



Brunswick Street United Church



Article: Hazel Andrews

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A Short History of Brunswick Street United Church

Hazel Andrews

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In the spring of 1782 a young Methodist preacher, William Black came to Halifax and held four out-door services in Fort Needham, and three in the home of a Mr. Wells. He returned in the Fall and a small group rallied 'round him. From this small group of worshippers the congregation of Brunswick Street United Church dates it's birth. We are the mother church of all the former Methodist churches in Halifax. William Black had parishes in the Valley, the South Shore and in New Brunswick.

The people worshipped in various buildings and in 1792 a new building was built on Argyle Street where Scotia Square stands today. It had a 50' x 60' floor pace and it seated 900. It was called Zoar Methodist Chapel, the Sunrise Church, as it stood on the west side of the street and faced the harbour. The dedication service was held on Nov. 25th of that year.

By 1829 attendance had increased beyond the capacity of Zoar Chapel and they began planning on building a new place of worship. A lot, our present site, was purchased for £1,000. The deed, hand written sits in our safety deposit box at the bank. the building was completed in 1834 and could hold over a thousand. some things are built to last, the foundation being constructed of cut stone, two and a half feet thick. (Our present building was built on the same foundation. Hence, the book by Margaret Campbell, a former minister's wife, titled "No Other Foundation" got it's name.

It was September 14th, 1834, and folk walked from Zoar, just a few blocks south of here, to attend the first service. William Black, our founder was to have preached at the first service, but the plague took his life a few days before. Well wishers came from all over the city.

In those days the church had no organ, nor piano and the music was provided by band instruments. Pretend you are at a service. I see someone coming into the church with their candles, hot stones or bricks, warm garments and blankets. I wonder why! Well, the building was unheated until 1850 when gas lights were installed.

Over the years the church was enlarged, an organ installed, front entrance and steeple constructed and rooms added on at the back. In 1917 Brunswick Street Methodist chapel was severely damaged by the Halifax Explosion and the building was not repaired and usable until 1919.

We move forward to 1925, and Church Union when we became Brunswick Street United Church. The very next year, with poverty in the inner city, a board was set up with representatives from the other United Churches, each with a financial stipend to assist with the work. Thus our mission work began and still continues on.

We move forward to 1934 when the old church was celebrating it's 100th anniversary. (It was not until the 1960's that they started using the 1782 date to count from.) I remember that anniversary very vividly, I remember Ida Clarke and Ralph Peckham going through an archway and presenting a gift of money to the church from the Sunday school. She was wearing an outfit made by her mother, a Victorian dress, with frilly pantaloons, a poke bonnet and a parasol. I was talking to Ida last Fall and she says she has a picture of her in that outfit and will send me a copy when she comes across it.

I remember there being two or three hundred children in Sunday school with classes being held on four levels. Let's take a peek into the primary room and see what's going on. Sunday school is about to begin, and there's a sweet little old lady standing behind a table (Miss Annabelle Seals) and classes of boys and girls sitting at round bright blue tables, maybe fifty or sixty children. they open with "very softly I will walk, very softly I will talk, when to church I go. Though I cannot see him there, God is with me everywhere, He is here I know. this is God;s house and He is here today, He hears us when we sing and listens when we pray."

A person I taught in Sunday school told me recently of one of her earliest memories singing "Away in a Manger" at the age of four in a Christmas concert. She knew it by heart and sang it lustily, except the person who played for her played a different tune, but she just kept on singing it to the tune she knew.

Time passes on and on we go. On June 20th, 1979, our beautiful old church was destroyed by fire. this occurred just ten days before one of my sons was to be married in it. I went down the nest day and stood across the street very saddened at the sight of the remains of the building I had attended for many years.

We were offered the use of Trinity Anglican Church to hold our services and also space in Alexander school for office space. We still carried on our mission work during the time of rebuilding, at a meeting at the Manse shortly after the fire some one said we have lost our church, but a wise member stood stated the church is not a building, the church is the people and we will rebuild.

It was not until the fall of 1984 that our present building was opened. It was designed by our own Jim Sykes and serves us well being very adaptable with chairs and not pews, so that we have had dinners and many gatherings and community group meetings held here. We pray that the work we do in the inner city will continue on for many years after the new board is in place this year to operate the mission and the building.. a job too vast for us as a congregation to keep going with small numbers and inadequate finances. we hope our prayers are answered and that things go well in the years ahead.

I hope you have enjoyed this journey back in time and all the story of our past is in the book "No Other Foundation" which I would like to present each of you with a copy. Thank you for listening.

notes:

Margaret Campbell, No Other Foundation, 1984, Lancelot Press,
Hantsport, Nova Scotia

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