

CHURCH :

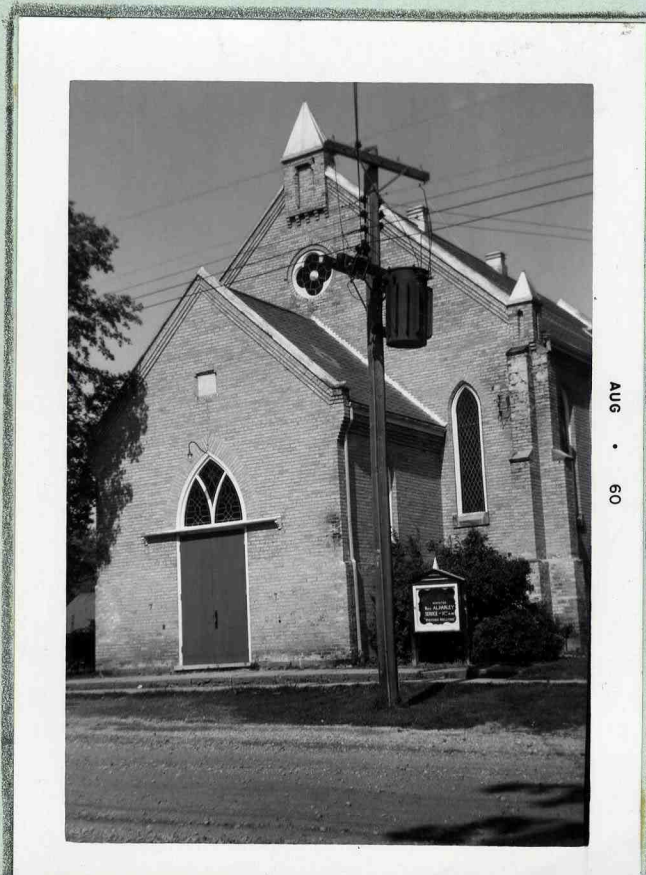


ANGELICAN.

HISTORIES :



PRESBYTERIAN.



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THE HISTORY OF ST. GEORGE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, BELMONT

1871 - 1971

In 1830 there was no Belmont. That year saw the incoming of the Manning Settlers from the Eastern United States. They settled a large block of land in Southeast Westminster. This was the Manning Settlement and Plymouth, along the Townline between Westminster and Dorchester Townships, their village (both north of present Belmont and its forerunner).

In the 1840's Joshua Odell, Lot 1 Concession 7. Westminster, divided part of his farm into building lots and Belmont had been founded. By 1850 Belmont was becoming an important community. A wealthy farmer Thomas Nugent arrived from Eastern Upper Canada and bought the farm adjoining Plymouth between Concession 6 and 7 in Dorchester and just across the road from Joshua Odell. He too divided part of his farm into lots and thus became Belmont's second founder.

Thomas Nugent, an imposing figure in top hat, and a public spirited, influential and wealthy man, was also a generous man and had allotted land for a Cemetery and three village churches from his "Town Plot".

Mr. Nugent was a religious man and religious services were held for some time in his new home. In 1862 this worshipping group became a Mission Congregation of St. Peter's Church Dorchester Station, whose Rector Rev. T. C. Des Barres ministered also to St. John's Church, Harrietsville. On April 5, 1864 the following item appeared in The London Free Press.

"Church At Belmont"

"It is contemplated to build an Episcopal Church at Belmont, a village about 12 miles from the city. With this object in view the Rev. Des Barres is now in this city soliciting subscriptions in aid of this very laudable undertaking. On Sunday morning last the Reverend gentleman preached in Christ Church (St. John's Church Harrietsville - briefly known as Christ Church) and made known his intentions to the congregation. In the evening Rev. Mr. Brookman warmly appealed to all classes to give according to their abundance, and thus bring about, what is very much to be desired, the erection of a place of worship in a very flourishing section of this district. No doubt every citizen of London will contribute towards the good work".

It was on December 19, 1864 that Thomas Nugent and his wife Elizabeth Moore Nugent conveyed to the Church Society of the Diocese of Huron, in consideration of the sum of \$1.00 of lawful money of Canada, lot 25 on the East Side of College Street in Nugent's Survey, as a site for a church in connection with the United Church of England and Ireland, and lot 24 as a site for a parsonage for a clergyman in connection with the said church.

The lumber for the new church, probably locally grown was all sawed at Nugent's saw-mill and was erected into a quaintly beautiful church.

