



1845

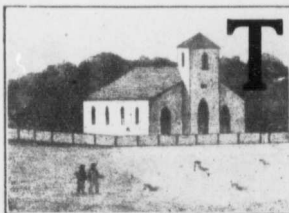


1920

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# Melville Church, Fergus, Ontario.

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## THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

in Fergus began its visible history in a roughcast building situated on the lot occupied by the present Saint Andrew's Church, and facing toward the log school-house, which stood on the site of the High School of to-day. The internal arrangements were quaint to a degree, the high pulpit

being placed at the side of the church, and surrounded by square pews with doors. The communion table occupied a permanent position in the centre and stretched almost the whole length of the building. This structure was completed in 1835, at a time when there cannot have been more than five or six houses in Fergus.

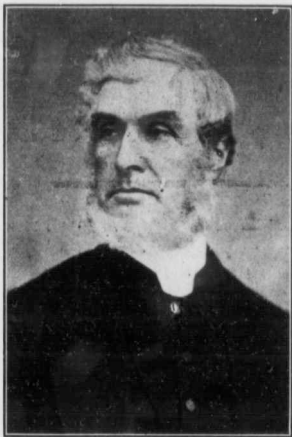
The first minister was Rev. Alexander Gardiner, settled here by the Church of Scotland in 1837, whose ministry lasted only four years. During the vacancy of two years which followed his death, Mr. A. D. Fordyce, who was the first clerk of session, kept the people together by conducting public worship and reading printed sermons.

On December thirteenth, 1843, Rev. George Smellie, who came from Orkney under direction of the Colonial Committee of the Church of Scotland, was inducted and began what proved to be an exceptionally long pastorate filled with far reaching influences. It was estimated one year after Mr. Smellie's settlement that nearly a thousand persons were connected with the congregation, and the parish practically extended to Georgian Bay.

The roads were originally mere Indian trails, and the pioneer settlers were obliged to hew out, or burn out, homes for themselves in the heart of the bush; so that a great deal of the pastoral work had to be done on foot, and it was not an uncommon thing for Mr. Smellie, sometimes accompanied by his wife, to walk to Guelph.



## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS



Rev. George Smellie, D. D.

Annually he made long tours to the most distant parts of his charge, preaching sometimes in taverns or barns, or other large buildings; marrying, baptizing or ministering to the sick wherever such services were needed.

In 1843, the Church of Scotland had been rent by a controversy over the question of State control, and the disruption resulted in the formation of the Free Church of Scotland, a sympathetic movement in Canada the next year bringing about a similar result. Mr. Smellie joined the Free Church party, followed by a large part of his congregation. For some time they continued to worship in St. Andrew's Church, but it became necessary to reorganize the congregation and,

in the Autumn of 1845, to proceed with the erection of a separate building, which was completed and formally opened for public worship in March 1847 under the name of Melville Church.

In spite of the fact that much of the material and labor was contributed gratuitously, about \$6 000.00 was expended on this first church building, including the wings which were added in 1861. Sites on the south side of the river, for both church and manse, were given by the Hon. Adam Fergusson, one of the founders of Fergus, and a "bee" was appointed for a given Saturday in October "to log off" the ten acres on which the manse was situated.

In the year 1880 this property was purchased from the congregation by Mr. G. L. Smellie. (now of Vancouver), and continues to be the home of the family, and a new manse was built and has since been occupied by succeeding ministers. The most kindly relations have existed between the old manse and the new, a common interest and affection forming a strong bond between them, and while Dr. and Mrs. Smellie lived, the younger ministers found in them warm and sympathetic friends for whom in turn they showed an almost filial regard.

## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS



As the country became cleared and settlers grew in number, new congregations were formed at outside points where Mr. Smellie had been in the habit of holding services periodically. Six years after the formal opening of Melville Church the first "swarm" hived off and was organized as Chalmer's Church, Elora, nearly sixty certificates of membership being transferred at one time. Another "swarm" formed the nucleus of St. John's Church, Belwood, and in 1864 another found a more convenient church home at Cumnock. As the area of the parish contracted, the minister was set free from some of his wide journeyings and could do more work at the centre of his charge.

