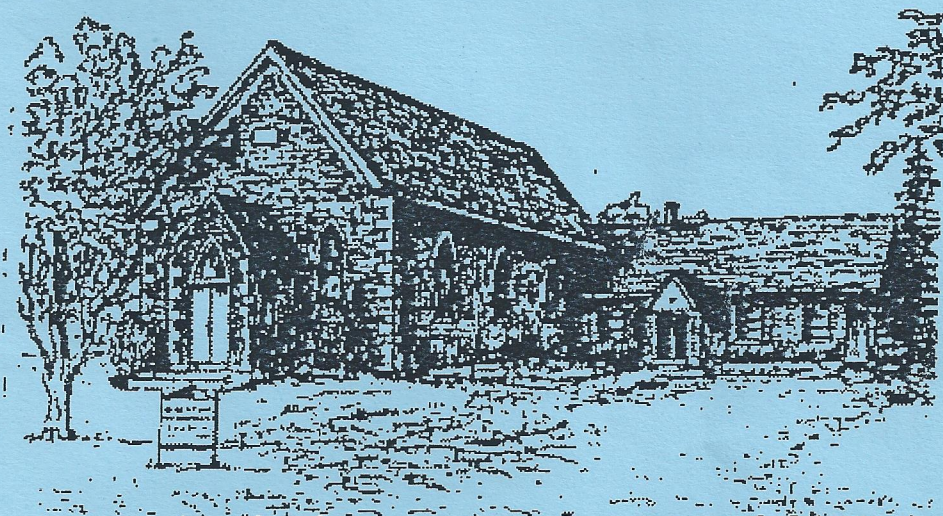


*Rep. John Bullard*

# Alberton Presbyterian Church



528 ALBERTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALBERTON, ONT. 1897-1898

J. Bullard del.

## History

528 Alberton Rd. N., Box 42, Alberton, Ontario L0R 1A0

*Submitted by History Conveyor, Jean Morwick, May 2002.*

The name for the community called Alberton is believed to have originated about 1854, and taken from Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert. Earliest records show that in 1846 William Kelly (1797-1881), a pioneer in the Ancaster West area (as Alberton was then known), gave a piece of land from the farm he had purchased in 1832 on Alberton Road North, (Lot 24, Concession 3 of Ancaster Township), for the building of a church. In return, he received the token payment of five shillings to make the transaction legal; he specified the church was to be a member of the new Free Church of Canada. There may have been a number of this branch of Presbyterianism roundabout, a group that probably worshipped in the home.

No doubt, Mr. Kelly felt the time had come to have a proper meeting place. The first building would have been a log structure. George Sharp, an Alberton elder in 1935, remembered "old folks" mentioning a log church on this road. George's parents were William Sharp (1831-1882), an elder, and Jane Findlay (1839-1916), who had bought land in the area in 1855. When Mr. Kelly deeded the land, the road from Hamilton to Brantford had been cut through and planked, so his site for a church was a good one.

The newly formed congregation was part of the Niagara Presbytery (Associate) "under inspection" of the Reverend John Frederick Augustus Sykes Fayette. This would imply he had oversight as an interim-moderator, and may have visited the flock. On November 23, 1852, the Presbytery of Flamborough states that Ancaster West (Alberton) was received into the fellowship of the United Presbyterian Church, still under Fayette's inspection. Mr. Kelly must have agreed to this change for he continued as elder till the time of his death, June 13, 1881.

Other changes followed. In June 1854, the Flamborough Presbytery reported that they had dissolved the pastoral connection between Fayette and Ancaster West; and on the same day, they had united the congregations of Ancaster East (Carluke) and Ancaster West into one pastoral charge, along with St. Andrew's of Ancaster Village. Furthermore, on July 10, 1855, they ordained the Rev. John Lees over this charge. The session of William Kelly and James Young met Mr. Lees in Ancaster Village along with Dr. Andrew Ferrier, Moderator Pro Tem, and they were constituted in their first Kirk Session. For a pioneer Congregation, it was a red-letter day, for now it had a full-time ordained minister to serve their needs.

