

A Historical Sketch

The history of the founding of Burns Presbyterian Church, Ashburn, is fascinating, and parallels the history of the developing of the hamlet of Ashburn.

The early deeds from the crown date about 1820, the land being cleared by Scottish pioneers. Records indicate that the hamlet was originally known as the Butler's Corners but the name was changed to Ashburn in 1832 as a potash plant which when established required large quantities of potash (from the burning trees) and water from the creek (burn).

In 1847, the first store and post office establishes. Ashburn also had an orange lodge, a school house, three stores, a drug store two hotels, a blacksmith and wagon maker shops.

The information about the beginning of Burns Presbyterian Church are excerpts from "the statement and the rise and progress of the Canadian Presbyterian Church in Ashburn", by the late Mr. William Heron Sr. Written March 2, 1868 and found some years after his death in his old desk. Mr. Heron died in 1884, aged 92 years and is buried in the Burns cemetery.



"The religious instinct, the love of God and His word was firmly and deeply embedded in the hearts and lives of these early settlers. After hewing out homes for themselves, instinctively their hearts turned for a place of worship."

The disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843, resulting in the establishment of the Free Church, followed by the disruption of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1844 saw the minister of Whitby and Pickering continue with The Church of Scotland. This being the only ministry available, the people of Ashburn continued to attend these services. In 1846 the Free Presbytery of Toronto sent a student from Knox College and, on alternate Sundays, the good folk of Ashburn attended services in Utica (just to the north of us).

With no resident minister in the vicinity, William Heron Sr. gathers his neighbours for worship at his home "Dalmore" or in his newly erected barn before it was

used to store the bounty from his land.

In April 1848, a Mr. Smith from Knox College was sent to Brock and Reach and stopped over at William Heron's home having come to Whitby from Toronto by ship and to Brooklin by stage. Mr. Heron took this opportunity to arrange a meeting on the Sabbath forenoon at the local school house; "and the house was full", the first formal church service held in Ashburn. William Heron was then able to arrange services on alternate Sundays at 6:00pm, by agreeing to go to Utica to pick up Mr. Smith, who was serving Brock (Woodville) and reach (Utica). "The meetings were well attended, and I hope there was much good done; many seemed to be awakened to give more attention to the things that concern the interest of their immortal souls."

Ashburn was organized as a station with Brock & Reach in January 1849. On the 18th of February, 1849, Rev. Dr. Burns came from Toronto and dispensed the first communion to the congregation at Brock and, on Monday, to ordained elders for Brock and Reach. Mr. William Heron Sr. served communion for Ashburn. Our church was named "Burns" in honour of Dr. Burns. Our communion roll contained 15 names. In 1850 Whitby, Ashburn & Utica were joined; The Rev. Dr. Burns conducted services in Ashburn on alternate Sunday afternoons.

At the annual meeting in 1856, after many attempts between 1851 and 1855 "to get up a church" had failed, it was decided to build in the summer of 1857; a committee was appointed to purchase an area of land for the sight and for

a cemetery. A number of people subscribed \$10.00 for this purpose and, in return, were assigned a burial plot. The total subscription for the building fund was \$2,031.50 - the cost of the church was \$2,356.00 and the acre of land was purchased for \$250.00.

A manse was purchased at the cost of \$400.00 in February 1869, and in 1870, the balance of the church debt was paid. In 1878 a new manse was built and sold in 1948 and still stands in Ashburn. The beautifully restored home of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Emm.

Ashburn became a self-sustaining charge in 1910, and was part of Whitby Presbytery until 1925. When the presbytery was dissolved and we became a member of Toronto Presbytery. In 1933, Ashburn was joined to Lindsay Presbytery and coupled with St. John's in Port Perry, and we have been sister churches ever since.

In 1911, it was found necessary to enlarge the church and equip it with a basement for Sunday school and women's organizations. The sanctuary was completely renovated with inclined floor, circular seating, new pulpit and memorial windows at the cost of \$3,000.00. In 1946 and 1947 an electric organ was purchased and the choir loft renovated. In 1950, a new heating system was installed leaving room for a kitchen. About 1948, it was necessary to remove the bell - which had been donated by a descendant of Mr. William Heron - from the bell tower. The harness was cracked and it was feared the bell would fall and damage the sanctuary. The bell was given to a museum at brougham, and is now on display at the Pickering museum. At the present time, Burn's Kirk Guild was negotiating with the board of the museum for the return of the bell.



February 12, 1967 is a never-to-be-forgotten black day in life of our church, as, on a clear, crisp Sunday morning, we watched our beautiful picture church get completely destroyed by fire. That evening, when St. John's generously loaned us their sanctuary for a service, from the depths of our despair came the will to build again. At a congregational meeting in March, there was unanimous agreement to go ahead with the re-build.

