BOTANY CHURCH

Records and Memories

... of ...

BOTANY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

AND ITS SUCCESSOR

ST. JOHN'S UNITED CHURCH

By FRANK CAMERON
The EDITH and LORNE PIERCE COLLECTION of CANADIANA

Queen's University at Kingston
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By FRANK CAMERON

Thamesville Ont.
PREFACE

This history deals more particularly with the Presbyterian congregation of Botany, and its successor, St. John's United Church, though reference is necessarily made to some related topics.

My main sources of information have been the church records. Just here the writer would like to express his thanks to the Session of the Thamesville Presbyterian Church for their co-operation, and for the splendid manner in which they have preserved some of their early record books.

For some events and conditions in the congregation, a few newspapers and other publications have been consulted. Of some incidents I have learned by interviewing older members, or by correspondence with those who had knowledge of them. The writer has also drawn on his own memories.

To all who responded to enquiries concerning persons and circumstances, the writer hereby expresses his appreciation.

It is inevitable that into any such work, no matter how carefully done, some errors must creep; but I trust that, knowing the difficulty of the task, and my own inexperience in such matters, you will accept the work in a spirit of kindly tolerance, as an honest and earnest effort to preserve the history and spirit of our beloved church.

FRANK CAMERON
N½ Lot 9, Con. 3, Howard.

November 1, 1941.
CANADIAN Presbyterianism in pioneer days, drawing its membership and its inspiration from the old land, inevitably echoed the doctrinal and other differences which, from time to time, split the Scottish church. Yet this tendency, from the very outset, was modified by the severe conditions of a new land which compelled men and women of all sects and races to work together for the common good.

To understand the history of Botany Presbyterian Church — now St. John’s United Church — a glimpse of general church history is necessary. Rev. John Bethune, who labored for twenty-five years in Glengarry, was, in 1792, the only Presbyterian minister in the new province of Upper Canada. Not until 1818 did the “four Williams” — Rev. Wm. Bell, of Perth, Rev. Wm. Taylor, of Osnabruck, Rev. Wm. Smart, of Brockville and Rev. Wm. Jenkins, of Markham — secure the organization of the Presbytery of the Canadas, to supervise ministers and congregations. Though this pioneer Presbytery unanimously agreed to recognize the doctrines, discipline and worship of the Church of Scotland, a rival organization, the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada in Connection with the Church of Scotland, was formed at Kingston on July 7, 1831, embracing the presbyteries of Quebec, Glengarry, Bathurst and York. Efforts to unite the two synods were, however, consummated in July, 1840, when the Synod of Canada in Connection with the Church of Scotland was formally organized.

Scarcely was union achieved, however, when the great rift in the parent church in Scotland divided the Canadian organization. At Kingston, in July, 1844, a group headed by Dr. Bayne, of Galt, formally seceded; and on the tenth day of the same month this group organized the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada — commonly known as “the Free Kirk.”

It was from this branch of Canadian Presbyterianism that the Botany congregation sprang.

The early days, when the first settlers of Botany hewed homes out of the forests, have left few records. Few and scattered though the pioneers were, from the very outset they felt the need of public worship. No doubt family worship was held in the homes; devout families met together in the more commodious log houses; but as the settlement grew, the need for better facilities was felt. To participate in communion, pioneers had to journey many miles, on foot over rough forest trails, to Chatham or Ridgetown.
An old record book of the Botany School furnishes this motion dated, "Howard, October 27, 1845:"

"The inhabitants of School District No. 1 United in the townships of Howard and Harwich met at four o'clock on the above day of October for the purpose of ascertaining the opinions of the above inhabitants as to whether the school house is to be opened to public preaching on school days or Sundays, by day light or candle light:

"Resolved:
"That the school house be open to all denominations of Christians for public preaching at all hours except during the hours of keeping school in said house.

(Signed) JAMES McCANN, C'n.
JAMES MOWBRAY, C'k."

The record does not show what party or parties asked the privilege of holding services in the old log school, but the large proportion of Scotsmen among the Botany pioneers is significant. And the records show that by 1848, only three years later, the Botany congregation was strong enough to justify the visits of a missionary who profoundly influenced the life of the community.

Born in Argyllshire in 1818, Angus McColl came to Upper Canada with his parents, John and Catherine McColl, in 1819. A farm boy in Halton county, a grammar school student at Toronto and later at Hamilton, and for a while a teacher, when Queen's College opened in 1842 he became a member of its first class, finishing his course at Knox College. He threw in his lot with the Free Kirk and on February 22, 1848, was ordained and inducted into its ministry, becoming pastor of the Free Kirk at Chatham.

Rev. Dr. McColl was a man of vast energy and wide interests. In addition to his ministerial work for Chatham and a group of outside missions, he was examiner of teachers and schools for Kent and later school inspector for Chatham. When, on July 12, 1848, the London Presbytery was separated from Hamilton, with Rev. Dr. McKenzie of Zorra as moderator, Mr. McColl was elected clerk. Through several diligent years, his faithful ministry laid firm and deep the foundations of the future Botany church.

This ministry was one of hardship. The journey to and from Chatham was toilsome. The congregation still met in the old log school house. In a letter written in 1848 it is recorded that "Nearly all of these houses are of a most miserable description, cold and uncomfortable." Yet, however long and rough the road, however dark the way and
fierce the storm, however uncomfortable the ultimate meeting place, Angus McColl never flinched.

In later years, the mission station at Botany was in charge of one or other of the ministers in towns to the south. Rev. Wm. Forest, ordained and inducted in Ridgetown, February 18, 1854, was the first of these. A few of the older members of the congregation were baptised by him. Rev. A. W. Waddell, inducted in the old log school house at Rushton’s Corners, July 5, 1854, and who preached at Rushton’s, Troy and Blenheim, helped by taking Rev. Mr. Forest’s work at Botany on frequent occasions. A stained glass window in the Blenheim church commemorates his services there. When ill-health compelled Rev. Mr. Forest’s retirement, Rev. Mr. Caven, inducted in his place, also took up the work at Botany.

It was about this time that the Botany Presbyterian congregation outgrew the old log school house, and steps were taken to build a church. Here is a copy of the subscription list:

"Howard, December 29, 1857.

"We, the undersigned inhabitants of Howard and Harwich, do agree to pay the respective sums for the purpose of building a church to be called the Presbyterian Church of Canada. The said sums to be payable in two instalments, the first to be paid October 1st, 1858, and the second to be paid October 1st, 1859.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Robertson</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wm. McKerracher</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncan McColl</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Robertson</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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<td>John Robertson, jr.</td>
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<td>Peter Robertson</td>
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<td>Wm. Simington</td>
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<td>James Campbell</td>
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<td>Laughlin Galbraith</td>
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<td>Robt. McLaughlin</td>
<td>3.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Cameron</td>
<td>2.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daniel McKinley</td>
<td>3.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Little &amp; McKinley</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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<td>(1/2 timber)</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Martin</td>
<td>2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wm. Parson, hinges</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for gates</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alex McKay</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Smith</td>
<td>1.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daniel Leach</td>
<td>1.05</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Rev. Wm. Forest     | 7.10   |
Robt. Alexander     | .10    |

5—
Richard Baxter ....... 1.00 Wm. Moore, 2 days’ work
Robert Brash ........ 6.00 James Duncan ......... 5.00
William Watt ........ 1.00 A. E. Pyper ........... .20
William Mayhew ...... .10 Charles Grant ........ 1.00
James Simington ...... .05 Mary Grant ............ .05
John Morrow .......... 2.00 S. Merrill ............ 1.00
Catherine Forbes ...... .05 John Sheriff ........ 1.00
Alex Forbes .......... .10 D. Sinclair .......... 1.00
Neil McMillan ......... 2.10 T. S. Arnold ........ .50
Finlay McKinley ...... 5.00 Thomas Nichol ....... .50"

To the list is appended this note:

"February 16, 1859.
Received from Building Committee, One Hundred Dollars in part payment of Botany Church.
Witness:

D. McFarlane

Robert Brash"

Like their Scottish forefathers, the Botany pioneers believed that school and kirk went together. So they built on the same farm where the school was already established, on Lot 23, Town Line Range, Howard, in the centre of the present cemetery on the south side of the Howard Road. On July 2, 1858, John McDowell deeded, free of charge, a site for a chapel and burying ground or country churchyard for the use of the members and adherents of the Free Presbyterian Church in Canada. The deed in part reads:

"And provided also that said parties of the third part and their successors in office shall erect, complete and finish, a proper building for religious worship aforesaid on the said premises hereby granted within one year from the date hereof and provided also such building and premises hereby granted shall be used and enjoyed for the Free Presbyterian Church of Canada and for no other purpose whatsoever.

