

Knox, Flos, Presbyterian Church - Origins and the first 100 years

Welcome to Knox, Flos, Presbyterian Church, located at 2942 Crossland Rd., Springwater Township, Ontario. We are one(1) mile south of Simcoe County Road 92 which runs between the Village of Elmvale and the Town of Wasaga Beach. Crossland Road is also known as Simcoe County Road 29. We are a modest-sized congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Canada housed in a distinctive red brick building that was built in 1909. We are one of a few rural congregations that are still alive and active in a countryside that was once dotted with hundreds of small Protestant and Roman Catholic churches built by immigrants to this country in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The architectural integrity and beauty of our church building has been maintained over the years by these immigrants' descendants and others and it is our pleasure this weekend to showcase our church in the programme *Doors Open Huronia 2014*.

In the middle of the 19th century, the landscape was radically different from what you see today. Survey notes of 1822 describe the area between the Penetanguishene Road (now Highway 93) on the east and the Nottawasaga River on the west as "swampy land unsuitable for cultivation". Early settlers recall an area dominated by almost impenetrable forest of cedars and elms. The only farming in those first years was on the high lands of the Old Survey (just west of the present-day village of Hillsdale) and around Apto. But about 1866, families of English and Lowland Scots origin that had settled in Oro Township a generation earlier began to move into Flos Township, settling (in our case) on the 7th to the 10th Concessions. Settlers with surnames like Langman, Cotton, Anderson, Locke, Hunter and Cameron appeared to clear the land, drain the swamps, built log houses and barns and start communities. A general store with a post office was soon opened at the hamlet of Crossland, situated at the corner of the 7th Concession and the 15th Sideroad. And with the arrival of the railroad in Elmvale (five miles distant) in 1879, development of the township 'took off'.

Lowland Scots were largely Calvinistic Protestants, holding to a "presbyterian" form of church government. Without their own church building in those formative years, the pioneers met first in homes to worship; then, as they were able, rudimentary frame churches were erected. So it is that we have recorded that the first "Presbyterian" service of worship in the Crossland area was held in 1869 in the home of Mr. & Mrs. Noah Cotton and subsequent ones (twice yearly only to begin with!) at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Walter Hunter, both on the 8th Concession. Part of a wide flung pastoral charge served initially by student ministers, this mission station became known as "Hunter's".

By 1878, the fledgling congregation at "Hunter's" were convinced that they could now build their own church building. John Cumming offered them a site on his hundred-acre farm on the N1/2, Lot 16, Conc. 7. A dispute with another group hoping to have the church built several miles north was settled by the Presbytery of Barrie in "Hunter's" favour and work was begun in November of that year. Although the official opening of this first "Kirk" (a frame structure) was not held until early in 1880, the formal establishment of the congregation of "Knox Presbyterian Church, Flos Township" is dated from this decision of Presbytery and thus we celebrated our 136th Anniversary on Sunday June 1st of this year (2014).

Over the following two decades, the main changes the congregation experienced was the alignment (and re-alignment) of Knox Church, Flos, with other local Presbyterian congregations until 1907 when it was united into the same pastoral charge as Elmvale. This arrangement continues to this day. The other addition was the establishing of a cemetery two miles to the west of the church. In 1896, an acre of property was purchased from David Cameron for \$14.00. This became officially "*Knox Burying Ground*" but was, and is still, referred to as the "Cameron Cemetery". While the upkeep of the cemetery is today maintained by a Cemetery Committee, no additional plots have been for sale since 1972.

Complaints regarding the heating of the frame church led to questions (beginning about 1903) about the cost of erecting another structure to house the growing congregation. At the Annual Congregational Meeting in January 1908, the Board of Managers were tasked with obtaining costs of renovating or of building. By October of that year, a recommendation was put forward to the congregation that "a new church be built with a cement basement, brick walls and a metallic ceiling". The smaller of two plans was accepted - the new building would be 44 feet by 34 feet with a vestry at ground level at the eastern end and a choir loft measuring 14 feet by 9 feet at the western end of the second storey. It was decided to rebuild on the same site as the original church so that structure was taken down. The lumber was sold to James Strath, Sr. whose farm buildings lie immediately south of the church property. Current Clerk of Session Donald Bell and his wife, Lorna, live in these dwellings today and can justifiably claim to reside in parts of the original Knox, Flos, Church!

The cornerstone for the new Knox Church was laid on Wednesday June 16th, 1909, in the presence of religious and political dignitaries. "At 5:30 p.m., Mrs. Robert Storey, President of the Ladies' Aid, laid the cornerstoneAfter the formalities, tea was served from 6 pm - 8 pm in James Strath's barn. The admission of 25 cents allowed people to view a football game and listen to music by the Kidd Brothers". The second Knox Presbyterian Church building at Crossland was dedicated on Sunday December 19, 1909, and the final payment on the mortgage (\$264.15) made in early 1915. At a celebration in the church on March 25th, "Mrs. John Anderson was called upon to hold the mortgage document while Mrs. Noah Cotton applied a match. As the smoke was ascending, the congregation sang "*Praise God from Whom all blessings flow*". This fine structure is what you see before you today! (The silver trowel used on the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone is in the care of relatives of Mrs. Storey and has been graciously loaned to Knox, Flos, Church for this event.)

