

St. John's Presbyterian Church

Toronto

1888

1913

## St. John's Presbyterian Church, Toronto

### Twenty-five Years

November 22nd, 1888—November 22nd, 1913



HIS is not old, as the history of congregations in older Canada goes, but it is an important mile-stone for this congregation. The Quarter-Century period upon which we now look back has no extraordinary or outstanding features—at least from the view-point of human ministries and successes. It contains, however, the record of much serious labor, as also the record of uncounted blessings of God. Thanksgiving to God, sincere and unaffected gratitude—is the emotion that overtops all others in a meditative review of the past.

#### The Beginning

St. John's congregation acknowledges St. James' Square as its parent church. To the missionary interest and initiative of that congregation our beginning is due. In December of 1886, a small cottage on the east side of Broadview Avenue, and south of Gerrard Street, was rented, and in this, a Sabbath School was opened. This school was manned at first by teachers from St. James' Square Church, under the superintendency of Mr. George Laidlaw, then, as now, a member of the Session of that congregation. Three months later, in the early spring of 1887, a preaching service was started in this same cottage, conducted by Mr. Scott, then an under-graduate in College, and missionary in connection with St. James' Square Church. Interest attaches to this particular initial service from the fact that, except for those who came to take part, nobody came to it. At the next service the Sabbath following, two persons came, and never afterwards less. Thus began in humble fashion the work which has grown to its present proportions in the large and well-established congregation of St. John's.

The commencement of a morning service on the Lord's Day—a further mark of development—dated from the Sabbath following organization. Mr. Charles A. Webster, now a Professor in the Syrian Protestant College at Beyrout, Syria, then an undergraduate in Knox College, was asked to give temporary help and take charge of the morning service, Mr. Scott having the care of the evening service, together with the oversight, as student missionary, of all the work.

**Another step** As the year 1888 was signalized by the organization of the congregation, so the year 1889 has been made special because of Mr. Scott's ordination to the Christian ministry, and of his formal induction as pastor of the young congregation. This service took place on December 17, 1889.

On June 15, 1890, Mr. John R. Gay and Mr. Samuel Greer, having been chosen as elders, were formally ordained and inducted to this office, who, with the Minister, constituted the first Session of the congregation. The first Board of Management elected after organization on February 14, 1889, were the following:—Robert O'Brien, James Traill, Chas. E. Lev, John R. Gay, Samuel Greer and George Stratton, with John Gowans and Geo. Lairdlaw representing St. James' Square Church. The first Board, upon which there was no representation from the mother church, were as follows, and were elected January 14, 1890:—James Traill, Alfred Duneau, Robert O'Brien, Chas. E. Lev, Dr. A. F. McKenzie, J. C. Walkinshaw, S. Greer and J. S. Cochrane.

In the gradual development of the work, our old church was twice enlarged; once in 1890, and again in 1896. The more extensive alteration in 1890, considerably enlarging the building, and seating the whole with pews was not, for the then congregation, an insignificant matter. Then, as in later and much larger and more burdensome undertakings, the congregation demonstrated its character in its spirit of union and steadiness and courage.

## The Building

In September of 1887, less than a year after beginning work in the cottage, a lot, two feet by 126 feet, at the corner of Fremont St. and Dalton Ave., was purchased by the mother congregation and upon this, the first part of our old church was erected and three delivery services were conducted by the late Prof. Martzen, who happily was spared to have some important share in the opening of the new church just twenty years later.

## The Congregation Organized

The next important step in the progress of this new cause was reached on November 22, 1888, when by authority of the Presidency of Toronto a congregation was formally organized with 27 members, and placed under the care of an interim Session with the Rev. S. H. Kellogg, D.D., Minister of St. James' Square Church, as Moderator; with the following Elders from his own Session:—Messrs. John Gowans, J. C. Anderson, and George Laflamme. Only two of this original Session have been spared to see this present anniversary. Mr. Gowans, until the time of his death a few years ago, continued a true friend of our congregation. The Kellogg's beautiful ministry closed by a tragic accident in North India about the same time.

Our congregation has never been unmindful of the debt they owe to the mother church. Because of their warm interest and ungrudging financial aid at a very needy period, we were saved hardships such as have come to retard the work of other congregations in the time of their early struggle.

