

100 Years Of Worship

Canarvon's Zion United Church celebrates its centennial

BY SUSAN GROBER

Sinclair Russell remembers hanging onto his father's hand the first time he attended the Zion United Church as a young boy.

"I used to go in the horse and buggy days," Russell recalls. "They had a driving shed for the horses in the back. And the men would get a raised platform for the ladies to step out of the buggy and onto the stairs of the church.

"It was great," he says with a smile. "Giddy-up, and all that."

The church was then known as Zion Methodist, a name chosen when the building was constructed in Stanhope Township in 1891.

Before they began attending the Zion church, Russell and his family would trek across the fields from their Carnarvon home to the 12 Mile Lake Presbyterian Church, where Russell and his twin sister, Alice, were christened. "I was a Presbyterian in those days," he says.

The Russell family made the switch just before the Zion Methodist and the 12 Mile Lake Presbyterian congregations joined together in 1921, in anticipation of the pending formal union of Methodist and Presbyterian churches into the United Church of Canada on June 26, 1925.

Today Russell is 82, and lives with his wife, Mabel, on the expansive Carnarvon property he grew up on. The couple spent a few of their early married years in Toronto and Oakville, but finally settled in Carnarvon in 1959. They have been steady members of Zion United Church ever since, and even acted as the building's caretakers for more than six years.

Russell isn't as active as he used to

be, and doesn't feel well enough in the morning to attend church services. But he looks forward to what the next few months hold in store, as the Zion United Church marks its centennial year with celebrations planned throughout the summer.

There have been many changes over the past 100 years, both in the church building and its congregation.

Of course, church-goers no longer

travel by horse and buggy. Russell enthusiastically recalls the first car which made its way to the doors of the church.

"It was a 1914 Cadillac. And it was so big, it scared the little fellas like myself. It had tires like wagon wheels."

The car was owned by a family named McElwain, who lived in Toronto and spent their summers at a cottage at 12 Mile

(more on page 54)



Built in 1891, Carnarvon's Zion United Church has seen many changes over the years. The building is located off of Highways 35 and 118 in Stanhope.

CHURCH

(from page 52)

Lake.

"They'd spend about two days coming up here, driving on those dirt roads with a two-wheel track," says Russell. "They'd drive about 10 miles an hour, I'd imagine."

Not all Russell's brothers and sisters attended the Carnarvon church — some had gone off to work for \$1 a day.

There were many other children who went to the church with their families. Looking back, Russell remembers how a few made their mark.

"Some of the kids used to carve their names in the backs of the seats," he says. "I didn't get tangled up in that, probably because I didn't have a jackknife."

"Bad boys," his wife says with disapproval.

"Bad boys, but we were good until that."

Russell and his sister were the first twins in Carnarvon. As young teenagers they would perform at church concerts together, playing violins.

"We used to be quite a hit, I think. People told us we were good, anyway."

The Russell twins once performed in the church building when the area Member of Parliament, Bill Newman was in attendance.

"We made tears run down his face," says Russell. "We said we didn't know we were that bad until then."

Music has been one of the mainstays of Zion United Church, and the congregation is very proud of its choir to this day.

"I think it's actually the choir that's holding our church together, because we're just a small congregation," says Mrs. Russell. "As a rule, you don't have a choir in a small church. We have a larger choir than Minden United Church, and Haliburton United Church didn't even have a choir until Melissa Stephens started it."

"It was rather unique that Carnarvon had a choir when the larger churches didn't."

Normally, worship services are attended by 40 or 50 people. However, in the summertime, chairs have to be added to the 80-seat nave. Sometimes, the

numbers swell so large that people actually have to stand outside.

"So many people say it's the music that brings them," says Mrs. Russell. "It means so much. If you go into a church without singing, you don't get the same feeling."

The sound of voices joined together fills the church, and its members, with joy. "It's very uplifting," says Mrs. Russell. "It's what the kids today would call awesome."

Each June, the choir holds A Berry Entertaining Evening, where people sit at tables to hear performances of secular music, such as songs from movie soundtracks. Afterward, the choir members serve luscious desserts made of strawberries.

"It's actually on for two nights, because we can't hold everybody," Mrs. Russell says of the popular cabaret-style event. "It's sold-out every year."

Mrs. Russell maintains the choir wouldn't be so popular if it weren't for

Russell says.

Stouffer now heads the Guild choir. Taking over from her was Melissa Stephens, who offers instruction in piano and flute at her music studio in Haliburton.

