

An Interesting Sketch

Written in December, 1904, by George H. MacGillivray, for *The Glengarrian*.

Williamstown was the cradle of Presbyterianism in Upper Canada. The Rev'd. John Bethune came here in 1787. Simultaneously with his coming to Glengarry, there arrived emigrants from different parts of the Highlands of Scotland, as well as companies of disbanded soldiers from the United States, who from their firm allegiance to the British Crown during the Revolutionary war, were designated "Umpire Empire Loyalists" and to whom grants of land were given at the close of the war in recognition of their services. While residing at Williamstown, Mr. Bethune also officiated stately at Lancaster, Charlottenburgh (Summerstown), Martintown and Cornwall. He was a man of great zeal and piety and deservedly esteemed by all who came in contact with him.

He never faltered in his path of duty, but labored faithfully and affectionately over his wide district until his death which occurred 23rd September, 1815, in the 66th year of his age, and 44th of his ministry. His remains lie interred in the churchyard of Williamstown, where a monument is erected to his memory by his six sons, Angus, Norman, John, James, Alexander and Donald. Two of these sons—having contracted a preference for the other church—took orders in the Church of England. They are still living (1866). The one, the Very Rev. John Bethune, D.D., is Dean of Montreal; the other who for many years occupied the position of Archdeacon of Cobourg was, in 1866, consecrated Coadjutor to the late venerable Bishop of Toronto, under the title of the Bishop of Niagara. Thus, the singular and interesting anomaly, it may almost be called, in the Church History of Canada is presented to our notice, of Presbyterianism having given two consecutive Bishops to the Episcopalian Church, the first having been a native of Scotland, and educated at Aberdeen with a view of the ministry in the Presbyterian Church, as may be fairly inferred from the fact that shortly after his arrival in Canada proposals were made by him to accept the pastoral oversight of St. Gabriel Street Congregation in Montreal, the second, as we have just seen, being the son of a Scottish Presbyterian minister.

The Rev. John McKenzie succeeded Mr. Bethune in 1818 and was ordained on the 23rd December in that year. He was born at Fort Augustus, Scotland, and died in Williamstown on the 21st April, 1855, aged 65. He was a faithful pastor, and greatly revered by his flock. That he stood well with his brother ministers is evidenced by the fact that he was chosen Moderator of the first Synod in Canada. Warmly attached to his native land, and to the church of which he was a minister, it may be truly said of him that following in the steps of his Lord and Master "he went about continually doing good."

On the 4th September, 1856, Mr. Peter Watson was ordained and inducted to the charge, and is still minister (1868). He is a native of Inverness-shire.

The first church in Williamstown was a wooden one, built soon after Mr. Bethune arrived. It was replaced by one of stone in 1809 or 10. From weight of snow on the roof, it fell one Sabbath morning—fortunately the congregation had not assembled. The present quaint-looking, but large and comfortable stone church, was erected on the same site in 1812. It has recently been repaired and embellished at considerable outlay, and during last summer a massive iron fence was placed in front of it. The congregation is large and respectable, a considerable number of them still retaining a preference for "the Gaelic." Mr. Watson officiated in English and Gaelic here as well as in the church at Charlottenburgh (Summerstown).

The foregoing historical sketch by Mr. Croil, author of the History of the County of Dundas, ends with the year in which it was written, 1866.