"In witness and seal:

From John McDowell

Her Ann (X) McDowell

Mark

To Alexander Dick

Daniel McKinley

John Robertson"

The architect was Squire George Young. These men were empowered to procure estimates. The contract was let to Peter Walker, who lived on N½ Lot 5, Concession 3, Howard.

The contract called for a frame building with shingle roof, lath and plaster on the inside and lap siding on the
outside; 1½-inch whitewood flooring, tongued and grooved; single door in rear and double door in front; eight windows with circle top, clear glass; whitewood seats, the back and seat parts to be of one single board each.

Material and lumber for a panelled pulpit at the far end of the church was a gift of Mr. Young, Sr. The minister ascended a stair of three steps, opened a door with a brass knob to let himself in, and, sitting on a red-cushioned seat, left only the top of his head visible from the pews. Below and in front of the pulpit was the precentor's box. He, also, had to open a door to get in.

This arrangement of pulpit and doors continued until, on March 2, 1891, the Board of Managers recommended "that the pulpit be remodeled to more modern style." But to many old timers that old pulpit, with its queer, awkward arrangements for getting in and out, is a vivid and happy memory.

Contracts in those days were stiffly drawn and stiffly enforced. The contractor, Peter Walker, was forced to give a bond that he would finish the church by a certain date. He had the building almost completed when the trustees asked him to suspend operations one afternoon for a church funeral. Walker very flatly told them that he was under bond, and would not stop work for that or any other reason. So the funeral was held in the Methodist Church across the road, while hammers and saws, busy on the still unfinished Presbyterian Church, furnished a queer obligato to the service.

The Botany Presbyterians now had their church. They also confronted the task of raising funds to pay the church debt—a small amount, by present day standards, but a heavy burden in a community where farm products were plentiful but money was scarce. One of the first expedients was the staging of a large social or picnic. A Botany man who was present thus recorded the event—in verse:

The Old Church
"The Botany Picnic, June 5th, 1860.

It's of a picnic party that I am going to speak
Which came off in Botany on Tuesday of the week,
On the fifth day of June, as most of folks do know,
The people round for twenty mile to the festival did go
In the Presbyterian Church for the finishing of the same
That was the object thus desired by the people there who came:

At three o'clock the doors were open, the people in were let,
And soon the tables were surrounded with good dainties set.
The tables there were noble set with the choicest of the land
The waiters then their places filled, the cakes around did hand.
The kind of cakes the chairman said, before the meeting he did close
I hope now will not be amiss to repeat them if I choose.
Big cakes and little cakes and cakes both high and low
With sugar candy on the top that looked as white as snow.
Round cakes and square cakes and tarts that helped their looks.
The women there that made them indeed are excellent cooks.
When tea then was ended, A. McKellar in the chair
He made a short speech, then called upon the choir
Who were ready at the call, a tune they did sing,
They sang so well together, they made the church all ring.
The Rev. Mr. Forest addressed the people all,
Then for Rev. Mr. Waddell, the chairman he did call,
Who spoke then to the purpose as always he doth do.
He seemed interested and the people with him too.
The Rev. Mr. Straigth for his speech was called next,
He made a long speech but didn't take a text.
The Rev. Mr. Walker whose words did soundly fall.
The speeches then were wound up by the Rev. McColl.
The Hon. chairman, though first is now last,
He spoke most altogether of the bounteous repast.
A vote of thanks was given to all the waiters there
Who acted their part most nobly, themselves they did not spare,
And also to the choir, they a long way did come,
A vote of thanks was given for the service they had done,
And votes of thanks were tendered to the reverend gentle-
men each
That had an opportunity that day to give a speech,
And next unto the chairman, A. McKellar, M.P.P.,
A vote of thanks was given as in this case should be.
The meeting now was over, the people went away.
I know they were all satisfied with the proceedings of the day.  
If there should be another I think they'd go again.  
I remain, yours truly, Cornelius McBrayne.  

Howard, Sept. 17th, 1860.”

Mr. McBrayne, one of the early pioneers, lived on Lot 7, Block Concession, had a primitive sort of printing office, and wrote—and published—several poems relating to the early pioneer life of the community.

It was Rev. Mr. Caven who started the first Session book which gives us the names of the first members of Botany Presbyterian Church:

“Wm. Mowbray  
James Thompson  
Mrs. James Thompson  
Mrs. Laughlin Galbraith  
Mrs. Mary McMillan  
Mrs. Robert McLaughlin  
John Little  
John Robertson, Sr.  
Mrs. John Robertson, Sr.  
Mrs. Peter Cameron  
William Edwards  
James Robertson, Sr.  
Mrs. James Robertson  
Duncan McMillan  
Mrs. William Smart  
Mrs. Catherine McColl  
William McKerracher  

Mrs. Sarah Cotter  
Mrs. Dickson  
George Young  
Mrs. George Young  
Agnes Young  
Eliza Young  
Jessie Young  
Laughlin Galbraith  
James Robertson  
Mrs. James Robertson  
James Winters  
John Robertson, Jr.  
Mrs. John Robertson, Jr.  
Daniel McKinley  
John Atkinson  
Mrs. William Martin  
Mrs. James Sampson.”

These were the officially recorded founders of the church, but in no great time there were numerous additions to the roll.

It was during Rev. Mr. Caven's oversight of the charge that the first Session was appointed—a joint Session for the three congregations of Botany, Thamesville and Indian Lands. The first appointment was made for Thamesville in the home of Wm. Staniforth on June 25, 1866, with Rev. Mr. Walker and Rev. Mr. Caven, and Mr. McKenzie as elder, in charge of the meeting. Robert Adair and Wm. Staniforth were appointed as two of the ruling elders. At Indian Reserve on the following day the same deputation proceeded to the home of Mr. Henderson, where Francis Clark and Mr. Haining were elected elders. The latter declining to serve, Wm. O’Neil was appointed to take his place. On
the evening of the same day, June 26, 1866, in the church at Botany, Wm. McKerracher and James Thompson were named elders. These six, with Rev. Mr. Caven, of Ridgetown, formed the first joint Session of the Charge. No matter where a meeting was to be held, every member got written notice, and the books show it was a rare thing for even one of them to be absent.

Students continued to supply; but the time for a placed minister was very near. As early as May 1, 1866, a meeting of the three congregations was held in Botany church “as the other two charges did not have a church building of their own at this early date.” At this meeting the following resolution was carried:

“That Botany should pay $200.00, Thamesville $100.00 and Indian Lands, $65, toward paying for a placed minister to labor in the three stations, and until there was one got, Thamesville should pay $4 for each sermon, $3 to go to the preacher and $1.00 to be paid to Botany towards boarding the minister.”

This agreement was made in 1866, and it is significant—in the light of present conditions—that Botany seems to have taken the lead.

About this time a young student, John Becket, supplied for a period of some months. In the summer of 1867 another student, James Robertson (later the Rev. James Robertson, D.D., Superintendent of Missions for the Canadian West) took the combined pulpits. He has left a graphic picture of driving over roads “very muddy and full of water . . . stumps on one side, quagmire on the other” to preach behind a rough pine table in one end of a log house, separated from cooking and other domestic activities by a thin partition or perhaps a blanket curtain.

The brilliant Robertson was destined for a great career; but young John Becket seems to have struck a more responsive chord in the hearts of the people. In 1867 Becket finished his course at college. At a meeting of Session in January, 1868, a petition was prepared asking Presbytery to allow the congregation to moderate a call; and this being acceded to, a call was extended to and accepted by Rev. John Becket.
Botany's first placed minister was ordained and inducted on May 27, 1868. Then began a career of diligent usefulness to the three scattered congregations that was to last for more than twenty-six years...years marked by steady progress and unmarred by any serious friction.

Rev. Mr. Becket presided at his first Sacrament of the Lord's Supper on August 30, 1868, at which, it is interesting to note, a new Communion Service, of pewter and costing $19, was used for the first time.

In those early days, Communion was held twice yearly, usually in May and October. The service lasted three days. On Thursday was a preparatory service, when the "tokens"—small pieces of metal—were handed out to intending communicants. (Tokens were last bought July 28, 1880, at a cost of $4.06 including 65 cents postage). The great day was the Sabbath, when the church was always filled to capacity. On Monday was a sort of after-service, somewhat in the nature of thanksgiving.

