

St. Peter's Church celebrates century

by MARTHA PERKINS

Staff reporter

ON St. Peter's Day, 1887, anyone walking along the shores of Maple Lake and coming near the frame rough-cast building of St. Peter's Church would have heard the sounds of music and prayer pouring from the windows and doors. The people of the lake finally had their own place of worship and there was cause for celebration.

If you exchange the frame building for one of stone, and move the date 100 years forward, anyone walking along the shores of Maple Lake past the tiny stone bridge would have heard the same sounds of celebration as the people of the lake and township gathered to celebrate that century of worship.

St. Peter's Day, 1987, (June 29), was a special day for the congregation of St. Peter's Church on Maple Lake. The settlers before them had worked hard to establish their own church and because of the hard work of the generations which followed, it is still a thriving source of pride.

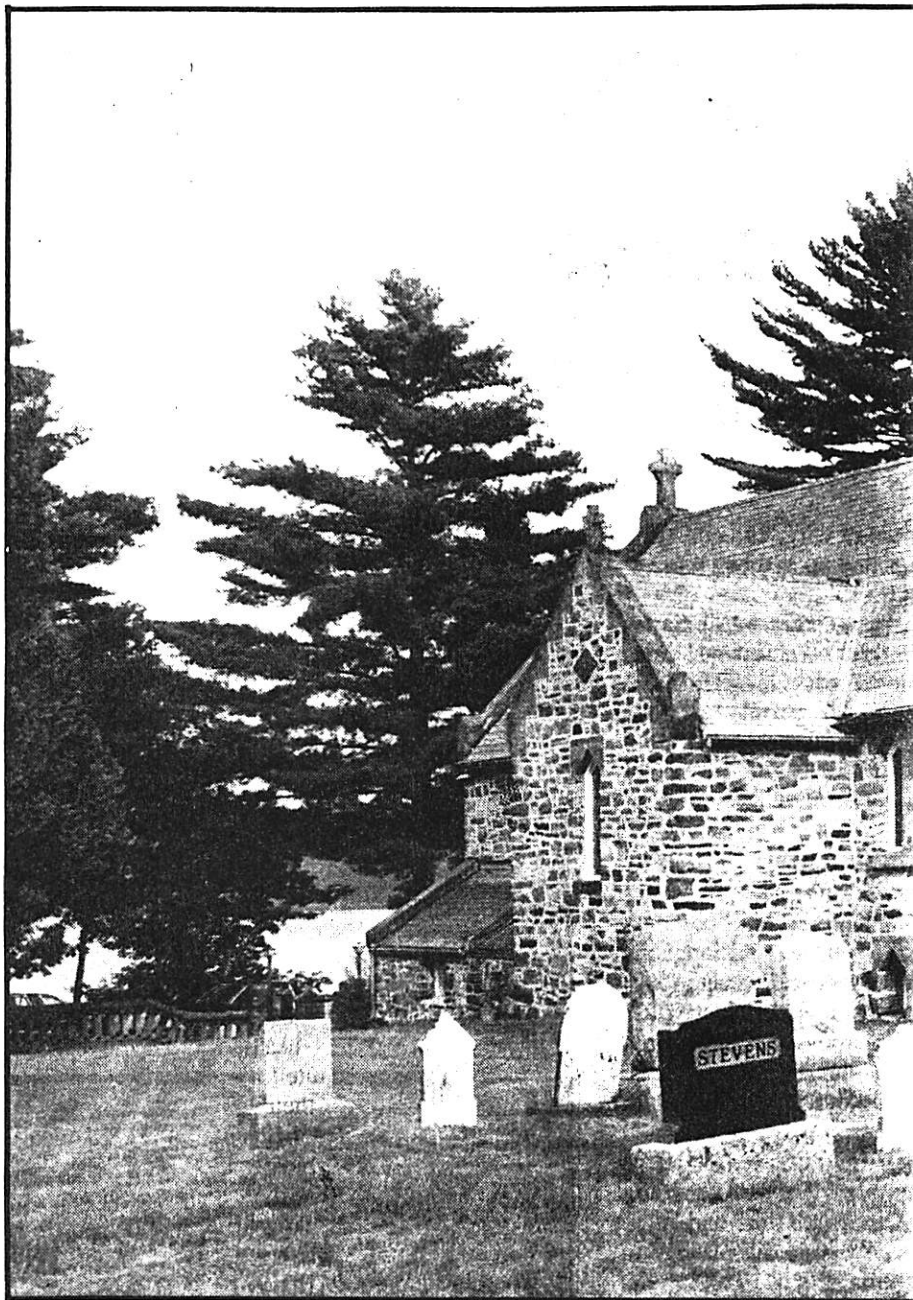
The church was full on Monday night as the congregation gathered with Bishop Terry Finlay, Father George Elliott, the guest choir from St. Paul's Church in Minden and Bill Gliddon, guest organist, to hold a special service in recognition of the vital role the church has played in their community.

