

History of Wesley United Church, Mountain View, Prince Edward County, Ontario

The congregation came into being in 1967 when Belleville Presbytery decided that small rural congregations should amalgamate. At that time there were three small congregations on the Ameliasburg Charge—Ameliasburg Church, Massassaga Church and Mountain View Church. The congregations were served by a part-time student minister.

The Ameliasburg Church was erected as a Wesleyan Methodist Church at a cost of \$5,000 in 1868. The building was built of local limestone—stone from Kingston was used for the mortised corners, window sills and door threshold. The steeple was the tallest in the county and today the building houses the Ameliasburg Museum.

The Massassaga Church was located across the Bay from Belleville, next door to the Massassaga School. Built in 1888 it was a brick building featuring a square tower at centre front and rounded window tops. At the time of amalgamation it was sold and is now a private residence.

The Mountain View Church, originally a Wesleyan Methodist Church, was built in 1877-1878. The total contract was \$3,000. The building is brick veneer and features twin square towers topped by spires—unique in The County—and a large round window high on the front facade. Next issue will include more history and information on the construction of Wesley United Church.

At present I do not know when people in this area first began meeting as a congregation but we do know that prior to the building of the church, worship; was held in the Union school house (the building immediately south of the church). This school was opened in 1854. The church when first opened was known as the Union Church. The area known as Mountain View, which had its own post office, was about 1 ½ miles north along the present Highway 62 (at the corner of the present Victoria Road. The view of the Mountain is to the west looking at the granite out-cropping, incidentally the only granite in the County.) In the 1880's the Mountain View post office moved to the building immediately north of the church when a general store was opened there and thus the church area became known as Mountain View.

On November 5, 1877, David Sprung, Cornelius Hubbs and his wife Huldah agreed to convey to the trustees of the church all the land in the northwest corner of lot 68, 4th concession of Ameliasburg between the school and the base line between the 3rd and 4th concessions. On December 3rd the committee signed and confirmed the building contract with James Davis of Belleville.

We have the original minute book of the building committee (it lacks the first two pages—handwritten of their deliberations.) In the minute book of the building committee it states that the committee hoped to have a tender from a builder for the amount of \$2500. The church must be 40 by 55 feet, have twin towers and a gallery. However Mr James Davis of Belleville presented plans for the building with those specifications for a contract price of \$3000. The

contractor was to supply all of the materials except for the stone which was already quarried and near the site. These negotiations with the builder took place on November 3rd of 1877. The agreement for the transfer of the land from Mr and Mrs Hubbs and David Sprung to the trustees of the proposed church was made on November 5, 1877.

On November 27th, the committee called a meeting of the 'subscribers' (I presume this means the members of the congregation). The secretary said that it was well attended. The Rev. J.C. Ash, superintendent of the circuit chaired the meeting. The Contractor, Mr Davis outlined the plans for the proposed church. The Committee had started out with 8 members but several (15) more were added that evening. There was discussion of whether to have galleries, how to warm the church and whether the shingles should or should not be laid in mortar.

When the committee next met, 15 members were present and another 3 names were added! On Dec 5th the committee members and neighbours were to turn out to clean up and level the building site. On December 3, 1877 the articles of agreement for the building were made and entered into by Mr Davis and 16 members of the building committee. The building was to be completed within 6 months. The first payment was to be made on January 1 and monthly thereafter. An architect /surveyor from Belleville was to be satisfied that the work was done in a good workmanlike and substantial manner. These details are taken from the minute book which we have (unfortunately the first two pages are missing.)

