

History
of
Birr United Church
and
Area Families



The corner-stones of the new Methodist church at Birr, outlined above, will be laid on Monday, the 2nd of June, at 2.30 p.m. Two of the stones will be laid by Mayor Beck and Mr. R. G. Fisher, barrister, of this city, and the Epworth League stone by Miss Annie B. Shaw-Wood, of Woodholm. Special music and addresses by several city ministers. A sumptuous supper will be served from 5 to 8 p.m. after which a grand concert will be given by city and local talents.

Compiled for the 160th Anniversary of
Birr United Church -- May 21, 1995

Birr United Church

The histories which we are presenting are as factual as possible; any errors are regretted. Appreciation is extended to those who have given information and made records available. We wish to acknowledge Betty White for her contribution of typing.

May you enjoy your heritage!

Edna Adams
Bob Duncan
Don Eedy
Don McComb
Annetta Savage
Helen White
Ken White

HISTORY OF BIRR UNITED CHURCH

When the Corporation of the Township of London was established in 1819, there was a sprinkling of settlers throughout the Township. The main artery for travel through the Township was the Proof-line road (No. 4 highway), which was surveyed in a line due north from London through to the Huron Tract beyond. Along the road at intervals of a mile or so hotels were built, to provide accommodation for travellers and their horses. Because this convenience was provided in the Village of Birr, it became a centre for the settlers of neighbouring farms.

In the 1820's and '30's many families were awarded property in London Township from the Crown. One such settler was Anthony Hughes who in 1833 acquired 200 acres comprising Lot 17, the land due west of the Proof-line road and stretching from the 12th-13th concession roads. Anthony was a strong personality with a very religious influence in the community. It is assumed that he gave a part of the north-east corner of his land for burial ground and eventually a chapel site in the time period 1833-1835. Land registry records indicate that in 1852, Anthony Hughes did sell 2 acres to the Trustees of Birr Methodist Church.

In 1835 the Canadian Wesleyan Methodist Church (Ryanites) among others served the religious needs of the settlers in the London area. The ministers were known as circuit-riders expressly because they rode horses. The circuit-rider followed a circuit of several parishes seeking converts. Whether it be a home, a school or a church, the people would gather there and an evangelistic service was conducted. In 1842 property holdings of the London circuit were recorded with only one chapel -- the 12th and 13th concession chapel -- this being Birr.

The grave markers, the older white slabs, indicate that the chapel building was located in the north-east corner of the property designated for burial ground and chapel. The oldest marker, an oak-slab dated 1835, marks the resting place of George McConnell.

In 1856, a new chapel was built to replace the original. James Scott was minister at the time.

A quote from the Methodist New Connexion Magazine reveals:

"On the last Sabbath in January, the new chapel on the London North Circuit, situated on the Proof-Line Road, on the 13th Con., was opened for divine worship. The congregations were good, and the Spirit's influence attended the Word at all the services. Our friends on the London North

Circuit have done themselves great credit by the erection of this chapel. The unsightly and dilapidated frame building, which formerly occupied the site of the present structure, is gone; now an ornament to the neighbourhood, and a home for our denomination is in the place. May the chapel be to thousands of souls the House of God and the very gate of heaven."

As the London North Circuit area became more populated with families settling in villages and on farms, the Church circuit took in fewer parishes and the minister became resident in his circuit area. In the middle 1800's the minister serving the Birr Circuit lived in a parsonage at the back of the graveyard; by 1874 Birr, Wesley and Ilderton churches comprised a Circuit.

In 1879, a new parsonage was built across the road. Rev. James Kennedy was minister and "the Circuit had made great progress during his pastorate. The handsome new parsonage at Birr is a monument to his zeal".

In the 1800's there was more to church than its religious significance, it provided for its members a much needed centre for meeting and socializing with neighbors of the settlement. Functions including tea meetings, lawn socials and garden parties were planned to entertain as well as raise funds for the church.

The Trustee Board had the combined responsibility of the Church and graveyard business. The Trustees, elected men of the congregation, had complete direction over the money affairs of the Church -- collecting by subscription for ministers' salaries and building projects. The current account was separate.

By 1900, Birr Methodist Church Congregation had thoughts of building a new Church. In 1901 the Minister, Rev. Sanderson, and Trustee Board -- Thomas Maxwell, John Guest, Richard Morgan, Richard White, Thomas Kestle, George Patrick and James Haskett accepted the offer of Thomas Kestle to sell 1½ acres of his property at a price of \$200.00. The new site was located directly across from the cemetery along the 13th concession road and adjacent to the parsonage property. Work commenced on the church grounds Nov. 21, 1901. Contracts for the building were let to Mr. Gibson, a carpenter, for \$1,429.00; Mr. Pulleyblank, bricklaying and plastering \$820.00; Mr. Chenie, cement foundation, sills, etc. \$135.00; Mrs. Harris, decorating \$180.00; and the architect's fee \$40.00. Church members assisted in the building with their volunteer labour.

