

HISTORY OF THE RECTORY OF ST MARK'S

It was on the first day of April in 1850 that the Crown granted two acres of land to the north west of St. Mark's Church for the construction of a "Parsonage House". It was nearly ten years, however, before any construction began.

The first two ministers at Niagara had owned their own homes. Several of the women of the parish, recognizing the need for a "parsonage", had begun raising money. When William McMurray, arrived in 1857, he and his family were obliged to live in a hotel, and he insisted that the Church move quickly to build a residence. The house was completed the following year.

The grandiose style chosen was the Tuscan Villa. It was constructed of white pressed bricks, unusual for this area. The bricks had arrived from Britain as ballast in sailing vessels and were purchased from the estate of Samuel Zimmerman. The building may seem a bit pretentious to us, but the style was one of several built in Ontario and it was not out of line with houses owned by the more prosperous businessmen of the area. The clergyman could not afford to be seen as living in anything less grand than his parishioners.

Generally homes of this period were spacious. Perhaps Canadian women had grown so tired of living in low ceilinged log houses that when their husbands decided to build, the wives demanded the extreme opposite, high ceilings and spacious rooms. In addition, there were no dishwashers, clothes dryers or other assistive equipment to the home maker. Most families had at least a hired girl to help with the housework. The well to do would have someone to keep the fires stoked, a scullery maid and so on. They also had large families. So houses required many rooms. There was no indoor plumbing in those days, so what are now bathrooms in the Rectory previously served other purposes.

In the Rectory the ceilings are high and the hall and stairway are "gracious". They might have been airy in the heat of summer, but dreadful to keep warm in winter, when wood was the fuel of choice, and stoves had to be stoked frequently. The kitchen was in the basement and a dumb waiter brought food up to the dining room. Outside, there was a large kitchen garden where the Rector was expected to grow much of his own food.

Two large sheafs of notes and receipts in the files of St. Mark's reveal the price of the stairway and banisters with the craftsmen's names. Such documentation of a building can be invaluable to historians. Not only can we spell out who was involved in the Rectory's construction, but the record of wages provides a good comparison whenever we attempt to equate the value of a dollar with today's currency.

Most of the Rectors since McMurray have made their home in this rectory. For many years Addison's collection of books, which had been entrusted to St. Mark's, was housed on shelves in the rector's study.

The REV'd WILLIAM McMURRAY 1810-1894 (Rector 1857-1894)

In the halls of Trinity College hangs a portrait of one of the early rectors of St. Mark's William McMurray painted by Sir Wylie Grier. McMurray was not a graduate of that college. Indeed before any institution of higher learning existed, he was a student of Bishop Strachan, whose vision brought both the University of Toronto and Trinity College into being.

McMurray was prepared for ordination long before he was old enough to be ordained and he spent those years as a missionary among the Ojibway people in Sault Ste Marie. After he had become rector in Ancaster, Bishop Strachan sent him to New York to raise money for the establishment of Trinity College. He did that with some great success both in terms of the profile of the college, but also in personal recognition. The American churchmen found him to be eloquent and persuasive and honoured him with a doctoral degree from Columbia University.

After he became rector of St. Mark's he was confronted with a greater challenge. Bishop Strachan commissioned him to go to England to raise funds for the endowment of Trinity College. McMurray spoke in churches throughout England about the work among the aboriginal people in Canada as well as about the financial need of the college. While in England, he met many important church and political leaders. He preached in St. Paul's Cathedral to an audience of seven thousand people.

Ever one to do things up correctly, when he returned to Canada McMurray wrote and published a complete accounting of his visit to Britain. The slim volume can be found in the Niagara Museum. As you read it the thought crosses your mind that he was a name dropper, for he wrote about meeting all these important people and their reaction to his message. By the time you have completed the reading, however, you feel as though he has no other motive except to ensure that people understood that he was not on holiday. He had made good use of his time pursuing the activities for which he had been sent.

Upon his return to Canada, McMurray was granted an honorary doctorate by Trinity College in recognition of his efforts to ensure the sound financial establishment of the college. His portrait in that institution ensures that he will be remembered as a founding father of one of the most significant Church colleges in Canada.

In Sault Ste Marie, McMurray carried out what has become a lasting piece of work. In 1833 he was ordained deacon at Frelighsburg, in the eastern townships of Quebec, by Bishop James Stewart of Quebec. He then returned to the Sault and married Charlotte Johnson, the daughter of a trader named John Johnston whose wife was the daughter of an Ojibwa chief. McMurray became fairly conversant in the Ojibwa language and translated *The Book of Common Prayer* into that language. For preaching, however he was not totally comfortable and continued to use his wife as his translator.

When the son of the Ojibwa Chief Shingwauk took ill, McMurray offered prayers for his healing. When the young man recuperated, the chief determined to encourage his people to become Christian and the son became one of the ardent converts. When Sir Francis Bond Head, became Lieutenant Governor of the province, he decided that the Native People should be left to themselves and he stopped the building of a village at the Sault. This and other factors convinced McMurray to leave the Sault. He became curate to Rev. John Miller at Ancaster and Dundas although he continued to submit plans for the settlement of the Native People.

Meanwhile his influence continued to be felt in the north and Chief Shingwauk continued to gather his people together for hymns and lessons.

McMurray soon gained the respect of the people in his new situation and they wanted him to succeed Miller as rector. The Bishop of Quebec hesitated to ordain him as priest. When the Diocese of Toronto was formed, John Strachan became the bishop and readily ordained McMurray on 12 April 1840. He was then inducted as rector and asked to make Dundas his home and build a church there. It became St. James' Church.

Bishop Strachan had founded King's College in Toronto. It had received its Royal Charter in 1827, but became a secular institution in 1850, called the University of Toronto. Strachan was disappointed that his institution was removed from the control of the Anglican Church and set about to found Trinity College as a distinctively Anglican educational institution. It received its provincial charter in 1851 admitting its first students the following January. They came mostly from the Cobourg Diocesan Theological Institute which Strachan had previously founded. Queen Victoria granted the college a Royal Charter later that year.

Clearly Bishop Strachan saw McMurray as an effective trouble shooter and in 1857 sent him to Niagara to help move the parish past its disruptive problems. The two previous rectors had owned their own homes. Recognizing that for some years the parish members, particularly a group of women, had begun raising funds for the construction of a "parsonage", McMurray had a rather grand rectory built in the style of a Tuscan Villa the following year. Unfortunately five years after his arrival in town the county seat was moved to St. Catharines leaving the number of parishioners of St. Mark's badly depleted and therefore a parish deeply in debt for the rectory construction. The church had to issue fifteen debentures to cover the cost and McMurray bought twelve of them.

In 1864 the council of Trinity College asked him to tour England requesting funds. Not only did he raise £4,000 in donations, he used his time fully and wisely contacting people all across the country. He developed many friendships in Britain and visited many political leaders as well as some of the leaders in the High Church movement such as Keble and Pusey. He preached in St Paul's Cathedral, as he reported, to seven thousand people. His journal of this trip provides an amazing amount of detail of these visits and funds raised.

The friends McMurray had made while he was away in England contributed to the needs of his parish in Niagara as well as to Trinity College. The debentures were soon redeemed, making McMurray a small profit. The later years of his rectorship at St. Mark's were years of prosperity. As part of the centennial celebrations in 1892 he was presented with an onyx clock, vases and lamp as an appreciation of his thirty seven years ministry. He died in Dundas in May 1894 and was buried in the family plot in the cemetery of St. Mark's Church.

For further information on McMurray see "McMurray William" by Richard E. Ruggle in The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol 12.