The agreement and specifications for the church building take up 20 handwritten pages in the minute book. I have summarized it thus -

- The foundation (ground floor) was to be 40 feet wide and 55 feet long. The ground was to be dug out to a depth of at least 9 feet at the southwest corner and deeper if necessary to get a good solid foundation. There was to be 9 feet in the clear between floor and ceiling of the basement. There would be four posts in the basement to support the upper parts of the building.
- The outside of the church and towers were to be built of brick of a good red colour. The window sills and arches in the stone and brickwork were to be made of Portland cement. The two door sills were to be of stone neatly cut and fine bush hammered.
- The inside walls of the sanctuary and towers were to have two coats of plaster. The basement was not to be plastered. Five years later the basement was finished. Most of the wood in the church is pine, but the posts supporting the gallery are hardwood and the gallery fronts are of black ash and black walnut. The contract says the altar rail could be of birch. The pews were to be made of black birch. The pine woodwork inside was to be grained to suit the hardwood.
- The contract doesn't say anything about the bell which was mounted at the roof peak. Perhaps this was added later. However it was removed in 1981 and is now situated on the front lawn.
- Sixteen members of the building committee signed the contract with the builder, Mr James Davis of Belleville. Those men promised and agreed 'evenly and proportionally for

himself, his heirs, executors and administrators covenant' that Mr Davis would be paid \$3000. of 'lawful Canadian money' for the building of the church, which was to be completed in 6 months. Who were the 16 men? Do any of their descendants attend the church now? They were: Wellington Howell, John Potter, D M Howell, Robert W Lauder, H L Whitney, G H Fox, W H Way, Oliver Young, S G Way, George H Sprung, Griffith Howell, Jacob Wood, S S Potter, T B Tillotson, L T Sprague and William Anderson.

- Committee members and people of the community were urged to come to the site two days later to begin the work of levelling and clearing the ground for the church.

Work on the building must have started immediately because the building committee held their first meeting of the New Year on January 4, 1878 in the basement of the new church. The treasurer reported that they had raised \$129.78 at a festival held in the same place on New Year's Day and a social on January 3, the previous evening. And \$282. had been donated. (Obviously the fund raising committee was hard at work!)

Early in the year of 1878, the contractor, Mr James Davis of Belleville was proceeding with the construction of the church building. Also the building committee was hard at work raising money to pay for it. People were appointed to canvass the neighbourhood. On February 28th an Oyster Supper and evening concert was held. The committee must have felt the canvass was going well because they decided that the proceeds of the supper would be set aside toward the finishing of the basement.

It would seem that the committee members and other volunteers did the actual work of finishing the basement because only bills for the building materials are submitted. At the meeting on April 30 they decide to go ahead with the plastering of the basement. Also at this meeting the date of June 20 is decided upon for the first service and dedication of the church.

At their meeting of May 26th, the contractor informs them the building will be completed by June 15th. The Rev J C Ash, the Ameliasburg circuit minister confirms that the Rev. John Potts of Toronto will be present to dedicate the new church building. The ladies of the congregation are to be asked to hold a meeting on June 4 at 2 p.m. in the church building to look into the furnishings for the church as well as organize the provision of a dinner after the dedication service. (Persons eating the dedication dinner were to be asked for 50 cents each!)

The men did organize to canvas the neighbourhood for provisions for the dinner. Three services were held on June 20 at 10:30 a.m., 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. with a different preacher at each service.

Unfortunately the notes don't tell us how many were present at each service. (I can remember being told many years ago that frequently people had to sit in the balcony at the regular Sunday services.)

Later in the fall the question of how to heat the church was discussed and a hot air furnace was their choice. At that time they felt they couldn't afford an organ. Two chandeliers and two sidelights in the choir gallery as well as eight lights under the galleries were decided upon for the lighting.

In the previous installment I posed the question - are there any descendants of the men of the building committee who are members of the church now? The answer is 'yes' - Muriel Minaker claims Robert Lauder is a great-great uncle of hers. John Potter is the great great grandfather of Willet and Bob Barber and S S Potter is their great grandfather. (A picture of this Mr Potter along with his four young daughters is at the back of the church over the bookcase.) (John Potter was known as Deacon Potter in his time. S S [John's eldest son] was named Samuel Stanley but was always known as S S.)

How fortunate we, the present members of the Wesley United Church congregation, are to have this distinctive building for our worship services - thanks to the hard work and foresight of these faithful people over 125 years ago.

Compiled by Nora Barber