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FIFTY YEARS OF HISTORY OF BRIDGETOWN METHODISTS REVIEWED

Dr. M. E. Armstrong Gives Recital of Leading Events of Providence Church At The Jubilee Celebration.

(Continued from Last Week)

During the decade of the "Eighties" the church was served by Rev. David W. Johnson, now Editor of the "Wesleyan," our own Rev. Dr. Jost, who liked the atmosphere here so well that he came back to live among us permanently nearly twenty years later; and during the first ten years of the new century we had in order given Benjamin Hills, W. H. Langille, Geo. P. Johnson and since then Rev. R. J. Porter, A. E. Reynolds, W. J. W. Swetnam, Geo. T. Bryant and the present incumbent, J. H. Freestone.

The membership of the church has never been larger than it is today. The town has been steady but slow, and while the constituency over which the ministers have had a pastoral care in number of families has been quite extensive, the membership does not indicate it very fully. We live in a Baptist portion of our country, and while they continue to do their work so well we have no desire to do more than assist in ministering to the religious life of this community in true brotherliness and sincerity.

Fifty years ago the membership was only one hundred and sixteen on the whole circuit, and less than half of that number attended here. Mr. Heartz left a membership of about eighty in Bridgetown church, but by deaths and removing it shrank to forty in 1850 there were only one hundred and twelve reported for the whole circuit. At the end of ten years more it had reached one hundred and forty and followed by the visit of Hunter and Croxley in 1861 there were large additions here so that the total reported that year for the whole circuit numbered two hundred and four. At the beginning of the 20th century the number was two hundred and four, twenty years later it was three hundred and thirty, and now it is nearly five hundred.

The development of Western Canada and the pioneer and the pioneer, E. Young, told of their work on the plains and among the Indians and first settlers there were many missionary pioneers of that early days helped make of that great west the splendid Christian civilization of to-day. Many have been called to the service of the church and its capacity have been held. During the South African war a notable meeting or two was held and many patriotic ever. We have not had more than five or six superintendents since 1829.

The general superintendents of our church, both Dr. Chown and the late Dr. Carmen have filled the pulpit. In the eighties there was a unique service that drew a very large congregation. It was a confirmation service held by the late Bishop Binney, Anglican Bishop of Nova Scotia, when nineteen candidates were regularly confirmed in the Anglican Church. The present St. James across the street was then in course of erection and this church building was offered to the Episcopal neighbors for the confirmation service and gladly accepted. The Chancel at the end of the church was erected in 1904. It was been talked of for some time before that but was deferred from time to time as too great an undertaking by the older officials of the time. Much of the credit of promoting this improvement is due to our brother, Leander Miller, who was very insistent in regard to it both in season and out of season and who headed the subscription list and circulated it until he saw the scheme was to succeed. At first it was thought that should only be a sort of cave or baywindow like projection on this main floor of the building but later it was decided to start at the foundation and go to the roof and to finish the roof to match that of the main church. The late J. W. Beckwith with Mr. Miller and the speaker composed the building committee but the entire credit of the neatness and symmetry of the work is due to the supervision given it by Mr. Beckwith who watched it daily many hours, that it should be carefully and well built. The same season the great roof of the whole church was reshingled and the church, inside and out, was well painted. A. R. Bishop being the contractor for the painting and decorating.

The first service in the improved building was the session of W.M.S. Nova Scotia Convention. On September 28th the church was formally opened. Rev. Dr. John MacLean, then Editor of the "Wesleyan" now of Winnipeg, being the pulpit supply for the occasion.

The electric lighting of the church came in 1892, February 29th, and was an improvement as great over smoky lamps of that time as the lamp that were over the old candles that served the purpose in the old chapel for our grand-parents until 1854. Lamps had, therefore, served us about fifty years before we had secured a better light.

The present organ came quite unexpectedly in 1908 during the pastorate of Rev. G. F. Johnson. At that time Wesley Church, Yarmouth, wished to install a new one and offered this one to our congregation, and as it was well recommended by those who knew it, and our old one, while in fair repair and doing good service, it was thought that the time was opportune to replace it. The trustees at once made the change and the old one, with its battered pipes from many tunings

and adjustments, was carefully stored in the wood room below and the new one installed by Wilton Gates, of Yarmouth. A few months later the old organ was sold to Middleton Methodist Church; its mellow and rich tones restored as sweet as an old violin, while its strong bass, always admired, came back to a wonderful degree and it still continues to lead the worshippers to praise in our sister town. Our present one speaks for itself and is still admired by its old friends and new ones. Its form of architecture lends itself very nicely to the type of our chancel and it almost seemed when it was installed that they were made for each other.

