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OLD ST. PAUL'S CHURCH & CHRIST CHURCH

On Sunday, September 28, 2003, the Ontario Heritage Foundation unveiled a provincial plaque commemorating Old St. Paul's Church and Christ Church in Chatham, Ontario. The bilingual plaque reads as follows:

OLD ST. PAUL'S CHURCH & CHRIST CHURCH

With the assistance of local parishioners and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Reverend Richard Pollard began construction of St. Paul's Church in 1819. Located one kilometre from here on Stanley Street, St. Paul's was the first church in Chatham and the first Anglican church in Kent County, serving the local population which included members of the Black community and the British garrison. By the 1840s, the congregation had outgrown St. Paul's Church and purchased this site across from the town market in 1860. Christ Church was completed the following year and consecrated by Bishop Benjamin Cronyn. The congregation used St. Paul's as a mortuary chapel until 1869 when it was destroyed by fire. Christ Church remains an important part of the spiritual and cultural life of the community.

VIEILLE ÉGLISE ST. PAUL'S ET ÉGLISE DU CHRIST

Grâce au concours de paroissiens locaux et de la Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, le pasteur Richard Pollard entreprit la construction de l'église St. Paul's en 1819. Située à un kilomètre d'ici, sur la rue Stanley, St. Paul's était la première église de Chatham et la première église anglicane du comté de Kent. Elle servait la population locale qui incluait des membres de la communauté noire et de la garnison britannique. Dans les années 1840, la congrégation était devenue trop nombreuse pour l'église St. Paul's et on acheta ce site en face du marché de la ville, en 1860. L'église du Christ fut terminée l'année suivante et consacrée par l'évêque Benjamin Cronyn. La congrégation utilisa l'église St. Paul's comme chapelle mortuaire jusqu'en 1869, lorsqu'elle fut détruite par un incendie. L'église du Christ reste une composante importante de la vie spirituelle et culturelle de la communauté.

Historical background

Reverend Richard Pollard

Richard Pollard (1752-1824) was born and educated in London, England. He came to Canada in 1775 and took up arms against the invading American forces before returning to England in 1776. The following year, he returned to Canada and began trading in Cataraqui, Kingston and Detroit. In 1784, he purchased land near present-day Amherstburg. When the Chatham area began developing in the 1790s, the Anglican Church appointed the lay preacher Richard Pollard to establish its presence by performing marriages and divine services for the community. In 1792, when the province was divided into counties, Pollard became sheriff for Essex and Kent Counties. He was appointed the registrar of deeds for the counties two years later. Later that year he was made registrar of the Surrogate Court, becoming judge of that court in 1801. Pollard also served as postmaster, justice of the peace, member of the land board of the Western District, and trustee of the district school.¹

In 1802, Pollard relinquished his job as sheriff to become a deacon of the Church of England. The following year he was ordained as an Anglican priest for the Sandwich area and Fort Malden. He was responsible for preaching to parishioners, baptizing children, performing marriages, and distributing bibles along a 240-mile circuit. Pollard also helped communities build churches – important buildings that served as places of worship, schools, meeting places and social centres.

Founding of St. Paul's

In 1807, Pollard requested financial support from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to build churches for the 500 Anglicans living around Sandwich. A philanthropic organization, the Society assisted escaped slaves, reformed prostitutes and the poor, and did missionary work.

In 1816, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel provided Pollard with £100 for personal losses during the War of 1812 when he had been captured by American forces during the Battle of Moraviantown. The following year he received another grant of £50 from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to build churches at Sandwich, Amherstburg, Chatham, and Colchester. Although the grant provided seed money, the remaining funds were raised through private subscription.

Parishioners supported the construction of St. Paul's by donating whatever money, goods, and labour they could afford. A subscription of January 7, 1819 reads:

¹ *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol.6 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp. 600-601.

We, the undersigned subscribers, promise to deliver flour, wheat or corn to the amount of the sum affixed to our names at the current price on the river on or before the first day of June next, to be delivered at Messrs. Arnold's mill, John Dolsen, Esquire, or Chatham Mills, which sums of money or produce are to be applied towards erecting an Episcopal Church in Chatham.²

Of the 27 households in the Chatham area, 19 people signed the subscription list.³ Donations from the Diocese of Quebec helped complete the building.

The church was built on the northeastern part of the town plan on Lots 1, 2, 3 and 4 at the intersection of Gaol (now Stanley Avenue) and Ninth Streets along the Thames River. This 3.5-acre site was set aside for the church by order-in-council after being selected by the residents instead of the church reserve that had been allocated by the government between Second and Third Streets.⁴ In October 1820⁵, St. Paul's Church opened its doors becoming the first church in Chatham and the first Anglican church in Kent County.

