

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE CONGREGATION OF PRINCE- TOWN, P. E. I.

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Long pastorates in one congregation at the present time are rather the exception than the general rule. Changes are now more frequent. A minister continuing in one charge until death is not so common as in days of yore. The first Presbyterian church in Truro has only had three pastors in 116 years and the congregation of Princetown which was the first organized on the Island enjoyed the services of Dr. Keir for fifty years.

This congregation owes its existence to Scottish immigration. On two different occasions families came out from the Fatherland and located themselves at Princetown, and on the east side of the Island. Soon after their arrival in their adopted home they received occasional visits from Dr. McGregor, Revds. Duncan Ross, and Matthew Dripps.

At this time however the country was very sparsely settled, yet in the year 1800 not a few of the people were permitted to enjoy the regular ordinances of religion. In a newly settled country when the means of intercourse was only by the rude path and congregations comprised a number of sections, service could not of course be held in each settlement every Sabbath.

The first minister who was settled over Princetown, the Rev. Mr. Urquhart, took under his pastoral care what now comprises some four or five congregations. At regular intervals a sermon was preached in each locality but the country being then almost an unbroken forest the labours of the minister were arduous, and the people had many silent Sabbaths. Elders however were ordained in each district, the sacraments were dispensed, and other pastoral duties performed.

Thus originated, 35 years ago, the small beginning of the Presbyterian Church in P. E. I. The tree at the outset was of stunted growth, but in 21 years three more branches were added when the P. E. Island Presbytery was formed which now numbers some twenty-six congregations. Mr. Urquhart continued to labour at Princetown about two years when he removed to New Brunswick. Shortly after coming to the latter province he was crossing the Miramichi River in the winter, fell through the ice and was drowned.

The congregation thus organized and

consisting of some four or five scattered sections became vacant and continued so for six years. They were not however wholly neglected. Dr. McGregor and Rev. Duncan Ross again visited them occasionally, though their visits were necessarily few and far between.

In the year 1806 another preacher arrived from Scotland, Rev. Peter Gordon. Having preached in the only two organized congregations on the Island and his services proving acceptable, calls were presented from each. The Princetown call was refused and accordingly set aside.

In the year 1808 the Rev. John Keir commenced his labours in this congregation and in 1803 received a call. In June 1810 he was ordained and inducted into the pastoral charge of the congregation. This call was subscribed by 64 persons and of these 64 only fourteen remained alive thirty years ago. For ten years Princetown continued to receive one half of his time and labours. The other half was divided in different proportions between New London, Bedeque, and West side of Richmond Bay. His labours during these ten years were very extensive. The comfortable modes of travel now enjoyed were then unknown. Carriages could not be used for there were no roads on which they could be driven. There was nothing but a foot path through the woods to guide the traveller on his way.

The following anecdote will serve to show some of his trials and difficulties in the way of trial and difficulties in the way of travel in the early days of his ministry. P. E. Island is much indented by inlets of the sea. When roads were few the route along the shore was considered the easiest and best. Mr. Keir was travelling at one time on foot to the place where he had appointed preaching. After passing over one or two inlets they reached one where there were no boats or other means of crossing. As Mr. Keir could not swim the only plan they could devise to gain the other side was for his companion to tie the clothes of both in a bundle upon the top of his head swim over with them, and then return to assist Mr. Keir across. In this manner they crossed over and proceeded on their journey.

For ten years the congregation continued as at first organized, but after that time three new charges were erected. In 1827 it comprised a district of country about ten miles square with the number of adherents, general attendance and communicants greater than before the se-