Of the original 27 persons who constituted the membership of the organization, only four remain today in our congregation—Mr. Robert O'Brien, Miss Kate O'Brien, Mrs. J. E. Armstrong, and Mr. John H. Crag.

## The New Church

It was all along foreseen that a time was coming when, in the process of normal congregational growth, a new church and Sabbath School must be erected. For this quiet preparation was being made by modest accumulations towards a building fund and unhurried consideration of the future interests of the church.

The congregation was unanimous in the decision to change the location of the church, and the lot at the corner of Broadview Avenue and Simpson Avenue was purchased in 1901, upon which, after a somewhat protracted and careful consideration of plans, the new building was begun in April, 1907. The corner stone was laid on June 1 of that same year, and the whole building completed, furnished, and formally opened and dedicated on January 25, 1908,—just an even 26 years after the opening and dedication of the first church building on Gerard Street. By some, the struggle involved in securing our new church equipment is regarded as the most important chapter in our congregation's history. As it is, we now find ourselves in a commodious and well-appointed church and Sunday School, which, counting the amount paid for the lot, was secured at a cost of \$39,270. The congregation is the possessor of a valuable church property, now greatly enhanced by the increase of land values, carrying a mortgage indebtedness not burdensome, and which is being reduced by a substantial sum each year.

## Our Heritage

More important far than the recital of steps in the process of securing a permanent church home, is the story of the real work of God carried on through the Quarter-century period just closed. A conscientious review of those past years is not without discomfort and sorrow for mistakes and failures, and yet as we look back, there is awakened the spirit of thanksgiving to God for progress made. In the address of the Session presented at the annual meeting in January, 1897, the policy of the congregation was announced in those words:—

...The great work of the Church is the evangelization of the world, and her key-note should

be that this should speedily be accomplished. This congregation can find her highest prosperity only when she takes up this note and shapes all her work to this important end. To be at one with Christ in this great work is to be truly spiritual, and to be of that condition of life which will reflect itself in the highest prosperity of every department of congregational work, and make us more effective in meeting the needs of our own community and our own country."

This view-point has colored the activities of our church. Consistent adherence to this policy has, we think, marked the life and work of our congregation in this formative period of congregational character, and has contributed much to the furtherance of the gospel in our midst.

An asset of our church much prized is the contribution of young lives from the congregation to the work of foreign missions. The going into this work of these young persons is but the normal working out and expression of our missionary policy. Our sorrow is that, comparatively, so few from the children of our homes have gone into the work of Christian missions abroad, or the Christian ministry at home.

**Our Growth** Starting with a membership of 27, twenty-five years ago, there has followed a modest and normal growth in the number of those who came into full communion with the church.

At the close of this present year (1913), after the usual revision, the roll of members will have safely passed the thousand mark. Since the organization of the church and up till the present time, 2,117 persons have united with the church. Of these, 1,378 came by certificate, and 739 were received on profession of their faith in Christ.

Not counting the gifts for the current year, the givings of the congregation for all purposes for 24 years, the earlier years being the days of small things, totals \$144,833.59, of which sum \$43,094.48 was contributed for missionary and benevolent purposes.

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beginning, interest attaches to certain persons who identified themselves with the beginning of things, and have continued throughout real factors in the congregation's growth. Among these who, later on, identified themselves with our congregation, are some, both men and women, who in their sympathy and unselfish co-operation have contributed greatly to the present strength of our congregation. Indeed, no true estimate of the factors in the congregation's growth can leave out of the reckoning the group of noble men and women who, in their genuine and unaffected interest, and with their ungrudging gifts of time and money, have done so much to encourage and bring the congregation to its present strength.

To be reminiscent upon the past is to awaken memories of our dead. In these past years, many have fallen asleep. Not a few amongst us are linked to this church by tender and sacred ties. The company of those who have passed from amongst us to the Assembly of Saints above grows larger every year. The trials and bereavements in the homes of our people through these years, together with the problems and difficult tasks that have been faced and overcome, have begotten a kinship and unity amongst our people that is wide-spread and deep, and that betokens strength. It also constitutes a warrant for great hopefulness in facing, for the days to come, all the claims of the work of God.

