



Installing New Roof (above)

Congregation signed shingles (right)



**Rev. Alton Ruff
inducted March 3, 2024
Alton and his wife Nikki
at their reception (left)**

Induction Service Choir (below)



Dear Friends,



As we gather to mark the 170th anniversary of First Presbyterian Church, Collingwood, my heart is filled with gratitude for the countless ways God's faithfulness has been shown in this place. Through changing times and generations, God has blessed our congregation with steadfast love, guiding us

to be a light in our community.

This book is itself a testimony to that faithfulness. I wish to express my sincere thanks to all who have contributed their research, memories, and reflections on the history of our church. From the stories of the organ and the beauty of our stained glass windows to the many other treasures that enrich our worship, each page reminds us of the dedication of those who came before us—and of those who continue to nurture this community today.

In particular, I want to extend heartfelt thanks to Cindy Lewis, our organist, for her significant contributions to this project. Her gifts of both music and scholarship are a blessing to us all. I am also deeply grateful for the devotion of all our musicians, whose talents bring life and joy to our worship. A special word of thanks goes to our Music Director, Deb Fitzsimmons, for her leadership and creativity in guiding our musical life. Finally, I want to thank our office administrator, Marlene Weatherall, for organizing this project (and myself) and for always being a warm presence to all who would wander into the church office Monday to Friday. As we celebrate 170 years, we do so with deep thankfulness for God's enduring presence among us. We also look to the future with hope and enthusiasm, confident that the same Spirit who has sustained us through generations will continue to lead us forward in faith, service, and love. May this anniversary be not only a remembrance of the past but also a joyful step into the future that God is preparing for us.

With gratitude in Christ,

Rev. Alton J. Ruff; Lead Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Collingwood

Introduction from Cindy

What started simply as a request to write an article on the pipe organ, somehow opened up a plethora of historical gems I felt the need to share with the current congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Collingwood. Although my father was quite the historian, I had no interest in “things of the past” - or so I thought! I currently find myself surrounded by fascinating documents—most hand penned—dating back to the 1800’s. The depth of the information is so great that I have only scratched the surface, and my writing has only just crossed into the early 1900’s, although I have been reading all year. Some documents lead me in a chronological, easy trajectory through the church’s history, while others require me to take off on a tangent to investigate adjunct findings. The Town of Collingwood (museum and library) has been invaluable in researching and verifying many of my findings that required more information, and some remain a mystery (not that I’m giving up my research)! Theressa Hanley has also been a wonderful resource for the cemetery research. Some of my discoveries I find amazing, such as original telegraphs from the Casavant Frères organ manufacturers from St. Hyacinthe, Quebec. As I become more engrossed in the church’s vibrant history, it provides me with a very realistic perspective on our mortal lives. I am constantly reminded of the lyrics of one of my favourite songs by Steve Green, “Find Us Faithful”:

We’re pilgrims on the journey of the narrow road, and those who’ve gone before us line the way—cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary, their lives a stirring testament to God’s sustaining grace.

Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run the race not only for the prize, but as those who have gone



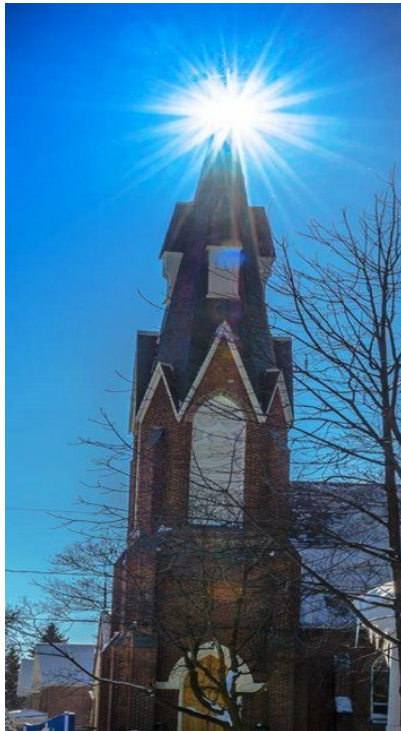
Conclusion:

Although a conclusion to this “Volume 1”, history continues to be made daily. By the grace of God, First Presbyterian Church will continue to be a positive force, locally and globally, for generations to come.

It is my hope that future historians will take the time to pen the stories that inspire and teach us what only history can.

.....until “Volume 2”

Cindy



before us, let us leave to those behind us, the heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives!

After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone, and our children sift through all we've left behind, may the clues that they discover, and the memories they uncover, become the light that leads them to the road we must each find.

Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful. May the fire of our devotion light their way. May the footprints that we leave, lead them to believe, and the lives we live inspire them to obey. Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful.

Although this booklet is simply “Part 1” of the history of First Presbyterian Church, Collingwood, I hope you glean some interesting facts and inspiration from those who so admirably established what we have the honour to continue today. Submitted by Cindy Lewis, Assistant Music Director





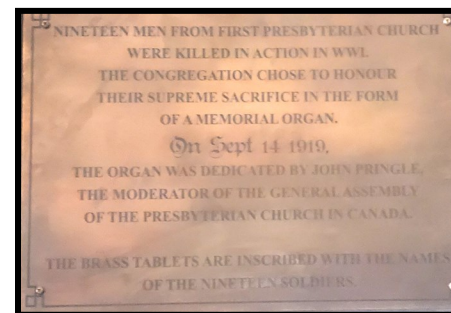
In The Beginning by Cindy Lewis: Mozart has been recorded in history as referring to the pipe organ as “the king of instruments”. No two are the same, and their use has been synonymous with

churches beginning as early as 700 AD. In modern day churches, the use of the pipe organ can be a bone of contention as generations differ in their opinions of its continued use. Regardless of your opinion, the power of the pipe organ cannot be refuted. It is the largest instrument in the world that is played by just one person, and the effects of an organ well played, in my opinion, can be an emotional event. Nothing is more powerful than an Easter fanfare or Christmas carol with full organ rumbling the floor and shaking the rafters!

My name is Cindy Lewis, and I have been the Assistant Music Director at First Presbyterian Church, Collingwood since 2009. Prior to this time, I was music director and organist/pianist at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Thornbury for 14 years. I grew up in Thornbury, obtaining my Grade 10 Conservatory in piano in early high school after which time I filled in as organist in the Thornbury church as needed, and taught piano to many students throughout my high school years. Post-secondary education included a B.Sc. from McMaster followed by my Chiropody designation which I obtained in 1994.



OUR HEROIC DEAD 1914-1918



Mystery Windows: Autographed



Does anyone have any information about these autographed these windows? Some signatures are obvious descendants of war veterans.

Please contact the church office if you can provide any information about these windows and signatures.

The signature "H. Hewson 1935" belongs to David Vuckson's uncle—his mother's younger brother Howard Hewson (of Hewson's Men's Wear). In 1935 he was 18



Although formally trained in piano, I was self-taught with respect to the pipe organ (a steep learning curve!) In researching for this little write-up, I was reminded of the significant differences in the techniques of playing both of these instruments. Although both use a keyboard, they are



extremely unique in the way they are played. Pianos have one keyboard, and a sustain pedal which allows the

musician to play multiple notes without their hands remaining in contact with the keys. This allows arpeggios, etc. to be executed without audible gaps. Pianos also allow the musician to play with "expression", or varying levels of volume or intensity depending on how the fingers hit the keys, which in turn hit the hammers that then hit the strings and elicit the sound.



Playing the pipe organ essentially throws all these conveniences out the window. A note played is a note played unless swell pedals or

different pipes are engaged. Pressing harder makes no difference to the sound. There are no sustain pedals, and therefore to have continuous sound, the musician must keep keys depressed until the next one is played or there is a period of sound void.

