

The Parish of Saint Peter's, Birch Cove
Parish Magazine
July 2025



The Gardens at Saint Peter's on Sunday July 20th

Saint Peter's Parish Magazine – July 2025

The Pilgrimage Continues – St. Peter's 75th Anniversary Story - Part Two

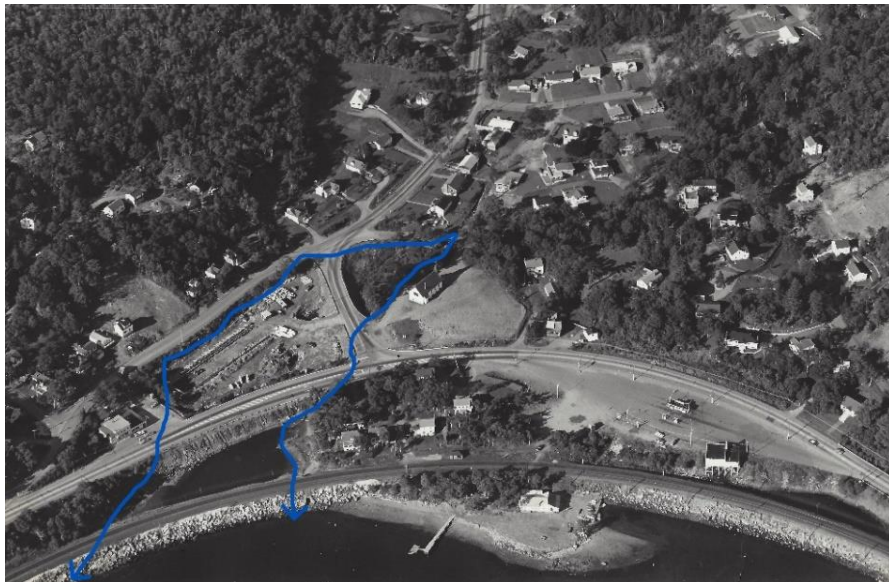
"I Found My Home" – an interview with Tina Xie

"If They Need You, They'll Call You" – an interview with Rev. Richard Walsh

Photographs of Say Yes to Kids Sunday

The Pilgrimage Continues (Part Two of Three)

It's amazing how fast things can disappear and 'things' can be a lot larger than car keys or a shopping list. Take Birch Cove for example. On an aerial photo, dated approximately 1958, one can see Saint Peter's Church before Daking Hall was built. The area where the hall and the parking lot now stand had just been leveled with the earth and rock, that once comprised a pine covered hill, removed. Across a newly built causeway, to the left of the church, one can see the Wedgewood Motel being built. Now the Wedgewood Motel is gone! The blue line shows where the original Birch Cove lay. The point is the cove is gone too and all of this in about 75 years! If something the size of a saltwater cove that's been around for thousands of years can disappear so quickly, how much danger is there that we can lose our own history? One of the goals for our 75th anniversary year is to chronicle and preserve the story that is Saint Peter's Birch Cove. Our story is not just nails and gyprock and asphalt. It's also about the pilgrimage that Saint Peter's parishioners started thinking about in 1947. It's about the pilgrimage those of us attending Saint Peter's today are on and those who will follow us.



Aerial Photo of Birch Cove circa 1958

On October 17th 1947 Florence Daking willed a piece of property, that had been in her family for close to 225 years, to the Parish of Saint John's Fairview. The intent was to give Anglicans living in the Rockingham, Birch Cove and Kearney Lake area, land on which they could build a church. Interestingly even the memory of Florence has all but disappeared. The street originally named in honour of her 'Daking' family was misspelled as Dakin and remains so to this day. That misspelled street and our church hall remain the only two public acknowledgements of Florence's existence, generosity and vision.

Following World War Two the demand for land on which to build homes exploded. In Birch Cove large pieces of land, originally part of the Donaldson estate, became available. Florence Daking, a descendent of the Donaldsons, owned land between Daking Drive and Bedford Basin. Her cousin, Minnie Dickson, owned property where Silverwood Terrace now lies. Minnie's brother Norman and his wife Bessie owned land in the Kearney Lake Road/Pinewood Terrace area. Florence died in 1948, Bessie in 1950. Minnie died in 1954 and Norman died in 1957. Their collective passings brought to an end an incredible chapter in the history of Birch Cove; however, the Donaldson legacy continues today in part through Saint Peter's. Minnie willed her home and property to the Anglican Diocese for a retirement home for Anglican priests. Minnie also willed land for Saint Peter's to build a rectory which the parish did in 1960. It was Florence's dream that an Anglican church be built on her picnic grounds. It was in 1951. Bessie Dickson (Norman's wife) is remembered in one of the three stained glass windows above the altar at Saint Peters.

