

## Pine Grove United Church, Burton, NB Historical Sketch

As a stranger drives through Burton, his eye is charmed as he passes a beautiful little church in a secluded place beside a cemetery. His first thought is likely to be "O, how lovely". Rows of majestic pines, towering high above the building and adjacent forest, line the roadside and surround the entire lot. These stately trees seem to unite with God's people in the worship, and stand as guards over the sacred dust where "The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep". They suggest the name "Pine Grove Church and Cemetery".

Among the pre-loyalist settlers, who came from New England to the Saint John River Valley in 1763, was Edward Burpee who obtained land and built the house once owned by Eugene and Ethel Burpee. A portion of this land was set aside for the cemetery and at a later date his son, Moses C. Burpee, donated the site for the Church. Many of the early settlers of Burton were, like Mr. Edward Burpee, of the pre-loyalist and puritan stock. Although without a church building of their own for many years, they were not irreligious. They crossed the river and united with their brethren there in public worship. No doubt they gathered in private houses for prayer and religious instruction under lay leadership, as did their neighbours on the otherside of the river.

The earliest report of a Methodist Church in Burton is dated the 7th day of November 1848, when a meeting was held to take steps towards the erection of a "Methodist Meeting-house". At the meeting, it was agreed that the building should be erected on the land adjoining the graveyard; and the aforesaid Moses C. Burpee offered the necessary site. The deed was later given to the Trustee Board, which consisted of James Gordon, John McGowan, William Thompson and John Phinney. At the same meeting, it was further agreed that a paper be drawn up for the purpose of receiving subscriptions for the said building. At the next meeting, held November 22, 1848, it was decided that the building should be 28 X 36 feet on the ground, with 15 ft. posts.

A building committee was appointed consisting of Moses C. Burpee, William Thompson, William McGowan, William Kilpatrick and George N. Gordon. Offers were made for the supply of materials and labour, and it was agreed that the lumber should be delivered on the spot by the last day of April. Jacob Barker promised that the foundation would be ready by 15th of May, 1849.

On the other side of the river a Congregational Church was built shortly after the arrival of the settlers who came in 1763. Their first resident minister was Rev. Seth Noble. Among the pioneer ministers who visited Sheffield was Rev. William Black, who, in 1792, organized the first Methodist Class -meeting in that community and a Methodist Church was built there in 1818. A number of the Burton people were associated with the Sheffield Methodists long before the "meeting house" was built in Burton.

After the Burton building was completed the new congregation sent a letter to the Methodist Conference, meeting in Woodstock in 1852, stating that for many years they had found it inconvenient to cross the river on the Lord's day to attend worship in Sheffield. It was stated that a neat and commodious chapel had been erected in Burton and was ready for opening. It was requested that the conference might send a young minister to be stationed in Burton and preach also at Gagetown and Oromocto under the supervision of the minister at Sheffield. Owing to the scarcity of ministers, this request was not immediately granted but a circuit was organized in 1854 with Burton at its head and Rev. George S. Milligan, M.A. a scholarly young Scotsman, as minister. Gagetown was one of the appointments. In 1858, Gagetown became the head of the circuit and since then Burton has been associated either with the Gagetown congregation or with the church in Oromocto. A long line of faithful and energetic local workers and ministers have, by God's grace, kept the fires of religion burning and brought heaven's blessing to the entire community. The year 1925 brought a great change to Canadian church life when, on June 25, 1925, the United Church of Canada came into being, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregation Churches joined hands in the struggle against evil and the Pine Grove Methodist Church became the Pine Grove United Church as it is know today.

In the 1940's memorial gifts were presented consisting of hymnaries, an oak hymn board, a communion tray with glasses, cloth for the communion table, a glass filler for the communion and electriclight fixtures. At this time Pine Grove was a part of a combined Gagetown-Oromocto Charge with preaching points at Tweedsmuir and Shirley Settlement as well (summer appointment with some assistance by student ministers for a few years). Tweedsmuir was a rather new settlement along the Broad Road below Geary where a church was being built and Shirley was situated between the Broad and River Roads. For a few years, services were also conducted in the school in Swan Creek. In the early 1950's with the expropriation of land for the military base known as Camp Gagetown, the churches and lands at Tweedsmuir and Shirley were sold to the Department of National Defense and the money from these sales was divided equally between the churches in Oromocto, Gagetown and Burton. It was decided to use Pine Grove's share of this money as a payment on the construction of a church basement. During the summer and fall of 1956, the church was raised from its original foundation, moved half of its width from the cemetery, the basement was constructed and a new oil furnace and chimney were installed. As a note of interest, it might be mentioned that when the earth was excavated for the basement, the old pine stumps were still in evidence, verifying the fact it has originally been a "pinegrove".