The organ also requires tuning, which we typically do prior to big celebrations to ensure its proper functioning and tuning with the piano. Without such care, the "beast", as I affectionately refer to it, will not perform as expected, and, trust me, it's not pleasant to deal with when it acts up!

There are at least two manuals on a pipe organ, the Great (lower) and the Swell (upper), which is what the organ at First consists of. Adding to the complexity of the play of the organ, there is a delay in the sound – when a key is depressed on the keyboard, the sound is not heard immediately, and therefore the rate of play needs to be adjusted accordingly to sound in synch with other instruments.

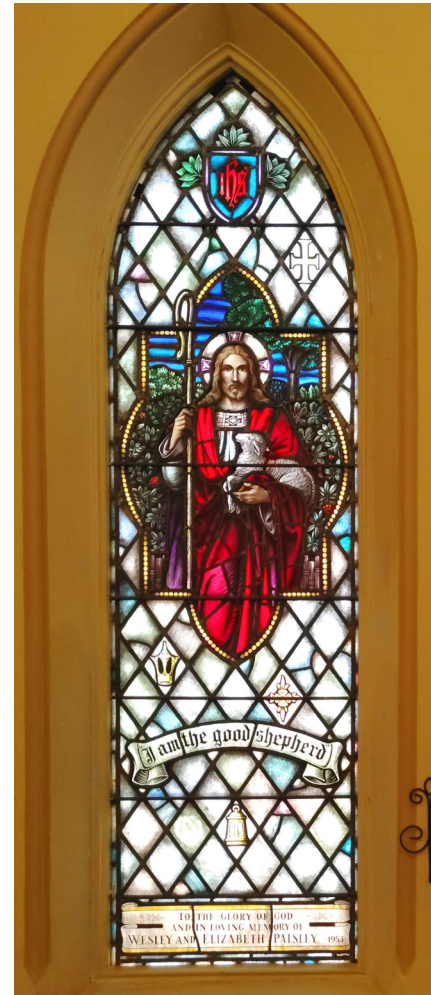


There are also foot pedals which are played in conjunction with both hands adding a depth of sound unparalleled, in my humble opinion, by any other keyboard instrument. One pipe is only capable of one sound. Therefore, multiple pipes are utilized to obtain all the different sound combinations heard by the congregation. The pipes seen at the front of the church are actually only decorative, but directly behind them are the functioning pipes which can be seen if you look closely. There are a network of ladders behind the pipes which allow access to them for tuning and repairs.

For the organ to function properly, it must remain clean (magnets are needed to open and close for the proper functioning of the pipes), and the humidity needs to be controlled in the sanctuary.

Our organ was dedicated on September 14, 1919 to honour the nineteen men from First Presbyterian Church who paid the ultimate sacrifice in WW1. I can only imagine the pride their families felt that day after enduring such devastating losses. 106 years later, the soldiers' names are still displayed on the back wall of the sanctuary, and the organ remains an important part of the music ministry which has become synonymous with First Presbyterian Church, Collingwood. I have become aware in attempting to research our organ's

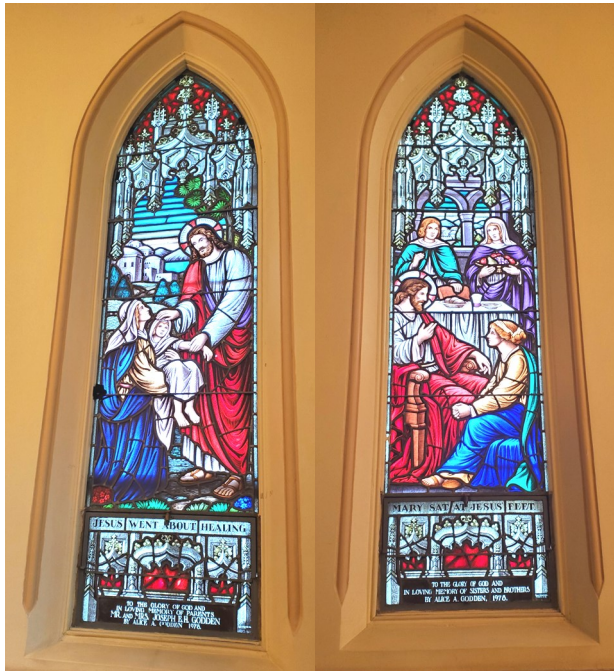
Paisley Window:



On Sunday June 21, 1953, a stained glass window on the north side of the sanctuary was unveiled. It was a gift from and in memory of Wesley and Elizabeth Paisley. The scripture read, "I am the Good Shepherd". Mr. Paisley was a dedicated member of the church, holding the position of the Chairman of the Board of Managers as well as a member of the Church Session. He was also a very active member of the community. He was a well respected motor mechanic during his years in Collingwood. In his obituary it was noted he was a supporter of the Progressive Conservative Party. The Paisleys were a well liked couple. They did not have any children. When his wife Elizabeth passed away she

willed their home to the church. It was to be used exclusively as a manse. The house was on Minnesota Street. There was a condition in the will that the home was not to be sold. However, a little known Canadian Law, "The Mortmain & Charitable Users Act" decrees that property of this nature must be sold within two years from the date the title was passed to the church. The proceeds of the sale of the property were used for the upkeep and maintenance of the existing manse at the time. The window depicts Jesus with a lamp and a staff.

The Godden Windows:



Alice Godden was the daughter of Joseph and Frances Winsley Godden. Alice was never married. She had seven siblings. Alice loved children. Alice was a dedicated member of First Church

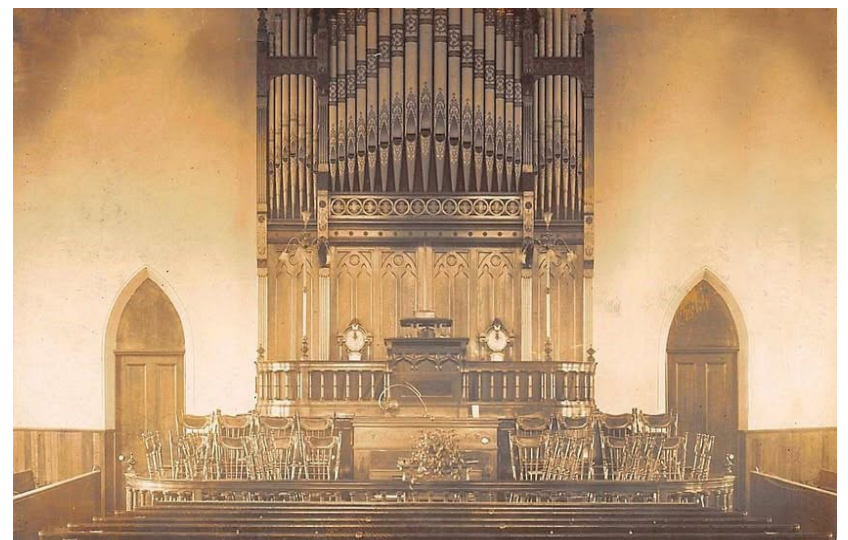
and was a faithful member of the Bessie MacMurchy Group of the WMS. The Godden Windows are a beautiful tribute to Alice Godden's family. The windows were unveiled in 1973. Alice Godden was a pediatric nurse and that is why she chose "God went about healing." The inscription reads, "To the Glory of God and in loving memory of parents Mr. and Mrs. Joseph E.H. Godden by Alice A. Godden 1973."

