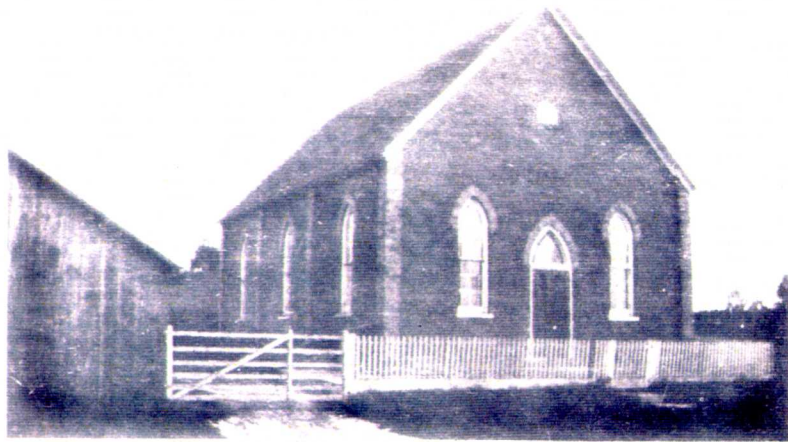


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1875 - 1975



Altona
Christian - Missionary
Church



Altona Union Church
1875

Altona Christian-Missionary Church 1875 - 1975

- - *Holding Forth The Word Of Life For A Century* - -

This history of the Altona, now Missionary, Church has been compiled to commemorate its 100th Anniversary. The real Church is the body of believers in Christ. This building of brick and mortar was erected in 1875 to be a meeting place for the "believers" in this area.

Three years prior to the building of the Church, a group of Evangelical believers formed a congregation at Altona as members of the "Christian Church" denomination. On April 22, 1872, Elders Tatton and Sholtz came up from the Brougham Christian Church to organize the group. They held their services in a building known as the Temperance Hall which was just north of the Altona crossroads. Prior to this, these folk worshipped either at the Brougham Church or at their homes. This congregation started with sixteen members.

Likewise, there were those in the Altona area who were members and adherants of the "Mennonite Brethren In Christ" denomination. They attended services at the Dickson Hill Church or in local homes until the Altona Church was built.

Mr. Abram Reesor donated the land for this Church. We have the original copy of the subscribed donations for the building fund. Each has written his own name and the amount that he wished to give. There are ninetytwo names on the document. The heading paragraph is beautifully written in a type of penmanship rarely seen to-day. It reads as follows-

"We the undersigned hereby agree to give the sums opposite our respective names for the purpose of building a "Union Church" at Altona, to be built east of the creek and on property of Abram Reesor, and to be opened for the use of Congregationalists, Christians, Mennonites and other Orthodox denominations, and for Sunday School. Sums to be payable on the 1st. of November next 1875.

provisional committee

Daniel Barkey

Abram Reesor

Menno Nighswander

It is presumed the reason the "Congregational" denomination is mentioned here is that they also held meetings in the Temperance Hall. However, this group built a Church in Stouffville, now known as the Stouffville Christian Church.

The largest donation given toward the building of Altona Church was \$200, next largest was \$50. Four pledged \$25 each. The rest are in amounts of \$20 down to 80 cents. A number of the names are those of women and no doubt the amount they pledged, though small, had been saved out of their "pin money". Two ladies have signed their names as Widow Wideman and Widow Ramer. All donations on the document total \$867.80. Preserved in a small book are the recorded pledges as they were paid off. It shows further donations from some of the original donors. As the Lord prospered them, they were able to give more.

Records state that there was a first day of dedication and a second day of dedication. The first one may have been when the sod was turned or whatever they did at that time, and the second one at the opening. However, we are not sure on this. We learn that the choir gave \$5 at the second dedication. We presume by this that the Christian denomination had a choir during their three years in the Temperance Hall.

A Mr. Wm. Feaster did the mason work on the Church. It is said that while working on it he caught a cold which resulted in his death.

One statement says that Mr. Henry B. Reesor insured the Church at the time of its opening for "a risk of one thousand dollars".

