

MM 52.7
. W 58

The First Protestant Missionary in Canada

BY
MRS. W. T. HALLAM, B.A.,
TORONTO

Reprinted from The Canadian Churchman.

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
GENERAL SYNOD, ARCHIVES



THE REV. THOMAS WOOD.
1706-1778.

MM 52.7
W 58

The First Protestant Missionary in Canada

THE REV. THOMAS WOOD, the subject of this sketch, was a Church of England clergyman, who was sent by the S.P.G. in 1752 to work among the Indians of Nova Scotia, and to visit the garrisons stationed in various parts of the province.

While he was not the first clergyman to settle in Canada, or to hold services here, yet he was the first to do real missionary work.

Several clergymen came over from England to Halifax with the settlers in 1749. One of them, the **Rev. William Anwyl**, held the first service on the beach at Halifax as soon as the transports arrived. He died a few months later. Another of them, the **Rev. William Tutty**, took charge of St. Paul's until the arrival of Dr. John Breynton in 1752, a naval Chaplain, who had been with the British forces at the siege of Louisburg in 1744. The third, the **Rev. Jean Baptiste Moreau**, was soon sent to Lunenburg, to minister to the German settlers. Earlier still than this time, there were clergymen at Annapolis Royal. In 1710, Port Royal was taken by the British, their first possession in Canada, and the name was at once changed to Annapolis Royal. The **Rev. John Harrison**, Chaplain to the forces, held a service of thanksgiving for victory. They used the Roman Catholic chapel of Ste. Anne on this occasion.

After this, from time to time, chaplains were sent to the garrison which was kept at Annapolis Royal, but more than once the officers and men of the garrison had to baptize their own children, there being no clergyman among them. There is another recorded service in Canada, some three hundred years ago, an inter-

esting account of which was given by the Rev. Sydenham Lindsay in a previous issue of the "Canadian Churchman." When Martin Frobisher went on his third expedition in 1578, he took with him a Chaplain, and it is recorded: "Master Wolfall, on Winters Fornace, preached a godly sermon, which being ended, he celebrated also a Communion upon the land, at the partaking whereof was Captain Best, of the 'Ann Francis,' and other gentlemen and mariners, soldiers and miners with him."

The place and date of Mr. Wood's birth have been obtained through the efforts of Judge Savary, of Annapolis Royal. He writes in *Church Work*: "Mr. O. R. Rowley, of Montreal, writes me on the authority of Dr. Lorenzo Sears, of Providence, R.I., that Thomas Wood was born at Harewood, Yorkshire, January 12th, 1706."

The date of his removal to New England is not known, but he was living there before 1749, for in that year he sought ordination in the Church of England, following a petition of the inhabitants of New Brunswick, New Jersey, who declared him to be: "*A gentleman of very good life and conversation, bred to Physick and Surgery.*" Mr. Wood had served two years as surgeon in Shirley's regiment of Foot, garrisoning Louisburg previous to June, 1749. No doubt the great success which attended Mr. Wood's missionary work was due in part to his ability to minister to the body as well as to the soul. He went to England for his ordination, and was licensed by the Bishop of London "*to perform the office of priest in New Brunswick, New Jersey.*"

Soon after Mr. Wood arrived at Halifax he made a missionary journey to Annapolis Royal, and it was reported to the S.P.G., by the chief officers of the garrison, that "*he had performed with great diligence all the duties of his function there, and behaved himself well in every respect.*"

In June, 1755, Fort Beauséjour, at the head of the Bay of Fundy, was taken by the British forces. This fort had been built by the French

on the north side of the little river Missiquash, which forms a natural boundary line between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The French gathered all their forces here, and put up a desperate fight, but the British, under Col. Robert Monckton, completely routed them. The fort was renamed Fort Cumberland, and a garrison was placed over it. In August Mr. Wood paid a visit to this fort. The diary of John Thomas, a surgeon in Col. Winslow's regiment, has the following record: "*August 31st, 1755.—Pleasant day. Mr. Wood, ye Church parson, preached at Fort Cumberland; all our regiment went to Church there.*"

According to Trueman's "*Isthmus of Chignecto*," Mr. Wood had held services here before, making visits to the British during their time of preparation for the reduction of Fort Beausejour. Their fort, called Fort Lawrence, was built on the south side of the little river.

Mr. Wood's visit in August, 1755, was the first occasion when a Church of England service had been held in New Brunswick, Fort Cumberland being in the present County of Westmorland.