In the remaining 70 years - to the congregation's Centennial celebrations in 1978 - the world passed through two World Wars, a Depression and a Cold War. Several generations of Presbyterians growing up in the centre of Flos Township saw major changes in the landscape and in society. But the changes that their church at Crossland experienced were more of the kind that follows 'technological' progress: sheds that had

once housed horses and carriages were torn down as parishioners purchased cars and trucks; wood furnaces were replaced, first, by oil-burning ones and then by high-efficiency propane furnaces; electric organs replaced the old, foot-operated, 'bellows' type of pump-organ; and, electric lights replaced the coal oil and gas lamps of yesteryear. Structurally, the church building being opened to the general public this weekend for the *Doors Open Huronia 2014* event is still the building that was dedicated on a December Sunday in 1909. And for that we say, "Thanks be to God!" **(The preceding information is attributed - usually without citation - to Mrs. Gladys Train's Beyond the Builder's Plan - The Centennial History of Knox Presbyterian Church, Flos, Ontario, 1878-1978)**

Knox, Flos, Presbyterian Church - The last 35 years

The early settlers had great courage and faith to proclaim God in Jesus Christ to this community. We, the congregation of Knox, Flos, have continued their legacy, maintaining the worship and the structure while striving to make it relevant to today's lifestyle. The strong leadership of the minister must have the co-operation of the Kirk Session in order for any programme to be successful. Leaders of music, teachers of children, servants to the community and all their helping hands are necessary for progress!

1984-1994 - During this period, Rev. Dr. Ian Clark, a Scottish scholar, was our minister (until 1988) when he was followed by the Rev. Diane Elder Clark, our first woman minister (1989-1994). We moved into the modern age with our first indoor washroom facilities which necessitated a septic system and tile bed. We got a hot water tank at the same time and the following were installed: a new front door, a new roof on the south side of the building, a sump-pump (in the basement) and a ceiling fan in the sanctuary. Painting was carried out on the exterior of the church building. There was work done on the sidewalks and to the entrance to the basement. Plexiglass was installed over the stained-glass windows in an attempt to protect them. Meanwhile, the denominational programme "Live the Vision" was faithfully carried out by our large church family.

1994-2004 - We welcomed the Rev. Charles Deogratsias as our minister. He offered us the opportunity to see life through the eyes of an immigrant from Rwanda, Africa. We came to appreciate the courage it took to settle in a new and far different land and were introduced to African music by his friends. He also brought a new 'light' to our church building when the interior of the sanctuary was painted and the vestry was wall-papered. The basement was painted and one wall was decorated with a mural depicting Noah and his animal companions. New curtains were hung and outside the building - high up on the south-west corner - a motion-sensor light was installed as a security feature. An educational 'tool' (originating in the Anglican Church) called "the Alpha Course" was introduced to us and a VCR was purchased for this purpose. During his time with us, "Reverend Charles" (as he liked to be called) became a Canadian citizen and eventually - when he felt the 'call' to the chaplaincy of Canada's Armed Forces - he and his family

moved on.

In August 2002, the Rev. Margaret Robertson was inducted into our pastoral charge. She came to the pastoral ministry from a (recent) background at the denominational offices and a lengthy career in Christian Education before that. During her ministry, a new keyboard was purchased and new carpeting was laid. "Reverend Margaret" introduced the beautiful Christmas Eve Candlelight Service which continues to this day by popular demand. Under her leadership, we celebrated the congregation's 125th Anniversary (2003). Memorial donations covered the cost of new *Books of Praise* (hymnbooks) and new pew bibles. The remainder of the roof was painted and the old evestroughing replaced.

2004-2014 - During this decade, a huge project was entered upon when each of the stained-glass windows were removed. Damaged or missing glass was replaced with new lead joints and the windows put back in place. This project (completed in 2007) was undertaken with great effort and dedication (and minimal expense to the church) by two of our newer members!

A fundraising novelty that first saw 'the light of day' in this period was the *meat pie project*. Twice a year, members gather together in the kitchen of our sister congregation (Elmvale Presbyterian Church) to make hundreds of meat pies. The sale of these popular pies make a huge difference on the financial side of the ledger.

Basement windows were replaced and painted and the basement floor, subject to occasional flooding, was also painted. We had a new high-efficiency propane gas furnace installed. And "Reverend Margaret" retired in the spring of 2011.

Our current minister is the Reverend Paul Sakasov who comes to us from Brandon, MB (and, ultimately, from Wingham, ON, which was also the boyhood home of former minister, Rev. D. K. Perrie.) "Reverend Paul" is very computer-literate and a musician of note. He has introduced "Family Sunday" on the 3rd Sunday of every month with a new emphasis on children's participation and more upbeat music (in which, of course, he takes an active part!)

The congregation's latest purchase is a power-point monitor which was installed high up on the south-west wall of the sanctuary. Service information which only used to be printed in the bulletin is now available for all to read without reference to a paper copy. This includes announcements, words of hymns and scripture readings.

Our doors which are open to welcome you this special weekend are open 51 Sundays a year and we invite you to join us then for worship. We gather every Sunday at 9:45 am. Thank-you for coming and for your interest in our building and congregation!

(Written by Mrs. Carole Huth for this occasion.)