In the old Botany church, the Lord's Table on sacramental occasions consisted merely of the white-wood pews. Somewhat later, on October 5, 1879, the Session appointed Mr. Thompson to procure white cloth and have the backs of the pews in front of the communicants covered with the same, "also to have the pews covered with the same at all church funerals." This custom was abandoned many years ago, but many of the older members can well recall the white-draped pews in the old church on Communion Sunday.

That first pewter Communion Set consisted of two plates for the bread and a pitcher and two cups for the wine. The service was jointly owned and used by the three congregations, Thamesville, Turin and Botany; and when Botany severed its connection with the other two charges on June 10, 1894, they also severed their connection with these historic pewter Communion Vessels. Later, on Janu-
ary 19, 1897, on motion of J. C. Balmer and A. Martinson, Richard Young was authorized to purchase a new Communion Set, similar to the old one, but of silver. This set, no longer used, is still in good repair and in the custody of the writer of this history.

In time, however, the younger generation, with modern ideas of sanitation, criticized the use of the common cup. It was even said that in the era of long moustaches, these drooping facial adornments would come up dripping from the cup, when the thrifty Scotsman would carefully squeeze the tip of each moustache into his mouth, so that not a drop would be lost. In any event, on February 3, 1916, it was decided to buy two trays of individual cups at a cost of $11.25; and a few years later a third tray was purchased.

Meanwhile, the quarterly Communion Sunday had replaced the old-fashioned three-day semi-annual service in the church calendar. This, however, is running ahead of our story.

After the coming of Rev. John Becket, the Botany church membership grew by leaps and bounds. Starting with a very small membership, in ten years the church found itself with almost a hundred members. At every Communion service new members were added. People came long distances to service; from McKay’s Corners, from Northwood, from several miles down in Harwich township, from as far north as the Thames River. In the early days they walked, or came in lumber wagons; but by the middle eighties the democrat was the accepted means of travel, and an average sized family of those days usually filled a democrat to overflowing. The ground where the church stood was about four feet higher than the roadway, so a carriage stand—very similar to a modern milk stand—was built in front of the church door, to make it easier for the ladies with their hoop skirts to get in and out of their carriages. These stands, being of wood, had to be rebuilt often; and this one was rebuilt for the last time on March 2, 1891.

In the old church in the early days the custom — in reverse of the present — was that the congregation stood up to pray, and sat down to sing. The old collection boxes were an interesting feature. A pair of boxes, about 4 by 6 inches, and 4 inches deep, was mounted on the end of a six-foot handle, the whole being of solid walnut. Thus the usher, standing in the aisle, could thrust a collection box to the far end of a pew. Unluckily, it was not uncommon for someone across the aisle to get a poke with the opposite
end of the contrivance. One of these old collection boxes, in a fine state of repair, is still in the possession of the writer.

An illuminating expense item of 1880 was 50 cents for a pail and dipper. The form of church service in Rev. John Becket’s early days was much longer than today, so on very warm Sundays, right after the collection was taken, he always announced a few minutes’ intermission when the ushers were asked to get the pail and serve cool water to all who were thirsty.

The minister was provided with a free manse, which, however, he had to furnish. The stipend paid was $350 per annum. This, though, was supplemented by gifts from his parishioners, for, though money was scarce, produce was plentiful. Each member vied with his fellows in making the pastoral visit a liberally rewarded event in the matter of flour, hams, potatoes, apples, and similar welcome commodities.

The long years of Rev. John Becket’s pastorate brought their inevitable changes. Until 1870 the Presbytery of London had oversight of this part of Ontario; but in that year the Presbytery of Chatham was formed with Rev. A. W. Waddell as moderator and Rev. Robert H. Warde as Clerk. Botany is today under the guidance of Kent Presbytery.

A decade later, 1880, brought another change. The Indian Lands church had been popularly known as the Reserve Church; but the district now got a post-office, called Turin, and on May 31, 1880, the Chatham Presbytery sanctioned a change of name to Turin Presbyterian Church.

The question of strong drink has always been a live issue in the church. We find that in 1870 the Synod of London wrote each church to ascertain its feeling in regard to a temperance vote in the province, as well as the number of total abstainers; and Botany Church was constrained to answer: “Intemperance is not so prevalent as formerly. A small proportion of the members are total abstainers.”

Another interesting milestone in church history is the entry for April 15, 1872: “The basis of Union and the resolution on the subject of Union as agreed to by the General Assembly, November, 1871, were read by the Moderator and unanimously agreed to by the Session.” This represented a preliminary step toward the union, or rather, re-union, of the two branches of the Presbyterian Church, which came into effect a few years later.

But the spirit of friendly co-operation which marked the local congregation of the Free Kirk extended to other
denominations. In particular, the greatest harmony and friendship traditionally prevailed between this church and the Methodist Church almost directly across the Howard Road. Till about 1880 there was a union Sunday School. The choir, before the organ was introduced, was a union choir, and for many years N. P. Weekes, the Presbyterian Precentor, was also Methodist Choir Leader. Union socials were held, with supper in one church and program in the other. The originally separate church cemeteries were united about fifteen years ago. And the church sheds, till the present St. John's church was built were union sheds.

There had always been one such shed on the corner directly across from the Presbyterian church. This first shed was so low that, when top buggies came in, a stranger unfamiliar with its limitations, driving into the structure with top up, usually emerged with top braces badly bent. When, in 1888, the Methodists, on whose ground the original shed stood, decided on additions, ground was purchased for $10 from Zachariah Spence and Jas. Anderson. A new shed was built directly in front of the old one, with another 40 feet long between the eastern ends of the two. This new shed cost $136 and the committee in charge of the work comprised R. Young, James McKerracher, James Thompson, Thomas Cameron, Wm. Steen, Z. Spence and James Anderson. The committee considered the erection of a shed with an upstairs hall, but no action was taken regarding the hall.

In the 90's came two events which profoundly influenced the life of the church. The first was the building of the Presbyterian church at McKay's Corners, which took from Botany a number of families that had always been strong supporters. The able and influential members thus lost included Alex, John and Sarah Clark, James Smith, Dr. T. L. McRitchie, Daniel, Duncan, John, Lockie and D. J. Galbraith, Lewis Huffman, James T. Sloan, Wm. Parsons and Mrs. S. E. Holmes.

In 1894 came the heaviest blow the congregation had yet experienced with the resignation of Rev. John Becket. His departure from Botany coincided with the formation of Turin and Thamesville into a two-point charge. It became necessary too for Botany to affiliate with some other churches, and in due time a new three-point charge comprising Kent Bridge, McKay's Corners and Botany was constituted.

Rev. Mr. Becket preached his farewell sermon at Botany on June 10, 1894, when the congregation presented him
with a gold watch and chain, and Mrs. Becket with a silver fruit dish. He continued to serve Turin and Thamesville, and also acted as Moderator at Botany until they called a new minister; his name appearing for the last time on the report of Session of January 2, 1895.

Many an eye in the Botany congregation was moist on the occasion of Rev. John Becket's farewell sermon. More than a quarter century earlier he had come, a new minister to a new congregation; and through the long interval, his life had been closely interwoven with the lives of those he served. He exemplified the type of old-fashioned Scottish Presbyterian minister immortalized by Ralph Connor, to whom financial gain meant little and who counted as his highest reward the service of his Lord and Master. Even to this day his earnestness has left its impress, not merely on the survivors of the congregation he served, but on their children and their children's children, and a rising generation that never saw him still revere his name.

No one could quite fill his place, but care was taken in the choice of a successor. It was not until the next year, after several good men had preached for a call, that the choice fell upon Rev. J. A. Mustard, who was inducted February 19, 1895. Rev. Mr. Becket took the chair, Dr. Battisby addressed the minister, Mr. McLean addressed the people, and Mr. Hunter preached. Tea was served in the Methodist church—always generously co-operative in such events—after which a program was given in the Presbyterian church. Rev. Mr. Mustard preached his first sermon after being ordained, February 24, 1895. About the first duty performed by Mr. Mustard was the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. T. Fritz.

Mr. Mustard rendered conscientious service during four years. He resided at McKay's Corners and made many warm friends in all three churches. It was during his ministry, in 1897, that the envelope system of collections was introduced.

More than that, a definite start was made on the building of a new church, to replace the modest frame structure which for forty years had served the community.

