

HISTORY

THE FIRST MINISTERS AT BRUCE BEACH

Last summer's last church service in the Church Grove was a rededication of the pulpit which was restored earlier that year. I have put a copy of the beautifully illustrated Order of Service produced by Barb and Bill Strain in our archives. It includes a news item on the original dedication from *The Kincardine News* of August 28, 1941, remembrances of plaque donors, and a list of benefactors for the pulpit repairs.

In 1941, the pulpit was dedicated to Stephen Tout in a service in which my grandfather, Rev. Dr. William Henry Sedgewick, assisted. For the 2019 service, I was asked to speak about the ministers of Bruce Beach. What follows is a summary of the first part of my talk which was about the early ministers. For information on these ministers, I relied on our Bruce Beach Bible, the *Souvenir History of Bruce Beach* by Rev. W. A. Bradley (1937). Because this book is readily available on-line, I will present an analysis of his account rather than repeating what he wrote.

Bradley described the first Euro-Canadian campers of 1894. One of them, Pauline McInnis, provided a few more details on their first visit to the beach. She wrote, "...the annual Sunday School Picnic of the Huron Presbyterian Church was held on the 24th of May at Tout's Grove. During the afternoon, a few of the school officials took a southerly stroll along the shore. They came to a most attractive opening in the woods, surrounded by cedar, maple and pine trees not too far from the shoreline. My sister, Margaret McInnis, on seeing this delightful spot, exclaimed, 'Wouldn't this be an ideal camping ground?' And so was born the historic Bruce Beach". From Pauline's account, reprinted in the *Paisley Advocate* September 2016, page 9, we can see that religion was at the very beginnings of Bruce Beach.

For the first nine years, there were no clergy summering here. Once James S. Anderson arrived in 1900, he led religious services each Sunday evening and was heavily involved with the church even after the arrival in 1903 of the first cleric on the beach, Rev. Robert Martin. The following year, Martin was joined by Rev. McNab and in 1907, five more clergymen arrived. The influx of religious leaders continued so that in 1908, there were ten of them compared to seven lay families.

Ministers continued to make up a large proportion of the summer residents for at least the next 15 years. From 1907 to 1909, most of the cottages were owned by ministers but from 1910 to 1914, lay persons owned slightly more. However, in 1915, five new ministers built at Bruce Beach. With these additions, clergy cottages again outnumbered those of the laity but only by one. Interestingly in that year, two of the new ministers were Methodists. All the others were Presbyterians as were most of the later arrivals. Also, four cottages were constructed beyond the 8th Concession and two of these were ministers' cottages. From 1916 to 1922, the ratios of cleric's cottages versus those of laity see-sawed but the differences were only of one to four

cottages. The year when the greatest number of ecclesiastics arrived was 1922, when there were eight new ministers. The result was 40 cottages each for ministers and laity by 1923.

After 1923, cottages owned by laity were more common than those owned by ministers, a trend which continued until 1930 when details on cottage ownership were no longer recorded by Bradley. However, at the end of his book, there is a list of the cottages and their owners as of 1936. From this list of 171 cottages, at least 51 are owned by reverends. (The number might be slightly higher because I could not decide whether some persons listed as Dr. were Reverends.) Thus, the number of cottages owned by ministers in 1936 was approximately 30 percent of all those on the beach at that time.

In total, between 1894 to 1935, there were 70 ministers at Bruce Beach, although not all concurrently. A list of their names can be found in the Order of Service for the Centennial Church Service of July 31, 1994. I have added a copy of this to our archives.

There are other interesting church items in Bradley's history. He stated that "owing to the growth of the colony towards the north, the place of the Sabbath services was moved, from the McCosh flats, beside the hill, to the Tout flats behind the Henderson cottage" (#37). This move was in 1918.

In 1919, there was seating for 125 worshippers when a platform and a folding pulpit were acquired. By 1923, extra seating had to be procured to accommodate increased attendance. The following year, an organ was purchased and the collection plates, which we still use, were donated.

In 1925, the church shed was built, *in less than a week*, and it was then called, at least by Bradley, the Church House. Previously, the organ and hymn books had been stored in my grandfather's cottage (#34), and the benches in the West's (#33) garage.

Services continued to be well-attended throughout the 1930s and in 1937, Jean Ernst began teaching Sunday School to an average of 60 children. According to an article by Mrs. Wm. Murdock in the *Lucknow Sentinel*, it was in 1920 that the Sunday school was organized.

So endeth the church-related information gleaned, primarily, from Rev. Bradley's history of Bruce Beach. Stay tuned for the continuing saga of the Bruce Beach church in our next issue.

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