1907 to 1952

Forty-Five Years History of Presbyterian Church Here

On Sunday next First Presbyterian Church will have as guest preacher for anniversary services Rev. J. A. Munro, B.A., M.C., general secretary of the Home Mission Board, Toronto.

The occasion recalls the early days of the Presbyterian Church in Prince Rupert. It was the first Sunday in July, 1907, when Rev. W. J. Kidd, B.A., B.D., of the Home Mission Board, was appointed missionary in charge. The first services were held on that date in the mess hall of Kenny Munro who had the contract for building the wharf and in the mess hall of the sawmill at Seal Cove. Later services were held in the dining room of the Grand Trunk Pacific Hotel. During Mr. Kidd's pastorage a church tent was erected near the GTP Hotel Annex site. It was later pulled down and rebuilt on the present church site. Approximately 25 by 60 feet, it was known as the Sunday School Hall. An organ costing $120 and chairs were installed and paid for.

Some years later when relating his experiences in Prince Rupert Mr. Kidd wrote: "I have forgotten just who were on the first Board of Managers but the most useful ones were Sandy Turnbull and Sammy Wight from Broughty Ferry near Dundee. These two with a friend named Struthers and another good man whose name was Evans built the church with voluntary labor in one week. One evening Sammy Wight went down town and collected mostly from working men enough money to pay for all the material."

The communion roll of September 1908 includes among others the names of D. G. Stewart, Dr. and Mrs. J. O. Reddie and A. M. Manson now Hon. Justice Manson, who is still a trustee. They were followed by L. W. Patmore, Mr. and Mrs. F. Stork, Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Millar, W. Brown, Daniel Jabour, Mrs. D. C. Stuart, John Currie and J. R. Mitchell

Mr. Kidd was succeeded by Rev. A. M. Ross who had formerly bee nmissionary at Atlin. After Mr. Ross's departure the congregation extended a call to Rev. F. W. Kerr who was then taking postgraduate work in Marburg, Germany. Mr. Kerr accepted the call and was the first inducted minister of the Presbyterian Church in Prince Rupert.

STRANGE APPEARANCE

In a letter written some years later from Montreal, Prof. Kerr wrote: "Prince Rupert presented a strange appearance in those days and blasting operations took place all the years of my ministry, in order to make the crooked places straight and the rough places plain. I have never known people with greater courage and optimism than those men of the early days. Everyone was brimming with happiness. Lots were selling rapidly and we were laying plans for a second Vancouver. The Presbyterians met in a hall but soon this became inadequate so that during my entire ministry we rented the theatre (Empress) for Sunday evenings. At the request of the managers one Sunday I announced that we would have a bee on Monday night to tear down the old hall in order that the lumber might be transported to our new site. It seemed to me as if hundreds of men were there and in the course of a couple of hours the entire hall was taken to pieces, the boards carried up the plank road and the next day hauled out to the site of the present church. Another thing that I remember vividly was my arrival in Prince Rupert with my bride, two years after my first arrival. As the boat came slowly into the wharf I thought I saw every Presbterian down there to welcome us. D. C. McRae took snaps of that occasion and I keep them among my treasures."

During Mr. Kerr's ministry the town had a rapid growth of population and the church soon became self sustaining. Dr. H. R. Grant writing of Mr. Kerr stated: "He was a very popular minister and a brilliant preacher and the congregation sustained a distinct loss when he went to New Westminster in 1914."

Mr. Kerr was followed by Dr. Grant who related the circumstances of his call as follows:

"In May (1914) the congregation notified Mr. Woodside of Mount Pleasant Church, Vancouver, interim moderator, that they were ready to extend a call. He was away at the time and I was sent in his place. I had to preach two Sundays to pay expenses of the trip. After the first Sunday the committee sent one of its members to tell me they were going to place my name before the meeting on Wednesday. This member was C. V. Bennett, a lawyer there at the time and an old university acquaintance of mine. I told him I would not accept the call. He went away but came back immediately to inform me that the committee still stuck by their choice and would stay with it. I then saw the question was already settled by a Higher Power and I surrendered. I have never regretted my decision or rather the decision that was made for me. I was inducted the week before war was declared. Prince Rupert was a young man's town then and at once there was a great rush to recruit. During the war the population fell to about 2,500 and the natural effect was a smaller church attendance. We at once commenced our services in the Sunday School Hall and worshipped there for ten years.