A building fund had been started several years previously, with J. C. Balmer as treasurer; and henceforth proposals to repair the old structure were invariably laid over pending a decision on a new building. That decision came on May 16, 1899, when, at a special congregational meeting, with Rev. Mr. Mustard in the chair, and Belle Weekes as secretary, a motion by Wm. Mowbray and R.
Young "that we take steps toward building a new church" was carried. A further motion by R. Young and J. C. Balmer specified that the new church be built on the same site as the old one; and it was also agreed, on motion of Geo. Cameron and Mr. Thompson, that the new structure be a brick church, seating capacity 200, stone foundation and slate roof, with full basement. A building committee was named comprising R. Young, Thompson, Balmer, Steen, Geo. Cameron, Atkinson, A. McMillan, Weekes and D. Winter, Sr., with Belle Weekes as secretary and J. C. Balmer as treasurer. The committee took charge of a building fund which had already reached $350.

So far, the utmost harmony had marked the proceedings, and harmony still prevailed when, a little later, a bee of all the men and teams of the congregation was held to start work. The old frame church was moved from its original site into A. McMillan's field just south of the cemetery, and a full-sized basement was dug on its original site.

At the close of the bee, when the participants were standing around, proud that at last they had made a start on the new church, someone casually remarked that the new church would look better in McMillan's field, where the old structure had already been moved. J. C. Balmer intervened:

"No, if you are going to change the site, we will move it a mile east to the corner where the Botany post-office is located."

That casual comment started something, for the suggestion evoked a far stronger support than its originator had expected, with the result that the site question became the subject of a long and stormy controversy. At the height of this controversy, Rev. Mr. Mustard resigned, on October 8, 1899, and the congregation was left without a spiritual guide to calm the turmoil.

At another special meeting on December 4, 1899, with Rev. John McInnis in the chair, two motions were presented. John Balmer and Wm. Mowbray proposed that the new church be built on the east corner of Lot 6, Block Concession, on D. Winter's farm near Botany post-office. An amendment by Messrs. Young and Hutchinson proposed A. McMillan's field as a site.

The amendment carried by a vote of 38 to 28, but with so close a vote, the start of the new church was delayed. The Methodist congregation across the road were also considering a new church, and a union church was seriously discussed. This far-sighted proposal, however, came to nothing, and the congregation went on wrestling with the
site question. As the controversy grew more and more bitter, the exclamation was not infrequently heard: "If Mr. Becket had been here, this would never have happened!"

The matter was referred to the Presbytery, which advised a new meeting of the whole congregation. On January 2, 1900, this meeting named the trustees a committee to select a suitable site near Botany post-office, to be approved by the congregation. But it was not until April 2, 1900, that, on motion of John Balmer, Sr., and John Robertson, the site at Botany post-office was at last definitely approved by a large majority.

Whatever the decision, the controversy had raged so long that at least some members were sure to be resentful, and, if the new site was more convenient for many, it was less convenient for others. So, at this period, many valued members of the church severed their connection and affiliated with other churches more convenient to them. It was the first and, happily, the last controversy to divide the congregation.

The old church is still in existence. Forty years ago it was sold to Mr. McMillan for an implement shed. Twice at least since then it has been menaced by fire. Two years ago a strawstack, close to the south side, was burned, but the church escaped. On October 11, 1941, a garage on the north side, with 80 gallons of gasoline, was destroyed; but though the old structure caught fire, volunteer firefighters saved it. "Nec tamen consumebatur"—the motto and the symbol of the burning bush, exposed to flames but never consumed, seem appropriate to this humble structure as they are to the great Presbyterian faith it once served.

A deed for the new church site at the east corner of Lot 6, Block Concession, was given by Dan Winter, Sr., free of charge so long as it was used for church purposes.

With the dispute settled, work progressed rapidly. Joseph Oldershaw, of Chatham, had the contract for the stone foundation. The stone was shipped by G.T.R. from Amherstburg at a cost of $14.36 a car load, plus $14.90 freight—the freight exceeding the cost of the stone.

At a meeting on July 30, 1900, arrangements were made for laying the corner stone. The date was set for August 10, 1900. On motion of Dan Winter and Wm. Mowbray, Robert Ferguson, M.P.P., was invited to lay the corner stone, on the northeast corner, the other stones to be laid by Miss Sarah Ferguson, on behalf of the Christian Endeavor, Mr. John Balmer, Sr., on behalf of the Sunday School, Mr. John Crawford and Mr. John Atkinson. The same meeting discussed a name for the church, several
motions being presented. Wm. Mowbray and Mary McMillan suggested St. Andrews; Dan Winter and Geo. Cameron proposed St. John's; Anna L. Gage and Maggie McMillan proposed Mount Zion. The vote resulted in a large majority in favor of St. John's.

The night previous to the ceremony, a committee, headed by Wm. Mowbray, met at the home of N. P. Weekes to prepare a history of the congregation which was placed in a suitable container and, next day, deposited by Mr. Ferguson under the corner stone. Unfortunately, no copy of these interesting records was kept, and their contents must remain a mystery while the present St. John's Church is standing.

Following the ceremony, a garden party on Dan Winter's beautiful lawn netted $599.80 for the building fund. The speakers were Rev. Mr. Tolmie, Rev. Mr. McInnis, Rev. Mr. Becket and Rev. Mr. Robertson. The Methodist congregation helped towards the success of the occasion by furnishing music in the afternoon, by finishing a great part of the baking, and by helping to serve supper.

An immense amount of voluntary work was done by the men and women of the church in connection with the new edifice. They teamed the stone, shipped by G.T.R. from Amherstburg to Northwood; they transported sand for plaster from the Jack Wildgen farm; they hauled lumber, most of which came from the Hadley firm in Chatham. Thomas Atkinson, Sr., told of bringing a wagon load of finishing lumber, for around the choir and railing, over rough and frozen roads, he walking behind most of the distance to pick up small pieces that fell off the load. The figures of the building fund are worth recording:

"Receipts:

Received from Ladies’ Aid .........................$  766.00
From thankoffering ................................ 1,025.63
By subscriptions .................................. 2,503.79
Money borrowed .................................... 1,700.00

Expenditures:

Carpenter work, H. Cameron .......................$  542.50
Painting, J. Jacobs ................................ 200.00
Hardware ........................................... 272.62
Furnace, R. Watt .................................. 165.00
Stone and freight on stone ....................... 155.02
Sand, Jack Wildgen ................................ 9.40
Architect .......................................... 85.00
Mason work, Oldershaw & Quelch ................ 689.55
Lumber, Hadley’s .................................. 1,640.54
Sundries ........................................... 214.24

—18—
The Present Church

Robert Ferguson, M.P.P., of Thamesville, always a generous friend to the church, and Walter Bell, of London, were the largest outside contributors to the building fund.

The opening of the new church took place early in the new century, on Sunday, Feb. 24, 1901. The services are thus reported in the "Ridgetown Plain-dealer" of February 28:

"The Presbyterians have been thoroughly up with the times and have erected a fine church. The new edifice is about a mile east of the old place of worship and is one of the most up-to-date country churches in the Presbytery. The church is built of red brick, with a substantial stone foundation. It is almost square, the main vestibute being in the east corner while the pulpit is in the corner directly opposite, with choir behind the minister. The place is seated similar to all modern churches. Stained glass windows are also of a very fine shape, and present a good appearance. Then there is a school room at one side of the building, and by opening the large doors it can be made part of the church. The vestry is just to the north of the pulpit, and is quite a cosy little room. In the basement is a large room to be used for tea meetings, etc., and a large Watt furnace which heats the building up splendidly. Mr. Hugh Cameron had the contract for the building which reflects great credit upon his workmanship. The hardware, paints, oils, etc., were furnished by Wm. McMaster of this town.

"The services on Sunday were attended by large crowds and excellent music was furnished by the choir. In the morning Rev. Mr. Sinclair, of Port Hope, was the preacher, and he took his text from 2nd Peter, 1st chapter, verses 5, 6, 7.

"In the afternoon Rev. Mr. Jamieson, of Kent Centre, preached to a good congregation, and Rev. Mr. Sinclair
again occupied the pulpit in the evening. The Sunday collections amounted to $200.00.

"The following Monday evening a large crowd assembled at the church when an old-time tea meeting was the order of things. In the basement of the church, tables were set, and here all were well satisfied with the good things the ladies of Botany had provided for them. After everybody had been served an adjournment was made to the body of the church where a splendid program was presented. The proceeds amounted to $175.00."

An extra large bell was added to the church about 1910. This was the gift of the Ladies’ Aid, and a good share of the credit goes to Mrs. Fred Weekes, then president of that live organization.

The congregation had gone through all the days and weeks of turmoil incident to the site and building without the guiding hand of a minister. Four candidates, Messrs. Sinclair, Wishart, Marsh and Davidson, had preached for a call. A call was extended to Rev. A. E. Wishart, then a student at Knox College, but he declined. Another call was given Rev. D. M. Robertson, which he accepted, and was inducted a few days after the corner stone laying, on August 21, 1900. His sociable disposition, his earnestness, both as preacher and pastor, brought a spiritual quickening to the congregation. The new church was pushed to a speedy completion. Rev. Mr. Robertson resigned in 1903, and now lives retired in Saskatchewan.

