

KILMARTIN CHURCH

1838 - 1905

It is related of him that he walked from Westminster to Southwold often, although sometimes he was met on the road between Westminster and St. Thomas by an elder, John Turner, of Fingal. The people in those days had their Gaelic Bibles, Gaelic Psalms and Paraphrases. The demand for preaching in English was becoming more urgent every day and Mr. McColl had to add to his labours the study of the English language. This new difficulty he faced bravely and with amazing energy, characteristic of the man, and he was soon able to preach in English also. Presbyterian rules forbade anyone not ordained to preach from the sacred precincts of the pulpit, and while Duncan McColl preached in the church at Fingal, it was always from a platform below the pulpit.

A few years previous to 1850, the Rev. Mr. McKillican left St. Thomas, and was succeeded by Rev. John Fraser, who continued to administer to the spiritual affairs of Yarmouth, assisted by the aforesaid elders, until some years after the congregation of Kilmartin had been organized.

The first meeting was on the 22nd day of May, 1851. There were present Rev. John Fraser, Moderator, Hugh McKay, Duncan Campbell, John McGregor, John McBane and Hugh Douglas, elders. The business before the session was baptism on behalf of infant children from Farquhar Campbell, Archibald McIntyre, and Donald McKellar. Meetings of session were subsequently held as occasion required. The Rev. John Fraser frequently preached in the church up till the year 1856.

The first communion was dispensed in Kilmartin Church on the 4th day of September, 1856, by the Rev. Duncan McMillan of Aldborough, he being first appointed to the Presbytery of London. There were quite a number of adults admitted into full communion and a number of infants baptized on that occasion.

Presbyterianism now began to assume a wider scope and in 1856, North Yarmouth was separated from St. Thomas and united with South Dorchester. In April 1858, the united sessions of Yarmouth and Dorchester, (two elders, John Stewart and Neal Brown having been appointed some years before in Dorchester), met in the home of Duncan Campbell, elder, of Yarmouth. The Rev. Alexander Young, who succeeded Rev. John Fraser in St. Thomas, Moderator, Duncan Campbell, Hugh McKay and John Stewart, elders, when it was agreed to ask the Presbytery to have the ordinance of the Lord's Supper dispensed in Kilmartin church on the first Sabbath of July. The request was granted, and Rev. John McMillan, of Fingal dispensed the communion on the 3rd day of July.

The order of services for the Lord's Supper in those days is of fascinating interest to members of St. James Church today. On the Thursday previous, which was fast day, a sermon was preached in English first, and immediately afterwards one was preached in Gaelic. The day was considered by many of them as sacred as the Sabbath. It is reliably reported that one of the members of Knox Church, Belmont, refused to make gain by selling grain to a neighbour, who came to purchase that day. On Friday, a prayer meeting, partly in English and partly in Gaelic was held, led by ministers and elders. At this service the distribution of tokens took place. On the Sabbath following, one minister preached in English and dispensed the communion in the church while at the same time the other minister preached in Gaelic and dispensed the communion in a barn nearby. Next day, that is Monday, the Thanksgiving service was held with preaching in English first and Gaelic afterwards. These services, whether on week days, or on the Sabbath, were held at eleven o'clock in the morning.

In 1858 the old log church was replaced by a frame building which was built on the Hugh Douglas farm across the road and east of Kilmartin Cemetery. Hugh Douglas, the owner of the farm, gave the land as a site for the church. The building stood here for twenty or so years, when it was moved across the road to the cemetery. It

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was placed facing the eleventh concession road, and remained in this place until 1905 when it was sold and moved to Yarmouth Heights. There it was used on the farm of Bruce Davis as a canning factory.

The pulpit in 1857 was supplied by the Rev. Archibald Stewart, in 1858 by the Rev. Donald McLean, in 1859 by the Rev. James Greenfield, and in 1860 by Rev. Neil McKinnon. The first communion within the walls of the new church was dispensed on the 18th day of May 1860.

