

One thing they both recall is that the Women's Auxiliary of St. Mary Magdalene played a key role in helping to keep the church stay open as long as it did – they recall it closed for good some time around 1992, after probably more than 75 years of service to the residents of the Monteith/Driftwood City settlement and the surrounding farm country.

There were two rows of pews, six on either side, with a maximum capacity of probably 25 or 30 worshippers. At the end, a Sunday service – whether in the morning or afternoon or evening, whether conducted by a minister from St. John's in Matheson or from St. Mark's in Iroquois Falls, a good turnout would be a half dozen. Most often, three or four faithful would show up.

It's difficult, but not impossible, to fathom the life-changing experiences that took place within the walls of this little house of worship – the weddings, the baptisms, the Christenings, the ordinary Sunday services, the Holy Communions, the Women's Auxiliary meetings, the funerals, and just the simply celebrations of faith that the early pioneers of the north would have gathered together to share with one another.

In likelihood, there were probably many non-religious events held in the little church, since, as Jake said, a church was certainly a place of worship, but in small locations like Monteith these tiny churches often doubled as town halls and even temporary school houses.

There could have been a mish-mash of faiths represented in Monteith, Roman Catholic of the English and French variety, Anglicans, Methodist, Finnish and Slovak and German Lutherans – and the doors of the single little church, whether in Shillington or Monteith or Watabeag, would have been open to all – and not only out of necessity – but because of mutual respect.

“The churches in these communities were really community centres as much as they were churches, said Jake. “It didn't matter what religion you were, the church building was everybody's common gathering place.”

Homes and towns where families once lived are fascinating, but there's something tragic and amazing about abandoned churches. These homes-away-from-home, like St. Mary Magdalene in Monteith, were often the setting of life-changing experiences.

