

Historical Sketch



THE purpose of the present brief sketch is not to trace the history of what is now called the Murray Street Baptist Church of Peterborough. What is attempted is the task of outlining briefly the events which led to the founding of the Church in 1846, and of recalling, even faintly, the atmosphere into which was born that organization which is to-day putting on a new dress. When the Rev. John Gilmour, in the autumn of 1837, came to Peterborough, after a pastorate in Montreal, he came to take, on behalf of the New England Company, the supervision of the Indians at Chemong and Rice Lakes. About forty years before that, Baptist work had been begun in Haldimand Township, not far from Grafton and Colborne, but in and around Peterborough there were no Baptists. Mr. Gilmour, whose duties for the New England Company gave him much liberty on Sundays, preached to the Indians and also, as occasion offered, to the scanty white settlers around Chemong Lake and elsewhere. The preaching was not at first attended with any outward marks of success, but the preacher was in due time cheered by the response of Mr. James Mann, whose character and solid worth counted for much. Others also made application for baptism, so that in 1838 four were baptized on profession of faith, and the little band immediately undertook to erect a place of worship in the Township of Smith, and the preaching of the Gospel has been maintained there ever since. The following extract from a letter written in 1841 by Mrs. Gilmour to a friend in Scotland is worth preserving because it brings in its own way a forest-scented breath from those days which now seem so far off:

"You will likely have heard from Mr. Watt of our little church and chapel in the wilds of Canada. Yesterday (Sabbath) three more were baptized in the Chemong Lake. Mr. Gilmour previously preached in an adjoining school house, standing on the threshold that his audience without as well as within might hear. When he closed all adjourned to the place of baptizing. The scene was picturesque and impressive, the afternoon beautiful. Here and there was seen an opening formed by the hand of industry in the dark, deep forest, and about five miles further, on the other side, as if peeping over the lake, the Indian Village. As the number on the beach was too great for all to witness, many went into canoes, and lay outside the spot, yet all was still and serious, the water calm and transparent, and the hymn of praise and prayer of faith arose from the spot where not long since, no holier sound was heard than the orgies of