Rev. Dr. Munro was moderator pending a new call, and secured the services of Rev. Archie Stewart, 266 Oxford St., London, then a retired minister. Rev. Mr. Stewart boarded at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Cameron.

Eventually, Rev. A. W. Hare received a call to the triple charge, at a salary of $860, of which Botany contributed $380, Harwich $280 and Kent Bridge $200. He was inducted in the Kent Bridge Church on February 2, 1904, immediately after completing his course at Queen’s University. Rev. Mr. Hare’s first baptism after he was ordained and inducted was that of Hugh Gillespie, son of Elder Peter Gillespie.

Mr. Hare brought to his first pastorate the enthusiasm and energy of youth, and a special interest in young people and their problems. The only regular pastor to make his home in the Botany community, he knew its people intimately, and infused new life into the young people’s organization, which under his auspices formed a literary society
which attracted wide notice. Active, too, in the field of sport, he organized the first baseball teams at Botany and Kent Bridge. A story is still told of the first game at Kent Bridge. The first batter up for the home team made first base; the next, George Langford, hit one down to second base; the man on first could not advance, so Langford ran to third. Rev. Mr. Hare decided then and there to do a bit more coaching before staging another game.

Years before rural free delivery was introduced, this enterprising pastor made a practice of collecting the mail for the community at Thamesville and distributing it on his way home.

During Mr. Hare's pastorate, the congregation met with a severe loss in the death of two elders, Wm. Mowbray and N. P. Weekes and the removal of A. Gage. All were staunch supporters of St. John's, diligent and active in church and Sunday School, and helpful and stimulating in their influence.

Rev. Mr. Hare finished his pastorate on February 27, 1910. He was succeeded by Rev. James Annesley, who served from 1911 until April, 1916.

Mr. Annesley had been associated with the Salvation Army in his native Ireland, but on coming to Canada studied for the Presbyterian ministry. His first charge was a mission church in Montreal. His coming to Botany in 1911 coincided with the establishment of a new two-point charge of Turin and Botany. Mr. Annesley made his home in Ridgetown, on Main Street East, until the Turin manse was completed, he being the first minister to occupy the new manse. There his wife passed away, leaving three small girls and a boy, the latter dying shortly after. Mr. Annesley's sister came from Ireland to keep house for him. Mr. Annesley left in 1916 for Merriton, later moving to Hamilton, where he died. His remains were brought to Ridgetown by M.C.R. and a sunset service was held at the grave in Greenwood Cemetery.

A story still lingers of a strawberry social held by the Ladies' Aid in 1914, with Mrs. Galbraith as president and Miss M. B. Cameron as secretary. Harry Woods, a colored helper on the Mowbray farm, was hired to turn the ice-cream freezer. The first freezer of ice cream was salty, the second still more salty. Investigation showed a crack in the freezer. The writer took the remaining cream to Thamesville and had A. Ridley freeze it. The president jocularly invited the unlucky Harry Woods, if he wanted
any ice cream, to eat all he wanted of the salty stuff. He ate the entire two freezers of it.

Rev. T. J. Jewitt was inducted in 1916, his ministry in Botany lasting six years. During this pastorate new steps were placed in front of the church, and extensive repairs made to the basement supports. In 1918 the church interior was redecorated at a cost of $175 and a like amount was spent in 1921 on repairs to the stained glass windows.

In the influenza epidemic of 1919, when many were stricken and many homes bereaved, Rev. Mr. Jewitt proved a tower of strength to the congregation.

His masterpiece of work on this field was the organizing of the Men's Bible Class with the following officers: Teacher, Rev. T. J. Jewitt; president, E. A. Baimer; vice-president, Jas. Brisley; secretary, John A. Dick; treasurer, Frank Cameron. So able a teacher was Mr. Jewitt, the vestry, in which the class met every Sunday after church, was taxed to capacity, and even standing room was at a premium.

Mr. Jewitt concluded his ministry in 1921. For five months, from the middle of August, 1921, to February 2, 1922, Rev. J. McAskile, a retired minister at Highgate, supplied. While preaching at Turin he suffered a stroke, was carried from the pulpit on a stretcher, and died a short time afterward. During these five months Rev. Hugh Cowan, Rev. J. B. Townsend, Rev. R. D. Tannahill, Rev. L. C. Gosling and Rev. D. A. McLean preached for a call. Eventually, with Rev. Geo. Weir, of Ridgetown, as moderator, a call was extended to Rev. D. A. McLean.

In contrast with some of his predecessors, Rev. Mr. McLean was a veteran, having been ordained into the Presbyterian ministry, September 17, 1887. He was inducted at Botany on February 2, 1922, at a salary of $1,800 for the two charges. An earnest and faithful minister, Mr. McLean was held in high esteem.

Rev. Mr. McLean was noteworthy for the number of marriage services he conducted. A tale is told of one Scotsman, married at the manse, who said, "Mr. McLean, you will have to charge this till I see you again." Not merely did Mr. McLean never see the happy man again, but when he next went to leave home, he found his new $8 hat gone and a battered old felt in its place.

It was during Rev. Mr. McLean's pastorate that the question of church union came up. Each congregation had the privilege of voting; with the proviso that if no vote
was taken, the congregation automatically entered the United Church of Canada. Botany did not vote—not that the members were unanimously in favor of union, but they had vivid and painful memories of the tragic split resulting from the site controversy twenty-five years before. To Dr. John Steen, chairman of the Board of Managers at that time, is due much of the credit for the skilful handling of a question that might quite easily have split the congregation.

Rev. Mr. McLean resigned in 1928, and Rev. J. W. Stewart was inducted at Turin in July of the same year, with the maximum salary ever paid for this charge, $1,800—a reflection of the lush financial prosperity the farming community was then experiencing. During the same year the M. and M. fund givings reached a new high of $445. Mr. Stewart’s pastorate in Botany was limited to one short year, but in that brief space his energy and enthusiasm contributed much to the uplift and advancement of the church. Originally belonging to Hamilton Conference and desirous of returning there, in July, 1929, he accepted a call to Merritton.

A call was extended to Rev. D. A. McMillan, a native of Woodstock, Ontario, who had served an Indian mission field before coming to Botany. A young man of hope, enthusiasm and high courage, he held the pastorate from 1929 to 1932. Unfortunately his health failed, and for the last six months Rev. A. S. Whitehall, of Cedar Springs, supplied for him. Mr. McMillan had been appointed at a salary of $1,800, but before he left one of the worst financial depressions in the world’s history made it impossible to raise funds on the accustomed scale. Mr. McMillan generously volunteered to accept whatever the church felt able to pay, and gave the treasurer a receipt in full.

Rev. H. Bolingbroke was inducted in this charge at Turin church on July 2, 1932, and faced the task of carrying both congregations through the worst years of the depression. With the co-operation of minister and people, St. John’s church came out on the right side of the ledger; while their spiritual life was quickened by the spirit of co-operation and sacrifice. Mr. and Mrs. Bolingbroke will long be remembered for their musical gifts, and for their willingness on all occasions to help the choir with their time and talent. Mr. Bolingbroke received a call to Chalmers Church in Chatham Township, and preached his farewell sermon at Botany on June 27, 1937.
Rev. W. M. Lovegrove came to the pastorate under some handicaps, in that he was the first minister to come without a call, being allocated to St. John's at the last moment when the minister originally called was unable to come. Mr. Lovegrove was in many respects what might be called a rough diamond, his culture being that acquired in the University of Hard Knocks. Not a few of his congregation frowned upon his secular activities of painting and paper-hanging, till it was discovered that these were part of an heroic effort to give his children the cultural advantages of which early poverty had deprived him.

Mr. Lovegrove moved from Botany to Trowbridge in 1939, and, shortly after, was killed by falling from a ladder while painting the manse.

Rev. H. E. Livingstone, the present pastor, was born in County Cavan, and received his early education in Ireland. Coming to Canada in 1914 he went directly to The United Theological Colleges at Montreal, and, upon graduation, was ordained in Pembroke, Ontario, in 1917, after which he proceeded by appointment to British Columbia, where he served for six years. Receiving an invitation to Elimville, Ontario, he has served since in the London Conference, accepting a call in 1939 to his present pastorate of Turin and Botany (St. John's).