In 1794, the first church was built at **Mount Whately**, called St. Mark's, and the bell used in this church is an old French bell which the English settlers found when they came to possess the land left by the Acadians. The French people, always ardent in their zeal for their church, had built three chapels at Chignecto. When they were sent adrift in September, 1755, they burned the chapels, but buried the bells, thinking, no doubt, they might return to their old home. The bell is ornamented with scrolls and fleur-de-lis, and has the inscription:—

*Ad Honorem Dei,
A Rochefort,
1734.*

During the summer of 1755, Mr. Wood also visited the German settlement at **Lunenburg**. He performed the service in English; and administered the Holy Communion to twenty-four

of the German settlers. One hundred and twenty English soldiers were on duty there. Mr. Wood was assisted by the Rev. Jean Baptiste Moreau, the pastor of this flock. Shortly after this, St. John's Church was built. In 1917, a tablet was erected in this church, to the memory of Mr. Moreau, by his descendant, the Hon. MacCallum Grant, Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia.

In September, 1759, the Rev. John Breynton and the Rev. Thomas Wood were collated by his Excellency, the Governor, as Rector and Vicar, respectively, of St. Paul's Church, Halifax. In this year, too, Mr. Wood was appointed Chaplain to the House of Assembly, reading the prayers each morning of the session, with the recompense of three shillings a day. He held this appointment for several successive Assemblies.

Apart from the garrisons stationed at the places which Mr. Wood had visited, the only English-speaking people were the Halifax settlers. For five years after the expulsion of the Acadians in 1755, all their rich lands lay desolate.

"There was silence in the forest and along the Minas Shore,

And not a habitation from Canard to Beau-séjour."

In 1760, in response to a generous offer by Governor Laurence, of Halifax, New England families began to arrive, and to bring life again to these once prosperous places. Settlements were made along the Minas Basin, from Windsor to Annapolis, mostly by those of Puritan principles, with only a few "Prayer Book families" here and there among them.

In 1762 Mr. Wood made a journey from Halifax to each of these settlements. There was only a narrow cattle road which the French had made through the woods, and as there were few horses, the missionary, no doubt, made most of this long journey on foot. At every place he visited he was made welcome, not only by the Church people, but by all who had the good fortune to meet him, and it might be said with

truth that by his sincerity and true friendliness, he won many for the Anglican Church.

Mr. Wood's successful work in New England among Puritans and Indians may have been one of the reasons for his removal to Nova Scotia. The Micmacs were showing themselves very unfriendly to the Halifax settlers. Mr. Wood loved the Indians, and he realized that their hearts would be changed only by showing them real friendship. He devoted two and three hours a day to the study of Micmac.

A sympathetic supporter in this work among the Indians was Colonel Gorham, of Halifax, who used to gather the young Indians into his house, and there have them instructed in the English language and in the truths of the Gospel by Mr. Wood.

The Hon. Michael Francklin, Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia from 1766-1776, was also a devoted friend of the Micmacs, and was in turn much beloved by them. He did a great deal to stop the treacheries which were being practised against the white settlers at this time. It would surely be a sore grief to the missionary to hear of one, then another, white settler being killed and scalped by these Indians to whom he was trying to teach the Gospel of love and peace. Probably some of the victims were his personal friends. The account of their savage cruelty to such men as Captain Samuel Cleveland and Mr. John Pyke, of Halifax, and Mr. Payzant, of Lunenburg, are heart-rending tales. These men were the ancestors of families well known in Canada to-day.

The Indians were not pagans. They had practically all been reached many years before by Jesuit missionaries, most of whom were sincere Christians. When we read how the French people entered into the life of the Indians, and of those joyous winter gatherings at Port Royal, by the members of *L'ordre de bon temps*, of the conversion and baptism of Chief Memberton and his family in 1610, we must

admit that the early French fathers approached these dark-skinned children in a way to gain their confidence and affection.

The French made an impressive ceremony of their baptismal service:

"The Priest, La Fleche, in his vestments, surrounded by gaily dressed French courtiers, soldiers in uniform, sailors, lawyers, labourers, and lackeys, baptized into Christianity, on the shore of Minas Basin, twenty-one Indian converts, and chanted loud and clear, the Church's Te Deum."

While much that was good was learned by the Micmacs from the Jesuits, after the English became the possessors of Nova Scotia, a low-principled Jesuit, called Abbé La Loutre, who was in the province, filled the minds of the Indians and simple Acadians with such startling ideas, as that they must own allegiance to the French King, if they would hope for salvation, that messages had been sent from Jesus Christ to this effect, and that the English were their avowed enemies. These were some of the delusions which Mr. Wood had to dispel.

