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Church Annals at Niagara

FROM A.D. 1792 — A.D. 1892.

A PAPER READ BY THE REV. DR. SCADDING AT THE ST. MARK'S
CENTENNIAL, NIAGARA, MONDAY, JULY 11, 1892.



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CHURCH-GOING A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

In Memoriam: Robert Addison, Missionary, St. Mark's Church, Niagara, A.D. 1792—A.D. 1829.

CHURCH ANNALS AT NIAGARA

FROM A.D. 1792—A.D. 1892.

THE present is an era of century celebrations. All the civilized portions of the habitable world are this year commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus. In 1874 was the so-called Caxton celebration, commemorating the introduction of printing into England in 1474. In 1883 was observed the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of Luther. In 1864 we had the tercentenary of Shakespeare. In 1876 the people of the United States observed their centennial; in the present year the Province of Ontario is doing the same thing for itself, as the successor to the Province of Upper Canada, in which its present system of representative government was proclaimed on the 16th of July, 1792. Semi-centennials, too, it has become the practice to observe. In 1884 the city of Toronto celebrated the fiftieth year of its corporate existence. The jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Victoria made the year 1887 forever memorable; and in 1889 the Diocese of Toronto held its jubilee, recalling the consecration of its first Bishop, Dr. John Strachan, in 1839. Even the lapse of a quarter of a century is held to be worthy of special commemoration. Thus in the present year the Dominion of Canada has celebrated the twenty-fifth year of its career. The custom of thus reviving the past at stated intervals is based on precedents to be found in Holy Writ, in the injunctions given to the Hebrew nation concerning the Sabbatical, or

Jubilee year, an observance fraught with good to the Jewish people. The commemorations just enumerated have all of them caused the voice of praise and thanksgiving to be heard over extensive areas and in situations of much prominence.

We come now to a celebration of a humbler character and calculated to excite an interest in fewer minds, although in this instance likewise, from some peculiarities connected with it, the attention given to it will certainly be by no means simply local. The parish of St. Mark's, Niagara, this year commemorates the one hundredth anniversary of its establishment as a mission in 1792. The registry of the parish of St. Mark's, Niagara, commences at that early date, when the first missionary was settled at this place, by the venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, in the person of the Rev. Robert Addison, whose ministrations continued down to the year 1829.

The tradition at Niagara at one time was, that Governor Simcoe had something to do with the building of a portion of the present St. Mark's Church, but it now appears that that edifice was not begun to be erected in stone until the year 1807. Still it is highly probable that the excellent Governor took some action in regard to the establishment of religious worship at Niagara, and the site of the church may have been set apart by him at the spot where it now stands, and a temporary wooden structure erected thereupon. It seems unlikely, when the character of the Lieutenant-Governor is considered, marked as we know it was by a solemn sense of religious duty, that he should, during an administration lasting from 1791-1796, have refrained from some such proceeding as this. We are incidentally made aware that even in his famous canvas house, temporarily set up at York in 1793, regular religious

services were maintained. Thus we have the ever memorable land-surveyor, Augustus Jones, while engaged in laying out, under the Governor's eye, the town plot of York, recording in his journal, that after transacting business with the Lieutenant-Governor "at the camp," that is while resident in this celebrated canvas abode of his, that he attended prayers there. His entry is, "went to camp on the 1st of September, 1793; attended prayers"—(see the writer's *Four Decades of York, Upper Canada*, page 16). Without doubt the Lieutenant-Governor would have made arrangements in conjunction with the recognized missionary of the neighbourhood, Mr. Addison, for public worship on Sundays at all events, whenever it should be practicable, and that too, as we may well believe, at or near the site of the present Church of St. Mark's. Mr. Addison was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, taking his degree of M.A. there in 1785. We have thus to imagine him often traversing the grand quadrangle of Henry the Eighth's famous Foundation, and passing in and out familiarly among door-ways and chambers, teeming with memories of Lord Bacon, George Herbert, Robert Nelson, Sir Isaac Newton, and the other innumerable historic worthies, who have been members of Trinity. His surroundings at Cambridge were doubtless congenial to his character; and I have been assured that Bishop Watson, of Llandaff, the well known author of the "Apology," had said, that the English Church was losing a scholar of no ordinary quality, when, in 1792, Mr. Addison decided to make far-off Canada the scene of his ministrations.

