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Area landmark to disappear

"I was a young lad then but I could drive a nail," explained Reg Tourney, 93, who helped build the Watabeag Anglican Church in 1910.

The church, which is scheduled to be demolished this week, holds a lot of fond memories for Reg Tourney of his years growing up and attending church every Sunday.

"I used to carry the portable organ a mile and a half up a bush trail every Sunday from our home," explained Tourney, who now lives in Beamsville, Ontario.

"My mother Marion Tourney used to play the organ during the church service every Sunday," recalled Reg, one of the last true pioneers of the area.

"In those days, there were no roads and it was common for us to carry packs that weighed about 150 pounds or more," explained Tourney.

"I was even christened and confirmed there by Bishop Anderson," said Tourney, sad upon hearing the news that the Church was to be torn down.

"The church should be preserved at all costs. The history and the memories of that church will never be forgotten," said Tourney sadly.

"I used to be a member of the boys' choir in the church. We used to sing to about 11 or 12 people on a normal Sunday and on special occasions there would be about 20 or 21. That was a big crowd," he recalled.

Having helped built the church when he was young, Tourney remembers that pine trees were cut out of the surrounding bush and then cut into beams at a local farm set up with a sawmill.

Tourney's father, mother, aunt, sister and brother Bob are all buried in the cemetery beside the church and Reg said that perhaps one day, he might be buried there to join the rest of his family.

"But I've still got a lot of years in me yet," explained the 93-year-old.

Julie Clark, Reg's niece still lives near the church where she grew up.

"I can remember my uncles helped build the church which was built of logs and then covered with shingles," she recalled.

Her father who just passed away recently, left explicit orders he was to be buried along with the family, she said.

Reg, however, who saw the church only two months ago said the church isn't dangerous and the money that is to be collected to erect a monument to the church and the people who built it should be used to fix up the 76 year old church.

Peter Ginn, a local history buff explained the church escaped the Matheson Fire in 1916. However, Tourney said the fire, which was started by railway workers who were burning old railway ties, didn't reach the Watabeag area and the church wasn't in any danger of being burned.

"I remember that I was in the Army and stationed at Camp Borden at the time. I was one of the many troops who were sent to the area to pick up the dead, search for others and to bury them," he recalled.

"I had to bury a lot of my friends," he said sadly.

However, with the church to be demolished this week, a committee

has been formed by Ginn that will collect money to have a special monument built at the site once the church is gone.

Ginn said Monday night that, although the committee will begin collecting funds in the new year, he hopes to raise more than \$5,000 to erect a brass plaque as well as a monument.

"There are a lot of people who are willing to donate to the committee for a memorial," explained Ginn.

"Bishop Caleb Lawrence from South Porcupine had given approval for the church to be demolished and it was his wish that the structure be burned so as not to disturb any of the graves in the cemetery," said Ginn.

A member of the local cemetery board, Ginn said the cemetery adjacent to the church is the resting place of between 20-30 pioneers who helped build the north.

Although the Bishop called for the church to be destroyed by fire, Black River-Matheson council expressed concern and will have the church bulldozed.

Although the church will remain in the memories of the people who helped build it and those who attended the last service more than 30 years ago, artifacts such as solid brass plaques engraved with the Ten Commandments as well as pews in the church have been removed and are in the new Anglican Church.

So, despite the church being taken away from the landscape which it has occupied for so many years, the memories and the artifacts will help the church live on.