

A Brief history of St Georges Anglican Church Owen Sound

Following completion of the survey of the Sydenham area in 1840, pioneers began to settle in the surrounding townships and the village of Sydenham began to take shape along the banks of the Sydenham River. The village was an isolated outpost surrounded by a hundred miles of wilderness.

Conditions were primitive and the roads virtually impassable for most of the year. The nearest settlements were at Goderich, Barrie and Elora.

Bishop John Strachan of Toronto visited the village in 1845 but returned to Toronto believing that Sydenham was years from being ready for the appointment of a clergyman from the Church of England.

In the autumn of 1846, the Rev. Alphonsus William Henry Rose, a graduate of Cambridge University, visited the village and was so enthralled with the place that he returned the following year to take up permanent residence, without the official sanction of Bishop Strachan. He traveled extensively throughout the area and undertook evangelizing initiatives, which hastened the formation of a Church of England congregation in the community. Bishop Strachan moved Rev. Rose to Guelph in 1848, much to the regret of the villagers in Sydenham. Rose died in 1850 and is buried in St. James' Cemetery in Toronto. It is interesting to note that Rev. Rose's gravesite location was unknown until 1999 – the year of our Sesquicentennial Anniversary. In June of 1999, our congregation made a special trip to the Cemetery in Toronto to place a memorial plaque in honour of Rev. Rose at his gravesite in St. James' Cemetery.

Rev. Rose left three valuable town lots in his will to the adherents of the Church of England at the corners of what are now known as 10th St. East and 4th Ave. East. However, no Church building would be built on that site until 1881.

In the spring of 1849, it was finally decided that there was a vibrant congregation of the Church of England, and Bishop Strachan moved quickly to make an appointment of a resident Clergyman. During the summer of 1849, Arthur Hill Ringland Mullholland, a promising theology student and a native of County Down, Ireland, arrived in Toronto, and following examination, was ordained a Deacon by Bishop Strachan. The Bishop sent Mullholland with a special license to administer the Sacraments to a new missionary parish that today would cover all of Bruce and Grey Counties.

The Rev. Mullholland conducted services in any accommodation that could be found. The parish's first place of worship was in a log house near what we would now find in the area of the Granite Club. The second place of worship was in a log building where the A&P store now stands.

Finally, in 1852, a permanent Church facility was built on the corner of what is now 10th Street East and 5th Avenue East, (that is where the tennis courts at the old O.S.C.V.I. used to be). The Village of Sydenham was incorporated as the town Owen Sound in 1857, and with the passage of time, the isolated wilderness settlement became a prosperous Great Lakes port. As the town grew, it became clear that the congregation was outgrowing the small parish church on

Boyd Street. The three town lots willed by Rev. Rose became the basis for plans to erect a new St. George's Church.

Our present day building was opened and dedicated by Bishop Hillmuth on August 7th, 1881. The building of the church was completed at a cost of \$12,000 and was considered, (and still is), one of the most beautiful churches in Ontario. St. George's Church is constructed of stone ashlar in the Gothic style. The Steeple measures 142 feet in height, and that measurement is directionally proportional to all of the measurements in the Church - the Nave and Chancel are exactly the same length, and the distance between the north and south transepts is exactly ½ that distance.

The interior plan of the 1881 Church was very traditional for Anglican worship. The Altar was placed against the east wall of the Sanctuary. The choir and organ were in the Chancel and the lectern stood in the centre of the Chancel area. In the Nave area, the pews were divided by the cross aisle from the steeple entrance and by the back entrance, forming a cross. Pews in the transepts faced inwards, towards the pulpit and lectern. In 1881, the offertory was gathered by "renting of the pews". Each pew had a name inscribed on it, plus a door at each end – How much you gave in your offertory determined where you sat. Wealthier families sat closer to the front and centre while poorer families sat in the transepts and farther back in the Church.

In 1898, our Parish Hall was constructed, initially to house the Sunday school.

Bishop Williams celebrated the consecration of the Church on October 3, 1920. Over the years, several renovations have taken place. In the 1920's a new entrance porch, built in the Norman style, was added at the west end of the Church. In the 1940's the Rectory was purchased. In the 1960's the Norman style entrance was removed and a new Narthex and Church extension were constructed, using the same stone from the original quarry near Kingston.

During a period of liturgical revision in the 1960's, the Chancel was redesigned. The organ and choir stalls were moved to the south transept and the altar was brought forward, thereby permitting the celebrant to face the congregation. During the 1990's, the Church grounds were landscaped and our Memorial Gardens were created for the scattering of ashes.