

## HISTORICAL SKETCHES.

No. 80. - ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, ST. CATHARINES



T. CATHARINES, the county town of Lincoln, Ontario, is an incorporated city on Twelve Mile Creek, and the principal place on the Welland Canal, which connects Lake Erie with Lake Ontario. It is situated in the Diocese of Niagara, and contains the parishes of St. George, St. Thomas (with Christ Church), and St. Barnabas. A very handsome book, edited by the present rector of St. George's Church, has just been published giving the history of St. George's parish, together with much useful information connected with it. The compiling of books like this is much to be encouraged, for it is an excellent means of preserving historical records which some day will be of great use to the historian. The present book is compiled with great care, and is handsomely illustrated. The group of portraits on our first page, as well as the picture of the church accompanying this article, are taken from it, through the kind permission of the editor.

From this book we glean the following facts connected with the parish:

St. George's, the mother church of St. Catharines, goes back to the years 1791-4 for its foundation. Somewhere between these years there was a mission parish of the Church of England in the place now called St. Catharines; but the authentic history of the parish commences in 1796. A subscription list of that date is still in existence, the object of which was to secure "an appointment to the Church at St. Catharines."

The original site of the church was a plot of ground given by the Hon. Robert Hamilton, of Queenston, in 1798, and the first church appears to have been built between this date and 1810, for in the latter year an agreement was entered into between Herman Hosteler, Joseph Smith, Thomas Adams, George Adams, John May, and Paul Shipman, as trustees, and Jacob Dittrick and Thomas Adams to put in four circular window frames to St. Catharines' Church, Twelve Mile Creek."

Just as the Church seems to have been making some headway, the war of 1812 came as a terrible interruption. The Church was promptly thrown open as a hospital, and remained so during the war. An old account is found among the parish records as follows:

"An estimate of damage done a church in the Village of St. Catharines, at Twelve Mile Creek, by the British troops using it as an hospital in the years 1813 and 1814. Damages, £100. We certify the above to be a fair valuation of the above damages, Thomas Merritt, T. Butler, Trustees."

In 1819 a meeting was held at which it was resolved to petition the Bishop of Quebec "To send out a pious clergyman; we paying £50 currency per annum, and furnish him with a comfortable parsonage house."

This petition was sent in, but the bishop did not at that time see his way clear to granting it.

During these years the Presbyterians possessed some pew rights in the church, and from time to time used the building for their services. But in 1825 a meeting was held at which arrangements were entered into appropriating the church and lands to our sole use, payment being made to such Presbyterians as claimed for pews.

In 1828 the Rev. Mr. Parkin wrote to the "Churchwardens and trustees of the Church at St. Catharines," that he had at length effected an arrangement by which he is enabled to take charge of the mission at St. Catharines.

A subscription list of £320 pounds was made in the following year for a parsonage; and among the names at the head of it are: Job Northrup, Wm. H. Merritt, George Adams and Henry Mittleberger.

Mr. Parkin remained in the parish only about two years, and in 1830 we find the Rev. James Clarke in charge.

A new church was commenced in 1835, but was not finished for some four or five years. In 1840 Mr. Clarke was thrown from his carriage and killed while on his way to take afternoon service in Port Dalhousie. He was a man of great simplicity of character, evidently beloved by his people. He was an Irishman, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and before coming to Canada had been for many years a curate in the Diocese of Armagh.

The congregation marked their appreciation of Mr. Clarke's worth by placing a tablet to his memory on the west wall of the church.

The next rector was the Rev. Abraham Fuller Atkinson, D.D., who was appointed in November, 1840. In making the appointment Bishop Strachan described Dr. Atkinson as one of the most eloquent and pious preachers of the diocese. Like Mr. Clarke, he was a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin. He came to Canada in 1827, and was soon afterwards ordained by Bishop Charles Stewart, of Quebec. For eight years he was attached to Christ Church, Montreal, and then for four years he had charge of the parish of Bath, near Kingston, and upon resigning the latter charge he came to St. Catharines.

For twenty-four years Dr. Atkinson was Rector of St. George's. During this time various improvements were made in the fabric of the church, the chief of which was the erection of a tower to the memory of Thomas and Mary Merritt.

Failing health compelled Dr. Atkinson to resign the rectory in 1864, and he left St. Catharines to the regret of the whole community.