The charter members in full communion on July 10, 1855, were: Daniel Van Sickle; Phoebe Van Sickle; William Kelly, elder; Charity Kelly; David Myers; Mrs. Pepper; Mehitable Bigger; Mary Weaver; Elisabeth Vanderlip; Elisabeth Weaver; Maurice Sharp; Annie Sharp; Francis Irwin; Nancy Van Sickle; Mary Clout (or Mrs. George Applegarth); Alexander Burnside; Ann Burnside; William Thomson; Ann Thomson; James Young, elder; Jane Young, Sen.; E.W. Wright; Margaret Wright; William Young; Mrs. William Young; Jane Young (or Mrs. James Burnside); Robert Forbes; Donald Forbes.

Mr. Lees served as pastor until 1869, with William Kelly, James Young, Alexander Burnside and Robert Forbes as elders. Session records make no mention of their frame church built in the early 1860's; this important fact is made known through the minutes of the Upper Canada Bible Society, where it states the society (Trinity and Alberton) met in the new church in Alberton in 1861 for its annual meeting – another major event, to be sure!

When the Rev. William Patrick Walker arrived in 1872, his session

consisted of William Kelly, Robert Forbes, A. Young and Hugh Morwick. Another milestone occurred "on the sixth day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand, eight hundred and sixty-one years when at Montreal the United Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Presbyterian Church of Canada were united into one body under the designation of the Canada Presbyterian Church." In consequence of this the session concurred that "The hand of Providence was recognized in the accomplishment of this most desirable result" and it was impressed upon the Kirk Sessions "the solemn responsibilities growing out of this epoch in their history." When this major announcement was made, for this session, it was agreed to take up a special collection to help clear the debt still owing on the Knox College building. They acted responsibly at once!

A further union was consummated in 1875, this time between the Presbyterian Church of Canada in connection with the Church of Scotland, the Canada Presbyterian Church and two other bodies, when all Presbyterians came under one banner, "The Presbyterian Church in Canada" as known to this day. The Rev. William Patrick Walker moderated the session, with elders Kelly, Forbes, Young and Hugh Morwick.

Raising money for congregational purposes in the 1850's was done through a Missionary Committee, with Robert Forbes as secretary-treasurer. Three women collectors, the Misses Agnes Young, Sarah Weaver and Mary Van Sickle, were "to go over the congregation regularly every two months to solicit subscriptions." In 1859, during six months the sum of fourteen dollars and sixty-four cents was collected and sent to the synod. Later, this mode of collecting was replaced by a collection made on an appointed Sunday.

(Perhaps the girls got married and were too busy with families!).

When a deficit occurred, or a special project was undertaken, canvassers were appointed for the occasion. The Hamilton Presbytery berated the congregation in 1875 "for the smallness of levies contributed to the schemes of the Church." By way of explanation, the minister replied that "it was due to the decision of the congregation to build a manse in the spring of 1876." They declined "to promise any more for the coming year." A manse materialized in Ancaster, and Alberton paid its share.

A brick church appeared in 1878. Additional land had already been bought for a driveshed in 1866, but when a blacksmith and wagon shop burned down (owned by William C. Kern and operated by Daniel House), for one hundred and twenty-five dollars the church bought this quarter acre lot to the south, for the erection of the present building. The keystone in the gable attests to this fact, even though the session minutes make no mention of its dedication! The date was November 19, 1878. Their pastor, the Rev. John Hepburn Ratcliffe had been inducted as minister in 1876. He served until 1883, including that important time in the congregation's life.

When the debt in 1882 rose to three hundred and twenty-five dollars, a subscription list was formed to canvass the people. At the congregational meeting of 1884, it was announced that "after much labour and vexation" the debt was cleared. At that time, the Rev. Thomas Turnbull Johnston had become their minister.

What was going on in the little church as its people worshipped Sunday by Sunday? By 1862, a Sunday School was functioning and a special

collection was taken for books. Later, in 1865, a collection provided an enlargement of the library; the early settlers valued learning, and books for the scholars were both precious and necessary. A Bible Class for older members was started too.

