

THE CENTENNIAL HISTORY  
OF THE  
SOUTH GOWER BAPTIST CHURCH  
1841 - 1941



This Centennial History of South Gower Baptist Church is the gift of Mrs. Mary Ker Stewart, B.Sc., M.A., in memory of her beloved mother, Mrs. Mary Christie Ker, daughter of Mr. Thomas Christie. Mrs. Ker was born November 18th, 1841 in the house where the South Gower Baptist Church assembled during the first years of its history; consequently her childhood life was intimately connected with this Church.

MRS. MARY CHRISTIE KER

"A sweet, calm face that seemed to wear  
The look of sins forgiven!  
A voice of prayer that seemed to bear  
Our own hands up to heaven!

How reverent in our midst she stood,  
Or knelt in grateful praise!  
What grace of Christian womanhood  
Was in her household ways!

For still her holy living meant  
No duty left undone;  
The heavenly and the human blent  
Their kindred lives in one.

She kept her line of rectitude  
With love's unconscious grace;  
Her kindly instincts understood  
All gentle courtesies.

The dear Lord's best interpreters  
Are humble human souls;  
The Gospel of a life like hers  
Is more than books or scrolls."

## THE HISTORY OF THE SOUTH GOWER BAPTIST CHURCH

We invite you to review with us the main features of the first hundred years of the life of the South Gower Baptist Church. Like many rural churches, its history is marked with periods of rapid growth and by other times when life seemed to be almost extinct. Some of the most able preachers and missionaries of the period have occupied the pulpit, bringing many to a knowledge of Jesus Christ and into a working relationship with their fellows in our world wide Baptist fellowship. There have been long as well as short pastorates and times when no pastor was on duty, but living stones have been built into the Church through the years. Always there has been some witness here to the principles for which Baptists have always stood.

As the second century begins we have prepared for those now living and for posterity this brief history which includes information gleaned from extant minutes and other authoritative material recording events since 1840. Dr. C. C. McLaurin had been until his death in February, 1941 a treasure-house of interesting data. For many years he manifested an unflagging interest in the doings and in the history of this church. Much of the material contained herein is as it came from his pen a few months ago.

Mrs. John D. Stewart, of Winchester, has also supplied valuable information from family records preserved throughout the century by her Mother, the late Mrs. Mary Christie Ker. Mrs. Mary Christie Ker was a prominent pioneer Baptist and a daughter of the late Mr. Thomas Christie in whose house the South Gower Church was assembled until the erection of a Church edifice. This historical home is still in a state of excellent preservation and is one of the oldest houses in Eastern Ontario.

The County of Grenville, Ontario, was settled during the latter part of the 18th and the early part of the 19th centuries with emigrants from England, Ireland and Scotland. Quite a number came from the United States as United Empire Loyalists during and following the Revolutionary War. The townships of South Gower, Mountain and Oxford settled by these fine folk has been the area from which the church membership has come.

Rev. Robert Boyd, D.D., of Prescott, a Presbyterian Minister, was about the first man to conduct religious services in these townships. For many years he lived in the town of Prescott and his parish included these three townships, in addition to Prescott. He would reach each appointment sometimes less frequently than once a month. The Methodists and Anglicans covered the same territory. They usually followed each other on regular Sundays. The Presbyterian population seemed to be more numerous. Dr. Boyd was a strong preacher and left his name engraven on all the community.

In 1826 a Presbyterian Church (congregation) was formed on Robert Hyndman's farm

in North Mountain by the Presbytery of Brockville, and another Church in South Gower. In 1834 Rev. Joseph Anderson, M.A. became pastor of the South Gower Presbyterian Church. His descendants are still in the community. Mr. Anderson had a large following and was an eminent minister.

In 1840 Mr. Thomas Christie, living about two and a half miles North West of South Gower Post Office, was longing for some spiritual help. He heard of Rev. Daniel McPhail, a Baptist Minister in Osgoode, some twelve miles away, who was making no little stir by his fervent and strong evangelistic preaching. Mr. McPhail was from Dolesville, Que. and was a graduate from Madison Baptist College. He was a very devout servant of God, and was referred to as "the Elijah of the Ottawa Valley." His preaching had life and warmth that appealed to many and awakened those who were mere formalists religiously. His energy was boundless, there was no limit to his parish and wherever there was an open door for the Gospel he entered it. Baptists were looked upon as having some new-fangled ideas and much effort was made by established churches to suppress them. But the more they were resisted the more rapidly they grew. Thomas Christie invited Pastor McPhail to come to South Gower in the Fall of 1840 and a congregation gathered in his home. He and his wife became convinced that Scriptural Baptism meant the immersion of a convert in water, and were baptized by Daniel McPhail in the presence of a large concourse of people, in the Summer of 1841.

