"I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the House of the Lord."—Psalm 122:1.

Seventieth Anniversary 1872 - 1942

Including an Historical Sketch of the Earlier Years of the Church

By

Deacons John Wilkinson
and W. H. Pitfield
The EDITH and LORNE PIERCE COLLECTION of CANADIANA

Queen's University at Kingston
FOREWORD

On this Seventieth Anniversary Occasion it was deemed advisable to put into permanent form a brief history of the earlier years of our church, along with lists of early names as they are recorded in the appendices. Actually the beginnings of Baptist work in Sarnia go back twenty-three years earlier than 1872. But a continuous organization has prospered for seventy years. And now we have a membership of 326, the church and parsonage are free of debt, and a fund is being set aside for future extension.

Further information and statistics are obtainable from old church records which are on file at McMaster University, Hamilton; from minutes of the Middlesex-Lambton Association of Regular Baptist Churches; and from the Year Books of the Ontario and Quebec Convention of Baptist Churches.
REV. J. L. BARLEY, B.A., B.Th.
Pastor of Central Baptist Church
Since August 30th, 1936

REV. R. R. McKAY, B.A., D.D.
Pastor Emeritus
(Pastor 1916 - 1936)
IN THE YEAR 1849, fifteen people banded themselves together as a Baptist Church. Among these were the Hon. Alex. Mackenzie (later Prime Minister of Canada), R. S. Chalmers and R. Steed. For some time they met in private houses. Such a measure of success attended their efforts that they felt bound to erect a meeting house, which they did in 1851 on the site of the present church. It was an unpretentious frame building. Before it was finished it was used as a banquetting hall upon the occasion of a visit to the village of Lord Elgin, the Queen's representative at that time in Canada. For three years public services were conducted chiefly by the late George Watson of Sarnia Township, a devoted brother, the fragrance of whose memory has not even at this late date passed from the community.

The growth of the town was very slight in these years and accordingly material for church growth was scanty. Slow progress brought discouragement, and after a few years the effort to establish a Baptist cause was abandoned. Just when services were discontinued cannot be said, as there are no available records of the event. For a time some Roman Catholic people who were out of harmony with the authorities of their church made use of the building. Subsequently it was leased to the school board and was used as a public school. It seemed as though the Baptist spirit was dead, but in reality it was only a case of suspended animation.
It would be of great interest to know something about the inner spiritual movements which led up to a revival of the cause and the formation of the organization which has continued until this day; but an impenetrable pall hangs over several years and there are no records to inform us. However, two factors seem to have contributed to the renewal of the attempt to found a Baptist church here. One was the coming into the community of a few people holding the Baptist faith, and the other was the indomitable spirit of brother R. S. Chalmers, who never gave up the purpose of founding here what he believed (and we believe) to be a New Testament Church.

On October 13th, 1871, a meeting convened in the house of R. S. Chalmers according to previous announcement for the purpose of organizing a Baptist Church. Three ministers were present, namely, Revs. McDermand and J. Donnelly of Port Huron and D. W. Rowland. The first named, after relating his fifty years experience as a Baptist, stated very clearly the object of the Church of Christ and the individual responsibility of its members. The articles of faith as set forth in the New Hampshire Confession were then read by John Parker, who had been appointed Secretary, and as those present stood up the church covenant was read by Rev. J. Donnelly, both articles and covenant being accepted by all. The roll of membership was then signed by the following, twelve in all: Anna Middleton, Elizabeth Wallington, Arthur Streeter, Agnes Ferguson, Robert S. Chalmers, Ellen Chalmers, Thomas R. Jones, Margaret Jones, John Parker, Jane Parker, Mary Pottinger, Jane Neil.

After R. S. Chalmers had been elected Deacon, and John Parker, Clerk and Treasurer, the meeting closed with prayer and praise. The organization thus and then formed has continued until this day as the Baptist Church of Sarnia.

At once the church set about securing a pastor. On December 19th, 1871, Rev. James Samis of the Canadian Literary Institute (later Woodstock College) preached in the Congre-
tional chapel. At a meeting subsequently held in the house of Deacon Chalmers an unanimous call was extended to Mr. Samis to become pastor. The call was accepted and by the middle of April, 1872, Brother Samis entered upon his duties. The records do not contain minutes to this effect, but at a special meeting on April 25th, the pastor was in the chair. At that meeting it was decided to "invite delegates from the Baptist Churches to meet in council for the purpose of recognizing the church as a regular Baptist Church." There is no further record of that matter in the minute book, but it is quite likely that on May 20th, the date fixed by the church, delegates from sister churches met and duly recognized this church.