The interior was of natural oiled and varnished tongue and grooved woodwork, the whole supported by arches and braces in a unique style much as it is to-day, - a testimony to the excellent workmanship of a century ago. It would accommodate over 100 persons, and was lighted with coal oil lamps and heated with as many as three wood stoves. (Many will recall the Entry full of cordwood for the purpose).

The exterior was brown, of vertical boards - with slate covering the joins. This was the church completed in 1865. The London Free Press of July 29, 1865 said this:-

"Church Dedication At Belmont"

"The new Episcopal Church at Belmont was publicly opened for divine worship on Sunday last (July 23) by his Lordship the Bishop of Huron. Services were held at 11 o'clock and at 3 p.m. which were of a very interesting and impressive character. Prayers were read by Rev. Des Barres, Incumbent of Dorchester, whose sphere of labour extends also to the Belmont Mission.

The sermons preached by His Lordship the Bishop were characterized by fervid, eloquence, and sound scriptural doctrine. The morning's discourse was upon the text in St. Matthew, Chapter 5 - 20th Verse, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven," being -

listened to with marked attention by a large congregation from London, Aylmer, Dorchester and surrounding districts. The singing was very good. Miss Nugent of Belmont presided at the melodeon. We may add that the church is a neat and commodious structure costing \$1100.00 a large portion of the sum having been raised through the exertion of Mr. Des Barres who last year made a tour through the Lower Provinces for the purpose. The church people in the neighbourhood also contributed largely."

Thomas Nugent was one of the largest givers. In fact legend has it that when approached to subscribe to the building fund for the new church he gave the land and all the money to build it. We do know, no man did more, but in the light of these records, we must give credit where due.

The newly dedicated church was call^{ed} The Episcopal Church (one of many terms used in various eras for the church officially known to-day as the Anglican Church of Canada).

On St. George's Day, April 23, 1871 the church was officially named St. George's Church and this gives rise to our Centennial's Date, rather than the date of the erection of the Episcopal Church or Belmont Mission in 1865. That date has been retained as the Establishment of the Parish. The date April 23, 1871 is inscribed on the Bell made in England, which last midnight tolled one hundred times to usher in this day of centennial celebration.

Construction of the Rectory immediately south of the church was built prior to October, 1873 as "extensive repairs" are recorded as having been made at that time.

Changes have been made from time to time.

On February 13, 1914 the Bishop was advised by Wardens John Bowey and Thomas Strachan that the repairs undertaken in the Fall of 1913 had been completed and "that the whole building had been covered with concrete plaster on metal lath, the second coat of plaster marked off in blocks 8" x 20" and joints pencilled in black to dry out almost white". The sidewalk was also laid at this time. The cost was \$281.17 and included:- concrete work \$155.00, windows \$40.00, carpenter work \$15.17, painting \$60.00, hardware \$4.85, lumber \$4.55 etc. It was paid for by a collection on the opening day, November 23rd. - - \$28.50, donation from the Ladies' Guild \$109.61 and the balance from the Synod.

In 1929 repairs were again undertaken, Synod matching dollar for dollar with congregational givings up to \$200.00. It is assumed that the insul brick siding and roof were put on at that time.

Other changes were from oil lighting to hydro and from wood heating to gas. Removal of the horse sheds marked the end of an era.

Other planned changes did not materialize. Mr. and Mrs. John Ferguson obtained cement blocks to install a basement under the church. The Synod engineer discovered that the north-west corner was on quicksand and the plan abandoned.

In 1961, in preparation for the 90th anniversary, the exterior trim was painted and the pews refinished.

A Reconstruction Fund was also begun to build a new church but this plan too was given up. Other improvements and additions were made from time to time.

The Sunday School had a long and faithful record of nearly 100 years, functioning at least by 1872. About 1900 there was a "good Sunday School" under Superintendent Walter Paul. The Sunday School Library was in the vestry. Other Superintendents were Colborne Warren, Tom Strachan, Mrs. John Ferguson and Fred Baker, always aided by dedicated teachers. Intermittently the Sunday School would reach low ebb, but be revived, the last time by Linda Satterley but with her marriage in 1965 the Sunday School finally closed.

Around 1900 the Sunday School Christmas Concerts were held in the Masonic Hall to accommodate the crowds, later in the Bowey home and in the 1930's in Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Moore's home. In latter years a family Christmas evening was held in the church.