The earliest minutes to be found re administration are dated Feb. 10, 1876. It reads, "Meeting of the Stockholders of Altona Union Church to elect a trustee. A Rev. Mr. Day was appointed Chairman. At that meeting, Mr. Y. Millard was the elected trustee. It appears that there were three trustees. One new one was elected each year or the retiring one re-elected for another three year term. These trustees looked after the business of the Church building, re up-keep, heat, light etc. They were elected from both denominations. Each denomination paid half of the yearly expenses. In 1895, twenty years after the Church was built, a record shows the expenses for upkeep to be \$16.60 for the year. Mr. Daniel Barkey was the first "Mennonite Brethren In Christ" minister. His son Wilmot also was a local preacher at Altona. It is not known who the above Rev. Mr. Day was nor where he resided.

The Sunday School was a union effort of the two congregations. It was the only Sunday morning meeting. Sunday School superintendents were alternated at yearly business meetings. No pastor was in attendance at these Sunday School services because they were fulfilling duties at their other charges.

The Sunday evening services were alternated and a pastor came from a sister denomination. Each denomination had its own executive to deal with business within its own group. This arrangement worked very well. The two denominations worshipped together in harmony. Proof of this is the fact that the arrangement continued for 80 years. In Nov., 1955, the "Christian" denomination members asked to join with the "United Missionary" denomination members. By this time the name "Brethren In Christ" had changed to "United Missionary". Still later the word "United" was omitted and the denomination became "The Missionary Church" on July 19, 1968.

At the time of the decision to unite, Rev. F. Huson was the "United Missionary" pastor and Rev. G. Brown was the "Christian" pastor. In 1955, Rev. Brown moved to Wheatly and Mr. Kenyon Edwards filled in the remaining months as the "Christian" pastor. Quoting from a remark made by Rev. Huson at the time, "The two congregations have had a long and wonderful courtship and have now decided to be married". The final decision was made in Nov., 1955. The change took place in June 1956 which was conference month for both denominations. Altona was the host Church for the "Christian" denominational conference that year. The uniting of the two had no real problems. Both were evangelical and had few doctrinal differences.

Many of the members on both sides were relatives. All were friends and neighbors and had worshipped together in each other's services for many years. In June, 1956, this united body of believers started out with about eighty members, each having had about forty before. At this time, "Altona Christian United Missionary Church" became a separate appointment with its own pastor appointed by the conference. The congregation purchased the former Mervin Bunker home for a parsonage. Rev. Dow Sargeant was the first resident pastor and stayed eight years. In 1964, Rev. F. Huson was posted to the Altona Church. The Husons said that it was like coming home as he had been a previous pastor here. In 1970, Rev. Donald Pugh came to pastor the flock. He was a local boy and to him it, too, was like coming home, although he had attended the "Missionary" Church at Stouffville.

An 1894 report mentions the Sunday School having a library. We have a book in which the librarian kept a record of books loaned from 1893 - 1899. Also preserved is the library card of one, Edward White. At present time there is a goodly number of books for loan.

In earlier years, The "Christian" denomination used a foot pedal organ to accompany the singing of the hymns. The "Brethren In Christ" denomination preferred to sing without an instrument for their services. There was an appointed song leader. In these early days, one of the outings looked forward to by the young people was the singing classes held in the homes. Folk learned to sing by note without an instrument. The blending of voices in the singing of the hymns in the Sunday services was a joy to hear.

The earliest minutes to be found of the Sunday School is for the year 1892. Mr. E. Reesor was elected superintendent. Mr. P. Stouffer was assistant superintendent and Mr. F. J. Reesor elected Secretary - Treasurer. Teachers were elected for nine classes and until the basement was built all classes were held in the auditorium. The secretary's report was "read" each Sunday at the close of the session. It told the number of officers, teachers and scholars present, number of verses memorized and the amount of offering.