On May 12th the morning service was held in the chapel and from this date there is no mention of meetings being held in private houses. Mr. Samis was pastor for a little over three years. They were years of progress. The membership was increased by twenty-seven baptized and fifty-two received by letter. The utmost care was taken to preserve the purity of the church's life; discipline was firmly administered, looking to the reclamation of any who were careless in regard to their church attendance and un-Christlike in their lives.

Mr. N. Wolverton, then a student at the University of Toronto, served as pastor during his summer vacation in 1875. The Rev. T. S. Johnson became pastor in the autumn of 1875. In the following year a gracious revival was experienced, fifty-five were baptized and the church was greatly strengthened. During the eight years of his pastorate additions were frequent, a total of one hundred and eighteen being brought in by baptism.

Spiritual development continued during the four years' pastorate of Rev. A. C. Baker, ninety-six being baptized.

The Rev. C. C. McLaurin was the next pastor, his term of service being six years. Audiences were increasing and the Sunday School growing so that enlargement of the building became necessary. The next pastorate, that of Rev. H. C.
Speller, was one of the longest in the church history, being for nine years. It would seem that at this time the influence of the church in the community widened and deepened.

The Rev. W. T. Graham followed as pastor. His power as a teacher and preacher was generally recognized. The services of the remaining pastors are well known and so fresh in the memory of all that they do not need to be dealt with here. The list of pastors from the beginning until the present with their terms of service is as follows: Rev. James Samis, 1872-75; Rev. T. S. Johnson, 1875-83; Rev. A. C. Baker, 1884-88; Rev. C. C. McLaurin, 1888-94; Rev. H. C. Speller, 1895-1905; Rev. W. T. Graham, 1905-08; Rev. J. E. Hawkings, 1908-12; Rev. J. W. Newsom, 1913-14; Rev. A. A. Holzer, 1915-16; Rev. R. R. McKay, 1916-36; Rev. J. L. Barley, 1936 to the present. The pastorate of R. R. McKay, D.D., was the longest in the history of the church being twenty years in length.

It has been said that the re-commencement of Baptist work in Sarnia in 1871 was partly due to the increasing demands of a growing community. The existing frame chapel, built in 1851 (measuring 30 x 40 feet), was enlarged and improved as the revived work made progress. Early in Mr. Johnson's pastorate (in 1876) a partition was removed and a vestry added, and in 1881 a beautiful new brick building with a spire on the north-west corner, was erected at a cost of $6,000, and 12 feet on the west side of the property was purchased. The building was opened for divine worship in January, 1882, the special preacher being the Rev. Dr. J. H. Castle, Principal of McMaster Hall, Toronto. Ten years later, in 1891, under the leadership of Rev. C. C. McLaurin,
the building was considerably enlarged (including an eastern tower and second steeple), which enlargement gave increased accommodation for the congregation and also for the Sunday School. This work cost $5,400. On January 17th, 1892, the reopening services were held. The Rev. Prof. Thomas Trotter, preaching morning and evening, and the Rev. Mr. Bramen of Port Huron, in the afternoon.

During the pastorate of Mr. Speller various improvements were made to the audience room, and under Mr. Graham additions were made to the galleries and a pipe organ was installed.

The needs of the community which could not be met by one central place of meeting have not been overlooked by the church and various efforts have been made to meet these needs. For some time a mission was carried on in the North Ward. Point Edward also had a Sunday School presided over by John Wilkinson. When the population of that village declined, owing to the removal of the Grand Trunk Railway terminal, Brother Wilkinson transferred his efforts to Clark’s School House, to the north-east of the city. Mr. McLaurin brought about the erection of a building in the new tunnel district and there a Sunday School and, for some time, evening services were carried on.

A close relation to denominational work was maintained from the beginning. For the first five years, Home Mission aid was sought and received. The first annual grant was $400; in the fourth year only $100 was received, and at the end of the next year the church declared itself self-supporting, and it has ever remained so.

In September, 1874 before it was three years old, the church adopted the weekly offering envelope system; collections began to be taken for Home and Foreign Missions, Grande Ligne Mission, Ministerial Education, Welland Canal Mission, and as the work of the denomination expanded, the church has faithfully taken up its share of denominational responsibilities.
From the membership of the church several have been called of God to give themselves entirely to His work. Among these should be named Miss Barbara Johnston, who joined herself to the famous Pundita Ramabai and for some time labored with her in India until God called her home. The Gospel Ministry has been strengthened from the congregation by the following entering it: L. S. Hughson, B. McDermand, A. G. Baker, W. S. McAlpine, G. V. Collins. All of these have rendered splendid service in the Master's cause.