The Presbytery was very concerned with the state of religion in each congregation. Yearly, from 1877, a questionnaire was put to each session. It dealt with facts about family worship, number of communicants, care of the young, special evangelistic work, the minister's supervision of the people, oversight by the elders, elders' districts, weekly meetings for scripture readings and prayer, hindrances to spiritual life, Sabbath observance, frequency of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and admission to baptism. Because of the difficulty in travel, communion was observed twice a year, in May and October; and the Sunday School operated only during the summer months.

Music was conducted by the presenter. Francis Irwin was an early one. No one was found to replace William Young when he resigned in 1877. However, the congregation was soon to have a larger musical instrument than the tuning fork. In 1881, the minister told the session he had been approached by Mrs. William Kelly (nee Charity Van Sickle, 1808-1896) and told that she wished to give an organ to be used in the service of praise. A grateful congregation accepted this generous gift. In compliance with Mrs. Kelly's wish, it was also agreed that Miss Mary Sager be appointed as organist; should she decline, the congregation wished Miss Mary Sharp to be appointed. It was at this time also that the Hymnal of the Presbyterian Church was adopted. Prior to this, the presenter had led in singing of the Psalmody from memory. From now on, the congregation stood for singing and remained

seated for prayers.

Another important step was taken in 1881, when the session agreed that collections would be taken up for missions in the Sunday School and Bible Class. It was seen as "necessary to train children of the Church in the grace of giving," especially when the pressing claims of mission work in Canada were a major concern.

The Board of Managers came into being that year too. Those elected were: Messrs. James Christison, William Wright, David Kelly, Richard Kelly, William Sharp and Alem Kelly. Thus, 1881 was quite a year in Alberton Church – missions, music and managers!

When the women of the church asked to play a more significant role in 1885, they received permission from the session to form a Ladies' Aid Society. (It has now been alive for over one hundred years). Tea meetings, as they were called then, quilting bees and annual bazaars were some of the activities that earned them respect. Records of early days have not survived, but these names as workers stand out: Mesdames L. Didmon, R. Smith, J. Morwick, G. Sharp, H. Ferguson, W. Young, R. Kelly, E. Baker, W. Baker, T. Wright, A. Baker, R. Horning and J. Thomson.

In more recent times, Stella Baker, Lily Robertson, Hazel Baker, Lila Wright, Isabel Fair, Dorothy Sharp and Lil Lovering filled the offices and shared in the projects. Today, they gather on Wednesdays in the hall for an all-day quilting session. Their services of quilting are sought in the wider Ancaster area. The regular stitchers are Helen Billiald, Wilma Butter, Margaret Lovering, Frances Campbell, Georgina Zimmerman, Helen Reid and others who drop

in to lend a hand. They are generous with their funds for church expenses, charities and the support of a child in a Third World country.

Another women's organization now came into existence. In 1899, the subject arose of reorganizing the missionary society. By 1909, a Home Missionary Society became organized. "Packing the bale" was once a big event, but has since been replaced by offerings.

In the 1980's three Alberton women served in the Hamilton Presbyterial – Clara Burditt, Helen Billiald and Wilma Butter, the latter two as presidents.

The Carluke and Alberton congregations separated when the former became self-sustaining in 1876. At that time, Ancaster and Alberton were reunited. Formerly, Ancaster was joined in 1870 with the Barton Stone Church congregation. However, in 1891, Alberton became a two-point charge with Onondaga, Brant County, a union that lasted a little over four years. It was ended because of difficulty in traveling over snow-covered roads in winter and ankle-deep mud in spring. Eventually Alberton united again with Ancaster, a union which remained in effect until 1994.

An interesting minister for Alberton (1883-85) was Thomas Turnbull Johnston. As a Knox student, he kept a diary of his experiences during a harrowing trip to the Upper Ottawa region. He left Alberton when they would not add a free manse to his stipend. Alberton's new church building was only eight years old when gale force winds caved in its eastern façade and damaged the gable, which had to be rebuilt. A congregational meeting was called for May 25, 1886, to consider how to raise fifty-eight dollars and sixty cents necessary for repairs. That amount was about one-fifth of the yearly



revenue. The minister at the time was H.C. Ross.