The second window that Alice Godden had created was "Mary sat at Jesus' Feet". Alice loved the colour red so she was drawn to this window. The inscription of the window reads "To the Glory of God and in loving memory of sisters and brothers of Alice A. Godden, 1978." Daisy died in 1976 and Alice died in 1979.

history that much is still a mystery. I am intrigued to find out more, and will search through the archives to find any missing pieces I can. If there is interest, I would be happy to share this with the congregation at that point. Regardless, I am humbled to be a small part in the history of such a ministry.

David Vuckson records some of the history of the organ from 1919 and its predecessor from 1895. In fact, the organ case/facade was retained from the 1895 organ and simply enlarged at the south and north ends (the rounded corners) to accommodate the larger instrument of 1919 which was not totally new but, rather, a rebuild of the previous instrument. Somewhere in my computer I have a photo of the facade as installed by R. S. Williams in 1895--I'll try to find it and I did find it! This clearly shows that the organ case of 1895 is still there, just with augmented corners that extend the case right out to the door frames. The stenciling on the pipes was a feature of the Victoria era; in 1919 Casavant would have painted these pipes gold overtop of the stenciling--a common way to "modernize" the look of a 19th Century organ in the 20th Century

(David Vuckson is a previous member with a long history of family members involved at First Presbyterian Church.)



**Deb Fitzsimmons, Music Director, August 2022—
Present**

"If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." - Sir. Isaac Newton



Anniversaries and birthdays (which are a type of anniversary, when you think about it) are great! They are wonderful opportunities to look back at what has brought us to this point. We celebrate the good things...and maybe reflect on the trials and tribulations. We also get to look

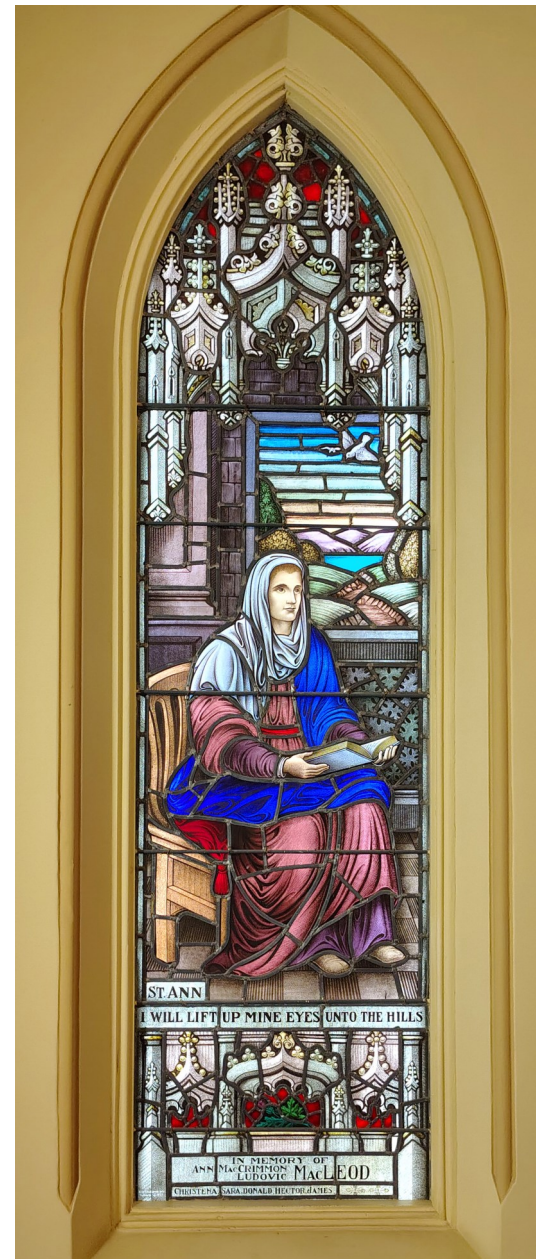
into the future with hope and excitement for all of the unknown adventures that await us.

170 years is certainly a lot of time to reflect on, and my predecessors have done just that. Our church has been blessed to have passionate, knowledgeable, and dedicated music leaders...and when I say, "dedicated," I mean to an obsessive level (in the best possible way). When your church is regarded as "the music church" by the community, it doesn't happen by having music leaders who take a casual, laissez-faire approach.

It's starting the planning of the next First Christmas Story while still presenting this year's First Christmas Story.

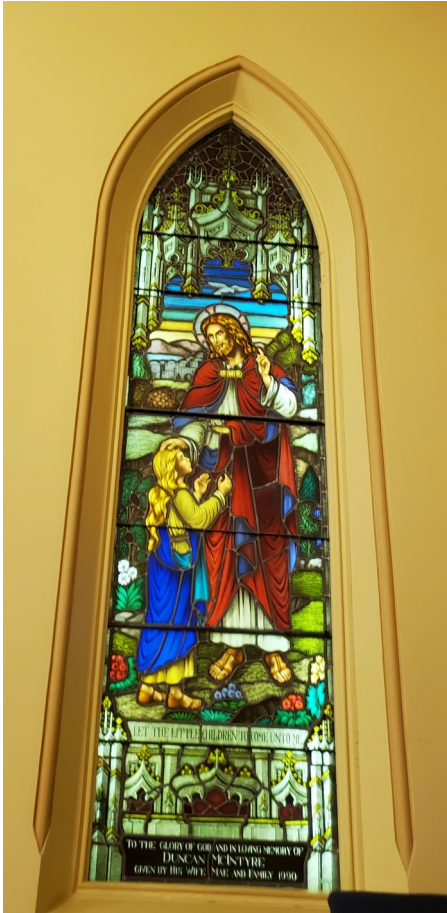
It's scouring the hymn book and contemporary song inventory for just the right songs to match the theme (and being willing to ask AI to write one when needed). Surprise! When songs match the theme, it isn't a happy coincidence!

St. Ann:



This window was presented by Jeanette MacLeod. The window greatly enhanced the south transept of the church. The congregation was very grateful for the generous gift. This inscription reads "In memory of her family, Ann MacCrimmon and Ludovic MacCrimmon MacLeod, Christena, Sara, Donald, Hector and James."

McIntyre Window:



Mae McDermid, daughter of John McDermid and Jane McDermid, married Duncan McIntyre.

Mae and her sister-in-law, Ina Wright, decided to dedicate a window in memory of Duncan McIntyre. Duncan was very active in the church. He was an elder from 1943 to 1980. He was on the Board of Managers as well as being the Church Treasurer for 21 years. Duncan attended business school and then worked for the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. He enlisted in WWII and was seriously injured. He lost his leg and returned home to Collingwood. Upon his

recuperation he became the Secretary to the Minister of Parliament. Later he worked in the post office and in the customs office in the Federal Building. Mae McIntyre was a school teacher. She is remembered for her warmth and friendliness to church members. The window was presented on December 16, 1990 by Mae McIntyre and their daughters, Ruth McIntyre Gammel and Marion McIntyre Thomson. Mae McIntyre McDermid passed away in 1994. This window depicts Jesus and the little children. "Let the Little Children Come Unto Me".

It's knowing that when you tell your family that you just need to pop to the church after dinner to do two small things, you will inevitably be racing to get out of the church by 11:00 p.m. when the alarm turns on - a high-pressure situation not dissimilar to a hero in a Hollywood movie who is racing to diffuse a bomb.

But make no mistake - none of us would have had it any other way. It is a profound privilege to stand in front of our choirs and sing with our band. It is worth every night of sleep interrupted by adding things to the "To-Do" lists and creating voice memos on my phone - some of which even make sense when I play them back in the morning. It is a ministry that I believe in so strongly, I can't think of what I wouldn't sacrifice to give my time to it. I am humbled by the faith our singers, musicians, and congregation have in me, and all of the ways they have offered support and encouragement since I took hold of the reins in August 2022.

