
ALBERTON

T o w n o f A n c a s t e r - 1 8 4 6



Alberton Church, 1878

The name for the community called Alberton is believed to have originated about 1854, and taken from Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert. Earliest records show that in 1846 William Kelly (1797-1881), a pioneer in the Ancaster West area (as Alberton was then known), gave a piece of land from the farm he had purchased in 1832 on Alberton Road North, (Lot 24, Concession 3 of Ancaster Township), for the building of a church. In return, he received the token payment of five shillings to make the transaction legal; he specified the church was to be a member of the new Free Church in Canada. There may have been a number of this branch of Presbyterianism roundabout, a group which probably worshipped in the home.

No doubt, Mr. Kelly felt the time had come to have a proper meeting-place. The first building would have been a log structure. George Sharp, an Alberton elder in 1935, remembered "old folks" mentioning a log church on this road. George's parents were William Sharp (1831-82) an elder, and Janie Findlay (1839-1916), who had bought land in the area in 1855. When Mr. Kelly deeded the land, the road from Hamilton to Brantford had been cut through and planked, so his site for a church was a good one.

The newly-formed congregation was part of

the Niagara Presbytery (Associate) "under inspection" of the Reverend John Frederick Augustus Sykes Fayette. This would imply he had oversight as an interim-moderator, and may have visited the flock. On November 23, 1852, the Presbytery of Flamborough states that Ancaster West (Alberton) was received into the fellowship of the United Presbyterian Church, still under Fayette's inspection. Mr. Kelly must have agreed to this change for he continued as elder, till the time of his death, June 13, 1881.

Other changes followed. In June 1854, the Flamborough presbytery reported that they had dissolved the pastoral connection between Fayette and Ancaster West; and on the same day, they had united the congregations of Ancaster East (Carluke) and Ancaster West into one pastoral charge, along with St. Andrew's of Ancaster Village. Furthermore, on July 10, 1855, they ordained the Rev. John Lees over this charge. The session of William Kelly and James Young met Mr. Lees in Ancaster Village along with Dr. Andrew Ferrier moderator pro tem, and they were constituted in their first Kirk Session. For a pioneer congregation it was a red letter day for now it had a full-time ordained minister to serve their needs.

The charter members in full communion on July 10, 1855, were: Daniel Van Sickle; Phoebe



An early missionary-minister in the area, James Frederick Augustus Sykes Fayette

Van Sickle; William Kelly, elder; Charity Kelly; David Myers; Mrs. Pepper; Mehitable Bigger; Mary Weaver; Elisabeth Vanderlip; Elisabeth Weaver; Maurice Sharp; Annie Sharp; Francis Irwin; Nancy Van Sickle; Mary Clout (or Mrs. George Applegarth); Alexander Burnside; Ann Burnside; William Thomson; Ann Thomson; James Young, elder; Jane Young, Sen.; E.W. Wright; Margaret Wright; William Young; Mrs. William Young; Jane Young (or Mrs. James Burnside); Robert Forbes; Donald Forbes.

Mr. Lees served as pastor until 1869, with William Kelly, James Young, Alexander Burnside and Robert Forbes as elders. Session records make no mention of their frame church built in the early 1860s; this important fact is made known through the minutes of the Upper Canada Bible Society, where it states the society (Trinity and Alberton) met in the new church in Alberton in 1861 for its annual meeting - another major event, to be sure!

When the Rev. William Patrick Walker arrived in 1872 his session consisted of William Kelly, Robert Forbes, A Young and Hugh Morwick. Another milestone occurred "on the sixth day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand, eight hundred and sixty-one years when at Montreal the United Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Presbyterian Church of Canada were united into one body under the designation of the "Canada Presbyterian Church." In consequence of this the session concurred that "The hand of Providence was recognized in the accomplishment of this most desirable result" and it was impressed upon the Kirk Sessions "the solemn responsibilities growing out of this epoch in their history." When this major announcement was made, for this session it was agreed to take

Present interior, Alberton



up a special collection to help clear the debt still owing on the Knox College building. They acted responsibly at once!

A further union was consummated in 1875, this time between the Presbyterian Church of Canada in connection with the Church of Scotland, the Canada Presbyterian Church and two other bodies, when all Presbyterians came under one banner "The Presbyterian Church in Canada" as known to this day. The session was moderated by the Rev. William Patrick Walker, with elders Kelly, Forbes, Young and Hugh Morwick.