Much needed space for Sunday School classes was provided in 1910, by an addition on the western end of the church. On its northern side stood a large woodshed, partially planked over to provide kitchen space and a range for the women; beyond this lay the "privy" and driveshed, all under one roof.

Apparently, the question of Church Union in 1925, which brought upheaval in many congregations, did not affect Alberton. When the vote was taken in January of that year, four approved and sixty-nine opposed the idea. No members left the fold. From 1886 to 1925 the following ministers served: H.C. Ross, John McClung, William M. Reid, D.H. Hodges, J.I. Manthorne, Andrew Ford Webster, Donald H. Currie, Gilbert Gray MacRobbie. They were followed by G.M. Young, Dr. E. Pugh Thomas, Dr. John McNab (editor of the Presbyterian Record) and David J. <sup>Donaghue</sup> Douglas. In 1935, the ladies found the kitchen facilities so inadequate that Thomas Williams built a new kitchen giving them cupboards with adequate shelves.

A new generation came to the fore following World War II. They saw the need for renovations, and under the Rev. Dean Cassidy an updated programme was launched. The windows in the sanctuary were replaced, each one being the gift of a family or former members, at a cost of one hundred and forty dollars each. They were dedicated in 1959. Phase II saw a "Ways and Means" committee appointed; later that year the present building at the rear of the church was erected. It incorporated the former Sunday School and now provided parlour, washrooms, kitchen and hall space for classrooms below. Many hours of labour were given by members; especially remembered

is Clinton Telfer, Sr., who gave unstintingly to this project.

also Percy Baker and  
Harold Wright

All this refurbishment made the sanctuary look shabby. The renovation committee chaired by Barbara Ferguson, and made up of Truey Baker, Jean Morwick and Messrs. William Baker, Nelson Howell, Ivan Zimmerman and Roy Billiald. Architect C.H. Moeller of Ancaster was engaged, and the renovation completed. Generous gifts were made in memory of former members. The communion table, pulpit, lectern, cross, front doors and piano were consecrated at a special service of celebration on September 20, 1964, when the hall was also dedicated. The debt of over eight thousand dollars was met by pledges. A gift from the Susan Kitchen Estate provided extra money.

An enlargement of the property occurred in 1960, when land to the south was purchased from the provincial highway department, providing a fifty-foot buffer zone from the highway.

Although the Young People's Society no longer functions, it once was very active. In the 1930's, Alfred Fair served on the provincial executive as treasurer. Four Alberton members were part of the rally in the early 1930's when eleven train cars of young Christians descended upon the capital city. Later, the youth kept busy attending retreats at Camp Goforth; planting shrubs around the church; serving at Wayside House; taking part in the church services and making banners in the 1967 Centennial Year.

In 1972, Mrs. Norma Baker organized the "Albertones", a group of girl singers who delighted all who heard them. Their members were: Norma's

daughters, Laura Jean and Nancy Kent; Sandra Lovering; Marilyn and Barbara Billiald; Diane Brooks; Sandra Jerome; Karen Ferguson and Christine Telfer.

In the 1950's, Children of the Church and Explorers replaced the Mission Band. Their leaders were Ruth Baker, Grace Markle, Wilma Butter, Mildred Markle, Norma Y. Baker, Edna Jerome, Helen Billiald, Corrie and Karl Van Derschaaf. Later, the Explorers joined with a group in Carluke, with Jean Morwick as a helper.

The Sunday School has been ably looked after by superintendents who in many cases served long periods: Oliver Howell, Garnet Vanderlip, B.J. Burditt, Lyn and Lloyd Zimmerman and Florence Smith. The cradle roll has been active, with Mrs. William Young serving for many years. In the month of July, Daily Vacation Bible Schools proved popular. Potluck suppers were started in 1983, in efforts to reach out into the community. So popular have they proved that larger accommodation in the Senior Achievement Centre nearby has been needed. The Advent Season is used to nourish spiritual values.