The following are records taken from "The Secretary's Account Book of New Methodist Church". This is one of the many church record books housed in the Arva Library's archives.

Nov 19 1901

Building com. met by appoint-
ment at Prossnage.
members present

W. C. Samierson
J. Guest
J. Maxwell
J. Kestle
J. Haskett
J. Maxwell

Moved by J. Haskett
seconded by J. Kestle
that J. Maxwell be app-
ointed secretary of com
motion carried

com decided to commence
work on church ground
on Nov 21st 1901 com
separated

Nov 21st 1901

Men started work on new
church ground to fill up the
front and to dig out basement
there were four teams and
three shovellers on the ground
six went to hotel for dinner
as agreed by com
com to pay for meals while
at work on the ground.

Nov 22nd 1901

Men at work on church
ground
there were seven teams and
five shovellers
nine went to hotel for
dinner

May 21st 1902

J. Kestle
and
J. Maxwell
went to Creditor and
bought 40 thousand brick
more or less as we require
at \$5.00 per thousand
bought from Alex. Kerr
also agreed with A. Wills
to draw all that we do not
get drawn by lead
for \$2.50 per thousand

Jan 18th 1902

Men started to draw sand
from H. Kennedy drew three
days and got eighty three
loads of sand to church
ground

On June 3, 1902 there was a corner stone laying ceremony with Sir Adam Beck, Mr. Fisher and Miss Shaw-Wood officiating.

The old church and parsonage in the graveyard were demolished -- the brick cleaned and moved for use in the new building. The old parsonage stable was sold for \$12.00.

On January 3, 1903, "the Church was opened for first worship and dedication". On January 6, 1903 the "opening supper" was held with a special appeal for subscriptions which were supported well enough to start the Church on a "career of usefulness and blessing unencumbered by debt". The total cost of the Church building and horse sheds was about \$4000.00.

Since the building of the Church, there have been changes in the structure of organization. In 1912, there was a revamping of Circuits; Birr and Ilderton became a charge, Wesley and Granton another charge. When it was decided that the minister of the Birr-Ilderton charge should live in Ilderton, a home was bought there and the parsonage in Birr was sold circa 1922.

A decision of the Birr Methodist Church trustees resulted in the formation of a Cemetery Board of Trustees separate from the Church Trustee Board. This change came into effect January 1925.

In 1925, Birr Methodist Church became Birr United Church when church union was instituted. 1985 marks the 60th anniversary of the United Church of Canada.

Physically, the church exterior has changed little. To solve the nagging problems of a leaking roof, the belfry was removed in 1941. The replacement of front and back doors and cement step at the front are recent improvements. By degrees the horse sheds were eliminated as the need for them became less and less. Changes in the interior are more apparent. The warm glow of the coal-oil lamps gave way to hydro in 1938 when the Junior Bible Class offered to sponsor the project of installation. The wood-burning furnace located near the back door in the basement was replaced by an oil furnace in the 1950's.

The role of women in the Birr Methodist (United) Church is not to be disregarded. The Ladies' Aid provided funds to buy the pews when the church was built. July, 1922 was the organization of the W.M.S. -- an organization dedicated to

the work of missions by study, collecting bales of clothing and donating money. In January 1950, a second organization, the W.A. was formed. This group assumed the responsibility of the social needs, the traditional strawberry supper, bazaars, sponsoring of plays and bake sales. In 1962, a new organization combining W.M.S. and W.A. was arranged to take care of all aspects of the purpose of United Church Women, and is known as U.C.W.

There have been Youth Groups too. At the turn of the century there was the Epworth League. When numbers warranted in 1940, a Young Peoples Union was organized, continuing actively until the early 1950's.

Couples Club followed Y.P.U. It has maintained a leadership quality within the Church with emphasis on the family.

Sunday School has been the most lasting of all our Church affiliates. It was routine for the whole family to remain after the Church service to go to Sunday School. Since the change to morning service there is a new format; the School has been devoted to the Christian education of the children.

The Sunday School anniversary was always held on the Sunday prior to the 24th of May. There was a visiting minister, anthems practiced well by the choir and seasonal flowers decorating the altar. The Sunbeam choir of the early 1900's and the Jr. Choir of the '50's and '60's, although generations apart, provided joy with their singing for Birr Methodist (United) Church. To accompany the hymn singing there has been in turn, an organ, a piano and an electric organ. The latter was dedicated in 1962 by Rev. J. Thomas White at a special anniversary service. Rev. White has been the only candidate for the ministry to come from this church.

There is a sense of responsibility within our congregation to maintain and improve the church building, allowing a more comfortable and pleasant environment. Memorials in the form of furnishings have been donated by families so that we will remember those who have had a part in our church history.

From the generations spanning 150 years (1835 - 1985) we have inherited a commitment. The Christian discipline and faith of our fathers are values to be respected now and in the years to come. We have a trust to keep.

