

The Parish of Saint Peter's , Birch Cove

Parish Magazine

June 2025



Rhododendrons at Mount Saint Vincent June 2025

Saint Peter's Parish Magazine - June 2025

The Pilgrimage Continues (Part one of three articles for Saint Peter's 75th Anniversary)

When I Entered St. Peter's I Realized I Was Walking into My Life – an interview with Rev. Dennis Walsh

Photos from this month's Parish Barbecue

The Pilgrimage Continues (Part One)

At eleven AM on October 21st, 1951, 215 people crammed into St. Peter's Anglican Church to participate in the first worship service held in the new church. Bishop R. H. Waterman led the service assisted by Rev. J Stead and Rev. George Arnold. That evening Rev. B.J. Davis led 96 worshippers in Evening Prayer. St. Peter's, as a chapel of ease of St. John's Fairview , had become a reality. The over four years of dreams and plans and just plain hard work of Anglicans living in the Rockingham- Birch Cove- Kearney Lake – Prince's Lodge area of Halifax County had finally paid off.



Saint Peter's 1951 (notice side door at east end of church)

One month after its official first service, Saint Peter's held its first baptism. Monya Rose Francis was baptized on November 25th. Even though Saint Peter's Anglican Church was the only church of any denomination in Birch Cove in 1951, Monya Francis was not the first child to be baptized in Birch Cove. That distinction, as described in Sharon and Wayne Ingalls' book "Sweet Suburb", goes to two Acadian children, Marcelline LeBlanc and Joseph Maurice. Both children were baptized by Father Charles Francois Bailley de Messein, in Birch Cove, on April 20th, 1772. In truth, other children had probably been baptized before Marcelline and Joseph but we don't have any records to confirm it. Marcelline and Joseph were likely baptized in someone's home or outdoors near a brook that raced down to the basin and Birch Cove. That brook entered Birch Cove near where Saint Peter's now stands. Today the brook races through a large pipe underneath a grassy area where a Christmas Tree lot springs up every December.



Birch Cove before it was filled in. This area is now a Christmas tree lot every December(courtesy NS Archives)

Birch Cove has been inhabited for centuries. For hundreds of years prior to the founding of Halifax, Birch Cove was home to Mi'kmaq families. In fact, Mi'kmaq lived in the area well into the 1900s. We know that following the Seven Years War and likely even before 1763, a small Acadian community developed in Birch Cove. There is even believed to be a small Acadian cemetery located near the intersection of the Kearney Lake Road and Grosvenor Road. The area around the cove, for several decades in the latter half of the 1700s, was also inhabited by British regiments of the line. It's difficult to picture hundreds of British troops camped out in Birch Cove where today cars drive up and down the Kearney Lake Road or along Dakin Drive or the Bedford Highway. The area became a desired location for large estates and farms one of which was home to a Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir John Cope Sherbrooke

Today Saint Peter's can be accessed by two roads, one from Dakin Drive, the other from the Kearney Lake Road. When the church was built however there was only one way in and out and that was up the hill from Dakin Drive. The causeway connecting the Bedford Highway to the Kearney Lake Road at Dakin was not constructed until about 1957. It was the third road to cross Birch Cove, the other two being the Bedford Highway and the railroad closer to the Basin. The railroad was constructed in 1855 and so upset Peter Donaldson, the owner of Birch Cove that he petitioned the Nova Scotia Government for damages caused to his farm and income. The Bedford Highway came next. It was paved in 1929. It was followed by the causeway in 1957. Gradually what became tidal pools or marshland was filled in to the point where today there is very little evidence, except for maps and aerial photographs that the cove ever existed.

