

ERSKINE CHURCH OPENED

CROWDED CONGREGATIONS

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Out of uncommon vicissitudes evolving uncommon success, the members of Erskine Presbyterian church who opened their beautiful new church at the corner of McLaren and Concession streets last Friday, feel a justifiable pride in their achievement. No congregation in the city has more reason for self-congratulation when the condition of the church just after the big fire in 1900 is compared with what it is now. The credit for the phenomenal success is about equally divided between the energetic and much-beloved pastor, Rev. A. E. Mitchell, and his faithful and self-sacrificing congregation.

The history of the church's progress makes an interesting story.

To be strictly correct, the church really dates back thirty years, but more has been done in the past six years than all the time previous. Before the great conflagration in 1900, which swept the entire western portion of the city the church, then a small but commodious edifice, was located at the corner of Elm and Preston streets. The church and the homes of almost every member of the congregation were swept away as by one fell swoop of flame on the afternoon of the 26th day of April, 1900. So disastrous was the effect of this fire that shortly afterwards when it was decided to extend a call to Rev. Mr. Mitchell, only sixty members could be found to sign the petition. Strange to say, this was the starting point of the most rapid progress of the church.

The starting point of Erskine church may be traced back to 19th November, 1874, when application was made for the establishment of a mission station in Rochester-ville. In June, 1875, the convener of the Home Mission committee together with a number of the Presbyterian ministers of the city were appointed to visit Rochester-ville and ascertain how much the mission could contribute towards its own support. The next month this committee reported that the mission consisted of twenty members and seventeen adherents and had pledged itself to a subscription of \$270. Then on July 6th, 1875, the mission station was erected into a mission in con-

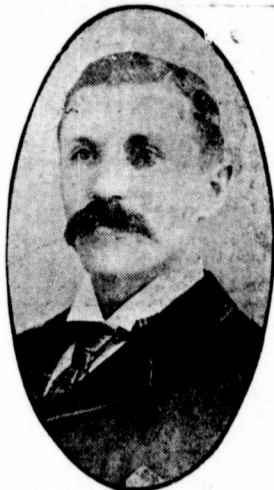
nection with the Presbyterian church in Canada. The little band grew and prospered but by slow degrees until eventually it developed into the congregation first known as the Presbyterian church of Rochester-ville.

A few years later the church burned in the fire of 1900 was erected and leave was given to rename the congregation. The convener of the Presbytery's Home Mission Committee, Rev. Joseph White, then of Wakefield, was appointed in the winter of 1886 to dispense communion to the congregation. One elder from each Presbyterian church in the city were formed into an interim session, along with the convener, and to twenty-five members the communion was given. This action was reported to the Presbytery and approved. On the first of May, in the year 1876, the Rev. Mr. White had been appointed an ordained missionary to Rochester-ville. In 1878 Mr. White was duly called and inducted into the pastoral charge. He continued to look after the congregation until 1891, when he was released to proceed to Manitoba. The Rev. Dr. Campbell succeeded Mr. White, and he, in 1900, resigned and was succeeded by the present incumbent, Rev. A. E. Mitchell.



REV. A. E. MITCHELL,
Pastor.

When Rev. Mr. Mitchell assumed the pastorate on the first Sunday in February, 1901, the state of the congregation was very low indeed. It was less than a year after the disastrous fire. Sixty per cent of families of the congregation had lost their homes. In a very short time, however, Mr. Mitchell succeeded in enlisting his small congregation to renewed effort, and they began to take a more hopeful view of the future. He and his congregation at once began to make preparations for the erection of what now constitutes the Sunday school hall, which was opened for public worship on the second Sunday of December, 1901. The congregation steadily grew and financially it prospered until once more they were confronted with the necessity of erecting a larger church. At the annual meeting in January, 1905, a building committee was appointed consisting of Messrs. James Baxter,



JAMES BAXTER,
Chairman Building Committee.

John R. Stewart, C. R. Johnston, George Eaman, R. E. Scott, Robert Thompson, J. A. Bowman, with Mr. A. Andrew and Mr. George Rochester as honorary members. Instructions were given this committee by the congregation to prepare plans for the new building. Mr. J. P. McLaren was retained as architect. Work was rapidly proceeded with and again the ceremony of laying the corner stone gone through. The beautiful new edifice is now practically completed.

The church from an architectural standpoint is a very handsome structure. Stately in appearance, strong in its construction and simple in its outline, it presents a striking appearance. The material used is grey limestone and the interior finish is done in light oak. The auditorium is amphitheatre shaped, the pulpit and the choir gallery immediately to the rear of it being situated at the east end. Circling the church in a graceful sweep is a large gallery, capable of seating about 400 people. The total seating capacity is 1,100. The seats, broad and high-backed, are of the most comfortable construction. They are made of ash, with quartered oak ends. The church is most conveniently laid out. There are three entrances from the street, two front entrances on Bronson avenue and a side entrance on MacLaren street. To the left of the pulpit there is a cosy vestry, while underneath the choir gallery there is a large room, 15 feet by 28 feet, which is to be fitted up for a ladies' parlor. The choir will also use it for a waiting room. It is most admirably adapted for this purpose, as on either side of the room there is a staircase leading to the gallery.

The church will cost somewhere about \$26,000 or \$27,000. No one who has seen the handsome structure can help feeling that the money was well expended and that every cent told.

The building committee, which has discharged its duties most creditably, is composed of Messrs. James Baxter, chairman; C. R. Johnston, secretary; John F. Stewart, treasurer; Robert Thompson, R. E. Scott, J. A. Bowman, Geo. Eaman, with A. Andrews and Geo. Rochester as honorary members.

Erskine Church was opened on Friday evening by Rev. Dr. Johnston, of Montreal. The church was crowded to excess. Rev. A. E. Mitchell, the pastor, had charge of the services and with him on the platform besides Dr. Johnston were Rev. A. S. Ross, moderator of the Ottawa Presbytery and Dr. Armstrong Moderator of the General Assembly of Canada. Both took part in the service. Rev. Dr. Johnston's sermon was cer-



JOHN F. STEWART,
Treasurer of Church.