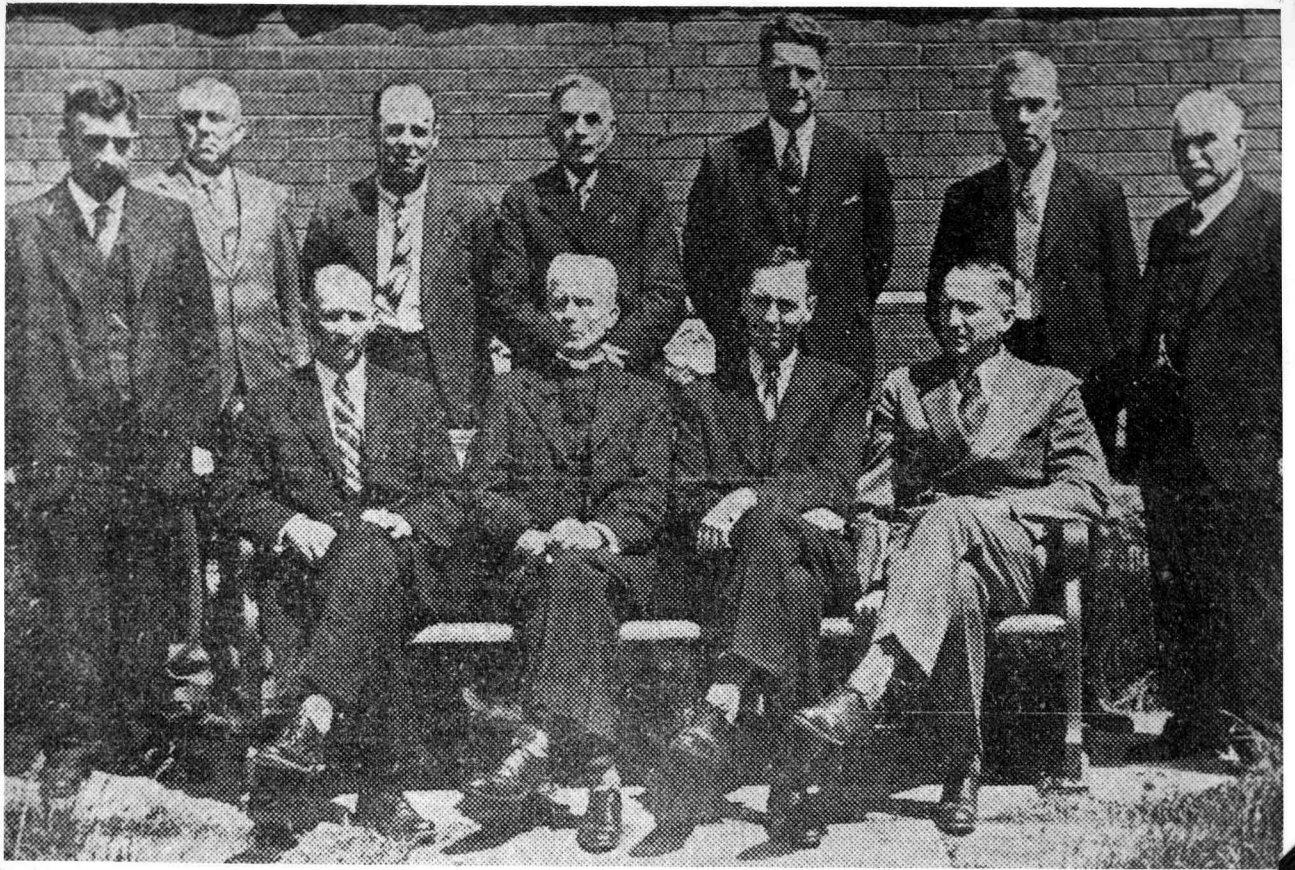
In the summer months during the time intervening between the organization of Kilmartin congregation and the first settled pastor, missionary students were: Archibald McDiarmid, James Greenfield, Neil McKinnon, Mr. McLean and Lachlin Cameron, and probably others. Among the lay preachers who did a large amount of self-denying work was Mr. William Clark, of London. He was for years an able and zealous worker, traveling from house to house, administering counsel or reproof as might be required, always respected and beloved by the people.

In 1861 Rev. Archibald Currie accepted a call and was inducted in 1862. He was the first settled pastor of the united charges of Belmont and Yarmouth. The Belmont congregation had been looking around the district for some time for another congregation to unite with them as they were not able to stand alone. They tried to unite with the newly organized mission church at Frampton, now Dorchester village, but most of the Presbyterians there were Irish and did not wish Gaelic preaching. Another attempt was made to unite with the Fifth Concession Church, Westminster, but being lowland Scotch, they likewise preferred not to have the Gaelic. But the Yarmouth people were people after their own heart, and loved the Gaelic accent.

The Precentor was an important personage in the services of those days. After a psalm, read two lines at a time, he began the selection of a familiar tune, without the assistance of any musical instrument. All the people then joined heartily in the singing, although perhaps it was neither musical or classical, being in the slow old Scottish chanting style. During the singing the congregation remained seated, while in prayer they stood up. After the benediction the people walked three or four miles back to their homes again with hearts filled with gratitude for the privilege of public worship.

The church building erected in 1858 was used until 1905, when a new red pressed brick church, named St. James, was built one mile north on concession 12.

From an article written by Rev. J. Knox Clarke, on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Church. Published in the St. Thomas Times-Journal, Sat. June 18, 1938.



ST. JAMES CHURCH 100th ANNIVERSARY. The above group includes all the present officers of the church, the members of the Board of Session seated in front, the Board of Managers standing behind. Front: from the left - Elder Gilbert E. Taylor, Rev. J. Knox Clark, B. A., Elder Herman Taylor, and Donald A. Ferguson, Clerk of Session.