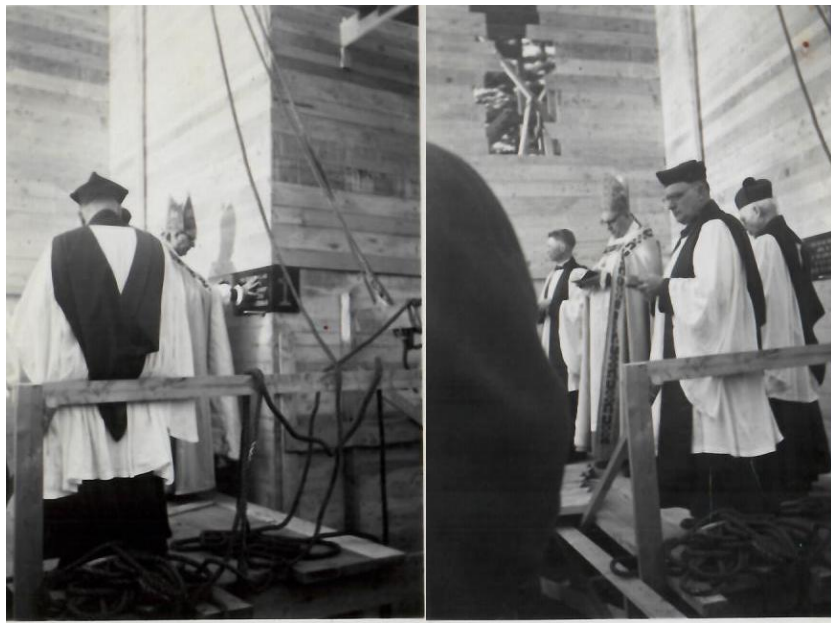


circa 1952-1954



2025

So how did the Saint Peter's pilgrimage unfold? There was a strong Anglican presence in the Rockingham to Prince's Lodge area of Halifax County in the late 1940's, early 50s. However, many Anglicans, unable or unwilling to travel to Saint John's Fairview chose to attend the United Church in Rockingham. With the promise of land, local Anglicans started collecting donations and pledges to finance their own church. A Sunday School was established in a local Rockingham home. In June 1950 a decision was made to build Saint Peter's and by early 1951 land had been cleared. On April 30th the cornerstone was laid and blessed by Bishop Waterman.



Bishop Waterman blessing the cornerstone on October 30, 1951

Saint Peter's was initially one of the only places in Birch Cove for community meetings. In 1955 Saint Peter's sponsored a scout group and built a camp at Millers Lake that could sleep 48. The Sunday School grew to over 100 children at one point and that was one of the reasons why the building of Daking Hall became so crucial. George Messervey was the parish's first Sunday school superintendent with Dr. Marion Dauphinee, the headmistress at Armbrae Academy, teaching the confirmation class.



Sunday School classes were initially held in the church basement (note the hats).



Members of church's First Choir (note level of driveway to door) photos: Jane Murphy

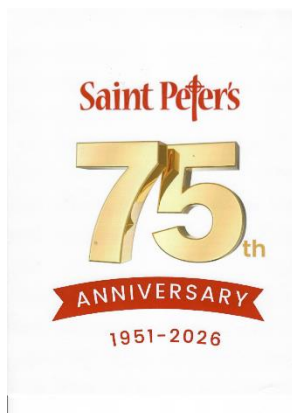
By 1960 the congregation was financially able to stand on its own. It became a separate parish and was no longer a chapel of ease of Saint John's. Our first incumbent priest was Rev. Doug Haviland. The Haviland family was the first to occupy the parish's new rectory which was built across Dakin Drive from the church. The parish no longer has a rectory. It was sold and the money realized from the sale now goes to providing our priest with a housing allowance. The parish built Daking Hall in the early sixties. Initially it sported a flat roof. That would be changed to a multi-pitched roof in 1989.



Aerial Photo of Birch Cove post 1960

In the post 1960 aerial photo one can see, circled in green, Saint Peter's with it's new flat roofed Daking Hall. Circled in red is Florence Daking's house (23 Dakin Drive).