Raising money for congregational purposes in the 1850s was done through a Missionary Committee, with Robert Forbes as secretary-treasurer. Three women collectors, the Misses Agnes Young, Sarah Weaver and Mary Van Sickle, were "to go over the congregation regularly every two months to solicit subscriptions." In 1859, during six months the sum of fourteen dollars and sixty-four cents was collected and sent to the synod. Later, this mode of collecting was replaced by a collection made on an appointed Sunday. (Perhaps the girls got married and were too busy with families!).

When a deficit occurred, or a special project was undertaken, canvassers were appointed for the occasion. The Hamilton presbytery berated the congregation in 1875 "for the smallness of levies contributed to the schemes of the Church." By way of explanation, the minister replied that "it was due to the decision of the congregation to build a manse in the spring of 1876." They declined "to promise any more for the coming year." A manse materialized in Ancaster, and Alberton paid its share.

A brick church appeared in 1878. Additional land had already been bought for a driveshed in 1866. But, when a blacksmith and wagon shop burned down (owned by William C. Kern and operated by Daniel House) for one hundred and twenty-five dollars the church bought this quarter acre lot to the south, for the erection of the present building. The keystone in the gable attests to this fact, even though the session minutes make no mention of its dedication! The date was November 19, 1878. Their pastor the Rev. John Hepburn Ratcliffe had been inducted as minister in 1876. He served until 1883, including that important time in the congregation's life.

When the debt in 1882 rose to three hundred and twenty-five dollars, a subscription list was formed to canvass the people. At the congregational meeting of 1884, it was announced that "after much labour and vexation" the debt was cleared. At that time, the Rev. Thomas Turnbull Johnston had become their minister.

What was going on in the little church as its people worshipped Sunday by Sunday? By 1862, a Sunday school was functioning, and a special collection was taken for books. Later, in 1865, a collection provided an enlargement of the library; the early settlers valued learning, and books for the scholars were both precious and necessary. A bible class for older members was started, too.

The presbytery was very concerned with the state of religion in each congregation. Yearly, from 1877, a questionnaire was put to each session. It dealt with facts about family worship, number of communicants, care of the young, special evangelistic work, the minister's supervision of the people, oversight by the elders, elders' districts, weekly meetings for Scripture readings and prayer, hindrances to spiritual life, sabbath observance, frequency of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and admission to baptism. Because of the difficulty in travel, communion was observed twice a year, May and October; and the Sunday school operated only during the summer months.

Music was conducted by the precentor. Francis Irwin was an early one. No one was found to replace William Young when he resigned in 1877. However, the congregation was soon to have a larger musical instrument than the tuning fork. In 1881, the minister told the session he had been approached by Mrs. William Kelly (nee Charity Van Sickle 1808-1896) and told that she wished to give an organ to be used in the service of praise. This generous gift was accepted by a grateful congregation. In compliance with Mrs. Kelly's wish, it was also agreed that Miss Mary Sager be appointed as organist; should she decline, the congregation wished Miss Mary Sharp to be appointed. It was at this time also that the Hymnal of the Presbyterian Church was adopted. Prior to this, the precentor had led in singing of the Psalmody from memory. From now on, the congregation stood for singing and remained seated for prayers.

Another important step was taken in 1881, when the session agreed that collections would be taken up for missions in the Sunday school and bible class. It was seen as "necessary to train children of the Church in the grace of giving," especially when the pressing claims of mission work in Canada were a major concern.

The board of managers came into being that year, too. Those elected were: Messrs. James Christison, William Wright, David Kelly, Richard Kelly, William Sharp and Alem Kelly. Thus, 1881 was quite a year in Alberton Church - missions, music and managers!

When the women of the church asked to play

a more significant church role in 1885, they received permission from the session to form a Ladies' Aid Society. (It has now been alive for over one hundred years). Tea meetings, as they were called then, quilting bees and annual bazaars were some of the activities that earned them respect. Records of early days have not survived, but these names as workers stand out: Mesdames L. Didmon, R. Smith, J. Morwick. G. Sharp, H. Ferguson, W. Young, R. Kelly, E. Baker, W. Baker, T. Wright, A. Baker, R. Horning and J. Thomson.

In more recent times, Stella Baker, Lily Robertson, Hazel Baker, Lila Wright, Isabel Fair, Dorothy Sharp, and Lil Lovering filled the offices and shared in the projects. Today, they gather on Wednesdays in the hall for an all-day quilting session. Their services of quilting are sought in the wider Ancaster area. The regular stitchers are Clara Burditt, Helen Billiald, Margaret Didmon, Margaret Lovering, Frances Campbell, Georgina Zimmerman and others who drop in to lend a hand. They are generous with their funds for church expenses, charities and the support of a child in a Third World country.

