

History of Rock Chapel United Church

684 Ridge Road West, Grimsby, Ontario

Before there was any established Methodist Church in Upper Canada, the spiritual needs of the pioneers were served by Methodist Circuit riders usually coming from the United States. These devout men, who had little formal education rode horseback and had thirty or forty appointments on their circuit. They preached almost every day and twice on Sunday in pioneer cabins, school houses and taverns. Camp meetings were also held in the area. Due to this there were services held in the community years before this church was built. It is believed that it was the Wesleyan-Methodist Church that dominated the following in this area.

When the Methodist Church became established in Upper Canada, about 1880, districts were set up consisting of circuits, each having several appointments. This, the Niagara District was one of the oldest in Upper Canada and prior to 1836, our community belonged to the extensive Canboro Circuit. At a conference held in Hamilton in 1836, an alteration of the circuit boundaries was made and Grimsby Township gave its name to a new circuit. The adherents to the Methodist faith in this community thus became part of the Grimsby Circuit. Because of the shortage of ordained ministers many of these churches were served by laymen appointed by the Church Board. Regular class meetings were held under the leadership of these laymen (class leaders) and were intended to encourage self-expression and Christian development. These very often took the form of public confessionals.

As more and more settlers arrived, the need for a special place to worship arose. Meetings had been held in different homes with ministers coming from nearby villages to help; this, however, proved to be an awkward situation. A piece of land was thus selected from the property owned by the Bowslaugh family and the men of the now enlarged community set about quarrying stone from the hillside near the Cline Mountain Road. Limestone for the mortar was quarried and burned in a kiln at the brow of the mountain. With the assistance of a stone mason, Mr. Lipsitt of Grimsby, the church was finally erected. All labour other than Mr. Lipsitt's was given gratis.

The altar, other carved furniture and the benches were purchased in St. Catharine's. A journey of a day was required to bring these by horse and wagon. It is interesting to note that under the top of the pulpit the date February 17th, 1873 is undersigned by Mary D. VanDuzer (Mrs. C.P. Hawkey) and Julia Gibson. We presume they covered the pulpit with red velvet which was not replaced until 1950.

Since we can find no deed to the land prior to January 1st 1882, we presume this is the first indenture held by the Trustees of Rock Chapel Wesleyan Methodist Church. The land was described as twelve one-hundredths of an acre

and was granted for the sum of fifty dollars. On Sunday, March 3rd, 1873, Rock Chapel Wesleyan Methodist Church was officially opened by ministers from nearby village churches. Rock Chapel was an appointment of the Grimsby Circuit along with Stoney Creek, Stewart's Church (now Fruitland United), Fifty Church, the Brick Church at the Forty (the former Methodist Church on Ontario Street, Grimsby), Beamsville, Smithville, Clinesville (now Elfrida), and Mount Zion Church (on Ridge Road just east of Tapleystown Road).

Around 1884, when the Wesleyan Methodist and the Episcopalian communions united to form the Methodist Church, Rock Chapel was joined to the Tapleystown Circuit which had five appointments - Tapleystown, Tweedside, Stone or Buckbee (now Fulton Stone), Rock Chapel, and Mount Zion. In 1887, Mount Zion was closed leaving a four point circuit with Tapleystown and Tweedside having a service every Sunday, and Stone and Rock Chapel alternating every other Sunday.

Tapleystown Circuit became part of the United Church of Canada in June of 1925 when the Methodist, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian Churches united. Rock Chapel now became Rock Chapel United. The Tapleystown Circuit continued until 1928 when Grassie Church was joined to the circuit in lieu of Fulton Stone Church. Two ministers were allotted to the charge. In 1932, Grassie Church was closed leaving a three point charge. In 1948, the Tapleystown Circuit was joined with Ker making the Ker-Tapleystown Charge made up of Ker, Fulton Stone, Abingdon, Tapleystown, Tweedside, and Rock Chapel. In the intervening years Abingdon and Tweedside churches were closed due to lack of membership.

The horse sheds were originally on the opposite side of the road and a little east of the church. At the turn of the century, the sheds were moved behind the church and since there is no record of more land being purchased to accommodate the sheds, we assume the land on the south side was exchanged for that on the north. In 1906, the first organ was purchased by the Epworth League. Until this time a member of the congregation would set the key for the singing. Mr. William Van Duzer was one such person. In 1920, hydro power came into the district and the coal oil lamps were replaced with electric lights. The oil lamps were suspended from wall brackets and one central chandelier. One time the central chandelier crashed into the seats and floor just after one of the services. In 1931, the present stained glass windows were installed. In 1948, horses had ceased to be used as a means of transportation so the sheds were demolished with the exception of the woodshed.

