

MATERIALS FOR OUR CHURCH HISTORY.—No. VII.

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH AT SOUTHWOLD, ONTARIO

BY REV. W. H. ALLWORTH.

The early history of this Church is surrounded with interest. It began with the settlement of the part of Canada in which it is found, and is among the oldest churches of the body in Canada West. At the time of which we write, London was not; dense forests covered the site where the city now stands. St. Thomas was not; and the same may be said of nearly all the towns and villages west of Ancaster. From Burlington Bay westward, it was for the most part forest, with the exception of here and there settlements in advance, on the leading roads and public highways.

In 1817, Rev. J. Silcox, member of Zion Church, Frome, Somersetshire, then under the pastoral care of Rev. Timothy East, emigrated to Canada, and with some others was attracted to the fertile lands of the Talbot Settlement, where the Hon. Col. Talbot was acting as an agent for the government, and, as an inducement to settlers, was giving out the forest land of this beautiful country in two hundred acre lots to actual settlers, the only condition being that they performed "settlement duties," i.e., cleared and fenced a certain portion and put up a log house. The "Talbot Street" and "North branch of Talbot Road" were both settled in this way. To the latter settlement Mr. Silcox came, and there with the first settlers began life in Canada, "roughing it in the bush," sleeping on the bark of a tree, and having to go about sixty miles to the nearest mill, in the vicinity of Long Point. A mill built by Col. Talbot in Dunwich, and burned by the Americans in the time of the war, was not rebuilt. Mr. Silcox's education being in advance of the other settlers, he was employed for some six months as a school-teacher, boarding among the people, who were composed of families of different religious views; American Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Baptists, and others. About the year 1819, these formed themselves into an independent society, calling themselves a "*Congregational Presbyterian Prince of Peace Society*," the first term denoting their Independent form of government; the second, that they were Calvinistic, like the Presbyterians, whose doctrines seemed to be best known; and the third, asserting their allegiance to Christ. Mr. Silcox, having evinced ability for speaking, was called to take the oversight of this church—for church it was. He was set apart to this work by a Mr. Philips and a Mr. Culver, who assisted in forming the Society.

Under Mr. Silcox's teaching the Society grew, and God bore testimony to His own word. Some were brought to Christ then, who preached the gospel with success among the Baptists for many years after. In this sparse settlement, the church was scattered in three townships, with a preaching station in each—Dunwich, now called "Iona Station," Southwold, and Westminster. The Lord's Supper was administered at the two latter places.

In 1819, when Mr. Silcox began to preach, there were in some settlements Baptists and others preaching through the country, but he found fellowship chiefly with Rev. Mr. Eastman, an American Presbyterian, who preached at that time in the Niagara District, in the neighbourhood of Barton. Mr. Silcox had preaching stations in log houses, and barns,—for regular meeting houses there were none in the settlement,—in Dunwich, Southwold, St. Thomas, Dorchester, Westminster and Oxford. The church was composed