As Mr. McPhail continued to come and hold meetings at different intervals, Phineas Felton, an elder of the Presbyterian Church, pro-

fessed conversion. He and his son Elijah, and his wife, with Donald McIntyre, and four from Kemptville, were baptized. The charter members who organized a Regular Close Communion Baptist Church in the Summer of 1841 in the schoolhouse, were, Thomas Christie, Nancy Christie, Elijah Pelton, Phineas Pelton, Mr. Permont, Mrs. Permont, John Coterell, Mrs. Walter, Mrs. D. McIntyre, John Condell, Overton Barnes and Mrs. Barnes. The first deacons elected at a later meeting were, George Spottiswood, William Cumming, Elijah Pelton. Having no regular pastor, they met in the school house for prayer, reading of the Scripture and mutual edification. They enjoyed much prosperity and spiritual enjoyment. They continued thus for two years, Mr. McPhail visiting them occasionally, and members were added each year. The Lord granted this church favor with the people continued prosperity and great spiritual enjoyment. For a period of two years, they met every Sabbath day in the South Gower school house for mutual edification, prayer and reading of the Scriptures.

In 1843 a frame church was erected on property donated by the Peltons on the site of the present brick church. That same year they called as pastor, John McLaurin, just graduated from the Baptist College in Montreal. He was promised a salary of £30. a year. Mr. McLaurin was a full cousin of the father of Rev. C. C. McLaurin, D.D., who became Pastor of the Church in 1877.

He was followed in 1844 by Peter McDonald who was a member of the Osgoode Church and also a graduate of the Montreal Baptist College. Mr. McDonald was an eminent scholar, an examiner of Hebrew at Woodstock College under Dr. R. A.

Fyfe. He remained in South Gower about two years and was afterwards pastor at St. Mary's, then retired to London.

At this time the members in Kemptville were building a Church. Mr. Joseph Leeming and his father were leaders in that undertaking. In Kemptville there was John Cotterell, R. Beddingfield, George Spottiswood, Mr. Gilliland and John Main, who formed a strong nucleus of a church and co-operated with South Gower as one church. Rev. James Cooper, who lived in Kemptville, became pastor about 1845 and continued until 1849. Dr. Cooper became a prominent pastor in London, then returned to Scotland and died in Perth in 1895. During his pastorate the stone chapel at Kemptville was completed, and worship was conducted there regularly. Following his resignation, the churches were without a settled pastor for about five years. In spite of frequent visits during this time from Rev. Daniel McPhail the cause suffered some decline.

Until that time the church at South Gower had been growing stronger. Since its organization, William, John and Robert Cumming (each of them) deacons of the church, David Miller, Andrew Seymore, a merchant of Spencerville and several others from Spencerville came into the church. David Miller, with his family of seven boys and one girl, were regularly in attendance in church. Mr. Miller was a successful farmer, a most devout Christian and all of his family became members of the church. His was a Christian home. He was always active in every movement that had as its object the advancement of the church and Christ's Kingdom. He was chairman of the building committee of the present church



building and was urgent in his endeavour to have it erected. The removal of his family, after his death, was a great loss to the church.

The various Cumming families were always dependable members of the church and community. The church members were scattered over an area of 20 miles square in Oxford, South Gower and Mountain townships. There came, during Mr. Cooper's pastorate, a Mr. David McGregor, who was a store keeper and Post Master until he moved to Manitoba in 1889. He was a brother of Mrs. McPhail and an uncle of the late Principal McGregor of Toronto Baptist College. Thomas Christie was the first Sunday School Superintendent and later David McGregor, accepted that position as well as being treasurer and clerk. Mrs. McGregor was May Cumming, a daughter of Robert Cumming. The McGregor home was called the Baptist Hotel.

In 1855 Rev. W. K. Anderson, born in Lanark and educated at the Montreal Baptist College, left the Breadalbane pastorate to undertake a great task in South Gower and Kemptville. He continued with them thirteen years. He resided in the parsonage in Kemptville and was untiring in his visitation of the people over the large area, also conducted services at many points, going quite regularly to Spencerville. For many years after he left people spoke of Mr. Anderson and his serviceable horse and their frequent appearance on the roads of his parish. He and his wife were greatly loved by his parishioners. He was Pastor and intimate friend to all. During his long pastorate the church flourished, there being conversions under his preaching and many added to the church, forming a happy, prosperous, warm hearted united people. Mr. Anderson



was looked upon as a Prophet, in fact, was called "the Elijah of the Ottawa Valley," a companion in many religious awakenings with Daniel McPhail, who also bore that title. In those days a Pastor could be absent for weeks at a time, helping another Pastor, or opening some new field for the Gospel, without the church suffering loss. The church would have its services conducted by one of the deacons. Rev. W.K. Anderson was a household name in all of that country. About the close of the thirteen happy years of his pastorate there was some dissension in the church at South Gower which seemed to retard the growth for a short time. Mr. Anderson returned to Breadalbane Church, where he remained for many years. In 1877 he became pastor of the Lindsay Church. Later he returned to Vankleek Hill among his old parishioners and friends, and died there in 1892.