So, where are we going? Instinctively I'd say, "Anywhere we want to go." I don't think there are many musical places we can't go to. There are thousands of songs to sing to the glory of God...and I am excited to sing them with you.

Happy Anniversary, First Pres!

Deb

Musical Memories

Submitted by Kimberley Raeburn-Gibson, (aka, 'Kimductor') Director of Music Ministries, 2009 – 2022

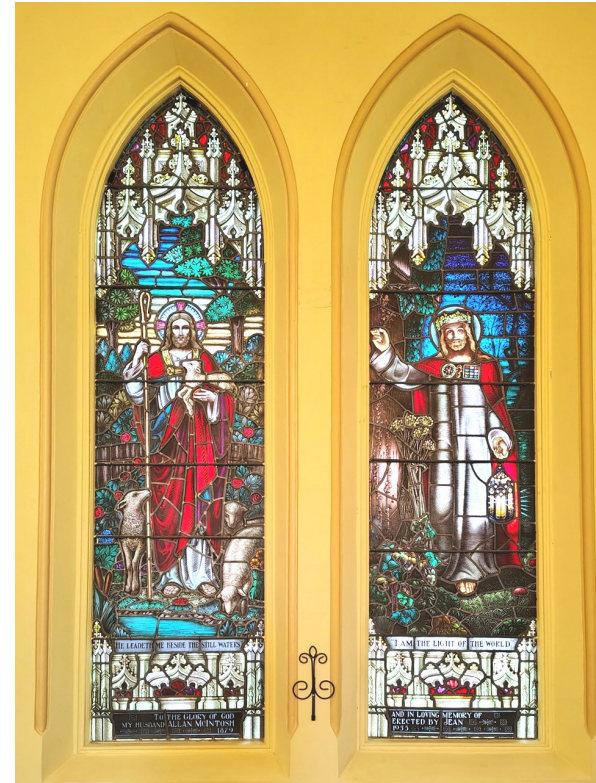


When I think back on my time at First Presbyterian, I am flooded with memories. Singing in the church as a teenager; getting married to 'Rev. Tim' with so many of our dear congregation members in attendance; watching our children grow up and join the church; our youngest daughter Haven's baptism and later the congregation's support through her illness; and of course funerals and life celebrations of so many family and friends.

But perhaps the most outstanding memory (and I've shared this before) is of my first steps into the sanctuary of First Presbyterian. I was thirteen years old (it would have been 1982); I entered the building on a Sunday morning with my grandmother, mom and brothers, and heard music coming from the organ, piano and choir. I had one thought: *this* is what heaven must be like. It was such a beautiful place to be—such a beautiful place to belong! I knew I was home. I didn't know it then, but 20 years later my life would become dedicated to welcoming other people to this holy place!

Fast forward to the summer of 2009. I was director of music for the Vacation Bible Camp for the very first time; and in my bones I knew it was time for a change--time to move the children from the cramped, hot and difficult-to-worship-in lower hall, and up, Up, UP to the Sanctuary. I wanted every child that attended VBC to experience the beauty of the Sanctuary, and to know that they belonged in this wonderful, sacred place! In addition to 'movin' on up', I also began including kids in the VBC music leadership—I believed that if the children in the camp saw other children leading, they would know that this was a place where kids are valued; and that this was a place that they could belong too! It was easy to believe that

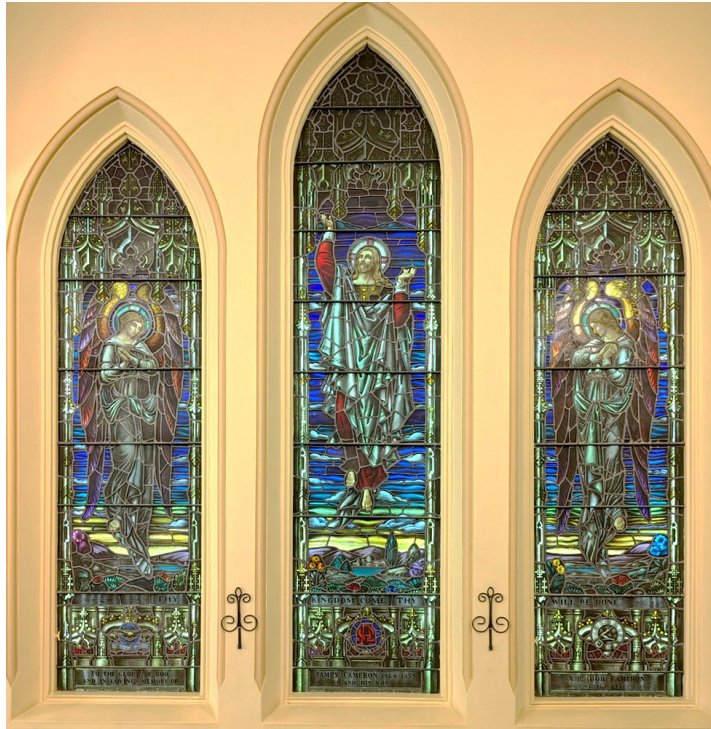
McIntosh Windows:



In loving memory of my husband Allan McIntosh by his wife Jean McIntosh. Allan McIntosh passed away suddenly on July 27, 1955. Mr. McIntosh had a long and useful career in politics. He was formerly a Councillor, Reeve, Deputy-Reeve and from 1939 to 1942 he was the Mayor. He also held a

position on the Board of Education and the Public Utilities Commission. He served as an Elder at First Presbyterian for 30 years as well as various Boards within the church. He gave generously of his time and means to the church. He was highly respected as a businessman in Collingwood. Some of you may remember his shoe store on the main street. It was the present location of Becker's Shoes. The name of the store was changed when Allan sold it. After his death his sons continued on with the shoe store. Mrs. Jean McIntosh dedicated this window in 1957. "He Leadeth Me Beside Still Waters". Jesus with a staff and a lamb by a stream. "I am the light of the world" Notice the brightness of the light.

Cameron Windows:



A.R. “Bob” Cameron was killed in a flying accident in World War II. He is also listed on the war memorial windows. Bob was the only child of Mr. & Mrs. James Cameron of Collingwood. They received the devastating news in a brief telegram from England. Bob was 25 years old. He attended school in Collingwood. Bob was employed by the Imperial Bank in Toronto. He enlisted in the R.C.A.F. and was in training in Southwestern Ontario until he was transferred to England. He was a very active member of First Presbyterian Church. Bob was a strong athlete and had a large circle of friends. James Cameron died in 1953. On June 23, 1955, Mrs. James Cameron dedicated these three windows to her son and husband. You will note the inscription of the Lord’s Prayer and the R.C.A.F. logo in the window.

Kimberley Raeburn-Gibson...cont’d

they were a child of God, and that *they* had a place here when The VBC Bandies proclaimed it from the front of the church!

I was green to the job of Director of Music Ministries in the fall of 2009. Of course I had been playing organ and accompanying the choir since 2002, but being in charge of the musical vision was a dream come true! The sanctuary had been revamped in 2008 and that allowed for so many possibilities not just for worship, but for the life of the church. In the years that followed, Sundays were always busy: we had a ‘contemporary’ service at 9am, and a ‘blended’ worship at 10:30am. Music ranged from classical to gospel to pop music that bore the message of the spirit; from chorales to rap/spoken word. I can’t count how many hours were spent transitioning from one set up to another (not to mention back bent out of place) but it was worth it to keep our worship meaningful and pertinent to members and adherents of First Pres. For the music to tell everyone: *You* Belong.