Compiled by Edna Adams

Music of the Church

It is a pleasure and a privilege to be here today to observe the 160th Anniversary of Birr Church and to help pay tribute to the people who have given so generously of time and talent to maintain this church, not only as a beautiful place of worship, but also a very real part of the community.

We wish to give recognition to those who, over the years, contributed to worship through music.

There have been a number of excellent organists who have served most generously, leading us in hymns of praise. After the service today there will be available, a bulletin in which will be, among other items, the names of the organists. We apologize for any omissions.

At times there have been in the church, choirs of varying ages and numbers.

I am most familiar with the years when we had a children's choir (1957 to the late 70s). It has been suggested that it might be of interest to mention how that choir began. We had been in the community and the church for a few years - long enough that I felt bold to speak up at the church annual meeting to ask about the possibility of having a choir. Someone said that putting people in the choir would too greatly deplete the numbers in the congregation. So I asked "What about a children's choir?". I think many of you will know what happens to a person who, at an annual meeting suggests a job to be done!! Though greatly under-qualified, I agreed to do my best and the following Sunday the children's choir began with an anthem by four young girls. The minister commented that was the quickest response he had seen from a motion at an annual meeting. Our young choir soon grew in number, varying from year to year. At one time we had as many as 23. The children learned the meaning of "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord". Enthusiastically, they raised their young voices to express in song, praise and gratitude, for all God's goodness and His many blessings. With much help from some of the mothers, attractive choir gowns were made, one of which you will observe, is on display.

As the years passed, children became teens then adults and the choir numbers dwindled. For a time there was a youth choir but as young folk moved away to pursue education and/or employment, there were not enough numbers of either children or youths to maintain a choir.

Much, much thanks is due to many persons who helped with the choirs.

I would like to make special mention of Helen Lewis, who was organist for most of the children's choir years. She was so faithful and patiently helpful at weekly practices as well as Sunday services and some special occasions. I hope many of the children have, as I do, fond memories of choir activities.

I wish to thank the Anniversary Committee for including me in this special service of tribute and praise.

Annetta Savage

Early Farm Families

With few exceptions, the early farm families who attended Birr Public School also took part in the Birr Methodist Church. Most farms in London Township were 100 acres in size. 800 acres comprised a block.

Our recollections will begin at the south-west corner of Adelaide and the 13 concession of London Township.

Dann

William Dann and his wife Loretta owned this farm. Their family consisted of three daughters and two sons. Mable married Charlie Guest, a thresherman from Bryanston. Verda married Arthur Morgan, a local farmer. Vera married Chester Hayes. Milton Dann inherited the farm from his father. Gordon Dann married Elsie Ironside, a local girl who lived on the 12th concession.

Marian White

The farm directly across the road was originally owned by Tom Sinclair. He never lived there as there was no house. He named this farm Bloomfield. The property was purchased by Gordon Dann and he in turn sold it to Seymour White. The farm was inherited by Neil White who built a house. Marian White and her son Wayne Lewis now operate this farm.

Kohl

The farm adjacent to the Dann farm and to the west, was originally owned by Gus Elliott who was a thresherman. John Hudson bought the farm from Gus and in turn sold it to Fred and Jessie Kohl. After Fred's untimely death, the property was purchased by the present owners, Jack and Edna Adams.

Fred's parents, Max and Anne Kohl, lived just north of Birr on Highway 4 where Dave and Nellie Hammel live today. Their family consisted of four boys and two girls. Wilburt, Fred, Graydon, Clarence, Betty and Bessie. Bessie married George O'Neil in 1927. It is believed this was the first wedding to take place in Birr United Church. Helen, their oldest daughter resides in Toronto, Marjerie in Ilderton and sons Stewart and Max live on their father's home farm and uncle's farm.

Fred and Jessie Kohl had three children. Don lives in the Toronto area, Phyllis in London and Maxine lives in the states.

White

Joseph and Anne White, with 8 children emigrated from southern Ireland in 1856. Richard, my grandfather was the youngest at age 12. It is believed they arrived in Canada West and settled in this area as sons and daughters married into London Township families.

Sons, Charles and Richard purchased a farm east of Bryanston in 1863. In 1877 they purchased another farm, the one where I now live, on the 13th concession. Shortly, Charles became full owner of the farm on the 12th and Richard the one on the 13th.

Richard married Sarah Maxwell who was sister to Don McComb's great grandfather. Sarah died of tuberculosis when she was 31 leaving six children. The oldest

was 10 and my Dad was the youngest at 3. In that same year Granddad built a new house - the one I live in now. My Grandmother never had the pleasure of living in it.

When my Dad was 15, his Dad died of blood poisoning. At this time Dad took on the farming responsibilities. His brother Thomas returned to school and studied to become a minister. After his ordination he spent many years serving the Methodist Church in Saskatchewan before returning to Ontario. Uncle Tom has been the only person from Birr United Church to be a candidate to the ministry. He celebrated 50 years as a United Church minister.

Granddad Richard was active in the Methodist Church and served as a trustee during the building of the new church.