ST. JAMES CHURCH 125th ANNIVERSARY. Session members: left to right - Allan Gillies, Elder, G. Herman Taylor, Clerk, Rev. W. A. Kincaid, Moderator, Bruce Smith, Elder, Duncan Taylor, Elder and also a member of the Board of Management. The Board of Management: In the back row - from left to right - George Jenken, Chairman, Douglas Gillies, Secretary, Keith Danbrook, Russell Lunn, Clive Lewis, William Grawburg, Colin Berry and Ray Reid.



ST. JAMES CHURCH is the fine red brick church which was built to replace the old Kilmartin Church in 1905. The congregation was founded by early Scottish settlers in North Yarmouth who came from Kilmartin, in Argyleshire.

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Bruce Davis built a white brick house on Fairview Avenue in what was then Yarmouth Heights, now St. Thomas. Although he served as a County Constable for a number of years, his main interest was fruit farming. He named his extensive piece of property "Brucedale Fruit Farm." He moved the old and abandoned Kilmartin Church from the 11th concession of Yarmouth Township to his property in 1905-06 and used it as a canning house, canning the produce of his orchards. Much of his canned fruit was shipped to the Canadian West, a great deal of it going to Manitoba. During his ownership of the property it was further subdivided, and Park Ave was put through from Talbot St. to Elm St.

(This information was taken from a family history compiled by Maxine Davis, my mother)

During my grandfather's time (Dayton Davis), I remember this old grey frame building being used to "grind" grain (wheat, oats) for chicken feed. I remember it as being a dusty old building with the pleasant smell of freshly ground grain. It had a wonderful wood floor that was great for sliding on as it was made slippery by the grain. My grandfather had a hatchery and raised many chickens himself, many of which in those days roamed on "free range" during the summer and were sheltered in the little wooden chicken coops. My grandfather kept the orchards and many times I was able to go with him to the old London market where he sold his plums, pears and apples. During this time, the building was never used for the canning of fruit.

Carolyn (Davis) Cameron

KILMARTIN CEMETERY

The Alexander Douglas family donated the land for a church and cemetery about 1837-1838 on the north-west corner of the 11th concession and the Yarmouth Centre road. The lot had a stand of heavy elm which was one of the most difficult woods to handle. Donald Ferguson, who was an expert axeman, living four miles away on concession 12 west, cleared the site. This work may have been a contribution from the large family to which he belonged. A small log church was built to the north of the lot in 1838.

Here were buried some of the early pioneers. The first burial in Kilmartin cemetery was recorded in 1841, but there may have been interments prior to this date. Many of the graves are those of children, others of young men and women struck down in their twenties by tuberculosis.

The original small log meeting place was replaced by a larger frame building which was erected in 1858, on the farm of Hugh Douglas, across the road from the cemetery. This church was moved to the cemetery property twenty or so years later and placed facing the 11th concession.

Burials continued to be made in the cemetery as long as this church stood in the churchyard. No board seems to have been appointed to look after the cemetery, it was probably the responsibility of the elders. (Duncan Campbell and Hugh McKay, two of the original elders of Kilmartin church, are buried here.) In 1905, a new red brick church, named St. James, was built one mile north on the 12th concession and the old Kilmartin Church was removed from the churchyard.

With the removal of the church from the property the little plot with its white slabs began to take on a neglected appearance. With a few exceptions, no burials had taken place since 1900, and like many other pioneer cemeteries, Kilmartin was sadly neglected.

Through the years some families tried to care for their plots. In 1909 some of the public-spirited men of the community raised money by subscription and by means of a bee erected a good wire fence around the lot. The cemetery was given a general cleaning of weeds and wild growth, shrubs were planted and the tombstones were straightened and repaired. In 1930 the North Yarmouth Womens Institute organized a field day to give the grounds another cleaning and for some years they arranged for the cutting of the weeds. In spite of the work that was done, it became increasingly difficult to maintain the plot in satisfactory condition, due to the unevenness of the grounds. In 1952, at the time of the Yarmouth Centennial, the township council erected another wire fence around the lot to replace the fence put up in 1909. However the weeds had taken over and the condition of the place became such that no individual effort could do much to improve its appearance.

A plan of the cemetery had been made by some of the members of the North Yarmouth W. I., and shortly after the Yarmouth Glen W. I. was organized they were asked by their sister organization to carry on with the work. The suggestion made by one of the members that the Yarmouth Glen group take on the renovation of the cemetery met with unanimous approval.

In April of 1960 a committee was appointed consisting of Mrs. John Penhale, President of Yarmouth Glen W. I., Mrs. Harold R. Davis, Mrs. Ferguson Campbell and Mrs. Donald McGregor. This committee met with Yarmouth Township council in October, 1960, and were assured of a yearly grant of \$50.00 starting in 1960. Two work bees were held by the members and their husbands, on November 5th and 12th. Every stone that was in good condition was removed and stored in Bruce Smith's barn, with the exception of the Smith and McDonald monuments, which were left in their original position. In December the plot was plowed and roughly levelled. In April, 1962, Robert Ryckman, Yarmouth Township road superintendent, supervised the final grading and levelling of the lot so work on the enclosure could be started.