During the first two decades of its pilgrimage, Saint Peter's was served by four priests. Its first priest Rev George Arnold (1951-53) , would go on to become Bishop. Rev. Arnold was followed by Rev. Wilfred Meadus (1953-1960). He was in turn followed by Rev. Douglas Haviland (1960-1965). When Rev. Haviland had to retire due to ill health, Rev. Meadus returned to Saint Peters for another four years from 1966 to 1970. In 1970 Rev. Vern Cluett was asked to become our priest. His tenure at Saint Peter's lasted an incredible twenty-two years! Rev. Cluett retired in 1992.



By the time Rev. Cluett retired our church complex looked much like it does today. The church's windows were all filled with stained glass windows. Daking Hall had been renovated in 1989 with its multi-pitched roof. In 1989 a parish office was added along with the present narthex and wheelchair ramp down to Daking Hall. Rev. Cluett's retirement wasn't of course the end of our story. When the parish celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1991 just before Rev. Cluett left us, parishioners talked openly about the future and wondered about what lay ahead. We today are what those parishioners of 1991 were thinking about. Their story is our story as we are part of theirs.

I Found My Home – an interview with Tina Xie by Glenn Taylor

(Ed. Note : In the fall of 2023 The Halifax Regional Library assigned Tina Xie and Peggy Taylor to the same weekly zoom ESL class for new Canadians. Both ladies were facilitators and only knew each other through their on-line association, until they met in person at a volunteer Christmas party at the Bedford Library. After the party, learning they had come all the way to Bedford by bus, Peggy offered to drive Tina and her children to their apartment at Saint Mary's University, where Tina was enrolled in an English Language degree programme . On the way into the city, Peggy drove by Saint Peter's and pointed out ' her church'. She also pointed out the Christmas tree lot beside the church. A conversation ensued which focused generally on ' Christmas'. The next day Tina contacted Peggy and asked if she and her children, Jane and Sean could attend church with Peggy on Christmas Eve. – Glenn Taylor)

Tina, who is from the Republic of China, had never stepped foot in a church before Christmas Eve 2023. There are very few churches in China and certainly not where Tina grew up in a small village in northern China, about 100 km. away from the city of Xi'an. Some parishioners may recognize the city as it is famous for its ' terracotta warriors'. The population of Tina's home town might be 300. Fascinated with languages, Tina studied the art and science of teaching English at university. After graduating, Tina opted to take a job in the city of Shenzhen, a city of 20 million people, very close to Hong Kong in southern China



Teaching English in China isn't for the faint at heart. A school day begins at 7:15 and ends at 6:30. There are 50 children in each elementary class. There were approximately 1500 students enrolled at Tina's elementary school. Hard work is not something Tina is shy about tackling. Since arriving in Halifax, she has earned her English Language Masters degree plus by August a B.Ed. She is now learning French! She has been substituting in elementary schools this past year and for next year she has already secured a part time term position in a Primary class. I had two questions for Tina. The first was " What was the biggest challenge of coming to Canada. Vey quickly she answered – The Weather!

I thought about Tina's journey from a small village in northern China to a huge city with a population half the size of Canada. I thought about her decision to travel to a country on the other side of the world with two children. But what I was most curious about was the journey she and her children began on Christmas Eve 2023 in a small church in Birch Cove. At the Christmas Eve pageant that evening son Sean became a wiseman. Daughter Jane became an angel and the Xie-Shand family began another journey, a pilgrimage. Tina, Jane and Sean have attended church almost every Sunday since that first magical Christmas Eve. Tina began to help in the Sunday School . A year later on January 12th, 2024 Tina and her two children were baptized. I asked my second question . " Why St. Peter's. " Tina replied – " I wanted my children to find some place to go where they found guidance. As for me, I found friends. It feels like family here. I found my home."

“If They Need You, They’ll Call You.”

An interview with Rev. Richard Walsh by Glenn Taylor

(Note: some readers may find some of this article’s content disturbing)

As he stared into the center of his study, Rev Richard Walsh spoke quietly, “ There was a tremendous noise; the Indian Harbour rectory shook. “ He then added, “I looked at my wife. She knew what I was thinking . She calmly advised ... “If they need you, they’ll call you.” Neither knew what had just happened nor did any of the other inhabitants along the shores of Saint Margarets Bay. It was 10:30 PM on the night of September 2nd, 1998.

The call would come in and by 2 AM, in the pitch dark, Rev. Richard Walsh found himself standing on the rocks at Peggy’s Cove looking out to sea. To even get into the village, Richard had to pass through a RCMP roadblock. Peggys Cove had become a no-go area for everyone except those involved in the rescue response to the crash of Swissair Flight 111.

Very few people to this day have any idea how horrific the accident was. For the 229 passengers and crew who were on the MD 11 aircraft, the actual crash lasted less than a second. For those, like Richard Walsh, they will have to deal with what they saw and experienced for the rest of their lives.