My Dad married Mabelle Brumwell on September 26, 1918. Snow fell that day. Mother and Dad had 5 children - Edna married Jack Adams. Frances married Abe Klahsen, Ron married Anne Cameron, Neil married Marian Lewis and Ken married Helen Duffin. The three brothers acquired farms along the 13th concession.

Sinclair

The farm to the west Jack and Edna Adams has only been owned by two families, the Sinclairs and the Whites. The original owner James Sinclair followed the creek, chose this particular land and purchased it from the Crown. He built a house of logs facing the creek. That is the original house as it stands today. It has been turned to face the road and modified over the years. The Sinclairs were Presbyterian and supported the Bethal Presbyterian Church but one brother Duncan attended the Birr Methodist Church regularly. One day as he was haying he fell off the load of hay and broke his back. This resulted in his death. The farm was purchased by Seymour White and was later inherited by Ron White. The current owner of this farm is Anne White.

McWilliams

The farm directly across the road from Anne has had a number of owners. Both the Tummonds family and the Andy McWilliams family attended Birr Methodist Church. Annie McWilliams married Amos Ferguson and they lived on the northeast corner of Adelaide St. and the 11th concession. They attended Birr Methodist Church regularly. Their daughter Doris is Mrs. Art Ashworth. I remember seeing Doris and her mother driving a horse and buggy from her home, west on the 13th concession to visit her grandmother.

Coleman

The Coleman family came from Nissouri Township to the farm on the southeast corner of the 13th concession and the Proof Line Road. Although they did support the Presbyterian Church, they also attended Birr Methodist Church.

Hughes

In 1833 Anthony Hughes was awarded 200 acres from the Crown, comprising the land due west of the Proof Line Road and stretching from the 12th to 13th concession roads. It is assumed he gave a part of the north-east corner of this land for burial ground and eventually a chapel site in the time period 1833-1835.

Kestle

The property on the northwest corner of the 13 concession was owned by Thomas Kestle. He sold 1 1/2 acres to the Birr Methodist Church for \$200.00 for the purpose of building a new church.

Cohoon

John Cohoon was the second generation owner of the Cohoon family farm. The house was severed and in owned by Dave Luce. The farm is presently owned by Paul Adams, and Julie and Tom Coulter.

John was the church treasurer for many years. He took pleasure in being able to balance his books when he gave his annual report.

Haskett

Mr. and Mrs. James Haskett lived on the southeast corner of Wonderland Road and the 13th concession. They were devoted members of the Birr Methodist Church and Mrs. Haskett was President of the W.M.S. When the new church was built the women financed the purchase of the new pews. The Haskett family consisted of Egerton, Clinton, Crozier and Edna. Edna married Dan Revington. They had a daughter Muriel and a son Stuart. Muriel Revington became a United Church minister.

James Haskett's brother, Wes lived directly across the road. He had a son John and daughters Mable and Neva (Mrs. Beryl Loft). When school properties were sold, Circa 1960, John bought the bell from the Birr Public School, which he had attended. After his estate sale, his sister Mrs. Neva Haskett-Loft and her family Ruth, Clark, Una, and Mary returned the bell to Birr with the suggestion that the bell be mounted in the cemetery. A cairn was built by the Cemetery Board. The bell was installed it its present spot inside the cemetery gates. These two Haskett farms are presently owed by Filsons.

Filson

Alfred Filson, his wife Sadie and son Hugh came from Saskatchewan to their home on the 13th concession west of Wonderland Road. Hugh and his wife Margaret had six children, Ellen, Barbara, Nancy, David, Kenneth and Raymond. Margaret was a devoted Sunday School teacher until her untimely death. Several farms and homes have been acquired along the 13th concession. Hugh married Kathy Lang. Ellen and Nancy reside in the western provinces. Kenneth in Ilderton, Barbara, David and Ray remain on the 13th carrying on the family farms.

Hodgins

There were two households. Wes and Debra Hodgins were brother and sister who lived together taking care of a young niece and nephew, Minnie and Willy Hodgins whose parents had died. Nelson and Minnie Hodgins were brother and sister to Wes and Debra. They raised the other two children of the young family Ada and Milton. Debra Hodgins taught Sunday School in the Intermediate Class for many years.

Mardlin

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mardlin lived on the 15th concession. The two youngest of their family, Arita and Gray would walk to church from their home. They also had a brother Sylvester, who owned the farm immediately north of George Adam's home farm.

Stevenson

Sam and Ida Stevenson came from Nissouri Township with three children. They settled on the north-east corner of Highway 4 and the 12th concession. In their retirement they bought the parsonage which stands immediately west of our church. Stanley Stevenson married Doris Hobbs, from Arva. Lorene married Russell McKeen. Helen married Ron Lawton.