Harold Cameron is secretary-treasurer of the church for 1941, and Rae Galbraith secretary-treasurer of the M. & M. Fund.

Willard Atkinson and family have fired the church furnace for many years, and are still doing this work.

In the history of the church the name of Mowbray must be given a prominent place. William Mowbray, Sr., one of the early elders was a loyal supporter of every church ac-
tivity, and a generous giver; traditions carried on by the later members of the family. It is told of Elder Mowbray that during the sermon he always sat with eyes shut, to outward appearances sound asleep—but when it was over, no one knew more of the sermon than he did.

Many of the Mowbrays were brilliant students, and their college studies, and their life work, in most instances took them far from Botany; but they never forgot their old home and their old church. On their visits home they usually brought distinguished company, and more learned and famous men and women have sat in the old Mowbray pew than in any other pew in St. John's. Among the members of the family to win distinction were the late Capt. J. N. Mowbray, a veteran of the Great War, later a candidate for the legislature, and subsequently director of the beet sugar industry in England; and Prof. Wm. Mowbray, an outstanding teacher and for many years principal of Upper Canada College.

St. John's United Church has its various useful and helpful organizations and brief references to these may be in order.

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

The duties of this board have special regard to the temporal and financial aspects of the church; more particularly is it their duty to obtain contributions for the maintenance of the local church and for the schemes of the church as a whole.

The earliest official records as to such a board are those for 1882, when the managers were Wm. Mowbray, James Robertson, Thos. Cameron, D. McMillan, N. P. Weekes, James Smith and James McKerracher; the elders being also members of the board. The trustees for that year were Wm. Mowbray, John Robertson, Duncan McMillan.

The managers at the time the present church was built were: J. C. Balmer, N. P. Weekes, A. Gage, Thos. Cameron, Wm. Steen, Geo. Cameron, P. Gillespie, John Mowbray, John McMillan; with Messrs. J. Balmer, Thos. Cameron and Wm. Mowbray as trustees.

THE SESSION

The Session, consisting of the minister and elders, was a distinctive feature of the Presbyterian Church, and is still such in the United Church. Its duty is to watch over and promote the spiritual interests of the congregation, to care for the religious instruction of the young, including oversight of the Sabbath School, to determine all matters touching the order of public worship, including the service of praise, to arrange for the dispensation of the sacraments and to visit members within its district, especially in illness.

The Session, when the congregation was organized, May 31, 1866: for Thamesville, Messrs. Staniforth and Adair; for Botany, Wm. McKerracher and James Thompson; for Indian Lands (now Turin), Francis Clarke and Wm. O’Neil; moderator, Rev. Wm. Caven, of Ridgetown.

Those who have served as elders of Botany Presbyterian Church or St. John’s United Church were: Wm. McKerracher and James Thompson, the original elders; John Robertson, James McKerracher, Duncan McMillan, W. McKerracher, Richard Young, Wm. Mowbray, N. P. Weekes, Amasa Gage, J. C. Balmer, Thos. Cameron, Peter Gillespie, E. A. Balmer, James Brisley, Peter Cameron.

The Session at the present time, 1941: E. A. Balmer, Jas. Brisley, Peter Cameron; moderator, Rev. Mr. Livingstone.

W. M. S.

The Women’s Foreign Missionary Society was organized in 1894 by Mrs. John Becket. Later the two societies in the church at large, the W. F. M. S. and the W. H. M. S., amalgamated, and since then the local organization has been known as the Women’s Missionary Society.

The W. M. S. has made for itself a splendid record as one of the most enterprising organizations of the church, its members being ever awake to the needs of missionary work at home and abroad. In addition to large contributions to missionary funds, every year bales of clothing have been sent to Western Canada. The officers are:

President, Mrs. Peter Cameron; vice-president, Mrs. Albert Savage; secretary, Mrs. E. A. Balmer; treasurer, Mrs. Frank Cameron.

The Mission Band, functioning as a junior organization of the W.M.S., was organized by Mrs. Bannatyne of Duart—a fact commemorated by its official name, the Botany Bannatyne Mission Band. It has been carrying on good
work with the children, and is at present under the able leadership of Mrs. Malcolm Gillespie.

Another junior organization, the Mission Circle, consisting of teen age girls, was organized by Mrs. Walter Lake, of Ridgetown, and has proven very helpful to the W. M. S. Its present leader is Mrs. Thomas Atkinson, and its president, Mrs. John Balmer.

CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETY

The Christian Endeavor Society was organized in the closing years of Rev. John Becket’s pastorate, in 1891. In the Session's report for that year we find this note:

"The year 1891 will be memorable in the history of the Botany congregation on account of the formation of the above society which has been productive of much good, especially to its members. It was organized by the pastor in October, 14 joining at first. At the close of the year it had 23 active, 12 associate and 5 honorary members."

Though formed in 1891, the earliest record of meetings is October 17, 1895, when we find that Miss Edith Thompson was president and Bella Robertson, secretary. The officers for 1900, the last year in the old church, were:

"President, J. McMillan; vice president, B. McDonald; secretary, Alice Atkinson; treasurer, Beattie Weekes; organist, Tillie Jenner; assistant organist, Rose Baker. Committees were: Music, Tillie Jenner, Rose Baker, Dan Winter, Walter Brown; Prayer, Miss E. McDonald, James Mowbray, Miss Anna L. Gage, B. McDonald; Lookout, Fred Weekes, Jack McKerracher, James Winter, Alice Atkinson, Minnie Baker; Mission, Miss E. McDonald, Anna L. Gage, Emerson Allison, James Mowbray, Maggie Atkinson, Alba Ransom."

At a meeting on August 30 of the same year, we find the topic taken by the local school teachers, Miss L. McCulloch and Mr. R. W. Gladstone.

For some years the society flourished, especially under the ministry of Rev. A. W. Hare. Residing in Botany, he took a keen interest, formed a literary society from its members, and held numerous debates, developing some excellent talent. The benefits of this training were shown, alike in the careers of those who left the community, and of those still active in the work of the church.

Mr. Hare's successor did not reside in the community. The society soon dwindled, and in a short time passed out of existence.
On May 29, 1928, it was reorganized as St. John's, Botany Young People's Society, Peter Cameron being largely instrumental, while members of the Turin Young People’s Society were present to assist and advise. The officers then elected were:

Honorary president, Peter Cameron; president, Mrs. Glen Robertson; first vice-president, Malcolm Gillespie; second vice-president, Margaret Balmer; third vice-president, John Cameron; organist, Sylvia Brisley; assistants, Margaret Balmer, Mrs. Peter Cameron; secretary, Mary Holmes; treasurer, Clark Cameron; committees: Program, Mrs. John Dick, Peter Cameron, Sylvia Brisley, Mary Balmer; Social, Mary Holmes, Elaine Robinson, Clark Cameron, Harold Galbraith, Gladys Atkinson; Music, Mrs. Frank Cameron, Ethel Atkinson, Arthur Winter; Membership, Arthur Winter, Clark Cameron, Malcolm Gillespie, Harold Galbraith.

The society has been not merely stimulating to the life of the church but has helped in many practical ways. A memorable event in the earlier days was the presentation of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in five acts by the Botany Dramatic Club, on Friday, January 20, 1921. Dramatis personae: Uncle Tom, D. M. Winter; Legree, T. Atkinson; St. Clair, J. A. Dick; Gumption Cute, H. Black; Shelby, F. Cameron; George Harris, W. Cameron; Sambo, M. Gillespie; Deacon Perry, Marks, G. Mowbray; Haley, G. Cameron; Eva, Miss M. Holmes; Emmeline, Miss C. Filby; Marie, Miss V. Gillespie; Eliza, Cassy, Mrs. A. Savage; Aunt Ophelia, Mrs. P. Cameron; Topsy, Mrs. J. A. Dick. J. A. Dick was secretary of the club. This performance, at 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children, was repeated in several other places, and paid for the piano.

The revived society in 1931 installed hydro in the church at a cost of $123.72, and has continued to pay for the service.

Of course, the primary objective is the all-round development of the young people to the full stature of Christian manhood and womanhood. That this purpose has been realized is proven by the large number who have taken part in the Y. P. S. work and have later gone forth to render many useful services in various walks of life.

Present officers are: President, Morley Cameron; vice-president, Mrs. Lyle Winter; treasurer, Lyle Winter.

**UPPER CANADA BIBLE SOCIETY**

Always undenominational, the Botany branch of this society, organized in 1879, included members of both the
Presbyterian and Methodist churches. The annual (and only) meetings were held alternate years in one or the other church. At these meetings a travelling representative of the Bible Society was always present, and a secretary-treasurer was appointed, who looked after most of the business.