Hitherto but one Sabbath service had sufficed, but of course that one was sufficiently lengthy at times. It is recorded that the first Sunday service conducted in old Melville lasted from eleven in the morning till five p.m. An afternoon service was accordingly commenced beginning at four o'clock. Later on the hour was changed to half-past six, and then to seven, Sunday School being held in the afternoon; it had previously been held immediately after morning service.

The names of many faithful workers in the Sunday School might be mentioned did space permit. Mr. James McQueen was the first superintendent and there has never been a time when one or more of his family has not been teaching, two of his daughters doing splendid work in connection with the Infant Class. Mr. James Argo was Mr. McQueen's successor, and he was followed by Mr. Peter Rennie, who superintended the school for twenty-six years. The present staff includes Mr. Adam Armstrong as superintendent, Mr. J. C. Templin as assistant and Mr. J. B. Bayne as secretary and librarian.

In 1836 the Kirk Session was composed of Messrs. A. D.



James McQueen, Esq.



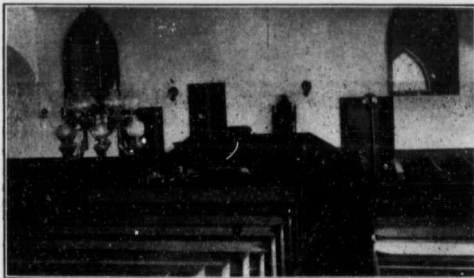
## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS

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Fordyce, Francis Anderson, Charles Allan, John Munroe and Geo. Slene. In 1840 it was found necessary to elect the following five elders: James Webster, John McKee, John Wilkie, William Gerrie and Thomas Dow. In August 1844 there were added: A. D. Ferrier, W. Gibbon, and W. Kilpatrick. In February 1853, John Martin, James Gerrie, James Ross, W. Clark, and James Beattie. In October 1861, George Wilson, Alex. Taylor, Adam Argo. In December 1865, Forbes Moir, Peter Dow, James Dow, James Davidson, Samuel Dobbin, John Rutherford. In February 1877, Robt. Phillips, William Castell, Peter Rennie, Hugh Black, John Richardson. In February 1888, George Tower Fergusson. In September 1890, James McDonald, David Nairn, Robt. Moir, F. B. Anderson, William Ross, Dr. J. P. Roger. In February 1903, A. A. Armstrong, William Barnett, Jas. R. Caldwell, J. C. Templin. In December 1905, John J. Sanderson, William Mitchell, James Aitken, James Walker. In October 1912, George Cruden, William Rutherford.

During all these years there were but four Session Clerks, namely: A. D. Ferrier, who ably filled the position until 1884, Dr. Smellie acting pro tem during his absences in the Old Country; from July 1888 to December 1900, William Castell; to December 1905, Dr. Roger; from January 1906 to date, J. C. Templin.

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Interior of Old Melville Church.

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In the early days the Kirk Session was a somewhat dread body in the habit of exercising a very strict discipline and freely summoning members before it on charges of Sabbath desecration, non-attendance at church, quarrelsome-ness, profanity, intoxication, and still more serious offenses; and an old practice was observed of calling at the church door "three several times" the names of offending parties cited to appear. It was the headle who magnified his office in the discharge of this function.

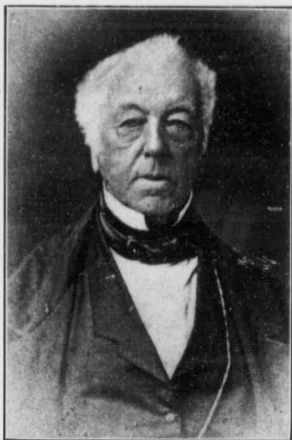
## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS

THE solemn ceremony of dispensing the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was prepared for by "A day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer" on the preceding Thursday, with public worship at eleven o'clock. Until 1868 the stores in the village closed on that day, the communion being observed only once or twice a year. A Divine Service was also held on Saturday at two o'clock, and on the Monday following a Thanksgiving service at eleven a.m. The service on Sabbath morning often lasted for three or four hours, the pews reserved for communicants being filled again and again as those who had partaken fled into other seats. The offering on all these occasions was for Missions, and the amount at the first communion season of Dr. Smellie's pastorate was £3 13s. In those days the offering was made as one entered the church, a collection plate being placed near the door.