Brumwell

Robert Brumwell was born in Northumberland County, England on October 9, 1831. He was the oldest son of Jacob Brumwell. As young men, Robert and his brother John boarded a sailing boat for Australia. It was the time of a gold rush so with pick and shovel they mined for approximately two years. The raw gold was exchanged for gold coins which they sewed into a money belt. Upon their return to England they found their parents had plans to bring their family to Canada.

Most of the Brumwell family set up farming north of Toronto, but Robert and John came to Lambton County and took up farming north of Forest. They paid for their farm with their gold coins.

Robert married Jane Strutt and had two children - Mary and Jacob. In 1872 Robert and Jane bought the farms on the corner of the Proof Line Road and the 14th concession of London Township. This is the farm presently owned by Ernie Dobinson.

Jane Brumwell traveled into the London Market on a regular basis to sell butter and eggs. She went by way of stagecoach which ran from Lucan to London.

Robert's son Jacob married Eliza Maguire and took over his father's farm. Their eldest daughter Mabelle was my mother. She had a twin sister who died shortly after birth. Second was my Aunt Bessie who married John Walls, Aunt Maude who married Charlton Robb, Uncle Charlie who married Kathleen Drake and Aunt Frances who married Jud Moorhouse.

The Jacob Brumwell family and in turn the Charlie Brumwell family with daughters Helen, Mary and Jane (twins) attended Birr Methodist Church.

Bilyea

At one time the second farm east of Highway 4 on the south side of concession 12 was owned by Mr. and Mrs. William Stephens. They attended Birr Methodist Church where their daughters Gertrude and Wilhelmine went to Sunday School and sang in the Sunbeam Choir. Norman and Ann Bilyea purchased this farm when they were married. They had three children. Their names are Laverne, Jack and Barbara.

Arnott

This farm was once owned by Leonard Lambourne. He ran a blacksmith shop in Birr and attended Birr Methodist Church. Other owners purchased the farm in turn. In 1957 the present owners, Jack and Edith Arnott bought the property. They attend Birr

United Church and their four boys Douglas, Allan, Kenneth and Charlie participated in Sunday School and youth groups.

Legg

Jack Legg bought the general store and related businesses from Etheld Harris (Circa 1946). Jack and Janet Legg had 5 children, Grace, Mary, Jack, Lois and Edward. Jack Jr. has carried on the variety store and gas pump business.

Adams

Mary and Sherman moved to Birr from Crumlin 1938 with their eight children. They attended Birr United Church where Mary was treasurer for many years. Jack married Edna Adams who taught in Birr Public School. They have four children, Kathryn, Douglas, Carolyn and Robert. They have acquired farms along the 13th concession.

George married Mina Stanley. They purchased the home farm on the north-east corner of the 13th concession and Highway 4. They have four children, Paul, Julie, Mary and Susan. With the exception of Mary, the children reside in Birr.

Corsauts

Bob and Minnie Corsaut were married in the early thirties. Their family consisted of Raymond, Douglas and Sylvia. The family attended Birr United Church and Sylvia taught Sunday School before her marriage.

Donley

After selling their home farm on Highbury Avenue to Fanshawe Nursery, Allen and Jean Donley made their home on the 14th concession, east of Adelaide Street. They had 4 children, Frances, Evan, Ada, and Neil. Following Allen's death, Jean continued the maple syrup and honey industries. She also served as treasurer of the church for twenty years.

Rhame

Mary and Percy Rame and their son Ron moved into our community in 1971. Coming from Glendale (south London) they purchased the farm on the southwest corner of Adelaide and the 14th concession from Mary and Henry Finkbeiner. The property had previously been owned by Allan and Edythe McNairn. Mary and Percy attended our church regularly. Since Percy's death in 1990, Mary has faithfully contributed to our services.

Nunns

Tom and Carole Nunns moved to Birr in 1961. Children are Mike, Sue, Tim, Rob and Chris. Carole taught Kindergarten class and looked after Sunday School for several years. Four children, a daughter-in-law and grandchild have been baptized in our church.

Savage

George, Annetta and two children, George Edward and Blanche came to Birr in the fall of 1948. They purchased their home in Birr from Etheld Harris. Children, Maryclaire and John David were born. All family members were active in the church.

Annetta led the children's choir from 1957 to 1970. The children were active in Sunday School, choir and youth groups. Some of the furnishings of this sanctuary attest to George's skill as a carpenter. Sadly, George and infant son Murray are deceased.

Edna Adams

Helen White

Ken White

The Maxwell Family

Thomas Maxwell, who married Ann Jackson originally from York, Ontario moved their family from their homestead on the 6th concession of Biddulph to the northeast corner of Highway 4 and concession 12, London Township. This settlement was known as Silverwood. The Maxwell family attended the Methodist church originally located in the cemetery across from the present United Church. They raised two sons and five daughters. Their sons John and Thomas Jr. took part in the building of the new church on the north side of the concession in 1902. Several families in this community trace their roots to daughters of this family today. Their daughter Alice was organist in this church for a number of years.