### **The Future**

The policy that has so largely shaped the character of our congregation in the past is again re-asserted. More deeply than ever are we entrenched in the conviction that only as we sincerely identify ourselves in our congregational policy and method with our Lord's great missionary purposes, can we the more speedily and effectually meet the spiritual needs of our own local community, and the spiritual requirements of our rapidly growing country. Much are we humbled in the memory of past failures; but reckoning upon the unalterable faithfulness of our God, we turn again with courage to face the future.





REV. JOHN M. PHERSON SCOTT, B.A.  
Inaugurated and Inducted, Dec. 21, 1886.



**DR. BELLE CHONE OLIVER**  
Nasirah, India



**MISS FLORENCE E. CLEARIHUE**  
Mhow, India



**MISS HARRIET THOMSON**  
Indore, India



**MISS ETHEL GLENDINNING**  
Indore, India



**MRS. DAVID F. SMITH**  
Mangor, India



MRS. GEO. M. ROSS



DR. JESSIE A. MacBEAN  
Kongmoon, China



REV. GEO. MURRAY ROSS, B.A.  
Hwai Wu, Honan, China



MISS MARGARET R. GAY  
Hwai King, Honan, China



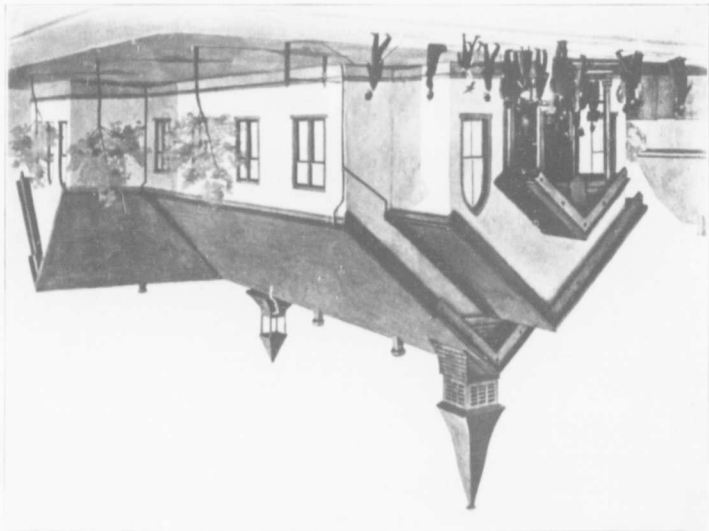
MISS ETHEL C. REID  
Kongmoon, China



COTTAGE ON BROADVIEW AVE.

In which work was commenced.

THE OLD CHURCH, 1888-1908





THE NEW CHURCH  
Dedicated Jan. 5, 1928

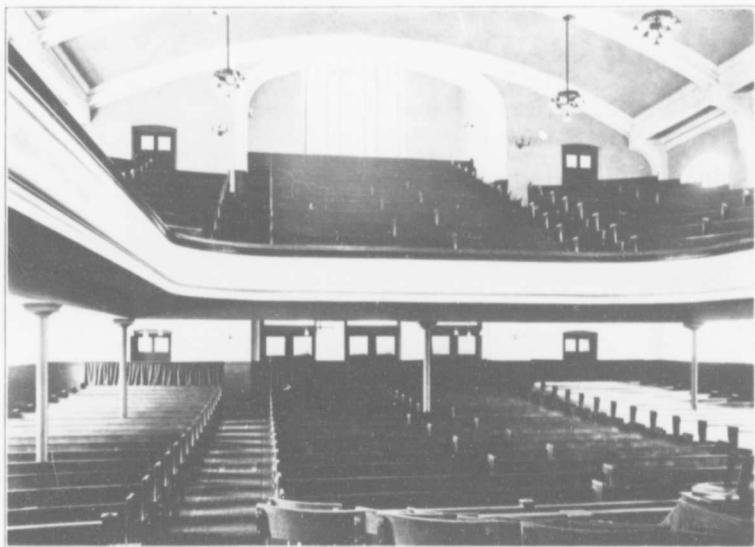


THE MINISTER'S VESTRY



INTERIOR VIEW





INTERIOR VIEW



SABBATH SCHOOL ROOM



SABBATH SCHOOL ROOM



ADULT BIBLE CLASS ROOM



PRIMARY CLASS ROOM



MEN'S CLASS ROOM