

R
287.
920924
NEAL

**The Proposed
Memorial**

TO THE

Rev. George Neal

BETTER KNOWN AS

Major Neal

THE PIONEER METHODIST PREACHER
IN UPPER CANADA

6 th 6- In Mike's presence
W at 7- favor it. My son



THE PROPOSED MEMORIAL
TO THE
REV. GEORGE NEAL

Better known as Major Neal, the Pioneer Methodist
Preacher in Upper Canada

A LITTLE more than ten years after the first Methodist society was organized in London, England, a child was born, either in Pennsylvania or, as some of his descendants claim, in South Carolina, who, in his mature years, exerted an important influence on the founding of Methodism in Upper Canada. George Neal was of Irish descent, the family name being originally O'Neal. In his youth Whitefield was itinerating in America, but it was not until later in life that Neal was brought under Methodist influences. During the stirring times of the American Revolution Neal served with the British forces in South Carolina and in Georgia, and attained to the rank of major. On several occasions he displayed conspicuous bravery, and more than once narrowly escaped with his life. Towards the close of the war, when his services were no longer required, he retired to the interior of the State of Georgia, where he engaged in teaching school. It was during this time that he heard the Rev. Hope Hull, an earnest Methodist preacher, and became concerned about his spiritual welfare, and a year later found peace through faith in Christ.

He soon began to exercise his gifts in the service of the Lord. His call to preach was in the form of a dream, in which a glittering sword was given him, having two edges, with the name of Wesley emblazoned thereon. He was sent by the Presiding Elder to preach on the Pee Dee River, where he was instrumental in leading a number of souls to the Saviour. Whilst strongly attached to the people amongst whom he labored, his British proclivities were strong, and he resolved to go to Canada. He missed the boat by which he intended to go to Nova Scotia, and

then travelled overland to the Niagara frontier and crossed into Canada at Queenston on Oct. 7th, 1786.

Although he was a British subject and had proved his loyalty to the Government and his attachment to British institutions on many a well-fought field, yet he found great obstacles thrown in his way when, on his arrival in Canada, he commenced preaching the Gospel. The British officer commanding at Queenston learned that Major Neal occasionally held meetings among the people, sent for him, and forbade him to hold any more, asserting that none but clergy of the Established Church of England should preach in the colonies.

Mr. Neal, feeling that he had rights as a British subject, determined not to yield to this person's dictation without making a strong effort to maintain them, and with them his religious opinions and privileges. Finding him, therefore, immovable in his purpose, the officer commanded him to leave the province within a given number of days. Before the time had expired the persecutor was called into eternity, and Major Neal was suffered, without further molestation, to proceed with his labor of love, preaching in various places in the Niagara District. The work of the Lord prospered in his hands as he travelled from settlement to settlement, preaching to the people in their shanties and barns, or in the woods, the unsearchable riches of Christ. From the commencement of his efforts Mr. Neal found some who sympathized with him in his religious views. Among these was Mr. Conrad Cope, who had come to Canada in 1783 or 1784, and had settled for a time near Queenston. He very much encouraged and assisted Mr. Neal in his early efforts. Through the instrumentality of Major Neal, Christian Warner was converted, who by his ardent zeal and earnest devotion became a power for good in that district, and later on was helpful in leading Nathan Bangs, who had been converted in the Niagara District, through the instrumentality of Rev. Joseph Sawyer, into the experience of perfect love.

Major Neal collected together those who had been converted, and formed a society at Stamford in 1790, and

appointed Christian Warner leader. This class was composed of a number of members who afterwards were distinguished as pillars in the Church of God. About this year, 1790, Major Neal married a widow named Cronk, who already had some family, but who proved a helpmeet in the best sense of the term. Whatever the facts may have been, the members of this class believed it to be the first class in Canada West, for upon the tombstone of Mary Neal, wife of Major Neal, it is explicitly stated that she was a member of the first Methodist class in Canada West.

The work continued to spread, the leavening influence of the Gospel manifesting itself in many places along the Chippewa, and up Lyon's Creek. Major Neal's proceedings were approved of by his brethren in the United States, as well as in Canada, and on July 23rd, 1810, he was ordained deacon by Bishop Asbury at the first session of the Genesee Conference, which assembled at Lyons, N.Y. About 1813 Major Neal removed to the township of Charlotteville, to what was formerly known as Cope's Landing, where he purchased two hundred acres of land, on a portion of which part of the village of St. Williams now stands. There he continued his labors, and aided greatly in building up the Methodist Society.