Another women's organization now came into existence. In 1899, the subject arose of reorganizing the missionary society. By 1909 a Home Missionary Society became organized. "Packing the bale" was once a big event, but has been since replaced by offerings.

In the 1980s three Alberton women served in the Hamilton Presbyterial - Clara Burditt, Helen Billiald and Wilma Butter, the latter two as presidents.

The Carluke and Alberton congregations separated when the former became self-sustaining in 1876. At that time, Ancaster and Alberton were re-united. Formerly, Ancaster was joined in 1870 with the Barton Stone Church congregation. However, in 1891, Alberton became a two-point charge with Onondaga, Brant County, a union which lasted a little over four years. It was ended because of difficulty in travelling over snow-filled roads in winter and ankle-deep mud in spring. Eventually Alberton united again with Ancaster, a union still in effect.

An interesting minister for Alberton (1883-85) was Thomas Turnbull Johnston. As a Knox student, he kept a diary for his experiences during a harrowing trip to the Upper Ottawa region. He left Alberton when they would not add a free manse to his stipend. Alberton's new church building was only eight years-old when gale force winds caved in its eastern facade, and damaging the gable which had to be rebuilt. A congregational meeting was called for May 25, 1886, to consider how to raise fifty-eight dollars

and sixty cents necessary for repairs. That amount was about one-fifth of the yearly revenue. The minister at the time was H.C. Ross.

Much needed space for Sunday school classes was provided in 1910 by an addition on the western end of the church. On its northern side stood a large woodshed, partially planked over to provide kitchen space and a range for the women; beyond this lay the "privy" and driveshed, all under one roof.

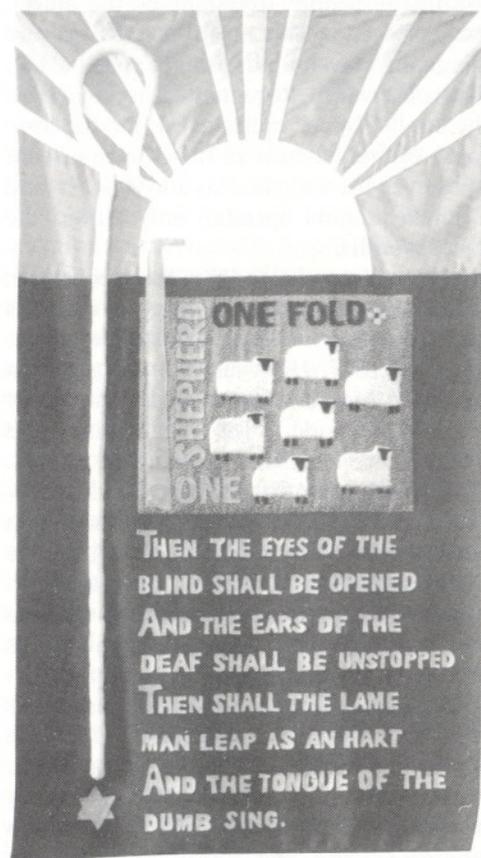
Apparently, the question of Church Union in 1925, which brought unheaval in many congregations, did not affect Alberton. When the vote was taken in January of that year, four approved and sixty-nine opposed the idea. No members left the fold. From 1886 to 1925 the following ministers served: H.C. Ross, John McClung, William M. Reid, D.H. Hodges, J.I. Manthorne, Andrew Ford Webster, Donald H. Currie, Gilbert Gray MacRobbie. They were followed by G.M. Young, Dr. E. Pugh Thomas, Dr. John McNab (editor of the Presbyterian Record) and David J. Douglas. In 1935, the ladies found the kitchen facilities so inadequate that a new kitchen was built by Thomas Williams, giving them cupboards with adequate shelves.

A new generation came to the fore following World War II. They saw the need for renovations, and under the Rev. Dean Cassidy an updated programme was launched. The windows in the sanctuary were replaced, each one being the gift of a family or former members, at a cost of one hundred and forty dollars each. They were dedicated in 1959. Phase II saw a "Ways and Means" committee appointed; later that year, the present building at the rear of the church was erected. It incorporated the former Sunday school and now provided parlour, washrooms, kitchen and hall with space for classrooms below. Many hours of labour were given by members; especially remembered is Clinton Telfer, Sr., who gave unstintingly to this project.