It was Stephens who started up the junior choir, which Mrs. Russell enjoys.

"They're cute kids," she says, adding with a laugh: "They do nice, upbeat stuff."

Each member of the Russell family has sung in the church choir, including Mr. Russell. He says there weren't adults in the choir until 1960, and there has been an adult choir ever since.

"We started off just singing hymns, and then Ruth Gorrie got us involved in singing harmony," he says.

"She started us right off with four-part harmony. We had 25 members that first year. We didn't know what we were doing, but we had a lot of fun."

When the Russells returned to Carnarvon in 1959, the choirmaster was Ralph Hussey, the superintendent of the Sunday school.

Each of the Russells' children attended Sunday school — the eldest two before they moved away from Carnarvon, and the youngest two when they returned. Their son, Ron, even taught Sunday school at one point.

In the past, there were many young people involved in the church, and there were youth groups such as Boy

Scouts, Cubs, Brownies, Guides, and later CGIT (Canadian Girls In Training).

"But those groups have just disappeared," Mrs. Russell says with disappointment. "Right now there are a lot more young children, but we just don't have the leaders for them."

Although it has recently picked up a bit, Sunday school attendance has also declined.

The Sunday school had a large membership in the past, with about 80 children. So in 1961, members of the congregation donated labour to build the Christian Education wing of the church in three or four months.

"It was a real going concern then," says Mrs. Russell, whose husband was

(more on page 56)

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the leaders who have provided the music with energy.

"You need somebody up there to give it the oomph," she says.

"We've been so fortunate to have people here who are talented."

When Ruth Gorrie became leader of the choir years ago, she didn't have any experience. As a teacher of young children, Gorrie was qualified to play piano. So she taught herself to play the organ, and became a successful leader of the choir.

"She never did learn to use the pedals, but she did a fine job," says Mrs. Russell. "When she resigned, we thought the bottom had fallen out of the church."

Then Marilyn Stouffer took over the choir. "She had such a beautiful voice, and was a professional musician," Mrs.

CHURCH

(from page 54)

one of the workers. "The men all worked hard at building it."

Years ago, when Marilyn Stouffer was the choir leader, the church was in need of a new organ.

The minister at the time, Douglas Miller, was a great music lover, and announced that loans and donations were needed to eventually raise enough money to purchase the \$7,000 organ.

"By the time that service was over, we had the \$7,000," Mrs. Russell says with pride. "Some of it was donated, and some of it was loaned without interest. It was a tremendous response."

Quite a few ministers have come and gone over the years.

"Mr. Miller was British, but was born and raised in Jamaica," says Mrs. Russell. "He was a terrific person, and a little bit older than some of the ministers."

"One young man was good, but he was just like an overgrown boy," she remembers with amusement.

"We get to know the ministers pretty well. But we always feel that we don't see them enough," because they share time at other area churches.

"That's one of our beefs here, because we don't get as much of the minister's time, but that's understandable I guess."

It goes without saying that it's the congregation that keeps the church going. And members of the Zion United Church have always worked together.

In July of 1962, an electrical storm set the church on fire. The fire was put out by some of the church members, but considerable damage was done to the south

end of the church building.

With the insurance money, and donations, a new spire and entrance were built. Later, the chancel and two side rooms were added. Further changes in subsequent years include stained glass windows and improved lighting.

For a centennial improvement project last summer, the church was covered in vinyl siding, says Mrs. Russell. "It was all done by volunteer labour. Only the material was paid for."

Frank Chambers put vinyl siding on the church's high steeple, with help from his brother. "He said, 'I built it, so I'll put the siding on,'" says Mrs. Russell.

When the Russell's were caretakers of the church, Mr. Russell dug the cess-pool, and also refinished the pulpit and chair, and communion table. "They were almost black before," says his wife. "But I don't even think anybody even knew he did that."

Mrs. Russell, who belonged to the

Minden church before getting married, has also been very involved at Zion.

"I've been on the board of stewards for I don't know how long." The 75-year-old has also enjoyed working with the United Church Women of Zion. "Being old, I get out of a lot of the work now, because I've had my day."

Much of the money raised for the church comes from the hard work of the United Church Women.

"We have a good UCW group," says Mrs. Russell, who has been president of the group two or three times over the years. "They've done a lot for that place, and yet have fun doing it."