While Saint Peter's may be the first 'official' church to have been built in Birch Cove, worship services in the Cove occurred long before October 1951. Father Bailey, who baptized Marcelline and Joseph, conducted Roman Catholic services in the Cove on Sundays for the small local Acadian community and other Roman Catholics living in Halifax who were willing to make the 6 mile hike out from town in the 1770s. Neither was Bishop Waterman, who officially opened Saint Peter's in 1951, the first Anglican Bishop to have a connection with the area. In 1801, Robert Stanser, the rector at Saint Paul's by the Grand Parade in Halifax, was gifted a 15 acre parcel of land on the south side of Birch Cove. Rev. Stanser and his wife Mary named their estate 'Sherwood' and the name still holds today. The tree lined road up to their grand house began near the intersection of the Bedford Highway and Torrington Drive and it's still there! To be fair to Bishop Waterman, Rev. Stanser didn't become the second Bishop of Nova Scotia until 1816, nine years after he had sold Sherwood. Interestingly Robert Stanser, after becoming bishop, only remained in Nova Scotia one more year whereupon he left for England. He didn't give up his bishopric however until 1825. Between 1817 and 1825 Rev. John Inglis, the son of Charles Inglis, the first Bishop of Nova Scotia became the rector of Saint Paul's and the unofficial

on-site head of the Nova Scotia Diocese while Bishop Stanser stayed in touch from England. In 1825 when Stanser retired, John Inglis succeeded him as Nova Scotia's third bishop.

While Rev. Stanser may have lived in Birch Cove, the distinction of being the first active Anglican priest in Birch Cove may go to Rev. Mather Byles, a Loyalist who fled Boston for Halifax in 1776 at the outbreak of the American Revolution. Rev. Byles was appointed garrison chaplain in Halifax where he remained until leaving for Saint John in 1789. As chaplain, Byles visited British troops camped in Birch Cove during his tenure in Halifax

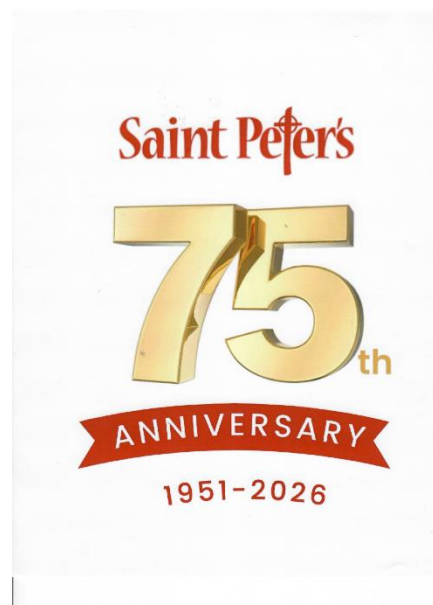
Interestingly while the name Birch Cove may have first been officially used starting in 1762 when local land owner James Monk gave his 400 acre estate the name, the cove before that time was referred to as Blockhouse Cove. Exactly where the blockhouse was erected isn't known but a top candidate for the location had to be the hill beside which Saint Peter's was built. Looking at the front doors to the church there was once a large pine covered hill known as Pine Hill. Several pre- 1957 photos show the remnants of the hill. It was eventually leveled to make room for Daking Hall. The 'fill from the hill' was carried across the Kearney Lake Road to be used to fill one of the tidal marshes still left from the original Birch Cove where, in 1961, the Wedgewood Motel was built. A blockhouse on Pine Hill would have been in a good position to defend Halifax from enemy forces approaching by the Windsor Road (today's Dakin Drive). It would have been in a good position to defend the cove from an attack by sea and it would remind the Acadians living just up what is now the Kearney Lake Road, that the British military was nearby and watching.



Remnants of Pine Hill to right of St. Peter's (photo Ainslee 1957)

Birch Cove was bought by merchant James Donaldson in 1811 but he could not move in until the Lieutenant Governor, Sir John Coape Sherbrooke, moved out. Donaldson was in no position to evict Sir John and his wife. That would have to wait until Sir John moved west to become the Governor General of Upper and Lower Canada. James sadly died before he could move into Birch Cove but his wife and children eventually did move in. They and their descendants would rule Birch Cove for close to a century. Nearly a century and a half after James Donaldson acquired Birch Cove, a descendant, Florence Daking, passed away but not before willing some of her estate to the Anglican Church. In 1948, local Anglicans who were attending Saint John's in Fairview sprung into action. Florence had set the ball in motion the year before by willing her 'picnic grounds' for the purpose of providing land for an Anglican Church. Anglican families such as the Hamshaws, McAuleys, Currens, Duncans and Connors took up the challenge to build an Anglican Church. Three years later Saint Peter's became part of the Birch Cove story, a story that had been unfolding for hundreds of years.

