

Celebrate 150 years at Cheltenham United Church

Next Sunday (Oct. 15) is going to be a special day at Cheltenham United Church, as the congregation marks its 150th anniversary. Founded the same year that Canada was founded, the idea of the church started the previous December, with a meeting at the home of John Lyons to discuss the building of a Presbyterian Church, according to information supplied by the Church.

Those at the meeting decided to start a subscription list as a way to raise funds for a building. For a location, they chose a site at the top of the hill at the south end of the village, on a half acre that had been donated by a Mr. Campbell.

Plans were made in January 1867 to hire an architect. The contracting job went to Ebenezer Haines and Son, who owned a saw mill in Cheltenham.

By the fall of that year, the new church was completed. It was a one-room, single storey building with the entrance next to the road with a porch over the door. It was approximately 30 feet wide and 40 to 50 feet long, heated by a huge box stove with a row of stove-pipes up each side. Coal oil lamps provided light. Straight-backed seats were arranged with two aisles. Much of the labour was voluntary and the entire cost of building the church was \$735.

The first morning service at the new church was Nov. 3, 1867, presided over by Rev. Dr. R. Burns, professor at Knox College in Toronto.

The establishment of the church was a major event for the people of Cheltenham. Many had recently settled in the area. They included a lot of Scotch Presbyterians and Irish Protestants. An outstanding trait of these pioneers was their love of a church and reverence for God's House.

By January 1907, it was realized by the congregation that the building was not up to their needs, so they decided a new one had to be constructed.

The building committee consisted of W. J. Cation, Alex Campbell, John Wilkinson, J. W. South, W. W. Wilkinson, James Lyons Jr., George Caldwell, Jas Lyons, James Hall, Thomas Lyons and William McKechnie, and work began in the early summer. The old church was taken down as the new one was being built. This new building stands on the same lot as the old one but a few feet to the north. A corner stone was laid July 30, 1907 at a ceremony conducted by Rev. Dr. E.D. McLaren.

The building was designed by architect John M. Lyle of Toronto with contractors Jarrett and Sons of Alliston. The total cost of building the church, including the furnishings and decorating, was \$8,342.

The new church was officially opened Jan. 30, 1908 by Rev. G. Crawford Brown. During the construction, the congregation had worshipped in the Baptist Church on the north hill, being kindly invited to do so by the Baptist Congregation.

In 1925, Cheltenham Presbyterian Church, without a vote being taken, passed into the United Church of Canada and has remained ever since.

A number of ministers and congregation members have passed through over the years, and families of the original founders still attend.

The 150th anniversary will be marked by the special commemorative service next Sunday, starting at 10 a.m.

The current minister is Heather Stevenson who is completing her ministry internship at the church. In fact, she grew up in the area and is quite at home at Cheltenham.