An interesting heirloom we have of the first chapel is our church bell. This was purchased and placed in a little tower on the old church away back in the fifties during the pastorate of Rev. Wm. Wilson. It being twenty-five years younger than the building itself. It was moved to its present quarters which are much more lofty, spacious and protected, in the beginning of 1872, and for fifty years since and for twenty years previous to that date it has regularly rung out the hour of the call for worship on Sundays and week days, as well as to toll out its slower notes as members of the congregation have been borne to their graves for three generations. For three quarters of a century too it has rung out the old and rung in the new years to our quiet town as the years came and were gone.

The most welcome news it has ever announced was on November 11th, 1918, when with the bell of St. James Anglican Church, it was able to announce the cessation of the great war and the signing of the armistice. This great event had taken place in France at eleven o'clock on Monday morning but by the difference in time and the wonders of telegraphy, the glad news was flashed across the Atlantic and known here at 5 a.m., several hours before it really happened by our clocks. Providence, however, was aided by the fact, Maurice Armstrong, and helped to arouse our citizens and to tell many anxious mothers, parents, and friends, that at last the cruel war was over with its many casualties even in our own community.

In 1872 a nice clock was presented to the church by the late John E. Sanction and it continued to hang on the front of the gallery, facing the minister and marking time as he preached for a half hour more or less, but within the last five years some "divine" who did not like to be timed so capriciously has removed it to the rear of the church. It should be returned to its rightful place in honor of the donor who was a valued official of the church for many years.

In 1921, during the pastorate of Mr. Bryant, a union of Gordon Memorial Presbyterian Church and Providence was consummated, the mutual advantage of both, we believe. For two winters previous the Sunday Schools united and the Methodist Church was used for all services, the Presbyterian minister filling the pulpit in the morning and the Methodist in the evening, to the united congregations. The union gives a larger number of workers in all religious activities and religiously, socially and economically. I believe time will show it to have been a wise and successful move on the part of the two congregations. I can refer briefly to the Sunday School, which near its hundredth anniversary of continuous work. While the circuit has changed its ministerial supply every three years on the average, the Sunday School, like the brook, goes on forever. We have not had more than five or six superintendents since 1829. Mr. John Hicks' services, which have been most faithful, dated since 1880. Previous to that J. E. Sanction filled this important place for a number of years and previous to him George Murdoch brought the school to this building in 1872.

Service in the early days of the church was held at three p.m., each Sunday afternoon. In Baptist service was always in the morning. By this plan the two denominations knew much more of each other than to-day. Presbyterian service which dates back to the early "sixties" here were held often at 4.30 at the close of Methodist evening. Other times it was in the evening. For many years there was a Y.M.C.A. meeting kept up at Tupper's Hall which was carried on by the men of the combined churches and for some years the Y.M.C.A. meeting was held in our church school room.

The Anglican Church in those days was the only main training public service both morning and evening. In the "eighties" our service was shifted to evening and a little later while Dr. Jost was the circuit, both morning and evening preaching service became the custom. The congregations in the early days when only one service was held there was neither Baptist nor Presbyterian service at the same hour, was very large, even more so than to-day when the bells of all the churches ring at the same hour dividing the community into three or more congregations. Time will not permit me to refer but I wish to say that those who had here a church home and worshipped regularly, who have now passed away "whose faces we have loved long since, and loved well."

The fifty years that have gone to join the years beyond the flood have wrought many changes and as we glance about and memory reminds me of those who were here at the beginning of the century one is appalled at the changes. Of the officials of the early years they, one by one, have passed away. Abner Bath and Joseph Fellows, in Granville, were faithful and active, they were succeeded in that section by the late Robt. Bath.

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whose cheerfulness and geniality is well remembered and who died in 1903. Weston Fowler, the father of Frank Fowler, and Mrs. Fowler, who is still with us, hale and hearty, were always useful members, as were the Fowler of the previous generation, Edmund Bent, who died in 1914, was for many years an official of this church, married to a very ripe old age, he was a generous contributor to all its activities and would say in his years of infirmity, that to help with his contributions was now all he could do. The late Watson Kinney who passed away at midlife, and whose children and grand children are among our active members, will long be remembered by those who knew him for his geniality and loyalty to his church. The Kinneys had moved here in the eighties from New Brunswick and had been trained in an old-fashioned Methodist home in that province. William H. Burns, a man of fine ability, a faithful member and supporter of our cause, passed away more recently.