In addition to Sunday worship, the tradition of Christmas presentations continued on—each year was a fresh take on ‘The Story’. In 2011 it seemed like it was time to add on the continuation of the Christmas Story: and *The Easter Story* was born. It took on many formats and had many wonderful dramatic directors including Gren Bray, Barb Sharp, Cynthia Odorizzi-Barlow and Patti Mills; and of course always the choir, along with amazing soloists (like the Christmas Stories before it). It seemed like the entire population of Collingwood came to hear our wonderful tales of Christmas and Easter!

Kimberley Raeburn-Gibson...cont'd

First Pres was also a place for fun! I was determined to prove that we weren't the stuffy congregants of centuries past! No, No! We could be fun too: and *A Little Night Music* was born. Comedy. Music Theatre. Tap dancers. You name it, we did it! This was a night of anything BUT sacred music. A night that you really could invite your dubious neighbours or your doubting cousin to.... And then they just might discover that church was a place that they could be comfortable; and they just might think about coming on a Sunday morning. A Place to belong.

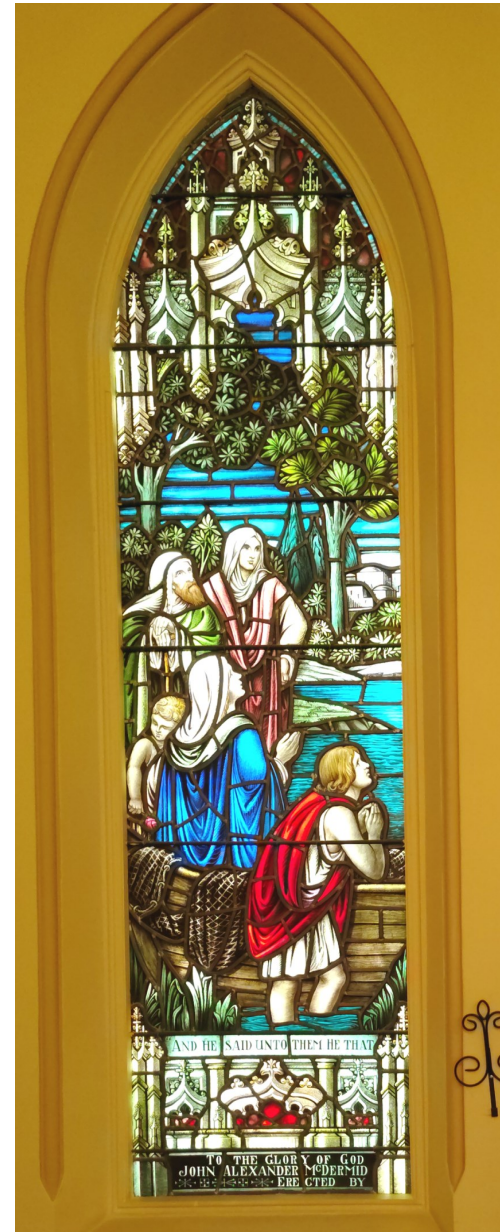


From the beginning of my time as Director of Music Ministries, I had been working (along with several dramatic directors) to establish a kid's musical theatre group at the church. In 2016 this idea finally took root, and Burning Bush Theatre was born. Our first musical was called 'Borders to Bridges'. By the end of my time at First Pres, BBT had presented ten complete musicals (plus almost as many musical scene selections in *A Little Night Music*). It gives me so much joy to see that this wonderful group continues on. It was always such a blessing to see a shy group of kids come together and present a musical that taught them AND the congregation stories from the bible in a way that made them relatable and memorable. And more importantly, taught *them* that First Presbyterian Collingwood was a place where they could BE, believe and belong.

Belonging is obviously a theme of my meanderings here. Music was my medium for bringing people together and helping them feel a part of God's family. It was truly my honour to have had a small hand in this. It's been three years now since we left First Pres; but like family, it doesn't matter how long we are gone that feeling of belonging remains. 'We are Family'

krq

McDermid Window:



John A. McDermid was an outstanding farmer and citizen. He took an active part in the community and helped to improve rural life. He was the eldest son of Peter and Ruth McDermid of Duntroon.

⁽¹⁾ "McDermid was a staunch Presbyterian and good conservative and member of the Manitou Lodge". John McDermid married Jane Bannister. The window depicts Jesus teaching to a group of people. "And He said unto them, he that hath ears to hear me, let him hear". The inscription reads: "To the Glory of God and in Loving memory of John Alexander McDermid and his wife Jane Bannister by their family—1962"

⁽¹⁾ *Obituary Collingwood Enterprise August 7, 1924.*

Bannister Window:



The Bannisters were pioneers of the community. They lived at the house on the corner of the Poplar sideroad and Highway 124. It was a Bed and Breakfast.

Mr. Bannister was in WW1. Upon his return from the war he settled in Collingwood. He and his wife had nine children. Some of the children remained in Collingwood and some of them went west. His daughter, Christina was the youngest. She is the one that donated the window. Christina worked at Smart's Farm as a secretary. Christina was very involved with the church. The dedication reads: "In the Glory of God and in loving memory of the Bannister family 1962." Jesus is holding an

infant. "He Took Them Up In His Arms".

Catherine Brown, Music Director, 1987—2009



The Moveable Organ—Did you know that the organ used to be situated in the middle of the stage area with permanent choir pews all around it?

To prepare for the annual Singing Christmas Tree presentations from 1981 to 2005, the organ was moved to the south side of the Sanctuary, in order for the Tree to be constructed. This move was a challenging task for quite a few strong men.

When the Tree presentations stopped in 2005, as Choir Director, I pondered the need to have the organ put back, front and centre. Our organist and accompanist at the time, was Marion Willis. She was using the piano more frequently to accompany the anthems and was moving back and forth quite often in full view of everyone.



I made a up a list of reasons why I thought the organ should be moved to its present location on a permanent basis and distributed these to the congregation to help Session decide on my request. No one questioned the reasons and the rest is history.

Now, our organist, Cindy Lewis, is almost hidden from view. No worries. She's there. Feel free to go over and talk to her after the service to be sure.

Marion Willis—Organist 1987—2005



My husband and our two children Calvin and Michelle moved to Collingwood from St. Thomas in 1960 when Bev was hired to join the History Department at CCI. We became members of First Presbyterian Church at that time. I became full time organist at First Pres in 1987 retiring in

2005. Sharon Haggarty had been organist and choir leader and I did fill in for her on occasion when the Singing Christmas Tree was in its infancy year. In 1981 I was asked to do the organ accompaniment on an electric organ which was placed on the floor in the sanctuary in front of the pews on the north side while Sharon directed the choir directly in front of her, a bit of a challenge for the organist but we made it work. When Sharon resigned Catherine Brown capably became Director of Music and I became organist and accompanist. For me, the Singing Christmas Tree became a highlight of the Christian Year. Many, many practices but oh the thrill of ending each performance with Harvey Underdown singing “For God So Loved the World”, then the full choir, guest instrumentalists, full organ and piano ending with Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus”. This tradition ended with the final presentation in 2005 (150th Church Anniversary).

During my years as organist at First Pres, I had the privilege of accompanying many fine instrumentalists and soloists, one who is special of course, my daughter Heather, on the organ and piano and also the opportunity of playing for other churches in the community. Think I have covered them all but always comforting to get back to First Pres.

Jesus Calms The Storm: This window was dedicated to the mariners who have lost their lives on the waters of Georgian Bay. Many lives have been lost over the years as a result of fierce storms on the lakes. In the month of November 1913 there was a devastating storm on the Great Lakes. Collingwood was particularly hard hit as we lost 30 mariners, nine of these were from this congregation. Rev. Urquhart was the minister at this time. He was a very sensitive man. He had to perform three funerals per day. Rev. Urquhart gave himself fully to the afflicted. Shortly after the storm of 1913, World War I broke out. All of this year caused him to have health issues of his own. He retired shortly thereafter and died in September of 1916. He is buried at the First Presbyterian



Church Cemetery in Collingwood. “To The Glory of God and in loving memory of the marines of this community.”