In 1868 Rev. Donald McDiarmid of Smiths Falls was pastor for a year, after which he went to the newly organized church at Kenmore, Ontario.

In 1859, Malcom McGregor, a newpew of David McGregor, a graduate of Woodstock College, became pastor. He was ordained at South Gower, resigning in 1871 to become pastor of the Smiths Falls church. He was followed by Rev. William Hillyard for a short time and then by Rev. William Cairns, an English Baptist Minister, who afterwards became pastor of First Baptist Church, Victoria, B.C.

For the Summers of 1875 and 1876, two students, Frank Dain and William McGregor, gave splendid help to the discouraged church at South Gower. No services were held at Kemptville. The cause had been suffering because of the dissension mentioned above and for want of oversight and

leadership of a pastor. The church was cared for by the Association and the Eastern Convention, through the occasional visit of a neighboring pastor.

Mr. C.C. McLaurin who was graduating in the Spring of 1877 from Woodstock College, was invited to the pastorate. Both church buildings were much in need of repair. The church building in Kemptville was unfit for use, the windows were all broken, and a bank of snow was on the floor when first seen by the new pastor. There were no seats nor pulpit.

Mr. John Evans, an active Baptist, from Brockville, had opened a hardware store in town. Alex. and Robert Cumming had opened a general store. They, with the older members, gathered funds and put the church building into splendid shape with new windows, pews, pulpit and furnace. Mr. McLaurin met with a hearty reception by both congregations and a new spirit seemed to enter the old church. The Town Hall at Kemptville was used until the church was opened. Mr. McLaurin was ordained in the South Gower Church during the Ottawa Association meeting in 1877. A great revival was experienced during the following winter and many young people were added to the church.

During many years the Pelton family gave wonderful help to the cause in the whole country, by their leadership in service of song and praise. Mr. Elijah Pelton, Jr., conducted a choir and singing schools which created much interest in all services. Mr. McLaurin spent seven very happy years with the church. He held services, more or less frequently, in Spencerville, Miller's Corners, Oxford Mills and Burrits Rapids. He had as an assistant, for two summers, D. M.

Milhill, a student from Woodstock, which made it possible to serve all these appointments with fine spiritual results. Many were converted and baptized. The congregations crowded the old church in South Gower, even filling the gallery weekly. Before Mr. McLaurin resigned a meeting was held to consider the erection of a new church, to which much strength was given by the addition of several strong members. From that time, morning and evening services and Sunday School were held in Kemptville, instead of the former afternoon service. During Mr. McLaurin's pastorate a baptistry and an organ were placed in both churches. The membership was increased by more than two hundred, Mission Circles were organized, and liberal contributions were made to all Missionary enterprises and local finances were in a most satisfactory condition.

Mr. McLaurin resigned late in 1883 to undertake further studies in Toronto. Eventually he went to Western Canada where he became Superintendent of Missions, with residence in Calgary. He was with the old church in June 1927 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his ordination and again visited it in June 1937. Dr. McLaurin passed on to his reward at the ripe age of eighty-seven on February 20, 1941.

He was succeeded almost immediately by Rev. D. D. McArthur who most energetically and successfully maintained the work of the church with increasing favor. The present church building at South Gower was erected early in his ministry. Mr. Anderson Cumming was the overseer of its construction, which gave much satisfaction. Mr. David Miller, chairman of the committee did much toward securing funds by which it was opened free of debt. Rev. W.K. Anderson was the

preacher at the opening and dedication, on December 26th, 1886, and the entire community rejoiced in having such a fine church building. During Mr. McArthur's pastorate, the congregation of Kemptville became a separate church in March 1885. The following officers were appointed at the organization meeting: Pastor, Rev. D. D. McArthur; Clerk, Thomas Main; Treasurer, James McGregor; Finance Committee, William Main; J. Smith, J. H. Allen; Visiting Committee, J. Main, Mrs. D. D. McArthur, Mrs. William Holmes; Deacons, D. B. Pelton, John Smith, John Cumming, Orlando Bush, A. C. Rutherford, P. R. McDonald, Hugh Brownlee.