A Church in a picturesque location

St. Paul's Church opened in 1820. John Howison, who visited Chatham that year, described St. Paul's as "a sort of church".⁶ A simple, wooden building painted white topped with a spire, its interior was finished with wood lathe and plaster and furnished with a pulpit and reading desk. During its first years, St. Paul's did not have a resident minister although Pollard gave three services there during the winter of 1821. One of his congregations numbered 200 persons.⁷ Pollard believed that the Anglican congregation would suffer unless St. Paul's was provided with a full-time minister. To attract resident clergy, a wood frame rectory, gifted of John Dolson, was built in the summer of 1824 on the east end of the block occupied by the church.⁸

After Reverend Pollard died on November 6, 1824, Reverend Thomas Morley was appointed full-time Resident Missioner. Morley was the son of an English clergyman and grandson of Bishop Morley. Before going to Chatham, Morley had been a missionary to Quinte Mohawk Mission and the Mohawks on the Grand River.⁹

² *Christ Church – The Early Years*. (Chatham, Christ Church, n.d.)

³ Robert Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada*. Vol. I. (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966), p. 291.

⁴ Fred Coyne Hamil, *The Valley of Lower Thames*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), p.139.

⁵ *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, p. 601.

⁶ John Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada*. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1821), p.197.

⁷ Fred Coyne Hamil, *The Valley of Lower Thames*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951). p. 188.

⁸ M. Stenton, ed. *Records of the Old St. Paul's Church of England, Chatham Ontario 1829-1841*. (Ridgetown: Kent Branch Ontario Genealogical Society, 1987). p.ii.

⁹ Christ Church Archives, Reverend T.R. Millman to Mrs. John Keil, August 18, 1956.

Morley built another parsonage at his own expense west of St. Paul's on McGregor Street in 1827. By then 44 people had joined the church, including 14 Black parishioners.¹⁰ Church services were being held at St. Paul's every Sunday and on special occasions.

In 1828, the Archdeacon of York, John Strachan, visited St. Paul's where he

found a Church in a picturesque situation in the midst of a thin grove of trees, and a decent country congregation. The horses tied to the branches, and the group of wagons and carts in different places pointed out the religious edifice. Preaching in a wilderness to a congregation collected from a great extent of country, which on cursory view, seems almost uninhabited, arriving one by one, two or three, from all sides, through paths almost indiscernible, thus assembled to worship God through the merits of a crucified Redeemer, we become sensible of the power of the Gospel. Several persons of colour composed part of the congregation.¹¹

The earliest parish records for St. Paul's date from 1829.¹² Sittings were free and by 1833 the congregation for St. Paul's averaged 50-100 persons although the church could hold 200 if necessary.¹³ The records also show that the church served Aboriginal peoples, European settlers, soldiers from the Second Battalion of Incorporated Militia, and people of African descent.¹⁴

The links between the Black community and St. Paul's were strong. Two of the first six marriages recorded at the church involved Black couples. Later, Black militiamen were buried at St. Paul's burying ground. Church records show this affiliation continued into the 1840s.

The congregation grows

In 1836, Reverend Thomas B. Fuller took over St. Paul's following the death of Reverend Morley. Fuller was concerned about the financial viability of the church. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had cut grants for churches in Canada and clergy reserves were no longer assured sources of revenue. Fuller wrote an anonymous pamphlet warning clergy not to "depend upon the favour of government, or trust to the property we now hold". He suggested that churches look for support among lay people and allow them to contribute to decisions regarding its dispersal.¹⁵

¹⁰ Quebec Archives, Series B, Vol. 1, 1827 Report of Rev. Thomas Morley, p.3

¹¹ *Christ Church – The Early Years*. (Chatham, Christ Church, n.d).p.2

¹² M. Stenton, ed. *Records of the Old St. Paul's Church of England, Chatham Ontario 1829-1841*. (Ridgetown: Kent Branch Ontario Genealogical Society, 1987). p i.

¹³ Quebec Archives, Series B, Vol. 1, 1833 Report of Rev. Thomas Morley, pp. 7, 9.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol.111 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) p. 327.

In April 1836, Chatham businesspeople petitioned the government to subdivide the old church reserve between Second and Third Streets for sale because it was “highly detrimental to prosperity, as they completely divided that part of it [Chatham] in which all the shipping and mercantile business is [sic] transacted.”¹⁶ However, St. Paul's was reluctant to lose the old church reserve because of its appreciated value. Fuller asked for 30-35 acres from the government reserve to compensate St. Paul's. His request was denied and the church was allocated the Glebe lands, 4-5 acres bounded by Adelaide, Stanley, Prince, and Murray Streets (two blocks from the existing church).

On September 23, 1838, Reverend G.J. Mountain, Bishop of Montreal consecrated St. Paul's Church and burying ground.