Chapter Nine: Stained Glass Windows

Congregational Windows: In December 1956 the congregation had three stained glass windows installed. These windows were dedicated by former Rev. J.R.E. Grieg. There is an entry in the financial statement noting the windows cost \$2,927.05



Moses: Moses is depicted holding the tablet with the Ten Commandments. The inscription on this window reads: "To the Glory of God and in grateful memory of the pioneers of this community."

How I loved accompanying our own choir. Most of those years the organ was situated in the choir loft in the front row, so needless to say, there was some winking, blinking and smiles going back and forth. A couple of memories...Don Doner on the trumpet and I doing a prelude, he was standing in the choir loft beside me, when for whatever reason the overhead fan came on and sheets of music went flying off the organ...but as the saying goes.. "the show must go on". A second one occurred, when the organ was being tuned. I always was there when that happened and this particular time a big renovation was taking place; doors, windows were open, the pedal board on the organ was removed and a big gap where the swell and great pedals are situated was visible. I was asked to push the Swell Pedal wide open when out jumped a cat through the opening wasting no time finding the open door of the church, obviously it had hidden back in the organ chest and the blast of music wasn't to its liking. The organist to say the least was equally rattled. Many wonderful memories, many joyous, humorous and some sad. We have had two of our four children married at First Pres; son Calvin and daughter Michelle. Our daughter-in-law tells me she was of the 7th generation in her family to be married at 7pm on a Friday night at First Pres Church. We lost an infant baby daughter in 1966 which took many years of healing. Our family was complete when Mary-Anne arrived in 1968 and Heather Elizabeth in 1969. I worked with many fine ministers and each one always gave me such inspiration. I love the classics and Catherine gave me that freedom with preludes and postludes.

My thoughts and blessings to all as this 170th Anniversary of First Presbyterian Church is celebrated.

Marion Willis

Researched and written by Cindy Lewis
History—Where It All Began—Chapter One

The *Huron Institute Paper and Records, Vol 1*, written in 1907 by Eva Mitchell recorded the first church service of First Presbyterian Church (FPC) occurred in the summer of 1855 in a partially completed building on the east side of Hurontario Street with makeshift pews of planks across boxes. It later became Long Brothers Store which was destroyed by fire in 1881.

The next recorded service was in February of 1856 in a “schoolhouse at the foot of Pine Street” where several baptisms took place.



By later 1856, plans were made to build a church in Collingwood, and a forested and swampy location was chosen on the corner of Ontario and Elgin Streets. The 20'x30' building was very costly for that day, but two women from the congregation went

through the rugged landscape, collecting from door to door until the debt was paid. Shortly after this, a bush fire swept through and the church was destroyed.

Resilient and persistent, another structure was built, slightly larger, 26'x36' having one aisle, three windows down each side and two at the end with the pulpit (packing case was covered by oak paper) in the centre. It was heated with a large box stove. This was built by parishioners who volunteered time after a long days work to hand hew lumber for the build.

To the glory of God and in memory of those who gave their lives in the Second World War, 1939-1945. Their lives liveth forever.

Robert Cameron
Colin Gordon
Neil Hurst
Donald Barnie

Kenneth Lester
Charles MacNichol
Thomas L. Wright
David Boynton

June 23, 1955, Mrs. James Cameron dedicated these three windows to her son and husband. You will note the inscription of the Lord's Prayer and the R.C.A.F. logo in the window



Pioneers and Successive Members: This window was dedicated to those members that worked so hard, both physically and spiritually to create the First Presbyterian Church. Times were not easy and there was much to be done. Through their dedication and vision we now find ourselves celebrating our 170th anniversary. There were many projects to be completed then and much more has been accomplished since it all began. We should be very proud of our past and present.

Chapter Nine: Stained Glass Windows Marlene Weatherall



Memorial Windows— World War II—1947;

donated by the church congregation. These two windows were presented by the congregation in memory of the boys who lost their lives in WWII. Mrs. A.E. Hurst, mother of Neil Hurst, unveiled the windows in 1947 with the assistance of John Richards. We know that Colin Gordon died

of natural causes while serving as a wireless air gunner and he is buried in Cumberland, England. Neil Hurst was killed in action and is buried in Belgium. Thomas Wright was a pilot and his plane was caught in a severe electrical storm and he crashed into the sea off of Spain. He is buried in Scotland. Donald Barnie was killed when the Aircraft that he was in, crashed. He is buried in Scotland. David Boynton was killed on D-Day, while serving the Queen's Own Rifles. Kenneth Lester was killed in an auto accident upon his return from duty. He was still a member of the Canadian Army. Charles MacNicol was killed while serving with the Lake Superior Regiment in Germany. He is buried in Holland. Bob Cameron was a pilot. He was killed in the line of duty. His mother donated a window in the south transept in memory of her son Bob and her husband James.

These services were random, and were led by students of Knox College.

In 1862 Rev. Robert Rogers became First Presbyterian Church's first minister and had a double charge—Nottawa and Collingwood..

Still no instruments. No organ or piano. Psalms were sung and led by a Preceptor or a Precentor (referred to as both in literature). This individual would solemnly stand and strike a tuning fork to establish the pitch, and lead the congregation in a capella singing of the Psalms. One of the earliest "hymnals" used was entitled "Songs of David".

First Preceptors were Mr. Fyle, Mr. Andrew Telfer, and Mr. Wm. Melville.

In 1875 the Collingwood congregation became self-supporting, supplementing necessary funds by having regular "socials" which were extremely successful.

Chapter Two: The Rebuild

As the history continues, the church is still located at Ontario and Elgin Streets, but the congregation is starting to build. To the rebuilt church (due to the fire), they now needed to add more space to accommodate people. They added 20' to the existing building which made it reach Market Street to the south.

In a very short time, it was necessary to expand again, so a wing was added to one side which housed the newly formed choir—the first choir this congregation had! This choir purchased the very first organ, which was located in this wing.

Since the church had a dedicated minister, and the congregation growth seemed promising, the church decided in 1876 to purchase an empty lot on the corner of Maple and Third Streets and there, built a manse to house their minister.

By 1878, the church's congregation had grown to a point that the old building (corner of Elgin and Ontario Streets) was completely inadequate. With nowhere else to expand over on the east side of town, the congregation, under the direction of the Board of Managers, decided to purchase the lot directly south of the lot where the manse was situated. Subsequently, the manse building was moved south on Maple Street to the newly purchased lot, thus freeing up the corner for the new church building. The original structure (much simpler than today's church building) was completed in 1879.

At the time of the writing of the *"Papers and Records—Huron Institute"*, 1907, they indicated that the original church building on the corner of Elgin and Ontario Streets was transformed into a residence, and at the time of the publishing, the building was still in existence, continuing to provide for the community!

An opening service dedicating the new church was conducted by a Dr. Grieg of Toronto, preaching to what was apparently a crowded congregation. A new organ had been installed in the new church, and the choir sang at this inaugural service.

The first actual hymnal was introduced to the congregation in 1880, and was met with "grave apprehension". This was a big leap—from a lonely preceptor in a simple church to a new church AND choir AND organ AND now a hymnal! Interestingly, the first couple to be wed in the new church were Mr. James McDonald and Miss Jane Grier.