The collection plate doesn't fulfill all the needs of the church. The United Church Women raise money from a number of activities, including catering for weddings, receptions and dinners.

"Some would rather just give the money," says Mrs. Russell. "But you can have a lot of fun peeling potatoes. And

you wouldn't get that by just giving in the money. Sure it's a lot of work, but it's good fellowship."

Last summer, six members of the group worked hard in the hot kitchen of the church baking fresh fruit pies. They sold the pies over the course of the season, and raised \$2,330.

Last winter, the church held a Jigg's dinner, where corned beef and cabbage was served. "It was really delicious," says Mrs. Russell.

Box lunches were sold at a centennial tea held in the spring, where the goodies included fancy sandwiches and sweets.

The United Church Women have been instigators of changes and renovations at the building. "In most churches, (more on page 58)



Sinclair and Mabel Russell, seen here at their home.

CHURCH

(from page 56)

they are the backbone," says Mrs. Russell. There are from 30 to 35 members of the United Church Women, says Elinore Kleinschmidt.

"We're good little workers," she says. "We've been good to that little church."

The United Church Women have raised money for a new furnace, a fresh paint job, and a new refrigerator and countertops in the kitchen.

They've donated \$1,000 to the choir, and the same amount of money towards a new ramp.

Through their work, the vanity and toilet in the ladies' washroom have been replaced, and the walls are covered in new bordered wallpaper. The men's room will be done too, says Kleinschmidt.

These women certainly do work hard, as the list of centennial events will attest.

A yard sale, convened by Mildred Archer, will be held July 20.

On Saturday, August 3, a garden party will take everyone back into the past. A canopy will be put up, and a horse-drawn wagon will take people around the town.

The women will all be dressed in 100-year-old dresses. Refreshments will include punch, watermelon baskets, fancy sandwiches and petit fours.

In the Christian Education building, there will be a display of such old-fashioned items as washstands, quilts and commode sets. A running video will show photographs from the past.

Everyone is invited to this free event, which the women will pay for with the money raised through the pie sale.

After the church services on the following Sunday, August 4, breakfast pastries and muffins will be served under the canopy.

The weekend is planned as a centennial homecoming, and church members hope to see many people from past congregations turn out for the gathering.

On Thursday, August 15, the women hold their annual summer dinner with a centennial theme. There are three sittings: at 4:45, 6:00, and 7:15 p.m. Cost is \$10 for adults, \$5 for children under 12.

Sunday, August 18, will feature a special speaker from the Presbytery. The service will include the charges of the Minden and Maple Lake churches. Later that day, there will be workshops, a pot-luck supper, and then a service at 12 Mile Lake Church.



A host of activities are planned throughout the summer at the Zion United Church to celebrate the 100th anniversary.

The stewards of Zion, who ensure the financial stability of the church as well as maintain the church plant, will hold their special beef barbecue and street dance on the evening of Saturday, June 15.

On June 16, the Christian Education department has its reunion, with an evening barbecue and potluck, and games for children of all ages.

On the July first holiday weekend, June 29 and 30, a choir reunion will be held, and many old members are expected for this homecoming. July is designated as music month, with the choir preparing special music treats each Sunday.

The Russells' youngest son, Colin, will be visiting the area from his home in Australia at that time, and will be present at the choir reunion.

Their other children are also scattered about — Ron lives in Baltimore, Maryland, Neil lives in Ottawa, and Barbara lives in Toronto.

"I've asked them to be here for the first of July weekend, because it takes in the choir reunion," says Mrs. Russell.

It really will be a homecoming for past members of this church which, aside from having a spiritual side, offers fellowship as well.

For Sinclair Russell, it's distressing to no longer be as involved in the church as he used to be. He's had his fair share of working over a hot stove in the church kitchen, preparing dinners with other men.

"My biggie was always Irish stew and beef stew," he says. Other meals prepared by men include spaghetti and, more recently, pancake dinners.

These days, Mr. Russell misses out on a lot.

"I miss the music the most," he says. "When Mabel comes home from church, she always tells me what they sang."

"A lot of our congregation is getting elderly," says Mrs. Russell. "But there are some younger families coming in, which is very encouraging."

"We've had our problems," she says. "Right now it's financial, but who doesn't have that problem with the recession?"

"We've always been like one big family, with everyone concerned about other people. I'd like to see more younger families get involved in that."

The Zion United Church has been an important part of the community's spirit since it was built a century ago. Hopefully, that tradition of fellowship will continue for another 100 years.