The Deacon's Court was instituted in 1845 to take charge of the temporalities of the congregation, and the office was for life. The first deacons to be ordained were: Messrs. R. Cromaar, Thos. Mair, (Jr.), George Cromaar, Wm. Clark, Francis Anderson, (Jr.), Jas. Perry, James Morrice, James Gerrie, Gairn Caldwell, Wm. Gibbon, John Cunningham, James Richardson.

This Court was changed in 1865 into a Board of Managers, and the printing of the annual reports of the congregation was ordered. No reference is to be found in the records of the church, as to the beginning of the precentor's office, but among those who led the psalmody in the early days were Mr. McQueen, Mr. Henry Michie, Mr. William

Rennie, and Mr. Alexander Forbes. Under Mr. McQueen a choir was organized, and although in 1863 an elder departed from Melville Church as a protest against the carnality of choir-singing, a choir has led the church praise ever since, and the use of the Hymn Book and of an organ was introduced a few years later.



Hon. Adam Fergusson.

## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS

One of the greatest spiritual events in the history of the congregation was the Carroll and Russell revival in the years 1869-70. It was accompanied by a remarkable awakening in Galt, Elora, and Fergus, and for some time afterwards throughout the countryside a strong impulse was given to the holding of meetings for the deepening of



A. D. FERRIER, ESQ.

spiritual life. It was a time to which many look back as an epoch in their lives, and none rejoiced in it more than the minister and his wife to whom it came as "a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

In Eighteen Hundred and Eighty-Five, Mr. Smellie's long and faithful services were fittingly recognized by Queen's University, who conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity, and several years later these services were still further recognized by a special jubilee demonstration under the auspices of the Presbytery of Guelph. This was the first jubilee

of ordination celebrated in Ontario.

During his long pastorate he had the joy of seeing a pioneer church with its wide domain of influence become a settled centre of worship surrounded by other strong charges which looked to Melville as their mother church. As one generation passed on, the younger grew up under his ministrations in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to carry worthily the burdens their fathers had laid down. During the first twenty-five years of his ministry, over a thousand children were baptized into the Church of Christ by this much venerated under-shepherd of the flock. He preached the Gospel, not only by the strong word of faith and conviction on the Sabbath day, but also by the powerful, silent testimony of an earnest and consistent life of consecration and service.



## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS

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### MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS Opened March 4th, 1847.

Familiar walls! — that long have stood  
Where grows the rugged pine.  
From kindred trees our fathers hewed  
Their forest homes "Lang Syne".

Each day with blows the welkin rang!  
Blazed clear their fires by night!  
At work, at rest, they stoutly sang  
Of Faith, and Truth, and Right.

On sacred days from far and near,  
They gathered at this spot  
To worship God, in honest fear  
That glowed, and wavered not.

True builders! May our work endure,  
Like theirs, through regions broad;  
And may our hopes in Thee be sure,  
O Living Son of God!

By Rev. J. H. MacVicar.

Written on the occasion of leaving The Old Church.

## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS

**HISTORY** of Melville Church would be incomplete without a tribute to Mrs. Smellie, the loving and beloved help-meet of its first minister. A daughter of the manse, she was eminently fitted for the position she so ably filled. Whether as mistress of the Manse, superintending the Ladies' Association, or in Sunday School teaching the Bible Class, or training the little ones in the Infant Class, of which she was the first teacher, or presiding at a W. F. M. S. meeting, she was always the energetic, conscientious leader, earnest in her efforts to instill into the minds and hearts of those under her care the great truths of the Bible.