His prospects at home were bright; to be a member of Trinity College, Cambridge, gave a prestige to a man everywhere in England, and this determination on the part of Mr. Addison was plainly an act of unselfishness. The

national Church was calling on her sons personally to assist her in fulfilling her duty towards the wide domain brought within her jurisdiction through the acquisition of Canada. He felt himself impelled to obey that call. The English Church was fortunate in having so worthy a representative in these parts at so early a period. Mr. Addison's character and abilities were duly appreciated. In the calendars of the day his name appears not only on the list of those who form the Board for the general superintendence of education in Upper Canada, and those who are appointed Trustees of the public schools of the Niagara district, but also on the list of the commissioners of the peace, or general magistrates, in which capacity Mr. Addison's name figures in company with those of Thomas Dickson, John Ball, Robert Nelles, William Crooks, Samuel Street, Abraham Nelles, George Keefer, James Kerby, James Macklem, John Powell, John Servos, W. H. Merritt, J. B. Clench and many others familiar even yet to us of the present generation.

Many little extracts have been already made and circulated from the casual memoranda entered by Mr. Addison in the parochial register of St. Mark's, dating back to July 9th, 1792, all showing him to have been a man of great soundness of judgment, and full of human sympathy. On the whole, in fact, he may be said to have possessed not a few of the qualifications sought for by good Sir Roger de Coverley in his chaplain and the parson of the parish, such as "a good aspect, a clear voice, a sociable temper, and competent scholarship."

The reports of his mission in Canada, transmitted periodically by him to the Society at home, would be, if collected and reprinted here, a most interesting historical record, and a valuable boon to the Canadian public. I have in my own possession a short autograph letter ad-

dressed by Mr. Addison to a young soldier of fortune named Chiniquy, from Lower Canada, breaking away from the narrow traditions in which he had been brought up and desiring to obtain employment among the more enterprising people of the west, with whom he seems to have met with some success. In this note Mr. Addison appears in the pleasing light of a fatherly adviser to a young stranger who by some means had been brought into friendly relations with him. The letter is dated from Chippawa. While the headquarters of Mr. Addison were at Niagara, there were numerous stations in other directions visited professionally by him. The Indians of the Grand River were familiar with his presence, and the Mohawk Chief Brant is said to have acted as his interpreter there. Mr. Addison's letter to Chiniquy is addressed to him at York and reads as follows :—

CHIPPAWA, 8th Oct., 1806.

DEAR SIR,—I have only a few minutes allowed me to tell you how very much I am pleased to hear from Mr. Jackson that you are very useful and agreeable to him. Suffer me to press this consideration upon you, that active industry, aided by frugality, is the parent of wealth. I do not expect you to be an hermit, and as I find you are doing well I will finish this dull advice by expressing my sincere wish that you may continue to do so. We elderly men are sad correspondents. By endeavouring to be of use we sometimes run the hazard of offending by our grave admonitions. You know we have had the honour of His Excellency on this side of the water and every one seems highly pleased with his affability and politeness. He was waited upon by the magistrates and principal inhabitants of Niagara, with an address in which was a high compliment to General Hunter, and let me tell you that his answer was

still more complimentary to that departed worthy. You will see both the address and answer in your paper and will then prize them for yourself. You will find that the sentiments concerning the late administration on the Niagara side are very different to what they are on yours. Our assize has been unusually long; I think it lasted ten days, and all, I observed, was conducted well. The grand Judge gave general satisfaction and is a gentleman of great and finished abilities. I hope to find you in good health and spirits at the session,

And am most truly,

Your obedient, very humble servant,

ROBERT ADDISON.

The Mr. Jackson here named had probably patronized Chiniquy in some way, and he may also have had a word of encouragement from General Hunter, whose loss is here regretted. The new Governor must have been Gore, and the "grand Judge" was no doubt Judge Thorpe, who, strange to say, was a "Reformer," and whilst retaining his judicial character became a member of the House of Assembly. It is amusing to read of the difference of sentiment prevailing "on this side of the water," that is the Niagara side of Lake Ontario, and that prevailing on "yours," that is the York side, where the feeling was perhaps less "liberal."