John Maxwell married Delia Priscilla Pether and farmed his family farm after building the present white brick home there. They moved into their newly renovated red brick home on the corner of Birr beside the church property in 1924. Their three daughters Edna, Gladys and Eva lived there until Edna and Eva married.

Edna married Chester McComb who owned the Tile Yard in Elginfield. Gladys worked at Harris' Store, presently Leggs in Birr. She taught Sunday School, played the piano and led the choir in Birr Church for 25 years before moving to London with her mother. Eva married Dr. Neil Clark, a dentist, and moved to Detroit. They were all active members of the Women's Missionary Society and Women's Auxiliary.

John Maxwell's family dedicated the pulpit in his memory.

Thomas Maxwell Jr. married Mary Ann Patrick. They farmed on concession 15, London township and were active members of Birr Methodist and later United Church. Their only child, a daughter Martha, played the organ for several years before her marriage in 1909 to Victor Snell of Exeter.

RENOVATIONS COMPLETED AT BIRR UNITED CHURCH

Extensive renovations and re-decoration have been effected at Birr United Church and the auditorium was reopened with a special Passion Week service. A large congregation of interested people from the surrounding community gathered and were led in the service of worship by the minister, Rev. F. E. Clysdale. He spoke on the theme: "The Rending of the Temple Veil," emphasizing the special significance of that event coincident with the sacrifice of Calvary.

The choir was assisted by the Davie family of musicians and Mrs. George O'Neil, who rendered excellent service, Mrs. O'Neil taking the solo part in anthem, and the three Davie brothers singing two

numbers accompanied by Mrs. Davie. The music was in charge of Miss Gladys Maxwell, pianist and choir director.

The Birr congregation is receiving the congratulations of the community for the excellent piece of work they have carried through so effectively.



The McComb Family

George McComb married Matilda McGuffin who died when their sons, William and Chester, were two and four years old. After their father remarried, the family came to Birr Methodist Church.

William married Myrtle Ironside in 1928 and raised three sons Alex, Roy, and James who all became members of Birr United Church, the Sunday School, and Young Peoples group holding several offices in the work of the church. Alex married Jean Hughes in 1952. They were active in stewards, elders, U.C.W., and raised three children Dianne, Grant and Kelly who sang in the choir and attended Sunday School. Roy married Mary Grover and moved to Dryden. James married Jacqueline Williams. They and their three children John, Janet and Jeff came to this church, Sunday School and choir. Jacqueline being an active member of U.C.W., steward, and served many years as treasurer of Sunday School.

Chester married Edna Maxwell in 1926. He taught the Bible Class and was elder for many years along with numerous other positions. Their two sons Donald and Keith attended Sunday School and took part in the children's choir. Donald was also involved with Young Peoples. He married Aleda Hughes in 1953, who became the first lady elder. They served the church through Stewards, Elders, U.C.W. and Sunday School. Their five sons Kevin, Brian, Darrell, Shawn and Erin took part in Sunday School, children's choir, Young Peoples and ushered.

Keith married Erma Thompson from Lucan. When a child, he attended Sunday School and sang in the children's choir.

Guest Family

Mr. and Mrs. John Guest farmed on the southwest corner of Highway 4 and the 16th concession of London Township. Their family: Emily, a journalist, high school teacher; Edna, a medical doctor and surgeon; Lena, a high school teacher; Walter, a University Professor of chemistry; Ernest, a famed horseman who remained on the farm all his life.

Emily asked for a leave of absence teaching in 1916 to go to England where her sister Edna was doctoring war casualties. She was appointed Canadian representative in the British Red Cross to care for extra comforts for Canadians wounded in a 1200 bed military hospital. By 1917 food shortages were acute. Mr. Nugent Harris, Gen. Sec. of Agriculture in Britain asked Emily Guest to join his department and help teach food conservation. She was honored when official thanks from the Queen was given to her for her work before leaving London, England. This was a lovely Women's Institute badge set with jewels. Later at Birr, W. I. thirty-fifth Anniversary August 1946 her two sisters presented this pin to Birr W. I. to be worn by each president.

Ernie Guest taught the Bible Class many years at Birr in his early years.

Thompson Family

Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Thompson and family farmed on the 16th of London Township, west of Highway 4. They were members of Birr Church and raised a niece Rachel Nixon whose mother died when she was two years old. Rachel married Fred Tuke. After living in London they came to live and care for her Uncle Tom on the farm.

Fred Tuke was treasure for Birr Church for a number of years, Rachel was active in the Women's Auxiliary and W.M.S. They had one daughter Isabel who attended Sunday School, sang in the choir and played the piano. She married Glen Haskett of Lucan.

Don McComb

Morrow Family

5 brothers and 1 sister

Jane, the only girl in the family, married Richard Eedy. They were my grandparents. The Morrrows were from the Bryanston area. Bob farmed on the 14th concession of London Township where Barb Morrow now lives. His son Ernie took the farm over. Ernie, wife Fairy, and their 3 children Beth, Irene and Robert came regularly to the Birr United Church for many years.