BERNARD A. HOWARD, A.C.C.O.
Organist and Choirmaster
Since November, 1927
APPENDIX A

List of Early Members and Congregation

R. S. Chalmers and members of family, John Parker and members of family, Thomas Jones and family, W. J. Barber and wife, Mrs. Wallington and members of family, George S. Samis, Thomas Manning and members of family, John Giles and family, Charles Rowles, sister and wife, Mrs. McCready, Miss Emily McCready (Mrs. Fred French), Thomas White (teacher), Mrs. C. Pitfield and members of family, John Wilkinson, Mrs. Wm. and Mrs. J. Wilkinson, The Woodells, Fred, Frank, Fanny, John, Winnie, Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Ellis and daughter, Andrew McAlpine and family, Henry Mills and wife, Robert Mills and family, Misses Jane and Anna Dunlop, Wm. H. Pitfield and wife (Ada Burton), Ebenezer Watson and family, George L. Hughson and family, Mr. and Mrs. McDermand and family, Members of the Lake family, Mrs. John Johnston and family, Andrew Buchner, Miss Alice Neil, J. Morrison and family, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Delmage and son, Leonard Johnston and family, Mrs. John Johnston and family (Davis Street), The Sinclair family, The families of David and John Finch, James K. Nelson and family, The Jones family (Mitton Street), Mr. and Mrs. Coutts and son William, Mrs. Hoag and family, The Reynolds family, Mrs. Alex. Bowles and family, The DeGroats (colored), The Jones family (colored), Mrs. Thomas Jackson, Joseph A. Jackson, The Avey family, The Cornell family (2 families), The Hoyts, Misses Alice and Marion Donald, The Yeates family, W. B. J. Williams, The McVicar family (Brock St.), The Collins family, A. V., Rose George, The Misses Hills, Mrs. Albert Ostler, John Burnett and wife, Mrs. Hamilton (Davis St.), The Charles Huckers, David Stokes and family, Robert Stokes and family, J. Frank Wilson, Mrs. Mary S. Barber, Miss Barnfather, F. J. Craig and family, Miss Mae Bush (Mrs. J. J. Porter), The Van Zandts, Mrs. Mapletoft and family, The Goldens, The Taylors (Cameron St.), The Slaters (U.S. Consul), Frank Valley, W. S. Gooden, The Miller family (Christina St. N.), Members of the Worsley family, John Armstrong and wife, The Parks, The Johnstons, The Davis family (Harry, Will, Fred, Charles and Florence).
APPENDIX B

THE MINISTERS

Rev. James Samis, called Dec. 19, 1871; retired Feb. 26, 1875
Rev. T. S. Johnson, called Sept. 11, 1875; retired Sept. 16, 1883
Rev. A. C. Baker, called Dec. 13, 1883; retired Aug. 9, 1888
Rev. C. C. McLaurin, called Oct. 25, 1888; retired Sept. 6, 1894
Rev. H. C. Speller, called Feb. 3, 1895; retired Apr. 30, 1905
Rev. W. T. Graham, called June 14, 1905; retired Aug. 31, 1908
Rev. J. E. Hawkings, called Dec. 1, 1908; retired Dec. 1, 1912
Rev. J. W. Newsom, called Apr. 20, 1913; retired Oct. 7, 1914
Rev. A. A. Holzer, called Jan. 20, 1915; retired Feb. 8, 1916
Rev. R. R. McKay, called Mar. 6, 1916; retired Apr. 1, 1936
Rev. J. L. Barley, called May 1936; commenced Aug. 30, 1936

APPENDIX C

THE DEACONS

R. S. Chalmers
Thomas R. Jones
Thomas Manning
Andrew McAlpine
H. W. Mills
George L. Hughson
D. Millard
John Wilkinson
W. J. Barber
David Stokes
James Parker

Thomas S. Smith
A. P. McAlpine
A. H. Gammon
H. A. Conse
W. H. Pitfield
John L. Gardiner
John Stokes
D. McDonald
Fred Rhodes
A. Blue

Geo. C. Gardiner
Frank Valley
Thos. G. Knight
O. C. Dennis
Percy Shaw
J. A. Clements
Bruce Williamson
W. F. Baldwin
Alex. Gardiner
W. J. Lockie
APPENDIX D

