matheson was the Minister of St. John Presbyterian Church.

It was in 1934 that Sharon United Church and St. John United Church amalgamated to become Sharon St. John United Church with Rev. Dr. George M. Young the Minister. Ten Ministers have served Sharon St. John United Church from 1925 to 1989.