

Churchill

The church that refused to die

by Jeanette Barr

A brief history condensed from information received, with thanks, from Frank Freeman, longtime official of Churchill Church and caretaker of historical records of Churchill now in the Canadian Archives; and from Chuck Beaton, minister of Acton Trinity Church, compiler of a printed Churchill history.

The little white church sits serenely on the hill wrapping her trees around her, unconcerned by the internal upheavals that have thrice threatened her very existence. During the past one hundred and forty years Churchill Church has suffered three congregational splits but still keeps coming up smiling.

Built in 1837 by Jacob Swackhamer, his first deacon, Churchill Church situated on Third Line and the Erin Esquing "Town Line" was often called the "Swackhamer Church". Most of its early membership was made up of the Swackhamer family, who are still very active in the congregation.

Originally a Congregational church, Churchill weathered its first storm in the 1860's when the Methodist portion of the membership built their own church less than a mile away on the corner of the second line (now highway 25) and the town line.

The Methodist church did not survive and a new one was eventually built in Acton village some 14 years later. At this time many of Churchill's Acton members left to join the newly-formed Acton Methodist congregation. A fine brick building was built complete with stained glass windows, carpeting and a brand new bell. A debt of \$8,000 was incurred by this new church—"a fantastic sum"—and the members had difficulty discharging the debt.

Meanwhile, Churchill Church, much depleted, continued to survive.

At the turn of the century many rural churches passed into extinction due mainly to a shortage of ministers. Congregationalists in general saw their church fail because of

lack of loyalty to any national body. Many Congregationalists came to Churchill from other closed community churches. Worshippers travelled by horse and buggy from as far away as Erin.

Baptist membership was encouraged. Because of a dearth of ministers, Baptist ministers were borrowed from Acton. But, in 1925, Churchill Church became one of the United Church fold.

In 1938, a huge gala celebration marked the hundredth anniversary of Churchill. Newly decorated with electric lights the church overflowed with members and friends attending the two day festivities and services. Rev. Dr. T. A. Moore from Toronto was the guest speaker. Dr. Moore was the brother of H. P. Moore, then publisher of the Acton Free Press.

The church stood tall until 1953 when her post foundation, often rooled by visiting pigs, started to crumble. Facing the necessity of expensive repair, the subject of closing Churchill was once more in the air.

Again the congregation rallied and undertook the job of building a solid foundation with extra meeting room and kitchen facilities downstairs. The old drive shed was used as part of the new vestry but still the estimated \$5,000 job grew until the 50 members faced a staggering debt of twice that much.

With the pioneer faith always present in this little church, members worked hard and repaid the debt in less than nine years.

By 1968, the church had dwindled to a mere meeting place for the one Sunday service by a borrowed minister and closure seemed imminent. The United Church sought to close the church

once and for all and move the entire congregation to Acton. A fiery damaging feud started, marking the most heated dispute of Churchill's history. Brothers refused to talk to one another, neighbours no longer visited, friends turned away from each other as the battle raged whether or not to keep the churchgoing.

The entire membership was transferred to the Acton church and Churchill became a nameless empty church until those members who wanted to stay managed to get themselves transferred back to the little church on the hill.

A new phase in Churchill's history started as it became a non-denominational community church and members who previously found little

time for church activities, became a hard working congregation. "It was the best thing that could have happened to the church," said members agree. Now the church was humming and alive. Faced with the worst and making their choice, the new membership threw themselves into making the church a centre of community activity.

Today, Churchill is one of the most active country churches around thanks to a nucleus of enthusiastic families. Social events, Sunday School, concerts and picnics augment the services and are well attended by the 40 families who support the church.

It's no wonder Churchill has been called "the church which refused to die."



Churchill Community Church

Steel strike in Milton

Picket lines went up round Frnkcl Steel Ltd. plant at Milton last week. Last June about 160 workers were laid off. Forty-three people manned picket lines there, while 130 struck the Scarborough plant.

The main stumbling block as far as workers are concerned is said to be the offer of a three year contract. According to union officials the original offer included no raise in the first year and minimal increase thereafter. Company president Jeff Jackson refused comment on the strike.

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Obituary

Fred West dies in Halton Manor

On August 22, David Frederick West passed peacefully away at Halton Centennial Manor after some years of intermittent illnesses and latterly in steadily failing health.

Mr. West was born in Guelph Township in 1891, the son of Lemuel and Adeline (Ryder) West. He was predeceased by one sister, the late Mrs. Gertrude Calvert and one brother, the late William West.

In June 1921, he married Margaret Near and went to live on the farm on the First Line of Erin where they lived for over 40 years. Their family consists of three children, Mrs. John Chapman (Wilma) of R. R. No. 2, Rockwood; Mrs. Lylal McCutcheon (Helen) of Preston; and Judge Ernest West of Waterloo. There are nine grandchildren and one great-grandson. Mrs. West, also in failing health, is still a resident of Halton Centennial Manor.

The funeral service was conducted at the Shoemaker Funeral Home by the Reverend Das Sydney of Acton Baptist Church, assisted by a former friend and pastor, Reverend Stanley Gammon of Thornbury. Pallbearers were two grandsons, David Chapman and Howard McCutcheon; two church friends Bill Landsborough and Wilmer Fryer; and two former farm neighbours Calvin Aitken and Don Milton. Interment was in Fairview Cemetery, Acton.

Friends attending the service were invited back to Acton Baptist Church where a

dainty lunch was served by the church ladies. It was indeed unfortunate that Mr. West's only son, Ernest, was vacationing with his family touring England and Scotland and it has been impossible to reach him.

Mr. West's keen sense of humour made him a great favourite with children, young people and older friends alike. While on the farm he was known to always lend a helping hand when needed and was interested in helping with Acton Fall Fair. He loved visiting people and having people visit his home where he and his wife dispensed loving hospitality.

His church activities meant much to him and there he made many happy associations. Throughout the years he sang in the choir, was a member of the Deacon's Board and was a Trustee of Acton Baptist Church.

A highlight of his family life was the occasion of his only son, Ernest, becoming a Judge while Mr. West was still able to join the family at this auspicious ceremony.

Before leaving the farm to reside on Bower Avenue, Acton, Mr. and Mrs. West celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary, and five years ago celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary receiving their guests in their happy gracious manner at Acton Baptist Church.

During the past year, due to failing health both Mr. and Mrs. West have been cared for and frequently visited by faithful friends at Halton Centennial Manor, Milton.

Obituary

Carmen Roberts

Carmen H. Roberts of 25 East Hastings St. Vancouver B.C. died in the Vancouver General Hospital, Thursday, Aug. 25 in his 85th year. He had been in the hospital for the past six months.

He was known by his many friends in Vancouver as "Wheel Chair Charlie," as he had both legs amputated many years ago.

He was the son of the late James and Agnes Roberts who lived in Eramosa Township near Eden Mills before moving to Guelph.

Mr. Roberts went to Western Manitoba at the age of 17. He was married in 1914 to Grace Morris who died in 1919. In 1975 he flew home and spent two happy weeks with

his sisters and families and also met several relatives and old friends. He also visited his parents' graves at Eden Mills Cemetery, where his ashes will be taken for burial after the Memorial service in Vancouver B.C. on Monday afternoon August 29. Many of his old friends met to pay their last respects to his nephew William Milne and wife Anne of Campbell River, B.C. who were frequent visitors with his uncle.

Mr. Roberts leaves to mourn his loss three sisters Mary (Mrs. Max Milne) and Ethel (Mrs. William Craig) of Rockwood, and Jean, (Mrs. John Chapman) of Columbia B.C. also several nieces and nephews.

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