Again divine providence guided and aided us. Because of the proximity of the original church to the cemetery and road, it was necessary to purchase new land - made available - joining the original site of the church.

The late Mr. Norman Anderson, and elder and treasurer of Burns, was given the honour of turning the sod at a very impressive ceremony on Sunday September 10th, 1967. Mr. Lindsay Death - trustee and manager - graciously accepted the onerous task of building committee chairman. Mr. William D Davis, manager, chairman of the finance committee, and the late Mr. Russell Batten spent long hours planning and building a miniature model of a new church. The plan was then accepted at the congregational meeting.

The corner stone was laid March 31, 1968, and our beautiful new church was dedicated to the glory of God on Sunday April 21, 1968. The late Rev. William Black was our minister, and the late Mr. Herbert Ashton was our clerk of session. The sermon that day was preached by Reverend Kenneth Heron B.A. B.D., a descendant of our founder and an Ashburn boy. We also feel blessed to have, as one of our elders, Mrs. Chrissie Simpson McKinney, whose father, Rev. Robert Simpson was minister of this charge from 1937 to 1940.

The church was built at a total cost of \$84,562.00 of which \$38,000.00 was insurance. Our only outstanding debt was a \$4,000.00 bank note paid off before the end of 1969.

We now enter another new annual of Burns when, as of January 1, 1990, we became a member of the new presbytery of Pickering.



For 140 years we have been bearing witness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in this place. He has blessed our pioneers, their children and their children's children, and all who call upon His name.

My husband and I feel most honored being the present owners of "Dalmore", the stone house William Heron Sr. Built for his family.

Service

Therefore, when we build, let us think that we build forever. Let it not be for the present delight, nor for the present use alone. Let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for, and let us think as we lay stone, that the time is to come when those stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say as they look upon labour and wrought substance of them, "see what our fathers did for us."

John Ruskin, (1819-1990) - Compiled by Margaret J. Davis, June 1990

With the dawning of the third millennium, we surge forward into the future, and look forward to many exciting years to come.

Margaret Davis, has come across a wonderful story called...

How the Burns Church mortgage was paid off

The following appeared in the newsletter of our sister church, St. John's, in Port Perry. We can't say how much of it is true, but it's certainly a good story.

This is a story about John Miller Jr. of Blairgowrie Farm of Ashburn, Ontario. Blairgowrie Farm is the first farm west of Burns Church on the south side of the road. John Miller Jr. was a breeder of shorthorn cattle and an importer of cattle, horses and sheep from Scotland.



The Miller family, three generations, were instrumental in bringing some of the first purebred British livestock to North America. John Miller Jr's son John Miller is 90 years old and still lives on the farm.

In 1855 there were so many Millers it was necessary at times to supplement family names with some additional identification. The first John Miller at Thistle Ha' could be called Reeve Miller, and his son, John Miller Jr. to distinguish him from other John Miller Juniors, was often called Silent John Miller Jr.; And the John Miller who was a grandson of the founding father became known as John Miller Jr. of Ashburn, sometimes as "Shorthorn Miller".

But as friends of John Miller Jr. of Ashburn were quick to point out, this man's originality and good humour, plus a spark of boyish mischief, would be no less effective in identifying him than his name. A cousin said he was "an unusual man who did things in an unusual way."

Originality was clearly a Miller characteristic. With understanding and approval, John's admiring friends in Shorthorn circles said his campaign to pay off the Burns Presbyterian Church mortgage was typical. The \$4,000 of lingering debt against the church of Ashburn annoyed him and when he met a neighbour who was a member of the Board of Managers, he had something to tell his friend.

"Fred, are you going to the church meeting tonight? I understand they're going to talk about reducing the church mortgage, again. Well, I can't be there but you tell them for me that they had better pay it off. Now, get this straight. Tell the people of the congregation to plan for a church supper and concert at my place. Admission will be \$1.25 and every woman will have to make six pies and three salads and I'll find everything else that is needed. I want to see that confounded debt wiped out in one evening. How's your new herd bull doing? Goodbye, Fred."

When the date was fixed, John Miller's phone started ringing. He called the President of Purity Bread Company in Toronto, saying, "Charlie, I want a truck load of bread and rolls for the Ashburn church supper. Thanks, and be sure you come to be fed."

John then called J. S. McLean, President of Canada Packers, and said, "Stanley, I want a truck load of Maple Leaf hams for the Ashburn church supper. Don't tell me a truck load is too much because I want some hams left over to sell to our visitors after the concert. Thanks, Stanley, and be sure you come to see us that night." He called all his prosperous friends in Whitby and Oshawa and Toronto and urged them to come and "Be sure to bring your wallets."