Middleton

Good records kept over the years, have made it possible for me to go back one generation before the Middletons; back to my great, great grandparents. They had many great, great grandchildren reside in Canada and the USA. They had 47 grandchildren. My grandmother was one of those 47 and she had 32 grandchildren. Some of those great, great grandchildren are in the church today.

Records show that in the olden days they had large families. They married young and death often came suddenly, at an early age.

It starts with a boy who was born in Yorkshire, England in 1794. His name was George Jackson. He married a girl named Anne Hord. By the year 1830, they had 5 children, the oldest had passed away. That year 1830 they got on a boat which was headed for Canada. They settled in York Township, north of Toronto where they had 2 more children.

By the year 1853, 3 of the Jackson girls and their husbands and some of them with small children loaded their belongings in 3 wagons and with 3 teams of horses, they headed to the London area. They all settled in the Elginfield area. Elizabeth and her husband Richard Jackson (no relation) settled in Biddulph Township, east of Edgewood on the old Moore property. They had 7 children. Elizabeth died 3 months after the last child was born, and was buried in Birr United Cemetery.

Ann and her husband Thomas Maxwell settled a mile west of Elginfield on the property where the salt shed is. They had 12 children. It is this family where the Whites, McCombs, and the Donley connection comes from.

Martha and her husband John Middleton settled on Lot 14 concession 16th London Township, a mile east of the Proof Line which is now #4 Highway. They brought one son with them and a girl was born that same year in 1853. By 1861, the seventh child was born. In 1862, there was an outbreak of diphtheria in the area. It was decided they should send the baby, Isaac, out of the area. He was sent a distance away, it is not known where and the oldest girl, Mary, was sent to help look after him. The family at home came down with diphtheria and it spread rapidly through the children. July 1862 in a 11 day span, the 5 children were buried in Birr United Cemetery and through all this the mother

was 7 months pregnant. On September 15, 1862 she gave birth to a baby girl named Emily, that was my Grandmother. They had 4 more children, 3 girls and a boy. The youngest boy, John was born in 1870. Tragedy struck again when the father died in 1875, leaving the Mother with 6 children between 5-14 years old.

The older girl Mary, who had now been married for 3 years lived down the road. In 1885 Mary died after giving birth to her 6th child. Martha, the grandmother, helped to raise another family. Martha died in 1897 at the age of 72. All these families are buried in Birr Cemetery.

Getting back to my grandmother, May 21, 1884 she married Richard Dann. They farmed on the 12th concession London Township, a mile west of Bryanston. They had 8 children. My mother was the 5th one.

Now I would like to read an invitation that was sent to my grandmother.

Don Eedy

Christmas...

At The Old Home Church

To *Mrs. Richard Dann.*

DEAR FRIEND:

You are cordially invited to join in this Old Boys' Reunion. If you cannot come, send letter of greeting to be read at the entertainment on Monday evening. If you come you will be asked to register.

Programme

Sunday, December 25th

- 10.30 a.m.—Divine Worship—Rev. L. Chester McRoberts, Lambeth, will preach. Subject, "Two Midnight Scenes."
 2.30 p.m.—Grand Sunday School Rally, under direction of Mr. J. H. Wilber McRoberts, Superintendent Methodist Sunday School, Mitchell.
 7.00 p.m.—Public Service, conducted by Rev. Fred. W. Langford, Dresden. Subject, "Home-Coming."
 Choir to be composed of members of former choirs.

Monday, December 26th

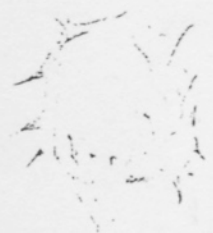
- 5.00 p.m. A Public Entertainment, under direction of Rev. Wm. A. Walden, Victoria College, Toronto, and Rev. Frank H. Langford, High St., London.

Address all Communications to—

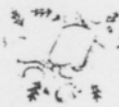
FRANK H. LANGFORD
 128 Simcoe St., London.

REV. J. MAHON,
 Present Pastor.

MR. G. A. STEWART,
 Present S.S. Supt.



Buy the Truth and sell it not.



Reminiscent

Pastors

Rev. Chas. Stringfellow
 Rev. Jas. Kennedy
 Rev. Wm. Walsh
 Rev. Thos. Jackson
 Rev. Wm. Quance
 Rev. D. M. Kennedy
 Rev. Chas. Barltrop
 Rev. R. Redmond
 Rev. R. J. Garbutt
 Rev. D. M. Kennedy
 Rev. C. C. Couzens
 Rev. T. C. Sanderson.

S. S. Superintendents

Mr. Henry Westman
 Mr. Benj. Walden
 Mr. Elijah Braithwaite
 Mr. James Braithwaite
 Mr. H. A. Powers
 Mr. Fenton Fitzgerald.



"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

They saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and fell down and worshipped him...they presented unto him gifts—Matt. 2: 11

His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace—Isa. 9: 6.