Church envelopes were first used in 1908. Annual reports have been printed since 1914. The congregation is enrolled in the "Every Home Plan" of the Presbyterian Record. The first woman member of the Board of Managers was Jean Morwick, elected in 1959, followed by her election to the session in 1969. She became its clerk in 1971, after B.J. Burditt's long term; was a member of the Synod Camp Board for seven years; and has sat on Presbytery as our representative elder.

Caretaking from 1965 until recently has been done by families of the church, with work-bees being held in spring and autumn. In 1988, Irvin and

Florence Smith redecorated the sanctuary walls for the one hundred and tenth anniversary celebrations of the present building, when Dr. Robert G. MacMillan was the guest preacher, and led the congregation later in a time of fellowship and celebration.

Alberton has had strong choirs in the past, with able leadership provided by Bert Burditt and people like Mrs. W.C. Baker. A new organ was bought in 1970.

Community interests have received strong support from members: the Ancaster Agricultural Society; the Provincial Fair Board; the Junior Farmers of Ontario; the 4-H programmes; the Ploughmen's Association; the Ancaster Senior Achievement Centre; the Ancaster Township Historical Society, the Local Architectural Conservancy Advisory Committee and the Fieldcote Museum. Walter Ferguson played a part in Ancaster's municipal life, serving as councilor and reeve. After his death, his wife, Barbara, and sons, Lloyd and Murray, followed as councilors.

Alberton church has been served well by members whose names appear over and over again in its records. Up to the year 1900, we see such names as Kelly, Young, Burnside, Morwick, Irwin, Sharp, Kerr, Howell, Sager, Billiald, Smith and Baker. Treasurers such as Albert Fair and Roy Billiald have given long service. The ministry continued to provide strong leaders such as Thomas H. Boyd (1964-67), Byron A. Nevin (1967-86) and David L. McInnis (1986-1994).

The above history of Alberton Presbyterian Church was printed in 1990 in the publication produced by The Presbytery of Hamilton entitled "Wee Kirks

and Stately Steeples.” Many changes have occurred since then, and the following, hopefully, will cover subsequent events in the life of this congregation.

Of course, life has gone as usual, with its births, deaths, marriages, baptisms and golden wedding anniversaries; ministers have come and gone; new members and adherents have been added to the Roll. But an event of tremendous impact occurred in 1993, when the congregation of St. Andrew's, Ancaster, with Rev. David McInnes as minister of both charges, requested that Presbytery make it a separate entity, severing its long-standing connection with Alberton. By having their own minister, serving their needs alone, it was hoped that this would bring growth, much desired for many years. Final stages for this separation were completed in 1994. Alberton wished St. Andrew's well, unwilling to stand in the way of their progress, but separation did indeed leave Alberton in a very precarious position with only fifty members and quite unable to support a full-time minister on its own.

Presbytery, as well as members of the Alberton congregation, were quite concerned, and did everything possible to help the congregation to function by itself. Rev. Robert Bernhardt was appointed Interim Moderator to oversee and provide for our needs. He held this position for several years. Rev. Walter Read was inducted as minister in 1995, and served until December 1998.

Since September, 1992, the Ancaster Independent Christian Reformed Church has also used the building and its facilities, worshipping at 11.00 a.m. and 7.00 p.m., which fits in well with our 9.30 a.m. Sunday service, with an hour of fellowship following. Their financial help eased us over a difficult time after the separation, as well as generous contributions towards our

projects, which have benefited them too.

In September 1999 our Interim Moderator, Rev. Larry Cowper, persuaded Rev. Dr. John A. Johnston to be our Interim Minister. How fortunate for us that this renowned minister, recently retired from MacNab Street Church after many years of outstanding service there, took on this small, struggling congregation. So many good things have happened since.

