

POST

Vernonville United: Church be

By Barry King

In its heyday, the village of Vernonville was a thriving community with a school, the "Blacklock" carriage shop, three hotels, a Sons of Temperance Hall and, strikingly set against a heavily treed slope, the white steepled church.

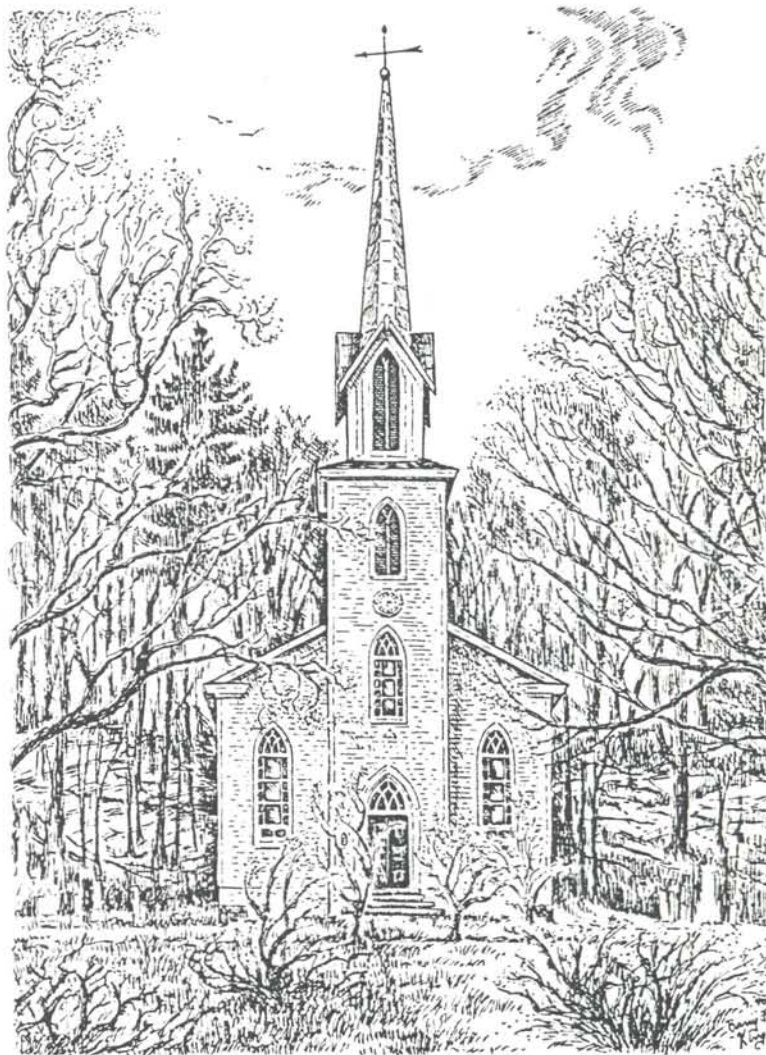
The origins of the Haldimand Township village can be traced to 1860, when the land was first surveyed and subdivided into 60 lots of one quarter acre each. Two one-acre lots were also planned, but one eventually returned to farmland. The other belonged to Charles H. Vernon and was sold to the Presbyterian Church in 1861 for the sum of 10 pounds.

In 1853, Charles had purchased his farm in the third concession, now the site of Vernonville, from the University of Toronto. An early settler and farmer, he later became a magistrate and a member of the counties' council.

Vernonville's prosperity coincided with the development of more than 25 mills that were mostly located along nearby Shelter Valley Creek. Two of these were the Broomfield Sawmill, three miles north, and the Gillespie Flour

Mill, one mile west, whose operations began as early as the 1830s.

When the time came to build the church, the pattern of the old kirk of St. Andrew's in Campbellford was decided on. Plans were drawn by James Kille who, along with George Robson, was sent by the villagers to study the Campbellford church. It has been



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EXTRA!

The Saturday Morning Post (Post Extra), April 14, 1990

meath the wooded hill

said that the spire shows some of the influence of the English architect Sir Christopher Wren.

Originally called St. Andrew's to serve the Scottish settlers of the community, the first minister, W. Smith, was from another Celtic country, Ireland. In the tradition of the times, many volunteers, guided by master carpenter James Johnstone, helped with its construction. Massive timbers, purchased from the Hanford Sargent farm at Eddystone and hewn by hand, can still be seen in the ceiling. By 1862, the finishing plaster work was completed by Thomas Clitheroe and services could commence.

Inside, the church still possesses the original pews that were installed just a few years after it was built. At one time, the number of worshippers was so great that a balcony was erected to hold the overflow. The walls are decorated with biblical paintings and the windows boast stained glass panes.

Though more than a century and a quarter have passed since the raising of its landmark steeple, the building continues to be well cared for.

In 1925, it became part of the United Church, and in 1932, 100 pines were planted by Lieut. Charles Rutherford V.C. in memory of the area's early Scottish settlers.

Services are conducted annually each decoration Day (the second Sunday in June), and occasionally it is the scene of a wedding. Though many of the congregation's founding families have moved away, their names can be found in the churchyard cemetery and some were recalled in the naming of several township roads. Some of the earliest stones carry these names: Gleason, Broomfield, McRae, Gillespie, Deviney, McAuley, Mulholland, Dunbar, Rutherford, Kerr, Robson, Radcliffe and Shand.

Were it not for its vane-topped steeple, Vernonville United Church might easily be missed by travellers along Shelter Valley Road. Almost hidden in a woodland setting, it has become affectionately known to its neighbours as "the church beneath the wooded hill."

(Thank you to Mrs. Leeman and Mrs. Broomfield for providing much of the information in this article.)

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