Rev. Richard Walsh, brother to our Rev. Dennis Walsh, was the rector of an Anglican parish that extended from Hacket’s Cove to West Dover. There are four churches in the parish, one of which is St. John’s in Peggy’s Cove. When he first arrived out by the lighthouse there were very few others out there with him. However, over the next few days relatives and colleagues of those on the doomed airliner started arriving by the bus load.

Local fishers, volunteer fire firefighters, local residents and entrepreneurs, the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Coast Guard, the RCMP, EHS, regional hospitals, the Salvation Army, even the United Nations responded to the disaster in a very comprehensive and professional manner. Their primary focus was the rescue or the recovery of those on board the aircraft. What very few had prepared for however was the need to counsel and deal with the needs of the grieving husbands, sons and daughters, mothers, wives and friends of those who went down with the plane. Richard Walsh was in the vanguard of that effort. Within days there were over 40 clergy doing what Richard had started- being there for those who were grieving. “ People needed to talk”, Richard added. At times they needed even more. He remembers an incident when a girl tried to leap off the rocks into the ocean . A member of the clergy grabbed her just before she could jump. They talked and then they walked down toward the water together.



The results of the crash were hideous. Only one body was recovered intact. The other 228 passengers and crew were recovered in pieces. Body parts floated in the sea and washed up on beaches. What do you say to a woman who tells you that parts of her husband had been recovered but she wasn't leaving until all of him had been found? Richard had to find the words. Richard shared, " Bishop Peters came out to see me. He went to the church and couldn't find me. He eventually did, down on the rocks.

Saint John's, Peggy's Cove

We tend to think of priests in their churches but if Swissair 111 is any example, clergy need to be where they're needed and that is often not inside a church. It certainly was the case in September of 1998 in Peggys Cove. In time disasters such as Swissair 111 become history to most but not to those who lost loved ones on the flight or who had the grim gut wrenching task of collecting human remains. Richard remembered one fisherman telling him " The beach is covered in skulls!"

One week after the crash a memorial service was held at the Saint Margaret's Elementary School. The president of Switzerland was there. Prime Minister Cretien and his wife flew in to attend. Richard met them both but it was to the family members, who had arrived from around the world, who Richard spoke directly to at the service, which he conducted. As reported in Steve Kimber's Book " Flight 111" Rev. Richard Walsh told the mourners " Each and every person who lives here wishes we could turn back the clock and change things. To the families and victims, I can only say your loved ones are spiritually part of our community. We will never forget them. We will always remember."

You can imagine after listening to this story that one might be at a loss for words. I managed however to come up with " That week must have been the most dramatic one-of-a kind weeks in your career as a priest." Richard looked at me and once again calmly replied " Not really ; there was 911." What do you mean? I quickly shot back. Richard went on to tell me that after the Swissair disaster the RCMP realized the importance of the role he played and asked him to become their chaplain. He agreed. Three years later when diverted planes started landing at Halifax International Airport on September 11th 2001, thousands of frightened passengers arrived with them. In fact , Halifax received more diverted planes than any other airport in Canada.

Just like September 2, 1998 , Richard received a phone call from the RCMP. We need you Richard to come out to the airport. Once again, not fully knowing what was unfolding, Rev. Richard Walsh instinctively went to where he knew he would be needed. He spent days at the airport walking and talking with those who saw his collar and realized he was there for them. I have wondered since our interview if while on his way to the airport, Richard thought about what his wife had said to him in their Indian Harbour rectory three years earlier. " If they need you, they'll call you." Well, they did and once again Rev. Richard Walsh answered the call.

Say Yes to Kids Sunday at Saint Peter's



The Diocese of Nova Scotia and PEI has been a leader in the 'Say Yes to Kids' project since 2021. Initiated and supported by the Anglican Foundation of Canada, parishes can apply for funding and along with money raised at the parish level, create opportunities for children. Saint Peter's will host a one week summer day camp, directed by Sunday School Superintendent Monica Stolov, this August. Sixty children from the parish and surrounding neighbourhoods will attend.

Rev. Arran with children of the parish on June 22nd

Music Director Heidi Jury and violinist Keigan Richard performing at our recent Say Yes to Kids Sunday service.



Following the Say Yes to Kids service on June 22nd a reception was held in Daking Hall. Bishop Sandra Fyfe, who attended our service, met with parishioners following the service.

Shown left are parishioner Ruth Mal, parish administrator Donna Lynn McLean, warden Art MacDonald, Bishop Sandra and visiting violinist Keigan Richard.