Fuller was convinced that the climate in Chatham was bad for his health and in 1840 he left the parish. In 1840-41, Reverend Charles Oliver Wiggins was appointed missionary for St. Paul's. In 1842, Reverend William Henry Hobson became incumbent until his death in 1849. In July of that year, Reverend Francis William Sandys was appointed the first rector of St. Paul's - previously Anglican ministers in Canada were called missionaries. “Sandys was fond of gardening, or horses and shooting ... He acquired a good property in the neighbourhood of the church, erected a comfortable house, soon had trees, fruits and flowers in abundance.”¹⁷

By then the congregation exceeded 300 persons and it was evident that the church required better facilities.¹⁸ St. Paul's was too small for its parish, too far from downtown Chatham, and inaccessible during poor weather. Church records show that by 1839 the congregation was planning to build a new church.¹⁹

However, nearly 10 years later the church had not been built. In September 1848, when Archdeacon Alexander Bethune visited the parish, he reported:

St. Paul's, which is quite at the north eastern extremity of the town; prettily, but most inconveniently situated. It is an inferior building of wood, painted without, and in appearance & dimensions much below what a town of the size & importance of Chatham would seem to require. I could not, therefore, urge the congregation to

¹⁶ Fred Coyne Hamil, *The Valley of Lower Thames*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951) p. 188.

¹⁷ The Church of England in the County of Kent”, *Chatham Daily Planet*, October 26, 1901. p. 6.

¹⁸ Thomas Beamish Akins, *A Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Church of England in the British North American Provinces*, (Halifax: W. Cunnebell, 1849), p. 120

¹⁹ M. Stenton, ed. *Records of the Old St. Paul's Church of England, Chatham Ontario 1829-1841*. (Ridgetown: Kent Branch Ontario Genealogical Society, 1987). p. 98; *Chatham Journal*, August 28, 1841; Lord Bishop of Toronto, *The Church in Canada*. (London: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1846) p. 22.

any special improvements, feeling it dutiful to recommend the erection of a new Church as soon as possible. About the Church are three acres of ground, which might still be retained as a burying-ground; while the new Church might be erected on a plot allotted to the Church & containing nearly six acres, more within the compass of the Town. – Some expense has lately been incurred in erecting pews of walnut within, - much too expensive in proportion to the cost of the Church, but it might be quite possible to render the material available in a new Church, should such be commenced. – the revenue from the Pews is about £20 per annum; and the average rent, namely 40/per annum, appeared to be about fair. – Collections are made every Sunday on which Divine Service is performed; though, in consequence of Mr. Hobson's feeble state of health, there have been many interruptions. – Communion – plate & Font have been provided, but as yet they are without a Bell. There is a Parsonage, an old ruinous building, standing on the Church site; for that the situation is very well adapted, when the congregation shall be in circumstances to rebuilt [sic] it. – No branch of the Church Society exists here as yet, though one was stated to be in process of formation.²⁰

Nevertheless, another decade would pass before the new facilities would open.

Christ Church

In 1860, Reverend Sandys arranged for the purchase of property for the new church for \$1,482. The building site was located on Lots 4, 5, and west half of 6, Block L along Wellington Street near the town market.²¹ The cost of constructing the church was \$8,000.²² When the church was completed it was renamed Christ Church and consecrated by Benjamin Cronyn, Bishop of Huron on August 26, 1861.

Christ Church was larger than its predecessor, accommodating 300 parishioners.²³ With its spire, arched windows, and wall fenestration, the architecture of the red brick building is English Gothic Revival modelled after the picturesque style of the simple English country church. Although the floorplan of the church was originally T-shaped, a chancel was added in 1960, creating the cruciform floorplan which exists today.

The Christ Church congregation continued using St. Paul's as a mortuary chapel until it was destroyed by fire in March 1869. Two years later, with the opening of Maple Leaf Cemetery,

²⁰ Archives of Ontario, Strachan Papers, Folder: July-December 1848, A.N. Bethune, Report of Visitation, November 1, 1848, pp. 57-8.

²¹ Christ Church Tour Guide, (Chatham: Anglican Church of Canada, n.d.), p. 1

²² Historical Sub-Committee of the Centennial Committee, comp. *Christ Church, 1819-1961*, (St. Paul's Guild, 1961), p. 6.

²³ *Journal of the Synod of the Church of England in the Diocese of Huron*, (London: Free Press Steam Book and Job Printing Establishment, 1875).

Council ordered that no further burials were to take place within Town limits and St. Paul's burying ground was closed. The graves were re-interred in Maple Leaf Cemetery and elsewhere. Today, a stone cairn marks the site of St. Paul's.

As the oldest Anglican congregation in Kent County and the first church in Chatham, Christ Church and its predecessor St. Paul's Church are significant for the role they played in the early settlement and development of the region. As a parish that also served the Chatham Black community, the church is important because of its links with Black heritage. Today, the church remains an important part of the spiritual and cultural life of the community.

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