The momentum of the church growth wasn't just in the adult demographic. The "Sabbath School" was flourishing under the direction of several, all male, superintendents. By 1885 it was decided that they required an addition to house all the children who attended. A Sabbath school and Lecture

Chapter Nine: Stained Glass Windows

South Wall

- Memorial Windows—WWI—1947; donated by the church congregation

South Transept

- McLeod—1973—donated by Jeanette McLeod
- Cameron—1955—donated by Mrs. James Cameron
- McIntyre 1990—donated by Mae McIntyre and family

Back Wall

- McDermid—1962—donated by their family

North Wall

- Bannister—1962—donated by Christina Bannister
- Paisley—1953—donated and in memory of Wesley and Elizabeth Paisley

North Transept

- Godden—1978—donated by Alice Godden
- 3 Congregational Windows—1956—donated by the church congregation
- Godden—1978—donated by Alice Godden

Back Wall

- McIntosh—1957 donated by Mrs. Jean McIntosh

- The town relied heavily on shipbuilding and grain shipping, but demand plummeted. Reduced orders affected employment, and mirrored the broader collapse in demand for manufactured goods and exports that hit Canada. Social assistance programs were introduced to try to help.



- The old “Beild House” (Beild is an old English word meaning “shelter”) on the corner of Third and Pine Streets housed a doctor’s office in the north end of the house which during the Depression became known as a “place where transients could find a meal and fresh clothes”. (Collingwood West Heritage Walks)
- 1942—Memorial Organ paid off

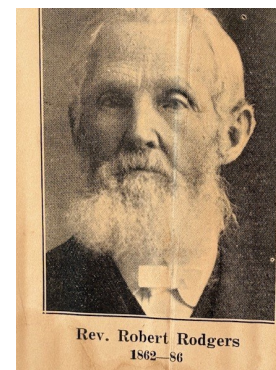


- In 1951—church basement was (LITERALLY) dug out by volunteers to create our large reception area!
- 1980—building of the Douglas A. Wilson Christian Education Centre (the west end of the church addition)
- 1996—the first two women ordained to session
- 2005—first time children were offered communion

Hall were added to the back of the original church on Maple Street; one of many to come! Interestingly, when up above the current ceiling in what we today call “First Presbyterian”, you can still see the original structure of the roof of the original church from 1879. Subsequent alterations and additions have enveloped the original structure.

Chapter Three—A Darker Time

The church history continues in its new location in 1879



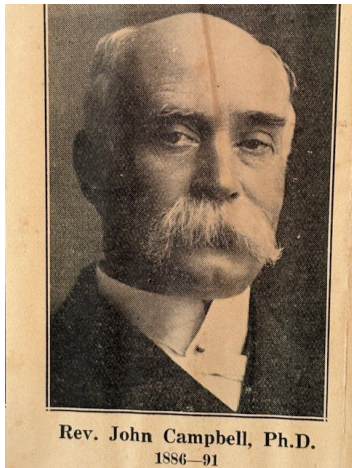
(present day site of Third and Maple), fueled initially by rapid growth and enthusiasm, and the devotion and leadership of Rev. Rodgers. He apparently was very evangelical in his preaching and took many responsibilities on himself (such as teaching Sabbath Sunday School Sunday afternoons, was a “classical master” at the High School, was Convenor of the Home Mission

Committee, etc.), and only formed a Session in 1872 to share some of the load and decision making.

By 1886, weighed down by the overwhelming debt load and discouraged members leaving the church, Rev. Rodgers resigned and dark and uncertain months ensued. He had been minister of this congregation for 24 years and had grown the numbers from 12 to 600 and during the time of his farewell speech, 210 members were in good standing.

Later the same year Rev. John Campbell, Ph.D. of Harriston (originally from the Nottawasaga area, and therefore known to many congregants) was inducted. The challenges he faced arriving at First Presbyterian Church were formidable and creative ways to unify the congregation and climb out of the huge debt load were priority.

The debt load was reduced in a variety of ways, the most successful of which were assigning a levy to each family, and increasing membership by adding members of the Auld Kirk (early beginnings by John Knox of Scotland—the Kirk ((church) of Scotland), who were previously worshipping in a building where the present day Salvation Army sits.



Under the leadership of Dr. Campbell, a “new order” was established starting in 1886. Some of the changes implemented included the beginning of the “communion roll”, Envelopes were introduced for tithing, and seating was numbered and assigned to families.

Under the “new order” a Home Missionary Society and a Young People’s Society of Christian

Endeavour were established. 1888 is the first mention of setting up a relief committee to assist those “in want”, especially in the winter months.

More individuals were assigned to different areas of the church which allowed much more diversity and growth. 1889 saw the first two women involved in leadership roles, and this was in the formation and direction of a Young Women’s Mission Band. A librarian and secretary-treasurer were also new roles in the church (positions held by men).

In 1890 Dr. Campbell was given a three-month leave, supplying at another “First Church” located in Victoria, B.C. During this three month absence, the church was fully renovated at the expense of the ladies of the congregation.

Dr. Campbell was ultimately called to Victoria, B.C. in

“green” or “natural” burials—buried in a biodegradable casket in a meadow or field-like area. Graves would be marked with a rock or plant (no name), but burial location would be recorded, which is law.



Chapter Eight: Interesting Facts

- 1855: Inception of Congregation
- 1856: First building erected at Ontario & Elgin Streets. 20ft x 30ft destroyed by fire. Second building erected 26 ft x 36 ft. Pulpit served by theological students.
- Session minutes from November 6, 1929 reference a boy’s club called the “Burning Bush Club” (we’re not so unique after all...or perhaps someone was aware of this and that’s why we used it again?)
- Session minutes from March 11, 1931 suggested that members bring their own hymn books from home to leave the ones at the church for visitors as there were not enough to go around. How many of us own or use a hymnal today?
- September 30, 1932 states that 295 members took communion.
- September 29, 1933 session informs the congregation of the critical situation” of the finances of the church, and session wished to “not be held responsible for any increased deficit”. (Page 116 of Session minutes, 1933). The Great Depression was impacting the local area in very tangible ways.

September of 2024 marked the 150th Anniversary of this cemetery, and a lovely service commemorating this milestone took place September 29, 2024 with trustees, caretakers and various government representatives present. Interestingly, an annual service at the cemetery occurred on or around May 24th, up until the session minutes of May 17, 1933 state that session decided to discontinue these services due to it being “too early in the season, and poor attendance”.



In the early 1900's, many deaths occurred from pneumonia. In 1918 between October and November there were 18 deaths recorded of people under the age of 36 from pneumonia alone in the Presbyterian Cemetery. (Historic Records: First Presbyterian Church Cemetery).

In the 1930's the red chapel building was built. The casket burial trend has been far surpassed by cremation in recent years. In 2021, 74.8 % of deaths in Canada resulted in cremation. This has resulted in our cemetery installing new columbaria every two years—each columbarium space has room for two urns.

Interestingly, the origin of the word columbarium is Latin from “columba” meaning “dove” - referring to a structure built to house two doves. Now we use this word to reference storage of two sets of human remains.

Future burial trends in the planning stages at this Presbyterian Cemetery include: mass pet grave sites;

1891, thereby, once again, leaving Collingwood vacant!

****Note**** - there are conflicting dates with respect to this leave and vacancy as the *Huron Institute: Papers and Records* states this occurred 10 years later. Further investigation supports the 1890-1891 years as accurate.

An interesting tidbit I came across identified an establishment started in 1896 called the “northwest end Sunday School”. This was run by a “student”, Mr. McGillvary, who also conducted a Sunday evening service at this site. A lady by the name of Mrs. Henry Robertson became active in this school, and this later became the “West Collingwood Church” with a building being erected at the corner of Elm and Second streets. This included an organ dedicated to her by her husband and two daughters. I am still researching the history of this, and am coming up empty handed so far. Research I've found calls the current day “Heritage Church” the “West Collingwood Church”, but the locations don't line up. Research continues.