On the evening of the supper, John Miller was seated beside the Church Treasurer at the entrance, acting like a Robin Hood. Most guests were admitted on payment of the nominal admission fee of \$1.25, but those to whom special invitations had been sent did not get past John Miller without paying amounts ranging from \$5.00 to \$50.00 and then they were "invited" to come around to the garage after the concert to buy some high class ham. They had no reason to think they would be expected to pay \$5.00 a pound for ham and \$25.00 each for home made pies, but they must have paid such amounts because when the receipts for the Miller-planned evening were counted, they totalled \$4,050, enough to liquidate the offending mortgage.

When the officers came to thank John Miller of Ashburn, they couldn't find him.

Submitted by Don Christie

The Story of How Burns' Building Became Barrier Free As presented to the congregation by Ken Brown



Sometime in the early nineties, Ruby was struggling up the front steps of Burns Church with her cane, wondering aloud, how we could make coming to worship a little easier. Not long after that, \$5000, a somewhat more significant sum back then, arrived at the church in honour of Ruby's husband with the instruction that it was to be used to help make the church barrier free.

That was when the idea of a ramp first reared its ugly head, as it would again many times over the intervening years.

A small group of volunteers formed the Barrier Free Committee, not knowing that it would become almost a life's work. Many meetings and discussions ensued as we tried to find a way to access the many levels of the church building and every attempt seemed to be lacking in some way. In 1996 an actual set of preliminary plans arrived, because, Sir William, had applied a little pressure on his

daughter Jane, who just happened to be an architect. It had an elevator - pardon me, a lift, as we were taught to say, that actually went to all four levels.

Two exterior options were presented, one following the modern style of the existing church and one incorporating a bell tower that was reminiscent of the original church that had burned down in 1967. That tower with its ground level entry, through which you all arrived, was our unanimous choice. There is no bell, the original one is sitting on a cairn in a corner of the property. The committee excitedly started to turn those plans into a reality and ran smack into a wall whose name was Budget.

Undeterred they moved slowly forward exploring the possibilities and permits and reporting at every annual meeting about their miniscule progress. They asked elevator companies if they had a model that travelled eight feet, making four stops, opening in three different directions. Laughter may be good for the soul but it did not encourage the committee.

Why not just build a ramp? Asked again by someone relatively new to the congregation. Chasing permits, we discovered, what we already knew but were unaware of, the significance of, we were in the Town of Whitby, facing a Region of Durham Road and sitting on the Oak Ridge's Moraine in the hamlet of Ashburn which is zoned, "hold for services." Those services, town water and sewers were not coming past the church in the lifetime of the committee's youngest member.

It was a revelation to us, when we first sat in a committee room with all of the government agencies, to discover that they don't actually all work from the same set of rules and that they can sit across the table from each other and state, with conviction, that their set of facts are the complete opposite of the set of facts previously pontificated by the other group. The committee quickly worked out that it was their job to mediate, cajole and otherwise entreat these various agencies to find enough common ground to allow our project to proceed.

A few more years passed. The estimated costs continued to rise and the congregation met and decided again, that what they needed, was more information. The town seemed to be somewhat helpful in leading us through the labyrinth known as a site plan agreement. The Region demanded 5m of land from the front of our property and we would even have to pay their legal expenses to transfer it to them.

The Region also wanted the easterly driveway closed and the fire department pointed out that, that was their fire route. The westerly driveway was to be widened and a few parking spots eliminated to create the new fire route which the department wanted paved. The Conservation authority refused to allow any pavement because it would stop the infiltration of rain water back into the Oak ridge's aquifer. I'm sure you all appreciated the partly paved parking lot on your way in. Handicap access trumps aquifers, apparently,

At the next congregational meeting, more detailed cost estimates were requested. The committee pointed out that that was not possible without a complete set of construction drawings and they would not come cheap. The new member who, invariably, asked about a ramp, was informed that a legal ramp would be 65' long and that would only get us in the front door and they were then asked if they would volunteer to make sure that it was free of snow each Sunday morning. Construction drawings were commissioned and detailed pricing was pursued and we were not overly surprised to discover that it was only a little more than three times what it would have cost us in 1996.

During those years, generous bequests were left by Harold and Hugh and many committed members had continued to contribute to the fund. The new fund raising committee had done yeoman work in securing pledges of support from the members. They also held a raucous and successful fund raising event using the donated facilities of Bruce and his family, long time generous supporters. We had over half of the money in the bank.

