

# ELGIN *Life*

## Local church has strong history

### ■ Congregation's search for peace ended here

*This weekly column's purpose is to reveal the local area's heritage. Elgin County is immersed in great wonders that are frequently taken as commonplace. Visitors meanwhile marvel for hours at these sites. We urge everyone to take a moment to view our heritage wonders and acknowledge what splendor we regularly overlook.*

*All articles are provided by local historical and architectural conservation groups.*

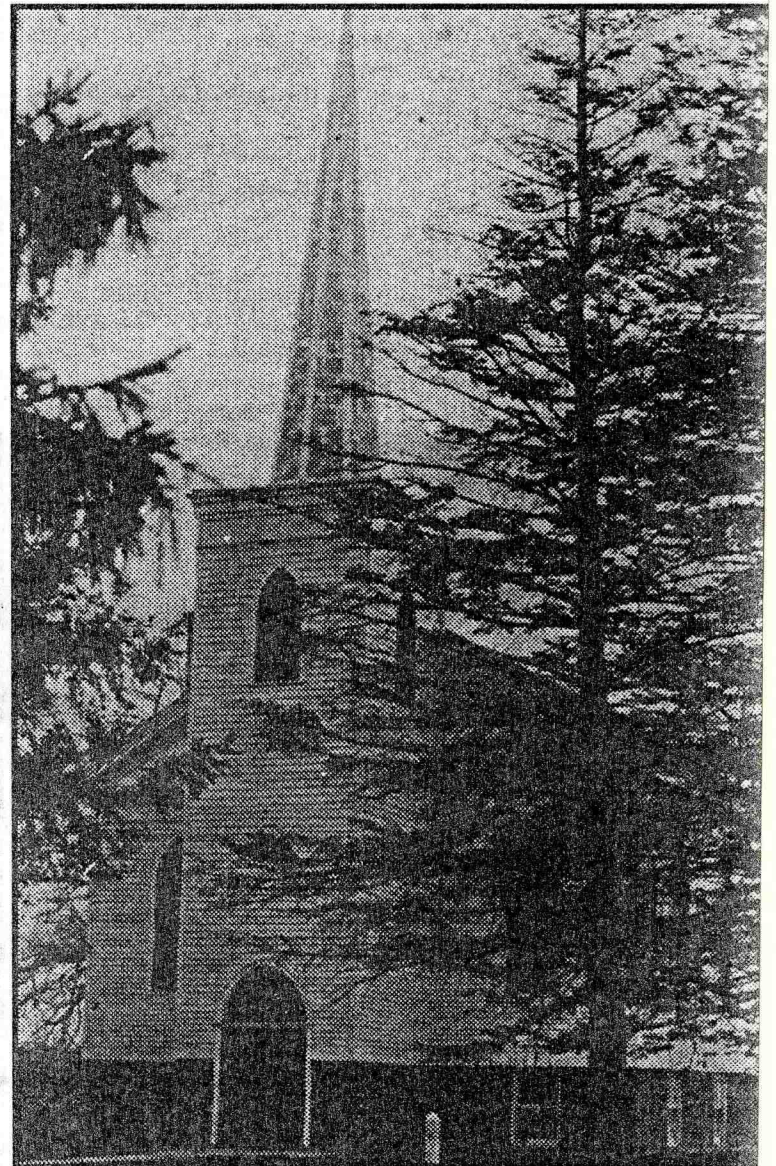
"All that is past or is old is not outmoded or grown useless. Neither is all that is new, wonderful and without question."

These are words spoken by Rev. Karen Hincks to the 1989 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, held in Montreal. They clearly express the feelings today of the congregation of the New Glasgow Presbyterian Church towards their building, which was erected by Mr. McFarlane in 1854 on land bought from Sir Richard Airey for 10 pounds or \$50.

However, the erection of this building was not the beginning of the congregation. After their many requests for help, the Church of Scotland finally, in 1828, sent a missionary in the person of Rev. Ross to serve

Western Ontario, comprising Harwich, Horvard, Oxford, Dunwich, Southwold, Mosa, Ekfrid and Zone. The first regular services were held in the house of Neil Haggart on Highway 3 near the Elgin-Kent townline. He had erected a large frame house with a partition across it fastened to the ceiling with hinges. For services, the partition was raised, and the house became one large room to accommodate the congregation.

Eventually by 1834, the people felt they needed a permanent place of worship. James McKinley gave the land for the site of the first church in Concession 12, lot 4, Aldborough Township, just beyond the Sixteen Mile Creek on the north side of Highway 3. The people turned out in force to build the St. Andrew's of Scotland with a frame of the best oak and siding of whitewood. The church was partly gothic in style, containing a large gallery in the west end and a massive walnut pulpit which placed the minister high above the congregation. Built by all the able-bodied men of the area, it stood as a wonderful example of community solidarity.



New Glasgow Church as it looks today

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## T-J LOOKING BACK AT BYGONE DAYS



**CHURCH PICNIC...** The participants in a Methodist Church picnic held in Wallacetown or Tyrconnell are shown in this 1900s photo submitted by Don Lucas of St. Thomas. From left, at the front are Dr. Ben Keillor, Dr. Fred Keillor, Lillian (Lyons) Keillor (with a tie at throat), Ermin (Keillor) Lucas (leaning on an unidentified lady), and Marguerite (Lucas) Dummer. Far in the back with no hat is John Lucas.