CHURCH BUILDING

"At that time we had a mortgage of $7,500 on the church property. It was suggested we issue bonds for that amount and sell them to the members. They were sold and not one presented for payment. This was done when things were at a very low ebb financially. In the winter of 1924 we started raising of funds for our church. The board of managers went in pairs. My partner was George Muro. My recollection is we did not receive a refusal. In three nights we received subscriptions totalling $10,000. A good friend of mine of another church, and who was very fond of a joke, told me he gave his money, not to build the new church, but to pull down the old one. T. H. Johnson was in England and was cabled to for his subscription. Back it came by cable. He told me afterwards his friends there thought it a strange procedure. He told them that was the way things were done in the West. There was one Scotsman who was well to do from whom I expected a good amount, but when I tackled him he began to tell me how hard up he was. I turned to another tack. I told him they were saying we Presbyterians could never build our church. We were too ambitious. His denominational pride was hit. He said, "How much do you want?" I named a good large sum and got half which was the amount I expected. It was now time to get a loan. I went to the Presbytery and asked them to endorse a loan from the church and manse committee for $15,000. Now this was away above the percentage of the cost of the building the church law allowed. One man got up and began to tell me this. I stopped him and said, "Mr. ———, I am quite well versed in the law of the church, and need no instruction in it. I came to break the law, not to observe it." I got my loan. The contract for building the church was let to Mitchell & Currie and the building is a testimony to their skill and workmanship. It was opened by Principal Millar of Robertson College, Edmonton, on February 1, 1925. The day was one of our worst winter days, but the church was packed at both services. Principal Millar was an old university friend and I was glad to have him with us."

The board of managers during the building of the church was G. H. Munro (chairman), F. G. Dawson, D. C. McRae, J. L. Christie, Joe Greer, Jarvis McLeod, John Currie, E. J. Smith and George Rorie (secretary).

DR. GRANT LEAVES

Dr. Grant was called to Fort William in October 1925, and, much to the regret of the congregation, decided to accept the call. His departure was a distinct loss to the church and the community. For 11 years he had ministered to the congregation with untiring zeal and devotion. His broad Christian sympathies won for him the regard not only of his own people but of the entire community.

During Dr. Grant's pastorage the vexed question of church union came before the congregation and, largely due to his influence, the question was settled amicably in favor of remaining in the Presbyterian Church of Canada. Following Dr. Grant, Dr. A. G. Cameron supplied the pulpit acceptably for many months, but the next inducted minister was Rev. J. R. Frizell, B.A., L.L.B. who labored during 1927 and 1928.

Following a lengthy vacancy a call was extended to the Rev. W. D. Hollingworth, B.A., of Knox Church, Calgary, in January 1931, which call was accepted and Mr. Hollingworth ministered to the congregation from 1931 to 1938. During his ministry in Prince Rupert Mr. Hollingworth was granted a year's leave of absence to make a survey throughout the province of the possibilities for church expansion. During his absence the Rev. J. W. Stevenson ministered to the congregation.

Shortly after returning, Mr. Hollingworth received and accepted a call to St. John's Church, Medicine Hat, from which he later took leave of absence to serve as a chaplain overseas. Mr. Hollingworth was an able speaker and during his ministry new organizations for young people, both men and women, were fulfilling a work which the congregation had needed for a long time.

Mr. Hollingworth was succeeded by Rev. H. C. Funston of Stewart, who was inducted in April 1938. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 confronted the church with new problems which it had to face and to which it had to adjust itself. Many of the young people of the congregation joined the armed forces, thereby depriving the young people's organizations of their active and zealous support. Mr. Funston's ministry lasted until 1941 when, at the annual meeting, he announced his decision to accept a call to Cooke's Church Chilliwack.

Mr. Funston was succeeded by Rev. A. F. MacSween, who was unanimously called to the congregation from Wanham and inducted under exceptional circumstances three days after the attack on Pearl Harbor and during a complete blackout of the entire city. One prominent member walked from his home through the pitch darkness of the blackout to attend the service and, seeing no light in the building, returned home without entering. The war continued to take its toll in the service and sacrifice of our young people. Ralph Morin, Mike Hudema, Clarence Finley, William Hadden, William Brown jr. and L. (Sonny) Keays made the supreme sacrifice. Mr. MacSween left in September 1947. Between September 1947 and April 1950 (when Dr. E. A. Wright, the present minister, was inducted), the services were conducted by various ministers in supply including Rev. A. F. McColl and Rev. G. E. Sendall, also Mr. Murphy. Under the present minister the church is showing renewed vigor in several forms. The various church organizations are actively engaged in renewing some of the furnishings and also refurbishing the church property all of which is being done in a spirit that has not been apparent for some time, making the outlook for the future very promising.

J. FREW.

Good Story, Willie-Roy

A good story in Frank Graham's new book "The New York Giants," tells of the first time young Willie Mays of the Giants came to bat in Brooklyn last year. Roy Campanella, the Dodgers' great Negro catcher, asked Willie what he thought of Preacher Roe, who was curving 'em for the Brooks.

"He's a mighty good pitcher, Mr. Campanella," Willie said.

"You're lucky today," Roy said. "Wait till you get Don Newcombe tomorrow. He hates colored rookies. He'll blow you down!"

Graham, probably for lack of space, neglected to relate how the mischievous Campanella kept tossing dirt in Willie's shoes just as the ball was delivered. Willie complained to his manager, Leo Durocher, and next time he came up told the bulky backstop:

"Mr. Durocher says if you do that again for me to throw a handful of dirt in your face, Mr. Campanella."

"That's fine, Willie," Roy said. "Any time you feel like dying, you just do that." Willie, it is recalled, went hitless his first 21 times at bat in the big show.

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