Abbé la Loutre was not *persona grata* with his brother Priests, either in Nova Scotia or Quebec. Most of them were men of high principle and godly character, and regretted many of his actions. After the reduction of Beauséjour, in 1755, he escaped to Quebec. From there he was sent to France, but the vessel on which he was sailing was captured by the English, and he was exiled to Elizabeth Castle, on the Isle of Jersey, for eight years, and when peace was declared in 1763 he was sent back to France.

A French Priest, Abbé Maillard, who was a sincere missionary of the Roman Catholic faith, was residing in Halifax during the years of Mr. Wood's ministry. They became close friends. When M. Maillard was very ill he asked Mr. Wood to visit him, and on the day before his death requested him to read the office of the

Visitation of the Sick in the presence of several French people. At his funeral Mr. Wood officiated in French, and there were present French, Indians and many Halifax citizens.

As can be easily understood, M. Maillard had great influence over the Micmacs, and through his affection for Mr. Wood he persuaded them to make their peace with the English. An interesting ceremony took place shortly before Abbé Maillard's death. The Chief assembled the tribe and spoke to them of Abbé Maillard's desire that they should make peace with the English, and then marched them off to the Governor. He received them in his garden, and the Chief said that they looked upon the King as their good father and protector, and that he now buried the hatchet as a token of submission and of their having made a peace which should never be broken. The Chief laid the hatchet on the earth, and the same being buried, the Indians went through the ceremony of "Washing the paint from their bodies" as a token of hostilities being ended. The whole ceremony was concluded by all present drinking the King's health. Although there is no record, we expect that our faithful missionary was privileged to be present at this ceremony.

When George II. died, in 1761, the people of Halifax showed their respect by proper ceremonies. The new King was proclaimed in public places throughout the town, and a dinner was held, followed by fireworks and bonfires. The next day the members of the council, officers of the army, members of the Assembly and the chief inhabitants went in mourning dress in procession from the Government House to St. Paul's Church at 11 a.m., where a funeral sermon was preached by Mr. Wood on the demise of George II. The pulpit, reading-desk and Governor's pew were draped with black. Minute guns were fired from the batteries. The guns continued firing for an hour and a half, the flags at the citadel and George's Island were hoisted half-mast during

the day, and assemblies for diversion were suspended by order for the space of one month as part of the general mourning.

The French people of any distinction up in Canada went into mourning for George II., and expressed the deepest loyalty for their English sovereign.

By 1767 Mr. Wood must have acquired the Micmac dialect tolerably well, for he officiated at the marriage of Marie Joseph, daughter of Thoma, the hereditary "King" of the Micmacs, and entertained them at his own home.

A very impressive service for the Indians was held at St. Paul's Church, Halifax, in the summer of 1767, a ceremony differing from that social function which had been held in the Governor's garden, but with a similar meaning—that there was peace at last. More than that, they accepted the Gospel of salvation as had been taught them by the First Missionary of the CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN CANADA. The church was crowded. Many Indians attended; the Governor was present, members of the Legislature, and men, women and children of all classes in Halifax crowded in to take part in this unique and solemn service. Mr. Wood *read the prayers in Micmac*. At the beginning of the service an Indian Chief came forward, and, kneeling down, prayed for the blessing of Almighty God upon King George, the Royal Family and the Governor. The missionary explained the prayer in English. The Governor arose and bowed. Both before and after the service the Indians sang an anthem, and after the service they returned thanksgiving for the opportunity of hearing prayers in their own language.

During the summer of 1769 the untiring missionary made a journey to the New England settlements on the St. John River, N.B. Reaching the mouth of the river on Saturday, July 1st, on the following day he "performed Divine Service," and preached in English in the forenoon

and in Indian in the afternoon to thirteen Indian men and women who happened to be passing through this part. An Indian girl was baptized. In the evening, the French inhabitants being present, Mr. Wood held the service in French.

Four English children were also baptized at St. John's Harbour, but at another village, where he had an audience of 200, only two were christened, as "most of them were Dissenters." In the villages of Gagetown and Morisania a like number were baptized, "two being twins who were born in a canoe on the river, two miles away from any house."

Mr. Wood's tour at this time extended to the very farthest settlements on the river. "The Chief of the Indians," wrote Mr. Wood, "came down to the landing and handed us out of our boats, and immediately several of the Indians, who were drawn up on the shore, discharged a volley of musketry, turned from us, as a sign of receiving their friends. After some discourse relative to Monsieur Baillie, the French Priest, whom the Government have thought proper to allow them, and finding them uneasy that they had no Priest among them for some time past, I told them that the Governor had employed him to go to the Indians eastward of Halifax, and, therefore, had sent me to officiate with them in his absence. They seemed well pleased, and, at their desire, I began prayers with them, they all kneeling down and behaving very devoutly. The service concluded with an anthem and Blessing. I am convinced that if I had been sent two years ago among them and no Popish Priests allowed, the greater part, if not all, had become Protestants."