At the conclusion of the Second World War, new families began moving into Birch Cove. Many were looking to build their own church, separate from St. John's Fairview and by 1951 they had succeeded. In so doing they not only began their own unique pilgrimage of which we today are a part, they started a new chapter in the story that is Birch Cove. In the year 2026 Saint Peter's will be seventy-five years old! Today's St. Peter's parishioners are part of that journey, a pilgrimage that began over seven decades ago. As we look forward both from an individual's perspective and as a congregation it's exciting to realize - the pilgrimage continues.



The Pilgrimage Continues

The 75th anniversary of Saint Peter's Birch Cove

January to December 2026

Get ready for new experiences and to revisit those that are tried and true. Prepare to expand your perspectives and look for opportunities to turn challenges into opportunities. A pilgrimage is a journey where one explores and celebrates one's faith, establishes new while strengthening existing relationships. A pilgrimage is an opportunity to set new goals for oneself and for the church to which one belongs and of course a pilgrimage is a time to party. Get ready. The pilgrimage that Saint Peter's first parishioners started in 1951 ramps up next year when Saint Peter's celebrates its 75th anniversary – **The Pilgrimage Continues!**

When I walked into Saint Peter's, I realized I was walking into my Life

An interview with Rev. Dennis Walsh by Glenn Taylor

Rev. Dennis Walsh in his own words retired from 'active ministry' in 2006. However, the more one gets to know Dennis, the more one has to question either the term 'retiring from active ministry' or Dennis' interpretation of it for it's quite obvious Dennis is anything but inactive. Dennis sings in the choir. He and wife Maureen basically took over coffee hour last summer and turned it into lemonade in the parking lot hour. Then there's taking on services, preaching, reading lessons. Neither can we forget how Dennis and Glen Kent stepped up to help Saint Peter's when Rev. Elliott was off on leave a few years back. If Dennis actually believes he has retired from 'active ministry' you may want to question everything else Dennis told me when I sat down to interview him for this article. Full disclosure, I did!



Dennis Walsh as the Innkeeper in Bethlehem

Dennis was born in Saint John New Brunswick and attended Saint John High School where he graduated with honours. He attended the University of Kings College in Halifax where in his third year he was awarded the President's Scholarship for highest average. He was ordained a priest at All Saints Cathedral by Bishop George Arnold in 1969. That was ironic as Bishop George Arnold was priest George Arnold, at Saint Peter's eighteen years earlier when our church held its first service in 1951.

Dennis has served in various capacities at churches in Port Morien, North Sydney, Lockport/Barrington, Emmanuel Dartmouth, Holy Trinity Dartmouth and St. Mary's & St. Eleanor's Summerside but we're just touching the surface here. I haven't alluded to Dennis' other side, well to be more accurate, other sides. You might think of Dennis as a Rubik's cube. He's a man with an incredible array of interests and skills which

he uses to easily twist (like the Rubik's cube) himself into different roles. Unlike the Rubik's cube however , Dennis doesn't keep trying for the predetermined end result (solid colours on all faces of the cube) . No, Dennis takes what life has presented him and sets out to make something special of it. The theme of this interview could be ' the many sides to Dennis Walsh '.

Now about the many sides to Dennis Walsh, who knew Dennis was an expert make-up artist. He's even taught courses in make up for theatre; but let's not stop there. Dennis has spent much of his life on stage as an actor. He's directed plays. He's a puppeteer, in fact that's where Dennis earned his spurs in theatre- in his mother's marionette theatre. Dennis and I spent quite a bit of time talking about touring New Brunswick with his mother's marionette theatre giving performances. Dennis even shared a book his mother had written about her incredibly interesting career with marionettes.

