

# St. Alban's celebrating 135 years in Acton

St. Alban's Anglican Church in Acton is celebrating its 135th anniversary with special events in September.

Official name of the church is St. Alban's the Martyr, the first martyr in what is now Britain, in AD304. St. Alban's has been a functioning church in Acton since 1872 and very active in the community. The rector, Rev. Canon J. Mark Tiller has been the rector for more than 12 years.

The church has always been active caring for the sick and lonely of the parish family.

Special events to celebrate 135 years include a dance, open to all, on Saturday, Sept. 8 and the annual flower service the next day, Sunday, Sept. 9. The Patronal Festival where all "old" members of the church who may have moved away are invited for a special themed service followed by a luncheon.

Although the church was built in 1872, the parish was a mission prior to that date, ministered by assistant clergy from St. George's church in Guelph and then by clergy from Rockwood with services in the old Temperance Hall, then Main St. N.

According to a history written by Rector Rev. A.E. Brooks who left in 1938, the legend is preserved that the roof leaked and that one winter day the clergyman fell on the ice on the floor. The mission then included a congregation at Acton,

Rockwood, Erin, Eramosa, Hillsburgh and Garafraxa. The missionary was the Rev. W.W. Bates who rode a horse which he called "Hi-watha."

In 1872 the mission was divided and Acton was placed in the charge of Rev. W.F. Swallow. In the same year the church was built in Acton and Mr. Swallow named it after St. Alban, the first British martyr. The property on which the church stands was deeded to the incorporated Synod of Toronto in 1882, by Wm. Sharp and Ester, his wife. In 1875 the diocese of Niagara was formed and the next year on July 4<sup>th</sup> the first Bishop of Niagara, T. B. Fuller, consecrated the church.

In 1881 an enterprising Englishman, the Rev. W.J. Pigott, was ambitious to build two new churches. He succeeded with building a new church in Rockwood, but had to be satisfied with the redecoration of the church interior in Acton.

Mr. Brooks described in his history of the church that the colour scheme was "weird and wonderful." The walls were creme and the ceiling lavender and the chancel rose pink.

A new organ costing \$500 was also bought and paid in full under the guidance of Mr. Pigott. On January 4<sup>th</sup>



St. Alban's Church and hall

1886, the rector dedicated the grounds which are now Fairview Cemetery and made the first interments the burial being that of Geo. Steele.

Rev. George Breda Cooke of Palmerston was appointed to the parish in 1889. He had a family of ten and lived in a house built by Joseph Fyfe in the property where the Beardmore residence, Beverly House, later stood. It was he who later laid the cornerstone of Acton Public School in 1892.

In 1898 a vestry meeting was called to consider the proposal made by the Rockwood congregation that the clergyman should reside in Rockwood. The minutes record that the "offer was refused."

It was Mr. Gordon who had the bell installed which

ever since called the people to worship. In 1899 electric lighting was installed in the church.

In 1905 the Rev. Matthew Wilson brought with him an ambition to build a new church to replace the old frame one. In spite of his efforts the new church was never built. The old one was renovated.

Like many parishes of all

denominations St. Alban's have had some fractious times. 1909 was the year Rev. Kelleman was appointed by the Bishop to the charge of Acton and Rockwood. The history prepared at the church's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary says, "The parish at the time contained some quarrelsome and officious people with whom he did not seem to have a very happy time." He

died in October 1911. Two years later the brass communion rail was placed in the church in his memory.

With the incumbency of the Rev. Wilkinson came the building of the parish hall in 1912 with a mortgage of \$900 which was placed on the rectory. The dimensions of the hall were to be 20' by 40'. For many years the revenue from the hall was considerable, however on the whole, finances were a serious problem.

In 1927 certain improvements were made to the parish hall, the chief improvement being the addition, 18 feet long and 6 feet deep to the back of the stage. On July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1929 the beautiful oaken reredos in the sanctuary of the church, the last work of Wm. J. Stuckey was dedicated by Bishop Owen.

A new parish hall was conceived as an ambitious project after Rev. W.G. Wexton arrived and is now in use as an annex to the church.

The present church benefitted from attractive new windows as a result of the efforts of Rev. E. Brillinger who arrived in 1934. They were dedicated by the Rt. Rev. W.B. Broughall in 1941 on Dec. 28. The old windows, paper covered panes, had been there since the church was built.

1944 saw the order places for the new pipe organ, the gift of Mr. and Mrs. S.G. Bennett and the delay in receiving it on account of wartime shortages, sorely tried the patience of the congregation, but it was finally installed for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent in 1946 and in time for Christmas services.

The congregation also benefitted by the gifts of a new oaken pulpit, the door into the vestry and two choir stalls which Mr. and Mrs. S.G. Bennett also added to the church.

St. Alban's has always had a strong presence in Acton and the parish is looking forward to another 135 years of serving the community.

## Who was St. Alban?

Who was St. Alban the Martyr after whom the Acton Anglican Church was named?

St. Alban has been continuously venerated in England since the fifth century. His feast day is on June 22.

According to Bede's "Ecclesiastical History" St. Alban was a pagan living at Verulamium in Roman Britain (now the town of St. Alban's in Hertfordshire) in the year 304, when a persecution of the Christians broke out, and a certain cleric flying for his life took refuge in Alban's house. Alban sheltered him, and after some days, moved by his example, himself received baptism.

Later on, when the governor's emissaries came to search the house, Alban disguised himself in the cloak of his guest and gave himself up in his place. He was dragged before the judge, scourged, and, when he would not deny his faith, condemned to death.

On the way to the place of execution legend says Alban arrested the waters of a river so that they crossed dry-shod, and he further caused a fountain of water to flow on the summit of the hill on which he was beheaded. His executioner was converted, and the man who replaced him, after striking the fatal blow, was punished with blindness.

A later development in the legend informs us that the cleric's name was Amphibalus, and that he, with some companions, was stoned to death a few days afterwards at Redbourn, four miles from St. Alban's.



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