A clipping, preserved from a newspaper dated Dec. 16, 1899, states that fourteen girls of the young ladies' class paid a surprise visit to their teacher, Mrs. Abram Reesor. They had met to present her with a gift. It reads as follows -

"We the pupils of your Sunday School class take this privilege of expressing our gratitude to you for the many kind words of instruction you have imparted to us. We can truly say we have received many blessings from your teaching. You have been very diligent and painstaking on our part and we doubt whether we have been as diligent as we might have been to receive the instruction you wished to impart to us. (At this time they asked her to accept their gift) We hope we and others shall have the pleasure of listening to your kind of teaching for many years and trust that your path will be strewn with blessing in so doing. We all join in wishing you a prosperous and happy New Year and we'll all be back again next Sunday, and we hope every Sunday to hear more of the Lord's Word as we study it together".

It is signed by Ella Davis (who was Fred Byer's Mother) and Pearl Boothby (who lived where Ross Wideman lives).

No doubt the same heartfelt tribute has been felt but not spoken in word to many dedicated teachers over the years. May the Lord reward them for their many labors.

When Mrs. Barkis Reesor was teacher, the young ladies' Sunday School group organized the "Twinkling Star Class". In addition to their Sunday morning classes, they met once a month in their homes for Christian education and fellowship. In 1930, these girls saved their "pennies" for one year to buy a piano for the Church. This piano is still used in the main auditorium. Mrs. Walter Carter followed Mrs. Reesor as teacher of this active class. Two photos of this class, one when Mrs. Reesor was teacher and another when Mrs. F. Byer was teacher, show twenty-one members.

A photo of Mr. Wm. Reesor's class of young men shows a group of 26 in number. Mr. Wm. Reesor, born the same year as the Church was built, was a dedicated Sunday School teacher. He taught the young married class for a number of years as well. His son Millard Reesor has followed in his father's footsteps as a teacher. Another father and son team of Sunday School teachers at Altona was Isaac Lehman and his son Norman Lehman.

Sometime about 1952, the "Twinkling Star" class invited the young men's class to join their monthly fellowship meetings and became a young people's group. The Young People's organization began under the leadership of the Christian Church pastor, Rev. G. Brown, plus the two class teachers, Mrs. F. Byer and Mr. N. Lehman. Their first project was the gift of the present communion table to the Church. At the time of the union of the two denominations in 1956, this group became the "Young People's Missionary Fellowship". At present Mr. and Mrs. John Gilham are their adult leaders.

Around 1932, the young, married ladies organized for monthly meetings in their homes, using the undenominational "Christian Endeavour Society's" name and program for their meetings. Missions was their main interest. At the time of union, this group became the Altona "Women's Missionary Society". Mrs. A. Foster is the present president.

A men's "Missionary Fellowship" was organized in 1958. They meet once a month, usually at the Church. Mr. Albert Foster is the current president.

The attendance at the weekly Bible study and prayer meeting increased and benefited in recent years under the arrangement of different age groups.

The Sunday School at Altona has always been well attended. There have been classes for all ages from cradle roll to seniors. In some places, Sunday School seems to be thought of as mostly for the young - not so at Altona. There has always been a goodly number of adults in the Sunday School.

The Altona Sunday School had been an active unit of the Pickering Sunday School Convention during the lifetime of the township Sunday School organization. Many times Altona Sunday School had the highest enrollment and attendance of Sunday Schools affiliated with the township convention. It was named the "Banner Sunday School of Pickering Township".

In the year 1961 quoting from an article in the "Gospel Banner", "Altona Sunday School broke all records on Rally Sunday for Sunday Schools in Class C within the denomination when 227 attended". A shield was received for the honor.

After Rev. Sargeant came, a morning preaching service was begun following the Sunday School hour. At this time, Mrs. Sargeant started a primary worship service at the same hour in the basement. It closed out due to inadequate space, lack of facilities and sound carrying to the auditorium above. With the new addition, a primary group known as "Junior Church" has met in the Sunday School auditorium following the Sunday School session.

Mrs. F. Huson organized a Happy Hour for juniors. They met on Fridays at 4 p.m. in the Church, with Mrs. Huson as leader. This group continued to meet while the Husons were at Altona. In 1973, Mrs. Robert Ellsmore organized a pre-teens group which was under her leadership. They meet every two weeks in the Community Centre.