The Woodhouse Methodist Church, which was the first in the County of Norfolk, was only ten or twelve miles from Major Neal's new home. Services were commenced in that neighborhood about the year 1800. The home of the Ryersons was near the Woodhouse church, and in all probability Dr. Egerton Ryerson and his three brothers, who were converted in 1815, or thereabouts, heard occasionally from the lips of Major Neal, as well as from other earnest preachers of those days, the message that at length led to their conversion. The Rev. George Ferguson in his manuscript journal, as quoted by Father Carroll in "Case and His Contemporaries," says that "while he (Ferguson) was yet a preaching soldier, during the War of 1812, he found many of Neal's converts in various places on the frontier, and still more of them when he came to travel on the Niagara Circuit in 1817."

He also speaks of encountering the old veteran on the Long Point Circuit, at a later period, in 1822, when he was stationed there as the colleague of David Culp. He says: "I was privileged with a familiar and very pleasing acquaintance with that apostolic ambassador of the King of kings, who was the first honored instrument of raising the Gospel standard and proclaiming salvation to a lost and guilty world, through faith in the all-atoning sacrifice for sinners, to the people along the shores of the Niagara River, through whose instrumentality many were brought to God—the Rev. George Neal, who lived at this time at Long Point Bay. His silver locks and apostolic looks, combined with the heavenly eloquence which flowed from his saintly lips on the sublime doctrines of the Gospel and the experience of religion, made it a treat to hear him, at once edifying and encouraging. He was a man of excellent mind and full of Biblical information. He was a more than ordinary preacher, masterly on doctrines. I had the privilege and honor of having him around the four weeks' circuit with me, and of hearing him every evening." The Rev. Robert Corson, who was stationed as the colleague of Rev. Wm. Griffis on the Long Point Circuit during the Conference year 1827-8, had Father Neal, at the advanced age of 78, with him around the circuit. Mr. Corson says of him: "Neal was possessed of a good English education. His preaching abilities were above mediocrity, very zealous, and rising sometimes to eloquence. He was tall and erect in person, retaining somewhat of his military bearing to the last. Religious truth from his lips sometimes was expressed in military phrase. He was wont to speak of the Gospel as a genuine Jerusalem blade, two-edged, cutting both ways. He was abundant in labors—travelling sometimes under the Presiding Elder on a circuit. Far on in life he became blind, but still quoted Scripture in his sermons with correctness, after taking the precaution of having them read to him by his little granddaughter."

The Rev. George Neal had three daughters who were married as follows: Mary, to Elijah Hazen; Desire, to Adam Procunier, and Esther to Lieut.-Col. John B.

Hutchinson, at whose home, a short distance north of Port Rowan, the declining years of the venerable servant of God and his devoted wife were spent. A number of their descendants are earnest Christians and respected members of the Methodist Church. Two are in the Christian ministry—Rev. George Neal Hazen, B.A., of London, and Rev. C. A. Procnier, M.A., of Revelstoke, B.C.

On February 28th, 1840, at the advanced age of ninety years, the veteran and heroic soldier of the cross passed to his reward. Rev. R. Corson was at that time superintendent of the Simcoe Circuit, which included the Long Point territory, and preached the funeral sermon. On July 5th of the following year, at the age of eighty years and eleven months, his beloved wife joined him in the heavenly home. The influence of the godly life of Major Neal still continues. There are yet living a few who remember him, and one at least who heard him preach, Mrs. F. Cope, of St. Williams, who although in her eighty-fourth year is a regular attendant at the church services.

In the spring of 1908 the Quarterly Official Board of the Port Rowan and St. Williams' Circuit, through the Simcoe District Meeting, memorialized the Hamilton Conference, with the hope that some action would be taken to perpetuate, in some suitable way, the memory of Major Neal, and as a result a committee, consisting of Revs. J. J. Liddy, M.A., Chairman of the Simcoe District; R. J. Elliott, S. J. Kelly, A. I. Terryberry, B.A., W. H. Garnham, and Messrs. J. N. Pierce and J. L. Buck, Esq., was appointed, with instructions to report at the next session of the Conference. This committee in reporting to the Hamilton Conference at its last session recommended as follows:

"That the memory of the Rev. George Neal, better known as Major Neal, the first Methodist preacher in Upper Canada, be perpetuated by the erection of a Memorial Church in the village of Port Rowan.