In October 1950, after the church had been re-decorated and a new altar front built, the Reverend Fred Jackson conducted a dedication service for this and the following gifts: a communion set - from Miss Dorothy Bowslaugh in memory of her mother and father (Mr. and Mrs. E. F. Bowslaugh), a pulpit bible - from Mrs. W. H. Van Duzer, Mrs. Harry Sturch, and Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Shuker

in memory of the late Mr. W. H. Van Duzer, a piano and organ light - from Mr. Enos Jeffery, Mrs. Edna Carlton and Mr. and Mrs. Percy Shuker in memory of the late Mrs. Enos Jeffery and the late Mrs. Jack Larmon, a pulpit light and two silver altar vases - from the former Unity class, a fern stand and offering plates - from Mr. and Mrs. G. DeQuetteville and baptismal bowl - from Mr. and Mrs. John Bowslaugh.

In July 1957, the porch was enclosed with new double doors and the stained glass windows over the original doors were removed to the outside. The need for a Christian Education building became evident while the Reverend U. Cronhielm was on the charge and so more land was acquired on the north and west of the lot. A building committee was appointed. A fund raising campaign netted \$2500 in cash and \$3300 pledged over a three year period. Mr. Keith Young was awarded the contract to construct the building. The approximate cost was \$7300. On February 19th 1961, the Christian Education Building was dedicated. The Rev. Ewart Culley - minister, the Rev. Carl Zurbrigg - chairman of Hamilton Presbytery and the preceding minister, the Rev. U. Cronhielm, conducted the service.

Up until this time, the church had been heated by first a box stove and then a furnace stove given by the Henry Barr family in 1907. About 1935, a pot-bellied stove was purchased which served until the fall of 1961 when an oil burning furnace was installed that had the capacity to heat both the church and the new C. E. building. By March 20th, 1965, the mortgage taken by the congregation to finance the building of the new addition was completely paid off. On the evening of March 6th, 1966 with the Rev. Ewart Culley officiating, the symbolic burning of the mortgage by Mr. Stewart Aman (treasurer of the building committee) was observed.

Music has always been an important part of the Christian Ministry at Rock Chapel. The original organ was replaced in 1935 by a new piano. In 1961, after the addition of the Christian Education Building, another piano was purchased. This remains in the church and in November 1963, an electric organ was added. That organ was replaced in 1969 and the replacement was used until 1990 when the family of Isobel Inglehart (organist from the early 60's until 1990) present the church with Isobel's personal organ in her memory.

As a Canada Centennial Year project in 1967, the congregation constructed a kitchen, wash-room addition to the C. E. building. In 1973, the church was carpeted in a colourful durable fabric.

In more recent times the following is a list of some of our improvements. Brass cross for the Communion Table - presented by Clare and Marguerita Brand and Laura and Andy Althouse in memory of Mr. and Mrs. W. Brand and Mr and Mrs. John Althouse; new lights and ceiling fans in the church - in memory of Ethel Vickers (1984); Good News Pulpit Bible (c.1990); outside floodlight at the

front of the church - in memory of Bill Morison (1992); church redecorated - wall paper, paint on trim, metal ceiling painted and trimmed with gold (c.1995); oil painting of the church painted and donated by Orpha Shuker, stained glass window hanging donated by the Lung sister; front facade inside church renovated and painted (1997); new brass coloured collection plates purchased, and a new sign erected in time for our 125th anniversary. In 1999, it was discovered that the stained glass windows were in need of repair or restoration. Former member Ralph Bowslaugh remembered that the original windows were all the same as the windows on the south end of the church and that in the 1930's the side windows were replaced due to wear and tear on the originals. A campaign for restoration work was met with very generous donations and the work started immediately but would take several years to complete. Windows are restored and dedicated to the memory of Mr Percy Shuker, Ron and Marilyn Vickers, Blanche and Stewart Aman, Edna P. Bates, Enos and Mary Jeffery, Jacob Bowslaugh, John and Clara Bowlaugh, Freeman and Sadie Bowslaugh, Dorothy Bowslaugh, Charles and Mary Hawkey, Florence, Lewis and Roy Hawkey.

Sadly, due to declining attendance and membership, Rock Chapel ceased regular worship on June 26, 2005. The final closing service celebrating the life and times of Rock Chapel was held on October 2, 2005 with Rev. Thom Davies officiating.

The history of worship here is filled with the names of a great many men and women, some whose names are remembered, some whose names have been forgotten. Our history is rich and colourful and it would be impossible to present it to you in any great detail. We hope that in this brief presentation we have done justice to those who have served God in this place. This account is dedicated to them.