All this refurbishment made the sanctuary look shabby. The renovation committee chaired by Barbara Ferguson, and made up Truey Baker, Jean Morwick and Messrs. William Baker, Nelson Howell, Ivan Zimmerman and Roy Billiald. Architect C.H. Moeller of Ancaster was engaged, and the renovation completed. Generous gifts were made in memory of former members. The communion table, pulpit, lectern, cross, front doors, and piano were consecrated at a special service of celebration on September 20, 1964, when the hall was also dedicated. The debt of over eight thousand dollars was met by pledges. A gift from the Susan Kitchen Estate provided extra money.

An enlargement of the property occurred in 1960, when land to the south was purchased from the provincial highway department, providing a fifty-foot buffer zone from the highway.

Although the Young People's Society no longer functions, it once was very active. In the 1930s, Alfred Fair served on the provincial executive as treasurer. Four Alberton members were part of the rally in the early 1930s when eleven train cars of young Christians descended upon the capital city. Later, the youth kept busy attending retreats at Camp Goforth; planting shrubs around the church; serving at Wayside House; taking part in the church services and making banners in the 1967 Centennial Year.



In 1972, Mrs. Norma Baker organized the "Albertones," a group of girl singers who delighted all who heard them. Their members were: Norma Baker's daughters: Laura Jean and Nancy Kent; Sandra Lovering; Marilyn and Barbara Billiald; Diane Brooks; Sandra Jerome; Carolyn Fair; Karen Ferguson and Christine Telfer.

In the 1950s the Mission Band was replaced by Children of the Church and Explorers. Their leaders were Ruth Baker, Grace Markle, Wilma Butter, Mildred Markle, Norma Y. Baker, Edna Jerome, Helen Billiald, Corrie and Karl Van Derschaaf. Later, the Explorers joined with a group in Carluke with Jean Morwick as a helper.

The Sunday school has been ably looked after by superintendents who, in many cases, served long periods: Oliver Howell, Garnet Vanderlip, B.J. Burditt, Lyn and Lloyd Zimmerman; and presently, Florence Smith. The cradle roll has been active with Mrs. William Young serving for many years. In July, daily vacation bible schools proved popular. Potluck suppers were started in 1983, in efforts to reach out into the community. So popular have they proved that larger accommodation in the Achievement Centre nearby are needed. The Advent season is used to produce spiritual values.

Church envelopes were first used in 1908. Annual reports have been printed since 1914. The congregation is enrolled in the "Every Home Plan" of the *Presbyterian Record*. The first woman member on the board of managers was Jean Morwick, elected in 1959, followed by her election to the session in 1969. She became its clerk in 1971, after B.J. Burditt's long term; was a member of the Synod Camp Board for seven years; and she sits in presbytery as a representative elder.

Caretaking since 1965 has been done by families of the church, with a work-bee each spring and autumn. In 1988, Irvin and Florence Smith re-decorated the sanctuary walls for the one hundred and tenth anniversary celebrations of the present building, when Dr. Robert G. MacMillan became the guest preacher, and led the congregation later in a time of fellowship and celebration.

Alberton has had strong choirs in the past; with strong leadership from Bert Burditt and people like Mrs. W.C. Baker. A new organ was bought in 1970.

Community interests have received strong support from members: the Ancaster Agriculture Society; the Provincial Fair Board; the Junior Farmers of Ontario; the 4-H programmes; the Ploughmen's Association, the Ancaster Senior Achievement Centre; the Ancaster Township Historical Society; the Local Architectural Conservancy Advisory Committee and the Fieldcote Museum. Walter Ferguson played a part in Ancaster's municipal life, serving as councillor and reeve. After his death, both Barbara, his wife, and their son Lloyd, followed as councillors.

Alberton church has been served well by members whose names appear over and over again in its records. Up to the year 1900, we see much names as Kelly, Young, Burnside, Morwick, Irwin, Sharp, Kerr, Howell, Sager, Billiald, Smith, and Baker. Treasurers such as Albert Fair and Roy Billiald have given long service. The ministry continued to provide strong leaders such as: Thomas H. Boyd (1964-67) Byron A. Nevin (1967-86) and at present David L. McInnis, since 1986.

We pray that the future will provide men and women of like faith, to bear witness to the one and only God, our Father, his Holy Spirit and his Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.



Rev. Robert MacMillan, Jean Morwick, Stella Baker (oldest member), David McInnis, cutting the 110th anniversary cake, 1988