"For the pioneers who built her, she stood as a symbol of faith, as a sanctuary from the concerns of the day, and as a place of refreshment," wrote Father Elliott when the present church celebrated its eightieth anniversary. "St. Peter's has been and will continue to be the men and women who call this place their spiritual home. It is their dedication and faithfulness that has carried on the shared ministry of Jesus Christ. They have made St. Peter's what it is, and the present family are determined, with God's help, to carry on what has been passed on to them in faith."

In 1955, a booklet was written by Norman Finney about the history of the church. It was based on information provided by Charlotte Cooper and 30 years later, Harry Davis wrote an updated version of the history which is as follows:

THE FIRST St. Peter's Church was a frame rough-cast building completed in 1887 on the land which Richard Dawson donated for a church and cemetery. The first service was held on St. Peter's Day, June 29th of that year. The church, of course, was a community effort built by a financially poor but spiritually rich congregation.

During the following years the congregation grew in number and the need was felt for a warmer and more substantial edifice. Consequently, in October 1891 the first stone building was completed. The



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Peter's Day, June 29th of that year. The church, of course, was a community effort built by a financially poor but spiritually rich congregation.

During the following years the congregation grew in number and the need was felt for a warmer and more substantial edifice. Consequently, in October 1901 the foundation stone of the present St. Peter's was laid by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Sweatman, but lack of funds delayed the completion of the building. However, due to the donation of four hundred dollars by the Women's Auxiliary of Toronto and a determined enthusiasm on the part of the local Anglicans, the new St. Peter's was started in 1905.

The congregation was fortunate in having John Henry Billing as a member. Mr. Billing was a skillful stonemason and he gave his best work to the glory of God. His two nieces, Miss Charlotte Cooper and Mrs. Lizzie Harrison were faithful members of this parish for many years.

The entire congregation helped Mr. Billing by donating pine timber, collecting stone from the nearby hill and bringing sand and gravel from the river. Mr. William Welch burned the limestone into lime in a kiln on the shore of Maple Lake and this was used in making mortar for the stone work. Two brothers, Eldon and Arthur Dawson were most helpful assistants to John Billing who had spent many years learning the craft. Perfection was his benchmark and he had a fetish about never erecting a building on someone else's foundation.

The first St. Peter's was dismantled and some of the material was used in the new church without causing any interruption in services. The old Church bell calling all the faithful to worship on the Lord's day hangs in the little stone belfry. The "driving shed" where horses were kept out of the weather during services sufficed for the new church until the

automobile became so popular that a shed was considered redundant.

The earliest records of St. Peter's contains the names of those who were considered as charter members of the parish Dawson, Welch, Ferguson, Sisson, Gibbs, Redner, Morrison, Barry, Taylor and Thompson. St. Peter's Day, June 29th, 1906, was the most memorable in the history of St. Peter's. On this day the Rev. Mr. Carey officially opened the new church by administering the Holy Communion to the faithful congregation. It was indeed a happy occasion for there was no overhanging debt. During the same summer the first annual church picnic was held and a happy group of children had their yearly fill of home made ice cream and lots of cake and goodies. Sunday services were a social and family function as well as a religious gathering. Families met and talked about everything from the crops and weather to new babies. In 1910 Mr. Billing built the concrete and stone fence with the willing help of members of the parish family. The following year he capped the fence with rough globs of cement to discourage the men from using it as a roost for he feared they would ruin the fence. This deterrent must have met his expectations as the original fence is intact today.