During Mr. McArthur's pastorate, a new parsonage was purchased. When he resigned and went to Winnipeg, Manitoba (where he still resides) the church was in a happy hopeful condition.

Mr. A. Darrock, a student from Toronto, filled the gap, until Rev. James Coutts, a well-known and highly respected pastor of various churches in Ontario, was called from California. He remained with the churches until 1894. Then followed in rather rapid succession, Rev. J. B. McKinnon, for two years; Rev. J. A. Kennedy; Rev. John Puttenham; Rev. W. H. Stevens; Rev. W. Westell; Rev. J. W. Gregory; Rev. Harry Jackson; Student pastor James D. Morrison, came in 1913. The church at Kemptville, under his ministry, decided to disband. This did not seem necessary according to the opinion of many and has proved to be a real loss to the denomination. But many had become quite discouraged from loss of members by removal and the indifference of others. The Superintendents of their Sunday Schools had been, Joseph Hemmingway (an Uncle

of Prof. H. MacNeill) Orlando Bush, R. E. Miller and Jennie Wallace, a most devoted worker who moved with friends near Boston.

Then followed Students: R. M. Fraser, Percy Buck, 1914 and 1915 and A.H. Metcalf. Mr. Metcalf was ordained at South Gower. He was succeeded by Rev. John E. Moyle. He had a happy and successful pastorate here. He resigned in 1920. Then followed Students: H.H. Smith, A.W. Small (now Travelling Secretary of Grande Lefne Mission). M. Saunders became student pastor in 1922. It was during his pastorate that a very helpful Evangelistic Campaign was held under leadership of Rev. Alex. Torrie. Many were converted and baptized. A parsonage was purchased. Mr. Saunders resigned early in 1923. He was succeeded by student pastors, Leslie E. Wilton in 1923, and Joseph McDermott in 1924.

Rev. Ernest Butcher was given a call late in 1925. South Gower and Winchester joined in his support, he living in Winchester. Great improvements were made on the interior of the church building and many were added to the church. He resigned in 1929 and went to Hagersville. Rev. J. Ostrom accepted the call toward the end of the year, remaining for three years.

Rev. Herbert Wood was pastor from 1932 to 1938. He came from Font Hill. At present he is living at Arthur, Ontario.

Rev. R. F. Willson became pastor in March, 1939, coming here from Niagara Falls, Ontario.

The Church feels the loss of the old members who have passed on to their reward. It

is not as strong as it once was, but there is a spirit of unity and helpfulness that is encouraging.

Looking back over the 100 years, much has been done since the first service was held in the home of Thomas Christie. Much has been accomplished and there lies ahead much more to accomplish. As many as 200 have been baptized into the fellowship of the Kemptville and South Gower churches. Besides this, numbers of others have been converted to God. If one soul is worth more than the whole world, then South Gower has much to rejoice over.

A number of members have filled useful places in the church and the world. Prominent lawyers, Haldane Miller, late of Ottawa, a former worker of the First Church; Gideon Grant, K.C., late of Toronto and a leader in Park Road Baptist Church was a nephew of Mrs. Thomas Christie, the former Nancy Grant; A.C. Rutherford of Edmonton, who was the first Prime Minister of Alberta, and was until his death June 11, 1941, Chancellor of Alberta University and a deacon of a Baptist Church; Wm. Grant, a leading doctor in Los Angeles; Dr. Samuel Coleman, D.D.S.; Dr. O. Coleman, D.D.S.; Capt. J.R. Cumming, M.D.; Dr. J.J. McKendry of Winchester, Ontario; Dr. Ira McKendry; the late Edmond Latourell, a prominent Veterinary of Yonkers, N.Y.; Orlando Bush, before going West, was for more than one term a member of the Ontario Legislature. Among the ministers of the Gospel we find the name of Rev. John Dempsey. He was converted by Rev. Daniel McPhail, while he was a chore boy at the farm home of Robt. Cumming. He became an eminent and useful pastor for many years, after graduating from Montreal Baptist College. Rev. W.C. McKendry and Rev.

J. B. McKendry held pastorates in many Ontario churches. Rev. J. B. McKendry is now in U.S.A. The late Rev. W. C. McKendry was a lecturer in the Toronto Bible College. But there have been large numbers occupying humbler places in life, who were converted and became members of the church, who have lived consecrated lives giving a clear testimony to the saving Power of the Gospel of Christ. Many of these members are exerting an influence in distant places throughout Canada and the United States.

The following are the present officers of the South Gower Church: Pastor, Rev. R.F. Willson; Church Clerk, Etta Carson; Church Treasurer, W. M. McIntyre; Sunday School Superintendent, W. E. Graham; Deacons, William McIntyre, Colin Fraser, N. J. Simzer, Percy Cumming.