The Pine Grove Church continued to undergo changes through maintenance and additions such as additional land for the cemetery, electric heat and ceiling fan, chimney removal and new insulation, vinyl siding, roofing, new fencing around the cemetery, paraplegic ramp and steps, electric organ, seasonal communion

tablecloths, and pulpit book rest. Memorials over this period include new pews, a wooden cross behind the pulpit, baptismal font, antependia (church seasonal pulpit hangings), green hymnaries, Voices United and More Voices United hymnbooks.

Since the early 1940's the ministers who have served at the Pine Grove Church include: J.E. Forbes, 1942; M. H. Manuel, 1945; P. H. Burrill, 1950; Ernest Breen, 1954; Ronald Smith, 1956; Merton Ewing, 1957; H.J. Flemming, Jr., 1960; Fred I. Withers, 1964; Norman Estey, 1967; Stewart Russell, 1973; Harold King, 1975; Darrell Metzler, 1982; Susan Estabrooks, 1992; Margie Patterson 1999, Robert McDowell, 2006 and Lori Beth Sheffield-Bowles 2014.

A Pine Grove Congregational meeting held on May 6, 2012 determined the number of services at Pine Grove Church would change due to lack of regular attendance (five to seven). A motion was carried that "Combined services for Pine Grove Church be held during the month of July and for Christmas Eve communion". The church elders will be able to add any services as requested (weddings, baptisms, funerals, etc)". The next step was to explore the integration and amalgamation of finances of the churches. Finances for 2013 were continued as in the past. The 2014 finances were separate from Oromocto, but done by same treasurer. Pine Grove kept its own budget lines for finances, its own Presbytery Representative and its own Trustees, however, other committees became blended

In June 2015, quotes were received for putting metal posts and fencing around the Pine Grove Cemetery. Mike Ryan accepted seeing the completion of this project. New fencing was completed later that year. Fill was bought and spread for the cemetery extension, which was necessary, as the old part was getting full. Landscaping was completed the next spring. Money, bequested by Eugene Burpee in 2008, designated for Pine Grove Cemetery, was used for these needed improvements.

The condition of the Pine Grove Church was brought to the congregation's attention. Discussions, as to the future of the church, needed to begin. A Pine Grove Congregational meeting on May 1, 2016, was held to discuss how members felt concerning future repairs to the building or dismantling the church. The motion, passed, was that a contractor be asked to assess the structure, and confirm, necessary repairs with costs.

On September 18, 2016, the congregation was informed that the structure was sound but the building had two issues. The stained glass windows needed maintenance. The basement needed work in order to remove the mold and to prevent further mold being formed. The Congregation of Pine Grove United Church approved that trustee, Mike Ryan, oversee the following repairs to the building, with a \$3000 cost expected:

### Basement

Dispose of materials in the basement

Remove all wall and ceiling coverings

Wash remaining surfaces to eliminate mold

Provide airflow to basement by replacing two windows with metal venting of two basement windows.

Close off rear door as a security measure.

### Sanctuary windows

Remove old caulking and replace with new

Do necessary repairs to sills

Following this meeting, Rev. Lori Beth Sheffield Bowles sent a letter to Heritage And Resources Committee of Woolastook Presbytery informing them of the state of the Pine Grove Church and of the congregation's decisions. Due to seasonal timing, this work was not started until 2017.

The materials in the basement and the walls/ceiling coverings were removed from basement. The vents, to provide airflow, were installed. Work was stopped after health concerns were raised, as the high levels of black mold and rot made an unsafe working environment. No work was started for the windows. The fix was going to be moving the church off the basement, fill the basement in and move building back on a new cement pad. This expense was determined by congregation to be much more than the few regular attendees could warrant.

An agreement to cease services at the Pine Grove United Church was reached, due to concerns of air quality raised by a summer supply minister, and some congregation, during July 2017 services. This prompted a recommendation that the church be closed. A request to presbytery was made for direction as to what the next steps would be for the fate of the church. The last service inside Pine Grove United Church was held on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

At a Pine Grove Congregational meeting held on April 15, 2018, a motion was made, and carried, that the Pine Grove Church be closed with a decommissioning service to be held later in the year. An inventory of the contents of Pine Grove Church was completed during the summer of 2018. Several of these items were moved to the Oromocto church (two large chairs, baptismal font, communion table, cross, organ). A number of pews were sold during the fall of 2018.

On September 16, 2018 a congregational meeting was held, and motions approved, to begin the process of amalgamating Pine Grove United Church and Oromocto United Church. A decommissioning service was held outside the 170 year old church on October 21, 2018. On October 28, a meeting was held to discuss, and decide, on a name for the amalgamated congregations. It was

moved, and passed, that the combined church congregation remain as Oromocto United Church in Oromocto Pastoral Charge.

A realtor had seen the building when it was thought it could be sold. That response put no value for the building. The cost to move the building would be too high. After this information, it was decided to try selling on KIJJI and to sell the pews as well. A committee was formed to determine where Pine Grove items could be placed in the Oromocto church.

Suggestions will go to Church Council with further plans taken to the 2018 Annual General Meeting.