"That with a view to the erection of the said church, may we venture to suggest that our Conference contribute

the sum of \$3,000 as a freewill offering towards this patriotic and worthy object, and we suggest the following amount from each district:

Hamilton	\$560
Guelph	240
St. Catharines	220
Brantford	300
Woodstock	250
Galt	180
Simcoe	180
Milton	200
Welland	180
Norwich	180
Palmerston	130
Mount Forest	130
Walkerton	130
Warton	120
Total	\$3,000

“That at the Financial District Meeting next fall, the Chairman of each district be requested to see that this matter be brought before the brethren assembled so as to receive their hearty and prompt co-operation.

“That J. L. Buck, Esq., and Rev. W. H. Garnham be joint treasurers of the Neal Memorial Fund.

“That this Conference respectfully requests the co-operation of the London and Toronto Conferences in the erection of the said Memorial Church to perpetuate the memory of Major Neal, to the extent of \$1,000 from each Conference.

“That the President and Secretary of Conference and Rev. W. H. Garnham be a committee to prepare a pamphlet for circulation through the Conferences.

“That the President of Conference and Rev. W. H. Garnham be a committee to visit the London and Toronto Conferences in the interest of the Neal Memorial.

“That, with the consent of the surviving relatives, the remains of Major Neal be removed from their present

resting-place and be interred beneath the new church, and that a suitable memorial tablet be placed in the church.

"That it is the understanding of this Conference that the Trustee Board of the Port Rowan Methodist Church assumes responsibility for \$5,000 towards the erection of the said church.

"That the committee be allowed to continue until its work is completed."

The recommendations of the committee were received and adopted by the Conference.

The London and Toronto Conferences were visited in the interest of the proposed memorial, and by vote heartily approved and endorsed the undertaking. The London Conference appointed the following committee: Revs. Principal Warner, D.D., J. Morrison, G. N. Hazen, B.A., and Messrs. W. F. Lawrence and Israel Taylor, of which committee W. F. Lawrence is secretary and Rev. J. Morrison, Alvinston, treasurer. The Toronto Conference appointed Revs. J. F. German, D.D., J. H. Hazlewood, D.D., W. H. Hincks, LL.B., and Messrs. R. Awde and H. L. Lovering—H. L. Lovering, Esq., Coldwater, being appointed treasurer for the Toronto Conference. In the case of each Conference the intention is that the committee shall continue until the work had in view is completed.

Port Rowan, where the Memorial Church will be erected, is a pretty and thriving village, pleasantly situated at the head of Long Point Bay, and overlooking that beautiful portion of Lake Erie, and is the terminus of the South Norfolk branch of the Grand Trunk Railway. It is a summer resort, frequented every year by many visitors. The fishing in the adjacent waters is considered by many to be superior to any in the older settled parts of Ontario, whilst the duck shooting in the fall is also very attractive. There are several natural gas wells within the limits of the village, from which an ample supply is available for lighting and heating and for mechanical purposes. With enterprising citizens, who have recently launched new industries with bright prospects of success, there can hardly be a doubt that, in the not distant future, Port

Rowan will develop into a busy town. There are splendid farms in close proximity to the village, whilst the possibilities of the adjacent region as a fruit-growing area have not yet been fully recognized.

Methodism was introduced to Port Rowan in 1853, and the present church edifice was erected in 1855, and needs to be replaced by a more modern structure, which shall be better adapted to meet the needs of the community, and shall more appropriately represent Canadian Methodism.

As the three Conferences have so heartily endorsed this movement to perpetuate the memory of the Rev. George Neal, may we urge upon the members of the individual churches included in these Conferences the desirability of giving a prompt and liberal response, so that this commendable project may be brought to a successful completion, with the least possible delay, and thus furnish a deserved tribute to the memory of our heroic pioneer preacher, and at the same time be an indication of the magnanimity and gratitude of those who are to-day reaping the fruit of his labors, and of the labors of other noble men of God who have gone to their reward.

J. J. LIDDY,

Chairman Simcoe District.

W. H. GARNHAM,

*Pastor Port Rowan and St.
Williams' Circuit.*

W. J. SMITH,

President Hamilton Conference.

C. T. BENNETT,

Secretary Hamilton Conference.