I myself remember Mr. Addison very well. When a boy I have heard him repeatedly officiate in St. James' Church, at York. His oval, intellectual countenance and finished style of reading made a strong impression. In addition I particularly remember observing him as he walked arrayed in his academic gown, bands and clerical hat from the church after the service, down King street to the Quetton St. George mansion, still standing entire on that street, and now occupied by the Canada Com-

pany. He was there often entertained as a guest during his visits to York from Niagara, by Mr. John Spread Baldwin. Mr. Addison was chaplain to the House of Assembly, and used to come over to York and remain there during the annual Session of Parliament. A formerly well known picture by Westall, entitled "Going to Church," exhibits the figure of a clergyman which, to my mind, always recalls the comely form of the first missionary at Niagara, as seen passing along King street in his canonicals, as just described. I have caused a photographic copy of Westall's picture, as shown in the illustration accompanying this paper to be made by N. C. Shorey, of Toronto, with an inscription appended, "In Memoriam: Robert Addison, Missionary, St. Mark's Church, Niagara, A.D. 1792—A.D. 1829." The costume of the parishioners, male and female, surrounding the pastor in Westall's picture is that which was in vogue among our U. E.'s and other pioneer settlers at the close of the last century. At a later period Mr. Addison built a house for himself, styled by him "Lake Lodge," on some property acquired close to the town of Niagara, wherein, as might be expected from his scholarly instincts, a library soon accumulated around him, a considerable portion of which is still preserved as an heirloom in the parsonage attached to St. Mark's Church. We have in this library a deposit of the solid Divinity common in English parsonages some sixty years since, including works by Warburton, Walter Land, Jeremy Taylor, John Jackson, Leslie, and so forth. Voluminous folio copies of Pool's "Synopsis," Bayle's "Critical Dictionary," and Clarendon's "History of The Great Rebellion," all likewise seem here to be remarkably in place. There is to be noted also a black letter quarto copy of the Geneva Version of the Bible, with the liturgy attached of the time of Charles the First.

With great appropriateness, at his decease in 1829, the mortal remains of Mr. Addison were deposited under the chancel of St. Mark's Church.

It is curious to conjecture why the name of St. Mark should have been chosen as the designation of the church at the mouth of the Niagara River; there are not many churches distinguished by that name, but there is a very famous one, however, at Venice, of ancient foundation. Every one has heard of San Marco there, and the lion with which it is so conspicuously adorned. Early mediæval sculptors and painters made, as we know, the lion to be an emblem of the Evangelist Saint Mark. Perhaps this figure, coinciding as it did with a popular emblem of Old England, may have taken the fancy of the loyal and patriotic first missionary here, and so he may have been induced to have attached to his church, when at last it rose from the ground a solid edifice of stone, the name of the saint whose symbol was the lion. Did not a lion holding a key symbolize Gibraltar? And here too was an important military post appertaining to Great Britain, guarding the entrance to a pass leading into the interior, into the very heart of the British possessions on this continent.

A pleasing water-color drawing of the stone St. Mark's Church of Mr. Addison's time is in existence. It shows a well-proportioned edifice of moderate size, an apse-shaped chancel with hipped roof over it, the rest of the roof not steep but rather flat. There is a square tower surmounted by a bell turret with a graceful slender spire. On the whole it resembles in many points one of the French churches that one sees along the river in Lower Canada. Below, the broad Niagara is seen flowing placidly into Lake Ontario, and across on the point stands the old

French fort, as it was before transformed by modern enlargements. In 1843, when transepts and a new chancel were added to the old St. Mark's, the bell turret and spire were removed, and four pinnacles in their stead were placed at the angles of the square tower. These changes were made during the rectorship of the Rev. Mr. Creen. Since then the whole interior has been re-arranged in accordance with ecclesiastical rules, as now well understood. This change has been made through the instrumentality of the Ven. Archdeacon McMurray, who has also secured the erection of a convenient school-house close by, as well as a handsome and most commodious parsonage house, in spacious grounds immediately adjoining. During his incumbency likewise, St. Mark's was provided with a chime of bells, through the liberality, in 1874, of Walter Hamilton Dickson and John Geale Dickson, of Niagara. The Ven. Archdeacon McMurray, who still survives, is the third rector since the foundation of the mission in 1792, Mr. Addison and Mr. Creen being his only predecessors. Few parishes in Canada can present a history so simple, so happily uninterrupted by vicissitudes, excepting those which are necessarily attendant on progress and improvement.