Duncan

I would like to take you back to the year 1936 -

It was a good year - it happens to be the year I was born. My sister Betty was born in 1938. Some of you will remember back then when the winters were so cold with 6-8 feet of snow and 48 degrees below zero. I am only planning to deal with a few important incidents which I can remember.

In 1939 I was 3 years old and living in a 10' x 18' log cabin in Northern Saskatchewan where I was born. Mom sent me out to play with the old dog "Shorty" and in no time he started to growl and kick up a ruckus. I ran into the house to tell Mom to come out and see the dog that came to play with Shorty - it happened to be a full size adult brown bear! If it hadn't been for Shorty the bear could have carried me away.

In 1940 a brush fire came through and burned all Dad's crops. However the clover came back and one night we could hear a roar in the sky - it sounded like a tornado coming through but it was not. The grasshoppers had eaten all the clover and green leaves. All the garden plants were gone.

By Spring 1941 Dad had experienced enough of Northern Saskatchewan and decided to move back to Southern Ontario. After holding an auction sale of the sparse furniture and farm animals Dad had gathered, he packed 2 large trunks and with the clothes on our backs we boarded a train bound for Southern Ontario. It took 5 days by steam engine to get to the station in London. We left the train - 2 adults, 2 children, 2 loaded trunks, no money in Dad's pocket and no place to sleep that night.

Somehow a man by the name of Etheld Harris picked us up and brought us out to Legg's store in Birr - Etheld told Dad he could start work the next morning and we could sleep in the old hotel on the corner of the 13th concession and the Proof Line.

We stayed there for one winter and nearly froze - there was no furnace, no oil, no gas to keep us warm - only an old cook stove that went out every hour all night long. The next spring we moved to the Savage house - the 3rd house south of the Birr Church Cemetery. My brother Joe was born in 1942 - the War was in full swing and money and jobs were very hard to find.

In the spring of 1944 we moved to Listowel, then Palmerston, then to a farm house near Atwood, then to a farm house in Parkhill and then to the 15th concession of London Township at Clarke Road where we lived in a 2-car garage. It had cracks in the walls and the snow would blow in and leave ridges on our blankets in the morning. The property belonged to Mr. Legg at that time. Dad worked for Mr. Legg until 1953.

In 1949 Dad had purchased a house in Lucan and moved it to the present location on the corner of Mr. Francomb's farm where my Mom now lives. There were a lot of rough time throughout the 1950's - we finally dug our well for water and had an indoor bathroom in 1956. Unfortunately, with all the moves my public school education took quite a beating. My sister and I started school in Birr and I have Mrs. Edna Adams to thank for helping us with our education.

In 1977 Dad and I built a log cabin on the home property - a replica of the cabin in which I was born. We completed it that year and over the years Dad filled it with antiques and items that reminded him of his beloved west and the hard time he and his family had endured. If anyone wishes to view the cabin sometime - please give me a call and I would be pleased to do so.

Bob Duncan

The Clergymen

- 1847 ~ Wm. Pollard
- 1849 ~ Richard Phillips
- 1852 ~ Alexander Green
- 1854 ~ Thomas Cleghorn
- 1856 ~ John Williams
- 1859 ~ Charles Turner
- 1860 ~ John Laird
- 1862 ~ William English
- 1865 ~ James Iverson
- 1867 ~ William Hewitt
- 1870 ~ James Harris
- 1873 ~ Charles Springfellow
- 1876 ~ Joseph Kennedy
- 1879 ~ William Walsh
- 1882 ~ Thomas Jackson
- 1885 ~ William Quance
- 1888 ~ David Kennedy
- 1891 ~ Charles Barlthrap
- 1892 ~ Richard Redman
- 1895 ~ R. J. Garbutt
- 1898 ~ David Kennedy
- 1899 ~ C. C. Cousins
- 1901 ~ Thos Sanderson
- 1904 ~ John Mahn
- 1906 ~ J. C. J. Millyard
- 1909 ~ C. J. Moorehouse
- 1913 ~ H. J. Creasy
- 1914 ~ T. E. Sawyer
- 1918 ~ S. J. Allen
- 1921 ~ W. R. Vance
- 1927 ~ A. E. Hopper
- 1933 ~ Stan Sweetman
- 1941 ~ Fred Clyesdale
- 1948 ~ C. D. Cox
- 1951 ~ D. A. Cowan
- 1952 ~ W. H. Pike
- 1953 ~ Bruce Guy
- 1968 ~ Malcolm Fife
- 1972 ~ Jim Warden
- 1975 ~ Ed. Morrow
- 1976 ~ Milton McGorman
- 1978 ~ Chauncey MacKay
- 1982 ~ Manley Sadler
- 1987 ~ Edward Sam

Church Organists

Martha Maxwell

Gladys Maxwell

Isabel Tuke

Frances Adams

Helen Lewis

Donna Jeffrey

Doug Barr

Alan Davidson

Mark Charlton

Belle-Ann Luce

Eleanor Westgate

Donna Jeffrey

Mark Rogan