Chapter Four—Building of the Memorial Organ

Earliest record was from January 20, 1919, in which the “Casavant Freres” from St. Hyacinthe, Quebec corresponded with First Presbyterian Church, Collingwood regarding an inquiry on pricing for a new organ.

Three options were given and the least expensive option was pursued. Prices quoted were \$8,290, \$7,496 and \$6,000. The price difference appears to be related to the space allotments and ours was more restricted.

Much back and forth correspondence occurred over the next two months in which time certain factors were nailed down. In order to allow for the organ console to be placed where it needed to be for choir sight lines, etc., it had to have an

electric component. If it were only pneumatic, the console's position would be limited and not able to be relocated.

The value of usable parts from the original organ (from 1879) was evaluated by Casavant to be \$518, and the decision was made to incorporate it into the new instrument. Therefore the organ had to be shipped to St. Hyacinthe in June of 1919.

The organist at the time, Mr. Howell, painstakingly selected and requested what he thought would create the "ideal" pipe organ for First Presbyterian. According to the correspondence, many of his requests were "technically impossible", but several were incorporated.



Mr. Howell requested chimes be added (20 notes at a cost of \$375) and insisted on rounded corners to the organ case and side display pipes which added \$105 to the total. Cindy Lewis, our current organist/author, believes this is invaluable from an aesthetic standpoint.

There is reference to a collection of sketches, including telegrams from the "Great North Western Telegram" Company. Also included is a copy of the actual legal document/contract between Casavant Freres and First Presbyterian Church, dated April 19, 1919! It lays out and identifies all pipes and stops to be included in the new build. It specifies that the console is detached, and that the "display pipes" were to be bronzed.

A note is found in this collection written to "Mr. Farley", the current minister, by D. Currie, eluding to the idea that "a gentleman of our congregation" may provide funds for a new organ in memory of his late wife. He wasn't interested in a used organ, and thought a substantial one was required for

Research referencing the "Old Village" was challenging, but Suzanne McLean from the Collingwood Public Library did some digging on my behalf, and found some references to this "Old Village". From "Butchers, Bakers and Building the Lakers", a quote from Charles Gerrard states that "I live here, this is the Old Village where Raglan and Ontario streets meet and across the road was Hurontario Mills..." (page 6) and "As the new Town of Collingwood began to grow, the earlier Connell-Stephens settlement of Hurontario Mills began to be referred to as the "Old Village". (Page 11). Theresa Hanley, one of the caretakers of our current cemetery, informs me that all burials prior to those in our current location occurred in what is the present day Catholic Cemetery on Raglan Street.

In 1874 a site was purchased on Poplar Sideroad where today's Presbyterian Cemetery still exists. Interestingly, the first burial, Mrs. George Forman (not likely a relative of the famous boxer!) at this new site did not occur for ten years, in



1884. This delay is not explained but simply noted in the archives.

Due to the faithfulness, care and interest of the many years of Cemetery Board Trustees and Caretakers, our Cemetery remains one of the best kept and beautiful ones in the Province of Ontario. Truly a tribute to those who have gone before.

several improvements to the original building. This reopened in 1891 and therefore it would have been this rebuilt structure that the congregation used during the church expansion.

Interestingly, although both of these town structures had a clock tower, it never had a clock until 1951 when one was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Courtice of Collingwood (Collingwood Museum Collection X970.979.1)

In 1896, for the first time, our church, proud of its accomplishments, was host of the Synod of Toronto and Kingston.

During the time of Dr. McCrae's ministry at First Presbyterian Church, the growth was exponential in both programming and numbers of congregants. His wife was a big part of that success with her contributions to the life of the church, including her very own successful Bible Class.

In 1900 Dr. McCrea was part of the committee that revised the old hymnal and created the "new book of praise" which was introduced to our church in 1900.

In September of 1900, eight short years after arriving, Dr. McCrae accepted a call at Westminster Presbyterian Church, London, leaving our charge open for 10 months. This same month, September 1900, the church manse was destroyed by fire. The ruins were removed and the space it had occupied was turned into a lawn.

Chapter Seven: First Presbyterian Church Cemetery

Another important aspect of our church and human journey is our final resting place.

In earlier readings the cemetery was referred to as the "city of the dead" and prior to 1872 all interments took place in the cemetery in the "Old Village".

the size of the sanctuary. No other information is found about this, and the organ was ultimately dedicated to the fallen members of the congregation during the First World War.

On August 23, 1919 our organ shipped from St. Hyacinthe. On September 14, 1919 there was a day of dedication to the Memorial Organ. A newspaper clip says "an especially attractive service has been prepared". Sunday morning, afternoon and evening services were held. The special guest speaker was Lt. Col. The Rev. John Pringle, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. He was also a military chaplain—meaningful, especially since the organ was dedicated to fallen WW1 members. On the Monday night, after a half hour organ recital, he gave a talk on the "Trails of the Yukon", as he had been part of the gold rush of 1898 and shared the many trials and tribulations he had experienced.

According to all accounts, the church was packed at all services.

Although Collingwood had been home to four other ministers between Dr. John Campbell and Rev. Farley, it is Dr. Campbell (who went to Victoria B.C. in 1891) who sends the only recorded telegraph of congratulations to First Presbyterian Church:

"Please extend to your congregation congratulations re organ dedication today in commemoration of the brave men who made the supreme sacrifice for freedom of humanity and are now sleeping under other skies. God comfort bereaved. Glad to know that Col. Pringle, military chaplain and Assembly Moderator, occupies pulpit. Are with you in spirit."

It is essential that we remember those families whose great loss inspired them to install such a stately instrument in our church. Time goes on, but their sacrifice has played a huge part in the freedom we experience today, and therefore should never be underplayed or minimized.

Chapter Five: Organ Facts

1. Manufactured by Casavant Freres, St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, who have been manufacturing high quality pipe organs since 1879.
2. Technically our organ is three organs in one; a “great” organ, a “swell” organ and a “pedal” organ. There are also a set of 20 chimes, a balanced swell pedal and a crescendo pedal controlling all stops.
3. There are more than 1200 pipes; some wood and some metal varying from 16 feet down to less than an inch. Diameter varies from approximately two feet down to as slim as a straw.
4. The keyboard, pedals and stops are detached and connected by many electrical wires. Blowers provide the sound from the pipes as the stops engage them. Humidity is essential to the function of the magnets and pipes.



Chapter Six: General Church History (continuing from Dr. Campbell's departure in 1890 to First Presbyterian Church, Victoria, B.C.)

In 1892, Dr. McCrae arrived in Collingwood having spent previous years in Montreal at the Presbyterian College. His delay in arrival was due to obligations at the College and the Ladies' Aid Society utilized this time renovating and re-carpeting the manse.

During his tenure, the church made “great and unprecedented advancements”. The Sabbath School attendance increased to the point where the structure (on the back of the church) was enlarged and redecorated and a large addition was added to the library.

By 1895 the growth of the congregation was such that an addition to the sanctuary was required, and after consulting several architects, the decision was made to add two transepts and a gallery (our current configuration).

A new pipe organ was installed. This was the one that was ultimately sent for parts to St. Hyacinthe to construct the current organ), at a cost of \$1,300.

While this construction was occurring, the congregation met at the Collingwood Opera House. As I was unaware of where this was located, I researched with the following results.

According to the Collingwood Museum Archives, a multi purpose “Market Building” was constructed in 1889 at 97 Hurontario Street (where the current town hall sits). It was designed and built by a Toronto architect firm and housed a courtroom, council chambers an opera house, retail stores and a farmer's market. In 1890 a property adjacent caught fire, and quickly spread to the Market Building and eventually all that was left were the outside walls. Local architects, Hodgson and Kieswetter undertook the rebuilding, and made