That's when we pivoted to books which exposed yet another side to Dennis. Dennis and Maureen's home is filled with books and I mean filled – not your latest New York best seller editions but older, thicker larger books that would make some coffee table books look like comic books. For example, while interviewing Dennis, he pulled a book off one of his many book shelves. It was 'The Decameron'. Turns out the 'Decameron' is a collection of 100 short stories written by Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio in the 14th century. What's more, Dennis has read it more than once. Full disclosure once again-Not only have I not read the book; I didn't know it existed. I mean how many people read 100 short stories about people trying to evade the Black Plague in Italy in the 1300s? Even more to the point, how many people have read it more than once? Dennis is a voracious reader. Dennis confided that he had grown up in a house full of books. He was reading before he went to school. After a few months in grade seven Dennis' teacher realized he had read all of his textbooks from cover to cover. He was advanced to grade eight half way through the year. That's when Dennis added that the house full of books was a farm house. You see Dennis grew up on a farm . We then pivoted to talking about animals. That didn't last long because we had to talk about Scouting. Dennis started scouting as a cub in 1953 and stuck with the organization all his life. He was awarded the Medal of Merit by Scouts Canada in 1996.

What probably surprised me the most about the many sides to Dennis Walsh (remember the Rubik cube comment) was to learn that Dennis had a twenty-two-year career in jewelry repair. He started working for Birks in 1972 and very quickly saw better opportunities working for well known G and F Roberts Jewelry Repair just down the street in Halifax. How did you get interested in jewelry I asked. Turns out Dennis' grandfather was a jeweller and Dennis spent many hours as a child making jewelry and earrings out of copper wire, amethyst and rhinestones. If there's a reoccurring theme in Dennis' life it's a commitment to making ordinary things special. His lifelong interest in jewelry started when he took ordinary copper wire and polished stones and turned them into something special. Later in life he was fascinated taking damaged jewelry and making it special again. Think about being a make up artist. Dennis took ordinary people and turned them into something special , a prince in 'Hamlet' , a Fairy King in a " Midsummer's Night Dream".

I wanted to talk with Dennis's about his involvement with the 84th Regiment of Foot Royal Highland Emigrants Second Battalion Recreation Society. You see for years Dennis acted the role as a padre assigned to the regiment as well as a civilian agent and an artillery officer. He dressed in period costume,

camped out with the regiment, took part in recreated battles and camps. You may remember for years Dennis wore his hair long in a pony tail (1783 style); that's why.

We still hadn't talked about Saint Peter's. Eventually we did. My first question was ' How did you end up here?' That's when I learned about yet another side to Dennis and Maureen- property management and caretaking. Why not I sighed, you've done most everything else. By this time, it was becoming difficult to keep up with Dennis ; I had to return for a second session (and another cup of tea). I learned that Dennis and Maureen had taken over an apartment on Larry Uteck Blvd and Saint Peter's was the closest Anglican Church. OK, proximity, I got it. My second question , given Dennis' life of constant change, was " Why are you still here?' Dennis' answer took me off guard. He casually said " When I walked into Saint Peter's I realized I was walking into my life.' I saw Dave Pepperdene who I knew in Saint John. I saw Barb Prime Walker who went to High School with me. I met Lorraine Trainor a former parishioner and Len and Joan Vallis who I knew from a former church. I saw the Advent Wreath that had been at Emmanuel before it closed down. There was Jane Clattenburg who attended the same high school I did. There was Glen Kent from the University of King's College. I saw the sister of a warden from the Parish of Summerside where I had been priest. My whole life was there inside Saint Peter's Church!

Then Dennis added Saint Peter's is one of the best churches in the Diocese. We have attitude- the good kind. It's tangible. You can feel it, he added. This church just doesn't think about itself. Newcomers are welcome the moment they enter the building. Dennis was quick to add though that we need more new people with new ideas and younger people too. I thought ' There he goes again -taking something and wanting to make it better. '.

Dennis' life has taken many twists and turns but each time Dennis embraced the opportunities that new situations presented him. He has spent a lifetime making the ordinary special. In William Shakespeare's ' As You Like It.' Jaques a nobleman exclaims " all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances and one man in his time plays many parts." That 's Rev. Dennis Walsh to a tee and to misquote Shakespeare it's ' AS We Like It '!



Brothers Richard and Dennis Walsh Reenacting as Artillery Officers with 84th Regiment of Foot

Parish Barbecue and Sunday School Closing June 8, 2025



Top Left – Water Water- Everywhere/ Top Right- Burgers & Hot Dogs - Everywhere/ Bottom- Smiles - Everywhere