In the fall of 1893 the church sustained a loss of one of its most useful officials and members and the town the loss of a leading and valuable young citizen. I refer to the death of John E. Murdoch, brother of the late Mrs. James DeWitt. Mr. Murdoch had just returned home from a visit to the world's fair at Chicago when stricken with pneumonia and died after a few days' illness in his 38th year. His funeral was held on a Sunday afternoon in October of that year and was spoken of as the largest ever seen here. In the evening a memorial service was held in this church with a very large audience at which the pastor, Mr. Giles, and the Baptist and Presbyterian ministers all took part and referring to the great loss the community had sustained. This was counted one of the most impressive services in the history of this edifice. Enoch Dodge, George Davis, John E. Sanction are all recalled as bearing a part in their day. Oldham, Whitman, J. G. H. Parker and late Sheriff Avarde Morse are all remembered as regular attendants here for many years.

There are others who deserve mention did time permit. There was the late Mr. Cunningham, who was the Circuit Steward for some years and came here from Kentville. William H. Cochran, who took the shoe business left vacant by the death of Mr. Murdoch. Mr. Cochran and family came from St. John; he was the son of an Irish Methodist and had a warm and loyal heart for the church of his fathers and was a man well liked and made many friends the few years of his life spent here. The late J. W. Beckwith was one of the group who were taken into the church in the days of Dr. Heartz on the circuit. While his life was an exceedingly busy one, he always maintained an interest in the religious work of this church and was a regular attendant of this church his entire life and a supporter of our work in this town. His family are about to install a new and improved electric light system in the church as a memorial to their deceased worthy parents.

Mention has been made of the band of women who did such helpful work at the building of the church. Of those active and who contributed so largely to the religious work of this church should be made of Mrs. Miller, widow of Rev. Gen. Miller, who was a class leader and whose whole class had a wonderful gift in prayer and often in exhortation. Our present Mrs. Fowler is perhaps the sole representative left of this group of women there were Wiedlocks, Fosters, Tappers, McKays, Batis, Currells, Murdocks, Davies and others. Of the younger group trained at by the older ones there was the late Mrs. John Hicks, Mrs. DeWitt, Mrs. J. W. Beckwith, and numerous others still remembered, whose work was most commendable and helpful in this community the past fifty years, and who have now passed away, and well remembered for their gifts whether of prayer, praise, service, hospitality or faith, they have left us a sweet memory of sincere and noble service faithfully performed during their brief lives, which even more than ours to-day, were beset with hardships and difficulties greater than we have to encounter and they counted them as nothing if they could but do their part in making this a Christian land and surrounding their homes with wholesome Christian influences.

During the whole of the half century under review our church has received much help and inspiration from the presence in our town and congregation of one or more retired ministers, "superannuated" as the official record classifies them, but to us they have given a very active and helpful service. When Rev. Dr. Heartz came here in 1870 he found living here, Rev. T. H. Davies, "Father Davies," as he was usually called. He died in 1876 about one month before the death of the pastor, Rev. Mr. DeWitt, and was very generally mourned. Mr. Davies was a man of good ability, a lover of the best of literature, a writer of poetry of much merit, and a great student and lover of nature. He had made a fine collection of mineral and geological specimens in his wanderings in the wilds of our province that was quite valuable and is now at Mt. Allison University. His assistance to the regular minister was most helpful as was his pastoral work in the town, irrespective of denominational lines. For fifty years his immediate family and descendants have given most valued help to this church. Rev. Jas. R. Hart, came in 1882 and Rev. John Cassidy in 1889, and Rev. J. B. Giles in 1890 as they gave up the active work of ministry. Each of these assisted materially in the work of our church and were good additions to our community. Mr. Hart moved away in 1898, while Mr. Cassidy died the same year. Mr. Giles died in 1901, after several years of invalidism. In 1900, we received our venerable Dr. Best, who has been shared for more than a score of years of faithful and helpful service as any pastor or citizen could give to church or state, the end we trust is not yet, when the infirmity of years will shorten his pace or his years of usefulness as a pastoral assistant, friend of the sick and most useful adviser and citizen. Last, but not least, Rev. Mr. Langille came in 1921, and has established his home among us and we trust he may be spared to us as long and useful and happy a life here as Dr. Jost. Our church is certainly to be congratulated on being located in

(Continued on Page Seven)

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