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## T-J LOOKING BACK AT BYGONE DAYS



**COYNES CORNERS TEACHERS...** This T-J file photo shows the former teachers of the Coynes Corners School who attended the school reunion in July, 1966, the year that the other one-room schools in Dunwich township were closed. From from left are Mrs. E. B. Nell, who taught from 1942 to 1944, Mrs. Edith Patterson, 1921-1922, Mrs. Donald Webster, 1931-1936, Alice Galbraith, 1924-1927, second row, Mrs. Norman Welch, music teacher from 1938-1950, Mrs. Harold Hansford, 1929-1931, Mrs. Thelma McFarlane, 1952-1966, Mrs. Annie Brown, 1936-1941, 1944-1947 and 1951-1952, Mrs. Clarence Blue, 1927-1929, Mrs. A.E. O'Maeley, 1917-1920, Mrs. Donald Leitch, music teacher from 1965-1966, and D. Joseph Hooley, 1911-1912.

# Security basked in the warm glow of our coal oil lamps

by Harry J. Boyle

The writer is an author and broadcaster

We had one defence against the smothering dark of fall and winter nights on the farm. Every morning the coal oil lamps and lanterns were lined up, the fuel replaced, wicks trimmed and the glass chimneys polished as the dark splotches of soot were removed. It was a priority job because the warm, mellow glow of their light was a comfort and a necessity.

In a world where light dissolves darkness at a flick of a switch the coal oil lamps and lanterns seem like awkward devices. Yet they marked enormous progress and efficiency over the feeble, guttering tallow and beeswax candles used by our pioneer ancestors.

They were fuelled by coal oil. That was the name and while as kerosene it has become useful in powering aircraft, no one used that name. If you asked the storekeeper for kerosene he would fill your container from a barrel labelled coal oil.

On the farm we had a battered five-gallon can with a screw top where it was filled and a slender spout for pouring. Coal oil contaminated everything it came in contact with, so the spout was usually filled with a plug of carrot or potato. If you forgot the plug the storekeeper might fill it with a gumdrop. Every farm child knew

from experience how powerfully obnoxious coal oil was by trying to rescue the gumdrop.

The lanterns and lamps demanded daily attention. They were assembled each morning for the ritual. It was father's job to fill them from the storage can kept in the back woodshed. This he did with a combination of impatience and smothered resentment which resulted inevitably in a spill of some kind. There was a standing order that no one could smoke in the woodshed or even light a match. Coal oil was combustible, and while we never had a fire as a result of the stuff, we lived with the knowledge that it was dangerous.

Mother looked after the lamps and lanterns in all other ways. Uneven wicks caused smudging of the chimneys with lampblack. There were some older people in the community who prized this black stuff as having healing properties on scratches and wounds. Observing children with patches of the soot on them I was glad my family didn't subscribe to the theory.

The glasses or chimneys were rubbed briskly with old newspapers balled up into wads. About once a week they were given the full treatment of suds and water. When finished, they stood on a sideboard in the kitchen glowing like jewels, waiting for night and service.

My favorite memory is of a grey winter afternoon. The sky would be foreboding

with snowflakes tumbling down somewhat erratically as an advance guard for a storm. You could sense the world being folded into a cloak of darkness. Visibility grew less and the firelight in the kitchen was reflected on the shiny, varnished wainscoting in vivid, dancing images.

There was always a peaceful kind of in-



Harry Boyle

terlude as daylight yielded to night. Mother, who seemed always to be in motion, would sit in the rocker at the kitchen window for a resting period. The only sounds were those of the ticking clock, the rhythmic squeak of the rocker, the occasional snapping of the fire and the bubbling from a pot on the stove.

She seemed to know intuitively when to

go and light a lamp just before father appeared for a lantern. The lamp spread a ring of light over the table, leaving the corners in shadow. Father, carrying the lantern to the barn, was the centre of a swaying circle of light in the full darkness.

Our nights were governed by those lamps and lanterns. Father worked by the lantern light in one spot of the stable and then carried it to another. It hung on a peg on a post while the milking was done. He carried it with him when he went to the pig pen or the hen house. The faint light through the dusty windows was a signal that he was still at work. When the splotch of lantern light started moving toward the house it was the sign for mother to put the final touches on our supper.

We ate by lamp light. We did our homework on the kitchen table while father sat sideways using the lamplight to see as he read the newspaper. When we went to bed a lamp sat on a small table in the hallways turned to a faint glow. It was our beacon of comfort and protection against the dark.

On those rare occasions of family gatherings in the front parlor the hanging lamp would be lit. Suspended by a brass chain, it was an elegant affair of a pink bowl and shade decorated with flowers. We regarded it as the ultimate touch of festive affairs.

We marvelled at the brightness of the lamps fuelled by naphtha gasoline when

they were installed in the church. Then, father brought home one of the hissing devices with the intriguing cloth mantles that turned into ash to provide light. Gone were the corner shadows in rooms. Father could sit away from the table and read comfortably.

The final mark of progress was when he bought a gasoline lantern. Neighbors made excuses to drop in and marvel at the brilliance. Mother, while admitting the advantages, remained fearful. She seemed to feel that the device might explode at any moment. Gasoline remained for her a much more dangerous substance than coal oil.

She was relieved when we bought a Delco plant for providing light at the command of a switch. In time, when Hydro power came we all stopped marvelling at progress. It was accepted simply as a mark of an age.

Yet, to this day when winter nights steal in to blot out daylight I often think of the coal oil lamp and its warm, comfortable glow. It makes me remember firelight and reflections and a sense of security. I recall also looking out a bedroom window before going to bed and seeing father in a ring of lantern light on his way to the barn for the final inspection of the stock. If the light was a defence against the mysterious dark then father on his final rounds of the day was the symbol of our personal security.