Mrs. Smellie's influence spiritually, intellectually and socially has been far-flung for it has been transmitted to the third and fourth generation by those, far and near, who were under her watchful care, and the whole community has been the better for it. Hers was a strong personality, and yet so tender and sympathetic that many have gone to the Manse sore distressed and come away uplifted and rejoicing because a little talk with their friend had helped to ease the load.

The Manse was ever open; an outstretched hand and a sunny smile were

ever ready to greet any who entered the portals of that hospitable home. We recall happy evenings spent there when fun and frolic held sway, though held in check by the gentle restraint of the gracious hostess. At not too late an hour, on bended knee, God's blessing was invoked on all. What a fitting ending to a pleasant evening! All came away thinking "It was good to be there".

Mrs. Smellie had the cause of Missions very much at heart and was one of a little band of women who met and organized "The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society", which under a new name has grown to be such an important branch of the work in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Though dead, she still lives in the Auxilliary of Melville



Mrs. Smellie

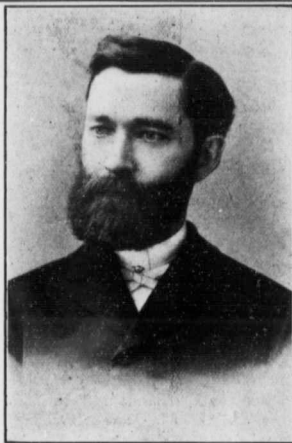
## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS

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Church, and many of those who were associated with her in her good works rise up and call her blessed and give God thanks that they had such a leader. Mrs. Smellie was called Home, March 11th, 1904. Her daughter, Miss I. L. Smellie, who lives on in the old home, now known as "Kirkhall", imbued with the same spirit as her mother, has worked on unceasingly for the good of Melville Church in Woman's Aid, Harvesters' Mission Band, Sunday School and Woman's Missionary Society, of which latter body she has been the Secretary for many years.

For a short time previous to Dr. Smellie's withdrawal from the active work of the ministry in 1888, Mr. J. C. Tolmie, then a student in Knox College, acted as his assistant. His young vigorous manhood and his warm interest in outdoor sports appealed strongly to the young men of that day, some of whom are still active in the congregation. His Bible Class was largely attended and much interest awakened among the young people in the general work of the church. He chose as his life-partner a daughter of one of the oldest families of

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Rev. R. M. Craig, B. A.

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Melville congregation in the person of Miss Margaret Fergusson, a granddaughter of the donor of the sites for the first church and manse.

## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS

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On November 14th, 1896, the first pastor of Melville Church passed away. At the time of his death, Dr. Smellie was in Toronto, but his remains were brought to Fergus and interred with all honor.

Dr. Smellie was succeeded in the pastorate in 1889 by Rev. R. M. Craig, B. A., whose faithful ministry and untiring services continued until 1895 when, for the sake of his health, he accepted a call to First Church, Santa Fé, New Mexico. Here he and Mrs. Craig exhibited the same energy and devotion in their work as had characterized them in Fergus, and as Mr. Craig grew stronger his fervent spirituality, his missionary zeal, and his ability as an organizer won the recognition, first of his own synod of which he was elected Synodical Missionary, and then of the Home Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church North, by which he was chosen as Superintendent of Mission Schools over a field extending from Alaska to New Mexico the duties of which he discharged enthusiastically and efficiently, even through failing health, until his death in 1910. His widow still lives in Ottawa and in the kindly remembrance of her old parishioners.



THE PRESENT SESSION

## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS

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**I**N THE MEANTIME, in 1896, the Rev. John H. MacVicar, B. A., was settled in Fergus. He was one of the band of pioneer missionaries from the Presbyterian Church in Canada to China, but had been forced, much to the regret of himself and Mrs. MacVicar, to relinquish the work there on account of her health. He spent himself unselfishly and enthusiastically in the service of Melville congregation, his devoted wife sharing with him the joys and trials and labors of a true minister's lot. Her genuine hospitality and gentle humour made the Manse an attractive place, and many unostentatious deeds of kindness and their friendship for little children gained for both an entrance into many hearts.