Mr. Wood reported that "The Sign of the Cross" in the English baptismal service gave the Indians and French particular satisfaction. This visit of Mr. Wood to the settlements along the St. John River marks the beginning of the Church of England in St. John.

In 1764 Mr. Wood was sent to Annapolis township to work among the new settlers from Massachusetts. In this field of work he was as greatly beloved and as successful as he was in Halifax, both among the English and Micmacs. He found here "more than eight hundred souls without either church or minister, whose joy was universal at the hopes he gave them of being appointed their missionary." Five hundred acres of land were granted to him, and he also kept a number of horses and cows.

His wife, whose maiden name was Mary Myers, was, like himself, an accomplished linguist. They had one son and four daughters, and an interesting document has been found which recorded "*conveyance of a Mulatto girl, Louisa, sold in July, 1767, by Charles Proctor, Halifax, for fifteen pounds, currency, to Mary Wood, of Annapolis, wife of the Rev. Thomas Wood,*" and by Mrs. Wood "assigned over to her daughter, Mrs. Mary Day, during the following year." Many of the wealthier people at this time were served by slaves. In 1773 Mr. Wood speaks of himself as "Vicar of the Church of St. Paul's, Halifax, at present residing in Annapolis."

His friend, M. Maillard, left him some valuable papers which enabled him to pursue his studies in Micmac, so that he prepared a grammar and dictionary. In 1776 he sent to England the first volume of his grammar and a Micmac translation of the Creed and Lord's Prayer. Mr. Wood was an indefatigable worker, and, while he did not neglect his important offices to the English inhabitants, he continued to minister to the Indians in their own language until his death.

In 1770 the inhabitants of Annapolis who were from New England sent the following representation to their former pastor at Dedham, Mass.:—

"We, having been educated and brought up in the Congregational mode of worship before we came to settle in Nova Scotia, and, therefore, would have chosen a minister of that

form of worship, but the Rev. Mr. Wood, by his preaching and performing the other offices of his Holy Function among us in the several districts of this country, hath *removed our former prejudices, that we had against the form of worship of the Church of England*, as by Law Established, and hath won us unto a good opinion thereof; inasmuch as he hath removed all our scruples of receiving the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in that form of administering it, at least many of us are communicants with him, and we trust and believe many more will be added."

This letter reveals the character of this earnest worker. How tactful he must have been, and friendly, for not in all places in Canada have the pioneer workers of our Church gained such an influence with the people. These settlers, being of Puritan stock, were much opposed to the Established Church, and the missionaries had uphill work to keep together even their own flock. Many of the settlers in Nova Scotia were being greatly influenced at this time in their religious beliefs by preachers of different sects. There sprang up Baptists, New Lights and Methodists. William Black, the founder of Methodism in Nova Scotia, had come from England, fresh from John Wesley's teaching, and he held evangelistic meetings in almost every settlement. In Annapolis township, during the next few years after Mr. Wood's death, he laid the foundation for a strong Methodist centre. Edward Moulton, an earnest Baptist preacher, also won many converts through the Annapolis valley, and at the present time the Baptists far outnumber any other religious body in that part of the province. Only the most conservative Anglicans remained true to their Church. Many of the Rectors would have nothing to do with the "Dissenting" ministers, whose methods of presenting the Gospel proved more attractive to the younger generation, so that many descendants of the first Church of England families have been lost to the faith of their fathers.

In 1775, the people of Annapolis Royal, under the influence of their beloved pastor, commenced a new church, sixty by forty feet, but it was not completed during Mr. Wood's lifetime. His people at Lower Granville also built a church in 1775.

On December 14th, 1778, Mr. Wood died. He was buried in the Old Cemetery, and in 1910, at the Bicentenary celebration, through the efforts of Judge Savary, the parishioners of St. Luke's erected a monument to mark the resting place of their first pastor.

"Divine blessing crowned his apostolic zeal,
Posterity reveres his memory."

It is fitting that the first missionary of our Church in Canada, should have his resting place in the spot which has the honour of being the first British possession in Canada.

Books consulted: Calnek and Savary, "History of Annapolis"; Savary, "Supplement to History"; "Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G."; Eaton, "History of the Church in Nova Scotia"; Trueman, "Isthmus of Chignecto"; Occasional, "Acadian Recorder"; Murdoch, "History of Nova Scotia"; T. W. Smith, "Slavery in Canada"; 1916 Report of the Landmarks Association of Canada.