RENOVATIONS

In 1937, the Church was renovated to some extent. A basement was put under it and a new heating system installed. The basement provided much needed Sunday School classroom space. Some changes in the entrance and pulpit area were made at this time. Volunteer labour of members and neighbours under the guidance of contractor, Mr. Norman Bunker, lessened the cost of the improvements. Mr. Stan. Thompson was the contractor when the new roof was put on in 1952.

The new Sunday School auditorium with basement classrooms was built by contractor Mr. Harold Lewis. The dedication service for this was held March 17, 1968. At the same time there were improvements to the main auditorium and a new foyer entrance stretching across the south end was added with washrooms below. This resulted in the original entrance being closed and a new entrance between the new addition and the rear west side of the original structure put in. The main sanctuary arrangement was reversed. A sizable legacy left to the Church by the late Mr. Fred Ramer was the nucleus for the new addition and renovations. The entire cost was paid off by 1971.

The pews and the windows are the original ones.

At renovation time, Mrs. F. Beilby made the gift of an electric organ in memory of her parents - Mr. and Mrs. Eli Lehman. The new pulpit Bible, open on the communion table, is a memorial to the late Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Byer. A well was dug and given at this time in memory of Clifford Reynolds.

The members are grateful for the many other gifts that have been made to the Church by individuals at the time of renovation and since.

One young man from the Altona Church felt the call of God to train for the ministry. Rev. Arthur Lehman studied at the Chicago Evangelistic Institute and was ordained by the Mennonite Brethren In Christ denomination. He is now pastoring at Rosemont, Ontario.

The first wedding conducted in the Church was in 1935 when Miss Beatrice Carter was married to Mr. Arthur Wideman. A Bible was presented to them at the close of the ceremony. Since then, many couples have said their marriage vows before the altar. The Sunday School, for a number of years now, presents each newly married couple of this Church or of the community, with a copy of God's Holy Word.

The Church believes in and has evangelistic services, usually once a year, lasting a week. In former years, these services generally lasted two weeks. As well as souls being saved, others were and are built up in the faith through these services.

The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper is open to all "believers". In former years, the communion wine was taken from two, glass goblets. Later individual cups were purchased and are now used. The unit, donated anonymously to the "Christian" members was given to the Stouffville Missionary Church at time of union. The unit, now used at Altona, was a gift to the "United Missionary" group by Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Lehman, as also were the present offering plates.

Our belief is that baptism be by immersion. In previous years it took place in local, outdoor waters but more recently in a sister church's baptistry.

At the time of recording this history, the Church has a membership of sixty-six. The Sunday School has an enrollment of one hundred seventy-four.

There has always been a wealth of talent at Altona which has resulted in manifold blessings. Just as the members have been

diligent, maintaining and refurbishing their place of worship, so have they been diligent in their worship, in their teaching, in prayer and Bible study and in their Christian living - thus giving witness to the entire neighbourhood. This Church has had scriptural preaching by their ministers and Bible-based teaching in the Sunday School. Because it is impossible to mention all of the names, we salute, as did Paul, those who are "helpers".

Quoting from an article written by the late Mrs. B. Reesor, "The Bible is the greatest book in the world. You will also find the greatest things in life can be traced back to God and the Church. In any generation, the Church stands above all other organizations in the community for the good of the community."

The Altona Church family offers their praise and thanks to God for His goodness to them, having cared for and watched over this part of His Church for 100 years. We would say, "May we ever be worthy of it and seek to pass it on in our time and to those who come after." We remember in gratitude the pioneering members and all who have gone before, for bequeathing to us a spiritual heritage.

With the song writer we can sing, "Many things about tomorrow we don't seem to understand but we know who holds tomorrow and we know who holds our hand". The Church and parsonage property was expropriated in March 1973 for the "proposed" new Pickering Airport. A number of the members and adherents of the Church have, by this time of writing, already found new homes for themselves in other areas. The Conference is holding the expropriated monies in trust for, if and when, the Altona congregation decide to re-locate.

This history is dedicated to all those who have given of themselves to build, to maintain, to project and forward the Lord's work in His vineyard at Altona through 100 years.

Compiled by

Mrs. Lillian Byer