N. P. Weekes was secretary-treasurer from the beginning until his death, July 23, 1906, when D. M. Winter was given the books and assumed the job as secretary-treasurer, which he still holds. The term of service of these two men covers a period of 62 years. Cornelius McBrayne, who ran the Botany post-office, kept in stock bibles from the Society for sale, from 1879 until 1900, when the secretary-treasurer, Mr. Weekes, took over the sale. When D. M. Winter succeeded, the Society discontinued the direct sale of bibles in Botany.

SOLDIERS’ SERVICE

In the years of the Great War, St. John’s Church was active in Soldiers’ service, and on September 12, 1919, the Soldiers’ Service Committee gave a reception for returned men, when the Women’s Institute presented all with gold watches.

The Honour Roll of St. John’s Church in the Great War, 1914-1918, includes the following who came back:

Capt. Wm. Mowbray  Lieut. James N. Mowbray
Geo. Dell  Charles Boyle
Wilbert Atkinson  Lyle Dick
Charles Hubbell  Floren McDougall
Nursing Sister Mabel McKerracher

The boys who went over and did not come back:

Percy McCorvie  Scott McDiarmid
Albert Steen

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Prior to 1880 a Union Sunday School was carried on, its sessions being held in the Methodist Church. Since then a succession of able and earnest superintendents and teachers have conducted our own Sunday School. To enumerate all who have contributed to this work would be impossible; there is space to mention only a few of the more outstanding.

James Thompson, for many years prominent in church affairs, was the first superintendent, and his successors in this office were: Duncan McMillan, Wm. Steen, J. C.
Balmer, E. A. Balmer, Peter Cameron, John A. Dick, James Brisley, Frank Cameron. Especially noteworthy was J. C. Balmer, who held the office from 1900 until his death in 1917. He put his all into the work, and was always on hand at least a full hour before the Sunday School started.

Among the devoted teachers a few demand special mention. The older folk still refer fondly to Richard Young, teacher of the Bible Class in the old church between 1880 and 1900. Mrs. T. Fritz, who taught the Bible Class in the new church, for 25 years (1914 to 1939), one of those quiet women who always knew her lesson, still fills in on occasion. From 1900 to 1914, Mrs. E. B. Stewart did excellent work as a teacher of 'teen age boys.

Mention must be made, too, of Mrs. Alex Dick, a leader in all branches of church work, but particularly in the Sunday School, where she taught the 'teen age girls' class for 25 years, and still lends a helping hand when needed. Not merely is she among the larger financial contributors to the church, but she has gone the second mile and has perhaps done more for the social, spiritual and moral welfare of the church than anyone who ever occupied either pulpit or pew. Year after year, her increasingly beautiful Christmas trees—even bigger and better and more beautiful since the advent of hydro—have delighted the children and endeared Mrs. Dick to them. In this labor of love Mrs. Dick was assisted, in years gone by, by a number of excellent helpers, including Miss Ella Cameron, Miss Janet Winter and Mrs. Fred Weekes.

Sunday School officers for 1941 are: Superintendent, Frank Cameron; assistant superintendent, John Crawford; treasurer, Gordon Atkinson; secretary, James Morehouse. The Sunday School roll is as follows:

Mrs. Archie Dick, beginners' class: Elizabeth Crawford, Helen Crawford, Bonnie Galbraith, Bobbie Peters, Gerald Gillespie, Jean Bedford, Nellie Johnson, Wayne Morehouse, Margaret Galbraith.

Mrs. John Balmer, little girls' class: Joanne Buller, Mary Crawford, Margaret Peters, Dorothy Robertson, Mary L. Galbraith, Mary Margaret Dick.

Miss Bernice Leggate and Ernest Balmer, small boys' class: Glen Atkinson, Alex Dick, Douglas Cameron, Glen Savage, Glen McBrayne, Claire Galbraith, Bobby Galbraith, Calvin McTavish, Douglas McTavish, Peter Gillespie, Neil Gillespie, Jim Bedford.

Mrs. Buller, young girls' class: Shirley Savage, Nora Robertson, Marilyn Morehouse, Eileen Keech, Jessie Buller.
THE CHOIR

From the earliest days, Botany choir has enjoyed the reputation of being one of the finest rural choirs in western Ontario. In the beginning, it was, like the Sunday School, a union organization, the Methodist and Presbyterian denominations both giving their best to the service of praise.

The first precentor was James Skakel, who served from 1858 until the Turin church was built, when he went to Turin. Mary Robertson succeeded him, and was followed by James McKerracher. The last precentor was N. P. Weekes, who filled the position until the organ was purchased, at which time the Presbyterians formed their own choir. Mr. Weekes, however, continued as leader of both choirs. His remarkable work as choir member, precentor and choir leader, beginning before Botany church was built, continued over a quarter of a century.

The late Fred Weekes, as a small boy, remembered, about the year 1880, the choir members gathering at his father's home for practice. All seated around the table, N. P. Weekes would strike the note on the tuning fork, and the resonant voices of the pioneers would pour forth the glorious old psalms. Choir practice was a great and joyous occasion for all, and the precentor was a loved and respected figure in the life of the church.

At a meeting on May 15, 1883, it was moved by James McKerracher, seconded by Thomas Cameron, and agreed that the Session be asked to take a vote of members to ascertain their views in regard to use of an organ in the church. The vote, taken June 26, 1883, showed 29 members for, 8 against. The committee to purchase the organ comprised N. P. Weekes, D. McMillan, James McKerracher, Thomas Cameron, Misses M. Dick, Susan Cameron, Mary L. Robertson and Petitia Little.

But while the organ was welcomed to the service of praise, the attitude toward secular music in the church is indicated, by a Session record of February 9, 1886: "At a meeting of Session in Thamesville, with elders present, Messrs. O'Neil, Davidson, J. McKerracher and J. Thompson,
a request was made from Botany for the use of the church there for the practice of singing music, and also for holding a literary and musical entertainment. The Session agreed that the church be given for the purpose of practicing sacred music provided that good order be kept; but that it be not given for any concert or literary and musical entertainment. Rev. J. Becket, moderator."

Hymns do not appear to have been introduced until 1898. On June 28 of that year choir books and small books of praise were bought. In January, 1936, Mrs. Jane Cameron, now of Ridgetown, but a life long member of the church, in memory of her husband, the late Thomas Cameron, for many years an elder, furnished the choir with the new large-size hymnaries with 50 of the smaller hymnaries for the congregation.

Among the choir members several were outstanding singers. The late Fred Weekes, who passed away in 1939, was for more than 40 years an excellent soloist. The late Will Robertson, who as a boy, had been given voice training and was a member of the first Botany choir, sang solos in the old church until 1900, when the site was moved. Conspicuous among today's soloists is Arthur Winter, a young man with an exceptionally fine tenor voice. Mrs. Archie Dick is another soloist whose charming voice has frequently been heard, not merely in the church, but at social events and funerals. Among the many singers of duets the most outstanding were, probably, Fred Weekes and Burnett McDonald.

The piano was bought in 1921 by the Young People's Society.

A regular and helpful choir event is the annual oyster supper when the members and their families get together for a social evening and elect their president and secretary. The choir for 1941 are: President, Mrs. Thomas Atkinson; secretary, Mrs. Peter Cameron; organist, Miss Ethel Atkinson; choir, Mrs. Lyle Winter. Mrs. John Cameron, Miss Mary Balmer. Mrs. Archie Dick, Mr. John Dick, Mrs. John Dick, Mrs. Glen Robertson, Mr. James Morehouse, Mr. Arthur Winter, Mr. David Everitt, Mrs. Herman Everitt, Mr. Morley Cameron, Mrs. Rae Galbraith, Miss Mary Legate, Miss Mary Atkinson. Miss Marion Cameron, Mrs. John Balmer, Mrs. Malcolm Gillespie, Mr. Gordon Atkinson.

The first organist in the old church was Miss Susan Cameron, who was succeeded by Miss Molly Dick. Successive organists in the new church were Miss Emma McDonald, Miss Tillie Jenner, Miss Carrie Mowbray, Miss Jennie McBrayne, Miss Tena Mowbray and Miss Ethel Atkinson.
The choir through the years owed much to the influence and example of the late N. P. Weekes. In his long service as precentor and choir leader he helped train many excellent voices, and established fine musical standards and traditions which a later generation has maintained. What he was to church, choir and community is attested by addresses from the two congregations he served so loyally and so long. The first, dated February 25, 1887, and signed by Cornelius McBrayne, John McKerracher and James Anderson, as committee, accompanying the presentation of a silver watch, declares:

“We, the people of Botany, and more particularly the members of the Methodist Church, have assembled here this evening to show our appreciation of your services as leader of the choir in our church for some time past.

