

Presbyterian Church Landmark at Claude

Present Structure Erected in 1870 - Many Pioneer Families Represented in History of Congregation.

In the early days of the history of Claude Presbyterian Church, the present church being erected in the year 1870, and stands on a prominent site on the No. 10 highway, not much mention was made of the routine of business. In the quaint and sedate phrases of the moderator he tells us that the Session had set apart a certain Sabbath in the fall of the year for the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the previous Friday in each case being designated as a day of fasting and humiliation, in view of the right observance of the ordinance. Mostly all the men whose names appear in this story have entered into rest and can add no word to the brief record. But to those who know something of the early conditions of the church in the country districts of Upper Canada, and something more of the history of the township of Chinguacousy, these records are full of interest and suggestion. They recall the days when the old centre road which connects Orangeville and Brampton, was the chief highway of commerce between Toronto and a large section of central and northern Ontario. First, there was a blazed track through the forest, then a cleared path for a jumper, then a corduroy road, then a dirt road thrown up high from the ditches on both sides. Over this the farmers travelled to the distant markets in caravans of twenty or more teams together, going thus in company for the sake of mutual cheer and protection from the wolves. There strong and self-reliant men; for one should have a true brave heart to blaze away into the wilderness.

With the love of home the first settlers of upper Chinguacousy brought from the old world also the love of the church. For a long time many of them journeyed to the lower Chinguacousy congregation, known as Mayfield. But the difficulties of the journey for wife and child, as well as the growing strength of the settlement, early led them to apply for ordinances in their own neighbourhood. At first an occasional service was held in a barn in the woods of the old Clark homestead, not far from the site of the present church. Then the services became more frequent, until the year 1850, they were regularly established, and the first church was built. This church was described by John Smith, M.P.P. of Brampton, son of Andrew Smith, the elder mentioned above. As a boy, John Smith assisted in felling some of the timber which was used in its construction. It

was a low wooden building, with a door in one end and three windows on either side, set on the slope of a hill and affording a convenient shelter beneath for the sheep that fed on the roadside. For some years it contained neither pulpit nor pews; a sawed off end of tree trunk served for the former and some rough boards placed upon blocks for the latter. At the opening of the church a special collection was taken to defray the cost of building. It amounted to \$20.00, and was so large as to call for the admiration of the whole countryside. At a later date the church was furnished with a high pulpit and sounding board and with high backed pews and book-boards.

The Rev. David Coutts, the first minister, who was also minister of the lower congregation, journeyed sometimes by foot, sometimes on horseback, over the rough roads through the forest, and cared for the souls of his people for some seventeen years. But in October, 1867, a new name was put on record, that of Rev. James Pringle, interim moderator of session. The pioneer minister had retired.

In 1868 the Rev. R. M. Croll was called to be his successor, and he exercised a ministry full of plain and emphatic, though kindly utterance, until 1870. It was during his ministry in 1870 that the present church edifice was erected.

After Mr. Croll's retirement, Rev. R. Douglas Fraser, M.A., ministered to the people from 1879 to 1885. Under his strong and active ministry there was a further development of the spiritual life which manifested itself incidentally in an increased liberality to the schemes of the church. Mention should also be made of the new and cheerful manse which was finished in 1880.

After Mr. Fraser came Rev. S. S. Craig who was later pastor of the Zion Congregational church in Toronto. He had been born and reared in Claude and his ministry here lasted from 1886 to 1890. During Mr. Craig's ministry, as that of his predecessor, much was done to develop the young life of the congregation and enlist it in active service.

The Rev. William Farquharson, B.D. was minister from 1891 to 1899. When the church celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, Rev. Wm. Farquharson preached upon the Sabbath to congregations which crowded the church to its utmost capacity. There were aged men and women who remembered the day of small things, and whose thought going back along the years, dwelt upon one and another of the friends who had once worshipped there, but were now worshipping in heaven. Upon the Monday evening following the Rev., Messrs, Fraser, Craig and Farquharson united with the pastor and the people in giving thanks to God for all that was done and in commending themselves to His care for all that was to come.

Taken from the Brampton Conservator – May 18, 1939