CHURCH CLERKS

John Parker, October 13, 1871
Robert Mills, January 7, 1876
Thomas White, November 30, 1876
Geo. S. Samis, January 3, 1878
Charles Rowles, January 1, 1880
W. J. Barber, January 5, 1881
John Wilkinson, January 12, 1882
Joseph A. Jackson, January 4, 1883
H. W. Mills, February 5, 1885
W. J. Barber, January 6, 1887
John Wilkinson, January 14, 1897
W. B. J. Williams, April 4, 1906
John Wilkinson, April 3, 1907
Clair Valley, April 15, 1931
Alfred Benson, April 18, 1934

APPENDIX E

TRUSTEES

R. S. Chalmers  F. J. Craig  Wm. Ellis
John Parker     Geo. S. Samis    Delwood Kitchen
John Giles      H. W. Mills    J. A. Clements
Geo. L. Hughson Geo. C. Gardiner Bruce Williamson
APPENDIX F

TREASURERS

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<tr>
<td>John Parker</td>
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<td>A. Sinclair Barber</td>
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<td>W. J. Barber</td>
<td>Miss Ina Jackson</td>
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<td>George V. Collins</td>
<td>A. Blue</td>
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APPENDIX G

SUNDAY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

(From the time the church elected same)

George Victor Collins, December 26, 1889 to 1893
  H. W. Mills, 1893 to 1900
H. A. Couse, January 10, 1901 to 1908
  A. W. Mills, 1908 to 1924
C. L. Brown, 1924 to 1925
  John Wilkinson, 1925 to 1928
  Bruce Williamson, 1928 to 1939
  Gordon Smith, 1939 to present

APPENDIX H

LEADERS OF CHURCH MUSIC

Mr. John Parker
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Rowles
  Miss A. F. Hughson and Miss Rose Collins
Mr. A. W. Mills (leader) and Miss Elma Chase (organist)
  Mr. Fred Mills (leader) and wife (organist)
  Mr. Robertson (organist and leader)
  Mr. B. A. Howard (organist and leader since 1927)
OFFICERS

Pastor ........................................ Rev. J. L. Barley
Pastor Emeritus .............................. Dr. R. R. McKay
Organist and Choir Leader .......... Bernard A. Howard
Clerk .......................................... Alfred Benson
Treasurer ..................................... Miss Ina Jackson
Envelope Recording Clerk .......... Miss M. Hayes
Envelope Clerk .............................. Will J. Richardson
Tellers (Chairman) ......................... Alex. Gardiner
Benevolent Fund ............................ Fred Rhodes
Music Committee (Chairman) ...... Rowland Samis
Ushers (Chairman) .......................... Percy Shaw
House Committee (Chairman) ...... Bruce Williamson
Baptismal Committee (Chr.) ........ Mrs. W. J. Lockie
S. S. Superintendent ....................... Gordon Smith
B.Y.P.U. President ........................ Miss Jean Williamson
Women’s M. C. President ............... Mrs. F. Rhodes
Grace Kenyon M. C. Pres. .......... Miss Hazel Piggott
Men’s Fellowship President .......... Lloyd Piggott
Women’s Association Pres. .......... Mrs. J. A. Clements
Choir President .............................. Mrs. Roy Brandon
D. R. Club President ....................... Mrs. G. Smith
Agent Canadian Baptist ................. W. A. Drury

DEACON'S BOARD

J. A. Clements, Chairman

John L. Gardiner (Hon.) John Wilkinson (Hon.)
Wm. H. Pitfield Fred Rhodes Alexander Blue
George C. Gardiner Percy Shaw Jos. A. Clements
Bruce Williamson Alex. Gardiner Wm. J. Lockie

FINANCE COMMITTEE

P. H. Bowden, Chairman

T. Connor Miss Ina Jackson (Treas.) C. Jones
Mrs. W. Schultz S. Rosebrugh J. A. Clements

TRUSTEES

George C. Gardiner, Chairman

J. A. Clements Bruce Williamson
MEETINGS

SUNDAY SERVICES—11 a.m. and 7 p.m.
SUNDAY SCHOOL—3 p.m.
B. Y. P. U.—Monday, 8 p.m.
PRAYER MEETING—Wednesday, 8 p.m.
C. G. I. T. and SCOUTS—Tuesday, 6:45 p.m.
CHOIR PRACTICE—Thursday
CUBS—Friday, 6:45 p.m.
WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION—Third Thursday
MEN'S FELLOWSHIP—Third Tuesday
GRACE KENYON MISSION CIRCLE—First Tuesday
WOMEN'S MISSION CIRCLE—First Thursday
D. R. CLUB—Third Friday
BARACA-PHILATHEA CLASS—Second Tuesday

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