At the congregational meeting in early 2011, the committee pointed out that we had already spent close to \$100,000 getting ourselves to this point. The motion to proceed was moved and seconded, there was no discussion and an immediate unanimous vote to build, was recorded.

The committee, while congratulating themselves, suddenly realized that their real work was just about to begin. We now had to obtain that precious document known as a building permit. It was at this point that we started to realize the significance of the phrase, if you touch it, you have to bring it to today's code. Septic system, not good enough, \$30,000 please. No fire alarm system, \$25,000 please. Driveway, not wide enough for fire trucks, \$10,000 please. We learned, that if you do one thing, our much desired lift, to make your building accessible then the entire accessibility code has to be followed, \$50,000 please. Two fire separated exits from each floor \$30,000 please.

Paul, one of Jane and Karl's architectural partners, had been handed the delicate job of fixing, finalizing and creating her original vision, some 14 years after she had presented it to us. Two exits. Paul can you just move the tower 3 ft to the North. The committee and Paul launched into a long relationship that involved a few 'discussions' over style versus function and cost. Somewhere in the middle of this while we were trying to figure out who might actually build our dreams, Hawkey Church Management appeared and Bruce and Ken, showed us their method of building churches while controlling costs and utilizing a certain amount of volunteer labour. We wrote our first cheque and asked them to start in a couple of weeks when we had the precious building permit.

Finally, three months later, building permit in hand, we packed up and moved to Myrtle United, who had graciously been a good neighbour and allowed us to have our services there at 11 am after their 9:30 service and Hawkey sent us Charlie, to be our site supervisor. He had a backhoe arrive in the first week of July and the excitement began. Contingents of volunteers started to be recruited for jobs large and small, each according to their abilities. The committee wants to offer a huge thank you to all of



those volunteers, who gave of their time and talents over those ten long months and we have decided not to try and list them all, as we want this little story to take less time than the sermon.

Instead an example - Our first real volunteer was Everett who responded to the request for someone to give Charlie a bed and a shower three nights a week. That barely noticed act of kindness and generosity stopped us from almost buying the little motel down the street. Charlie has been with us every day since then and has continuously suggested ways to save us money while improving the project.

Hawkey needed labour and we were in the business of helping our church family and eliminating barriers. Young Rebecca was handicapped, by her lack of experience, trying to get her first summer job. She said yes, when the committee asked if she would do anything and she became a construction labourer.

Did I mention that all of the old building except this sanctuary had asbestos tile on the floor? Bring in the boys in the Haz Mat suits and drop another \$7000 to eliminate that little problem.

The weeks turned into months. Money was spent and kept track of. Mortgages and deeds were organized and the very helpful and generous services of Mark, had us all changing our opinions of lawyers as he worked for weeks on a little favour we asked him to help us with. Mark is also a tireless champion for the rights of the handicapped and gladly serves as an example, to reinforce the reasons why we undertook this project. We also remember early supporters, Margaret and Lois, now sadly in nursing homes, and Ken a tireless member of our committee whose too early passing, reminds us that we did not move quickly enough for them.



The building we are all sitting in and admiring rose slowly out of the mud and the committee learned about site meetings. Every three weeks, the committee, Hawkey, Paul and various hangers on, met to iron out the million little details that cropped up as Charlie turned paper plans into a concrete and wood reality. Do you know that it can take 3 or 4 people close to an hour to design a sink when it has to meet several pre-existing criteria?

As the hole in the front wall slowly became a wonderful new entrance we started to dream of returning to worship at Burns. Christmas came and went. Easter looked tantalizing but left us enjoying Myrtle's hospitality. The committee continued to be educated in the finer points of electrical and plumbing contracts that go on for weeks with little external change, leaving us to explain to the congregation that things were actually happening.

The committee discovered that institutional light fixtures are not available at the local lighting store and we spent hours looking at pictures and specifications and trying to imagine what they would actually look like. Don't look up as you leave because we also discovered that they will take eight weeks to be produced after we had made our decision and we are promising Lauren and Mark that they will be here in time for their wedding this summer.

Moving back day was finally announced for the end of April and then postponed one more week but that disappointment did not stop crowds of enthusiastic volunteers from cleaning, unpacking and organizing. We worshipped in Myrtle on the last Sunday in April and in our excitement packed up and moved out of there in just over an hour.



On the sixth of May, almost exactly 10 months since we had left, we ignored the dirt and dust and unpacked boxes and stood in our sanctuary and gave loud and joyous thanks to God for bringing us through the experience and asking for his guidance in putting our newly barrier free facility to the best possible use, to glorify his presence in Ashburn and to welcome all who can now come and use his building.