“It is an honorable and responsible position to be the leader in singing praise to God. It is as much an act of worship as preaching and praying, and when it is done in a right spirit it is often blessed to be the means of salvation.

“And, sir, since your residence amongst us you have taken an active part for furthering the best interests of society, showing a Christian spirit in exerting yourself for the advancement of the cause of Christ.”

On January 23, 1889, R. Young, J. Balmer, A. Gage and Wm. Steen as spokesman for his fellow-members of the Presbyterian congregation presented gifts to both Mr. and Mrs. Weekes, accompanied by this tribute to Mr. Weekes:

“We, the members and adherents of the Botany congregation have taken the liberty of assembling in your house tonight for the purpose of showing by some outward demonstration our appreciation of your long and faithful services as leader of the choir in our church.

“Nearly a quarter of a century of time has passed away since you first assumed the duties of that office. During all these years you have given your time and services ungrudgingly. You have shown that tact, skill and patience which are predominantly essential in a successful leader. Your constant presence at your post of duty was a noble example to all church members. Notwithstanding the fact that the knowledge with regard to music has made rapid strides during that time, you have always kept in the forefront of that advancement. And now, as you have seen fit to withdraw from the choir, we ask of you to accept this gift. It is not because of the intrinsic value it possesses, but it will be a silent reminder to you that your kindly
services were not unheeded or forgotten by us. And to you, Mrs. Weekes, we would offer a similar gift."

Worth preserving, too, is a characteristic commentary written in 1932, shortly before his death, by the late Fred Weekes, son of the great precentor and at that time the last survivor of the choir of 1900.

"I think the choir is one of the main wheels of the church. I think it is the right-hand front wheel, next to the minister. Without the choir the preacher has pretty hard going. It is a great gift to be able to stand and sing praises. I think we can do much good in song. When we stand and sing, ‘Breathe on me, breath of God, Fill me with life anew’ or ‘Lead Kindly Light amid the encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on’ or ‘There’s a wideness in God’s mercy like the wideness of the sea, There’s a kindness in His justice which is more than liberty’ or ‘Seek ye the Lord, while He may be found, Call ye upon Him while He is near,’ etc., surely we are throwing out a little good to the other fellow besides good to ourselves.

“Our choir of St. John’s Church has a wonderful record. It is 32 years old. We have had but six regular organists: first, Emma McDonald; second, Tillie Jenner; third, Carrie Mowbray; fourth, Jennie McBrayne; fifth, Tena Mowbray; sixth, Ethel Atkinson. I have had the pleasure of sitting beside all of them, and have never had a scrap with one. Of course we had assistant organists all the time who always did their part.

“Our choir has always helped in gladness and in sadness. I don’t think, in 32 years, our choir has not been represented at a funeral in our congregation. There is only one spoke left in this wheel that was in the choir the day this church was opened. This one is a little rusty, and the paint pretty well worn off.

“I think we have at the present time the finest front row in our choir in this country. When a stranger comes in the church and just looks up and sees Mrs. Peter Cameron, Mrs. Fred Weekes, Mrs. Everitt, Mrs. Thomas Atkinson, Mrs. Archie Dick, Mrs. Stevens and Mrs. John Dick, also our good-looking young ladies, he cannot help but say, ‘This is a prosperous and very healthy and happy place.’

“This wheel has run for 32 years and has never had a single blow-out. We have never had a member of this choir hung. I have never asked a member of this choir to sing or help in any way and been refused. I like them all; of course I like some a little better than the other. We have had some very pleasant times together.
"I would like just now in behalf of the choir to thank all outsiders who helped us at different times. We have enjoyed them all. Also for our own minister, who has just put a little varnish on this wheel. I think Mr. Bolingbroke is the first minister that has helped us and did it willingly.

“We have at the present time one of the best choirs in Howard. Ethel Atkinson, organist, is always ready and willing to do her part, we are very proud of her; also David Everitt, assistant, who never refuses to act when called on. We have two of the best solo singers, Mrs. Archie Dick and Arthur Winter. We have also the best alto line-up in Kent. Our tenor and basses do their best. It is no wonder our preacher feels like speaking when he is backed with this line-up.

"Before closing I would just like to remember some of our old faithful members who are absent. Mrs. George Cameron and Mrs. Dan Winter, they are singing in a better choir. Also Mrs. George Balmer and Mrs. Alex Dick, who were always ready with their voices and tea pots. Why I mentioned the last two was because they sat just in front of me for years and I had to see that they behaved themselves, especially Mrs. Dick.

"I am glad my father did his part in the old church. I am not sorry I sing in this choir."

THE WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION

The women of the congregation have been zealous in the work of the church from the beginning. Though the first definite record we have of a Ladies’ Aid is in Cornelius McBrayne’s poem in 1869, undoubtedly there was a Ladies’ Aid before that time. All down through the years socials were held—the suppers usually in the Methodist Church and the program in the Presbyterian Church.

In the old church Mrs. Hutchinson was secretary-treasurer of the Ladies’ Aid for many years. In the new church the same office has been held by Mrs. Geo. Balmer, Miss M. B. Cameron, Mrs. John Dick and Miss Maggie Atkinson. Miss Atkinson merits special mention, having held the job for 25 years. The organization meets every month, and it is a rare occasion that Miss Atkinson isn’t at the post of duty. As caretaker she keeps the church spotlessly clean.

Since Church Union, the Ladies’ Aid has been known as the Women’s Association, but in purpose, spirit and usefulness the organization is the same. For some years after the new church was built, summer socials or garden parties
were held outdoors, usually on the beautiful lawns of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Gillespie, Mr. and Mrs. Dan Winter, Sr., or Mr. and Mrs. Tom Atkinson. Since, in recent years, the church basement has been remodeled, a new floor put in and stoves, tables and dishes provided, the socials have been held there.

Of the many capable ladies who have held the position of president, special mention must be made of Mrs. Dan Winter, Sr., popularly known as "Polly". She was president for many years, and, the church being conveniently situated on the Winter farm, she would freely lend anything required for a social—so freely, in fact, that sometimes, the morning after a social, she had hardly enough dishes to get breakfast.

The ladies pay for all repairs to the church and buy all new furniture, and if the managers are hard put for money, they can always find $50 or $100 to keep them out of the red. Mrs. Hugh Gillespie is president for 1941.

**SPECIAL EVENTS**

It remains only to refer briefly to a few noteworthy events held in the present church. An unique occasion was the calling, by Rev. James Annesley, of the banns for the marriage of Della Simington and James Morris Hepburn, of Saskatchewan, on January 22, 1914. While this procedure is permissible as an alternative to securing a license, this is the only case on record where the banns were called from the pulpit of St. John's church.

There have, however, been three church weddings. On June 21, 1913, Miss Carrie Mowbray was united in the bonds of matrimony to William R. Reek, this being the first couple to be married in the new church. Following the traditional custom of the kirk alike in Scotland and in Canada, this first bride to stand before the altar was presented by the congregation with a bible. The bible was later stolen. Mrs. Reek hopes it went to the right person.

Two more couples have since been married in St. John's Church, Miss Tena Mowbray and Harry Sifton, in December, 1921, and Miss Violet Gillespie and James Bowden, in October, 1927.

Another memorable church event was the impressive service held by Tecumseh Lodge, A. F. & A. M., of Thamesville, on St. John's Day, June 24, 1934. The Masonic brethren to the number of 120 gathered on the lawn of Very Worshipful D. M. Winter, and under the leadership
of Worshipful Bro. Peter Cameron, W.M., marched to the church, and marched back after the service, when short addresses were given by several of the brethren. Mr. Winter is known to younger members of the craft as the father of Free Masonry in Botany.

While many names are mentioned in these pages, the names of many more good men and women do not appear, but the God whom they served is not unmindful of the labor and love which they rendered Him.

The Botany church has suffered in late years by the drift of population to urban communities; but Christ and His Church will always be indispensible to the spiritual and moral welfare of this community.

Those who from present or past associations love Botany church, will pray that while it endures, it will continue a Bethel, a House of God, and a gate to heaven; that the homes of the community may be Christian homes; and that the young people who grow up here shall know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and as His servants live the life and do the work to which He calls them.

The church, notwithstanding human imperfections, has been a blessing to this neighborhood, and through those who have gone from it carrying their Christian faith, principles and ideals it has been a blessing to many places in the Dominion of Canada and in other lands.

"Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget! Lest we forget!"