First and foremost, Dr. Johnston has helped us to regain our confidence, badly battered and at low ebb, and with his enthusiastic leadership, good things are happening. A summary follows

1. The Canadian Food Grains Bank is on-going;
2. A project known as Cows for Central America (Nicaragua) was embraced successfully;
3. Two banners celebrating Millennium 2000 have been quilted by The Ladies Aid Society, one designed by Aly Meter of The Netherlands, A friend of the Venemas, the other incorporating the Church's "Fan the Flames" theme. The banners have been for two years on tour across Canada, returning in August 2002, to be hung in the sanctuary.
4. Pew cushions made by Florence and Irvin Smith provide much comfort;
5. Two new furnaces were installed and a conversion to natural gas heating followed;

6. New carpeting installed;
7. New drapes behind the Cross;
8. New doors in the hall;
9. Gowns for the choir;
10. A small orchestra of organ, piano, violin, drum, horns and accordion are in place virtually every Sunday to help us sing joyfully unto the Lord, with Laura Jean Falla directing the musical program effectively;
11. The Social Committee provides festive times at pancake suppers, St. Andrew's and Burns' Supper celebrations and church family summer picnics at the home of Lloyd and Martha Ferguson;
12. A big event occurred on March 17, 2002, when we were honoured by a visit from the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Rt. Rev. Dr. John Miller, and his wife. After a breakfast of pancakes, sausages and maple syrup, he delivered a very touching sermon, telling of his work among the members of his Glasgow parish, where he lives among them in a Council House, with his wife engaged in social work. We were moved by his simplicity and humble spirit as he made us aware of our link with Presbyterians around the world. He was touched by our gift of a jug of maple syrup, truly Canadian. His visit was a red letter day in Alberton;
13. A memorial gift of \$1,000.00 from the Freeman family, grandchildren of Clara Burditt, allowed us to purchase copies of our new Presbyterian

Book of Praise; other copies have since been purchased and sit in a newly-constructed bookcase above the table at the rear of the church;

14. Rev. Byron Nevin became our Minister Emeritus in February 2001.

Byron had served as minister for many years and is dearly loved here;

15. In September, 2001, the children's group "Kids' Club", began its bi-weekly meetings under the leadership of Lyn and Lloyd Zimmerman

16. Our Church School is well staffed to care for our children's instruction. Fifteen children were sent to Camp Kintail in 2002, virtually our entire Sunday School;

17. For some time we had our eyes on the vacant lot, measuring 30,000 square feet, adjoining the church building on the south side and stretching to the highway, owned by the Ministry of Highways. As early as November 1999, Ted Morwick had been asked by the Session to contact the Ministry of Transport regarding the acquisition of this property. Parking for our other congregation had become a concern, with their having to use the road shoulders, a source of possible danger. On March 27, 2000, the land was put on the market and open for bids. An offer of \$45,000.00 was made, accompanied by the necessary down payment, just one minute before the deadline for the submission of offers. Murray Ferguson, Ted Morwick and Dr. Johnston played their parts in this major transaction. With the approval of Presbytery and help from the Extension Board of Hamilton Presbytery, a grant from the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Extension Unions of MacNab and Central Churches, and assurance from the Alberton congregation for



the balance of \$15, 000.00, the purchase was approved by the Presbytery. The total payment was made before the year 2000 passed. A service of thanksgiving followed and God was given praise for guidance once again;

18. Landscaping was begun in 2001 and continued in 2002 with a fence erected to the west of the property. A sign in Presbyterian blue to match the fence posts tells passersby who we are. A sidewalk leads from the parking lot to the front entrance, thanks to Lloyd Ferguson and his company, Dufferin Construction;
19. In May, 2002, a new sidewalk and wheelchair ramp were constructed;
20. A new cupboard beside the stage was installed and an antique desk was donated to the National Presbyterian Museum;
21. Plans to renovate the kitchen are now underway;
22. Two new ruling elders, Tom Fiddes and Paul Rowcroft, were ordained in June 2002, in order to meet the spiritual needs of the congregation.

What's next? As God leads us, so we will go! A lot of happenings have taken place in Alberton Presbyterian Church since 1990, all will agree. We pray that the future will provide men and women of faith to bear witness to the one and only God, our Father, His Holy Spirit, and His Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

***Submitted by History Conveyor, Jean Morwick, May 2002.***