The first memorial window was donated by the old St. Luke's Church in Toronto and the east window portraying the good shepherd was installed in memory of Mr. Percy J. L. Smith who was drowned during the time that the new church was being built. A similar window in the same grouping was a tribute to Mr. Wallace Dawson by members of

his family. In later years the donated by friends and family. Bruce Napier Simpson, Jr., who had purchased the original Billing on Blagdon Hill in St. both John Billing and his wife. Mr. Billing's two nieces do memory many years previous.

Many improvements have years including a new broadloom, radiant electric washroom, kitchen facilities cent years several bequests to carry out many of these these bequests came from members of St. Peter's and our own church family.

Decedents of some of the attend St. Peter's and in the have added such names as son, Carr, Finney, Davis, W Johnson, Dron, Culley, Jub Brown. Special mention m Gibbs, our organist for over presented with a painting at this auspicious occasion.

Our Church Guest Book register of visitors from far a inspired by the beauty of S Lieutenant-Governor of O John Black Aird, official ceremony in this parish and he returned as a private citizen.



On the right is John Henry Billings, the stone mason who built St. Peter's. The community donated the lumber, collected stone from a nearby hill and brought sand from



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 hours could build themselves a church. Eighteen years later
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his family. In later years the entire west window was
 donated by friends and family in memory of Mr.
 Bruce Napier Simpson, Jr., a well known architect,
 who had purchased the original home built by John
 Billing on Blagdon Hill in Stanhope Township where
 both John Billing and his wife, Charity, are buried.
 Mr. Billing's two nieces donated a window in his
 memory many years previously.

Many improvements have been made over the
 years including a new pulpit, wall-to-wall
 broadloom, radiant electric heating, a new well, a
 washroom, kitchen facilities and many more. In re-
 cent years several bequests have enable St. Peter's
 to carry out many of these improvements. Some of
 these bequests came from people who were not
 members of St. Peter's and many from members of
 our own church family.

Decedents of some of the original families still
 attend St. Peter's and in the 1970's and '80's we
 have added such names as Barclay, Boles, Adam-
 son, Carr, Finney, Davis, Wales, Harpur, Randall,
 Johnson, Dron, Culley, Juby, Eastmure, Pettit and
 Brown. Special mention must go to Miss Isabelle
 Gibbs, our organist for over fifty years who was
 presented with a painting at a special dinner to mark
 this auspicious occasion.

Our Church Guest Book reads like an ecumenical
 register of visitors from far and wide who have been
 inspired by the beauty of St. Peter's. In 1982 the
 Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, the Honourable
 John Black Aird, officiated at the dedication
 ceremony in this parish and the following summer
 he returned as a private citizen with Mrs. Aird just

to attend a service at St. Peter's. Our summer con-
 gregation is made up largely of vacationers who find
 St. Peter's a home away from home. The Church
 takes on a whole new look of beauty as members
 of the congregation decorate the interior for both
 the Harvest Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons.

The A.C.W. continues to be a main cornerstone
 of the church today as it did in those early years.
 People come for miles to partake of the Thanksgiv-
 ing turkey dinner for which St. Peter's has become
 famous. The ladies of the A.C.W. have made this
 one of their top fund raising projects for well over
 fifty years.

Many events have taken place from the time Rev.
 Mr. Carey officiated at the first communion service
 in the new church in 1906 until the days of our pre-
 sent incumbent, Rev. Fr. George Elliot. It would
 be impossible to recount all of the weddings, bap-
 tisms, funerals, confirmations and special services
 during those eighty years.

The people of St. Peter's rallied around king and
 country through two World Wars. The Honour Roll
 of those who served in His Majesty's Forces is a
 memorable tribute to these men with special men-
 tion of Richard Dawson, Vern Cowan and Mervyn
 Harrison who were killed in action in World War
 II.

The Rev. James F. O'Neil, who was the rector
 in our Jubilee Year, 1955, said it so well when he
 wrote "We are proud of our little church which is
 built of stone. It is a reminder that ours is a faith
 founded upon the Rock, which is Christ. In that faith
 we go forward as a family dedicated to the purpose
 of God." It is the catalyst of our heritage.



*On the
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 John
 Henry Bill-*



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Church Century

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