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Rev. John H. MacVicar, B.A., D.D.

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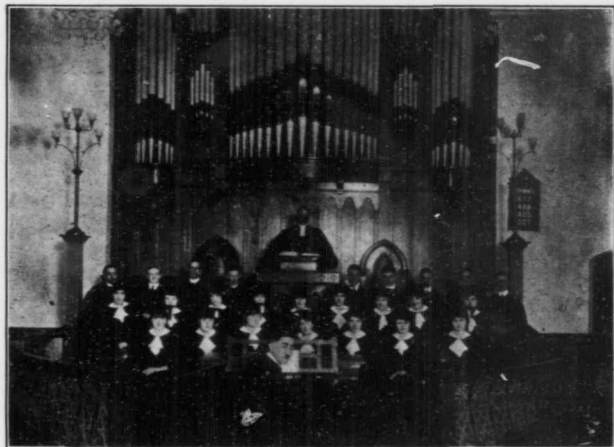
### THE SESSION

The following are the members of the present Session as shown in the photograph on the opposite page:

Rear Row—Messrs. James Aitken, John Sanderson, William Rutherford, Hugh Black, George Cruden and James Caldwell.

Front Row—Messrs. James C. McDonald, J. C. Templin, Clerk, Rev. R. W. Craw, Moderator, A. A. Armstrong and F. B. Anderson.

MELVILLE  
CHOIR



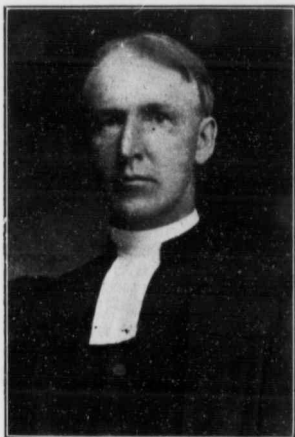
## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS

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It was during Mr. MacVicar's pastorate that the new Melville Church was built on a site nearer the centre of the town. The corner stone was laid in 1899 by Mrs. Smellie, now far advanced in years, but rejoicing that she had lived to see the congregation provided with a more commodious and well equipped place of worship.

The Church was opened in May, 1900, and here Mr. MacVicar continued his ministrations for some years, and attracted hearers of varied types by his preaching which was of a very high order characterized by scholarship and spirituality. It was with deep regret that the congregation in 1908 accepted Mr. MacVicar's resignation. The state of his health demanded a long rest from ministerial work, and although urged to take an unlimited holiday, he thought it wiser

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Rev. R. W. Craw, B. A.

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that the tie should be finally broken, and in August the pulpit was declared vacant. After a year spent in Scotland, shorter pastorates followed in New Glasgow, N. S., and St. John's, N. B., where Mrs. MacVicar died to the great sorrow of friends everywhere. After a time her husband returned to the field in China in which they had both been so deeply interested, and where he still labors in the proclamation of the Gospel.



## MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS

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IN the Rev. R. W. Craw, B. A., who succeeded him in Melville Church, the line of ministers of a Missionary type has not been broken. With earnestness and faithfulness he proclaims the Word of God and urges upon his people the duty and privilege of sending the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and part of the fruit of his work is seen in the fact that contributions to missions have more than doubled during his pastorate.

He has been ably upheld in this, as in all other work, by Mrs. Craw, under whom the Women's Missionary Society has maintained an honorable record for membership and liberality, and to whom the congregation owes much for her unselfish efforts to further all its interests. Together they have striven to lead their people to "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, and to remember that "To whom much is given, of him much shall be required".

In the retrospect of seventy-five years Melville Church has abundant cause for gratitude to God, and humble thankfulness as she sees many of her sons and her daughters occupying useful and honorable places in the world, and doing good work in the Church of God at home and abroad.



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