

## HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN SARNIA

In January 1910 four members of the church of Christ met to begin services in the home of Bro. Ed Culley at Blackwell, Ontario, a few miles east of Sarnia. Bro. Sam Whitfield of Woodgreen was asked to come to help them with their meetings. He came over and continued to come once a month.

On one of Bro. Whitfield's trips he expressed a desire to see a church started in Sarnia before he was called away from earthly scenes. Bro. S. M. Jones did some pioneer work.

In August 1925, arrangements were made to hold a meeting by Bro. Sam Whitfield in the home of Bro. Alfred Culley on Davis Street in Sarnia. Bro. Whitfield came to Sarnia and filled the appointment though a sick man. He returned home but was never able to preach another sermon. However, since that time there has never been a Lord's Day that the church has not met somewhere and worshipped. Great is the man's success who can live to see his desires accomplished.

At first the church met in a private home, but soon a church building was rented on the corner of George and Russell Streets. Bro. J. C. Bailey held a series of meetings here in January 1926 and continued to come to Sarnia for some time. During this meeting they had to carry their own firewood from one of the member's homes, and how it smoked at times. A number were added to the Lord during this meeting.

Bro. J. C. Bailey moved out west and though much help was given from Detroit and other places, there were times when there was no one to meet but a few women. The church was particularly grateful to Brother Black and Brother McGary.

On June 17, 1928, the members were forced to give up the church building at George Street and move to a hall on Mitton Street, just south of Wellington Street. Here the church made its home place for worship until June 9, 1935. During this time Bro. S. M. Jones of Beamsville held a meeting in March 1930. There was one addition to the congregation. Bro. Hastings of Port Huron spoke quite often on Sunday afternoons and held a meeting for us in 1932. There was one baptized during that meeting. Others came and helped from time to time and a number were added to the Lord.

In June 1935, we moved to a hall on the corner of Christina and George Streets, known as the Orange Hall. Here we worshipped until February 1943. During this period the church enjoyed a good growth, with much appreciated help from Bro. Earl E. Wallace of Flint, Michigan, and others we were able to carry on to greater work. While in this place, both Bro. Cecil Bailey and Bro. Carlos Bailey held several series of meetings.

In the late 1930's the Wade Hibbard family came from western Canada. The family of 6 made a nice addition to our small group. Our present elders, Ralph and Aubrey, are a part of that family. They have added wonderfully to the growth of our group.

Around that time the Lawrence Dennis family moved to Sarnia from Glencoe. Their family of 5 also made a welcome addition to our spiritual family in Sarnia.

But always we had found rented halls unsatisfactory. They were only available for meetings on Lord's Days, even then sometimes we would have to hurry out to make room for some one else. So it was decided in 1940 to build a house of our own.

In the latter part of September 1940, Bro. Carlos Bailey came to hold a 3-weeks meeting. He was from Radville, Sask., then. The meeting was held in a hall on Victoria Street. It was during this meeting the lot at the corner of Cobden and Russell Streets was purchased. After the service on Tuesday evening, October 1, 1940, members of the congregation held a short dedication service at the new site, which was presided over by Bro. Carlos Bailey.

At last members of the church of Christ commenced excavating for a new church building on the south-west corner of Cobden and Russell Streets.

The members of the church did the work themselves and it took nearly a year to dig the basement. A good part of the dirt was moved out in the evenings by wheelbarrow. At last there was a hole about twenty-five feet wide and forty-five feet long and five feet deep. A man with a cement mixer was hired and poured the cement to the level of the ground for a building forty-two by twenty-five feet. The walls were tarred and clay filled against the walls. The work was quit for 1941.

In the spring of 1942 four more feet of wall was built with brick. The joists were laid and a roof put on those. The inside was plastered, so we could use basement for our services.

The new basement building was opened for services in February 1943. Bro. John Whitfield of Woodgreen, Ontario, was invited to be the first speaker, in honor of his father who had held the first church of Christ meeting in Sarnia. Bro. McGary was also invited to be present but he was not able to come at that time, but came two weeks later. It had been eleven years since he had been with us, and it was surely good to see him.

The basement of the new structure was used for worship for a time and was built without the congregation running into debt and as funds for the purpose accumulated.

Bro. J. C. Bailey came in May 1943 to hold his first meeting in the new structure. There were six additions during this series of meetings. Edith Waldeck was the first to make the good confession in our own building. She was baptized by Bro. Bailey in Lake Huron on May 23, 1943. Then Bill and Clara Culley, Kenneth and Douglas Culley and Harry Forbes. Not having a regular minister at the time, Brethren of the congregation had charge of the morning church services for awhile.



Bro. C. W. Cox was the next to hold a series of meetings for us.

Early in the year of 1944 Bro. George Johnson and family moved to Sarnia from the west. There were 4 additions to the church during 1944. In the spring of 1945 the church of Christ challenged the Apostolic Church to a public debate on "Holy Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues and church government". The debate was held April 9 to 12: on 9th and 10th in the Auditorium of the City Hall; on 11th and 12th in Johnson Memorial School Auditorium. George Johnson and L. J. Keffer of Hamilton speaking for the church of Christ and W. G. Denton and F. C. Poole of Peterborough speaking for the Apostolic Church.

The churches of Christ of Sarnia and Port Huron visited back and forth a lot, and held joint picnics in August of 1944, 1945, 1946 and 1947. Bro. Lawrence Dennis made a beautiful large banner to be used at picnics, with wording "Church of Christ Picnic".

About this time, four deacons were appointed: Bro. Bruce Waldeck, Bro. Lawrence Dennis, Bro. William Yeates, Bro. Wade Hibbard. Also one acting elder was appointed: Bro. Fred Whitfield. When Bro. Keffer came to work with the Sarnia congregation, further study of the scriptures revealed that it was not proper to have one elder or acting elder, so it was agreed to not use the titles but to work together as in the past.

Bro. L. J. Keffer came to work with the church late in 1945. There were 6 added to the church during the 2½ years Bro. Keffer was minister. He resigned because of ill health.

Bro. Ellis M. Milton and Bro. Eugene Hollaway of Detroit took turns of filling the pulpit during 1949 and part of 1950. Several more were added to the church and baptized by Bro. Milton. During the latter part of 1950, Bro. Bethel W. Bailey and family visited in Sarnia and during his visit the brethren made arrangements for him to move to Sarnia and help with the erection of the top of the building on the basement. Bro. Bethel Bailey made arrangements with his brother, Bro. Nelson Bailey, a carpenter of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, to come and supervise the erection of the main auditorium, with the members of the congregation giving assistance. Bro. Nelson Bailey and his wife came and rented rooms here in Sarnia and stayed until the frame-work of top was finished. The congregation gave them a grocery shower to help with their expenses, and he was very reasonable with his charges. Brick was wanted for the outside, and the building fund was getting low. Bro. Lawrence Dennis was so anxious to have the brick on, he gave \$2,000 to get it finished. The men of congregation helped to shingle the roof. About 6 ft. more was dug out at south end of the church building so as to have room for baptistry behind the pulpit. We needed a pulpit stand for the main auditorium. Bro. Bruce Waldeck bought the lumber and hired a carpenter to build it the right size. Some used church pews were purchased from the Patterson Memorial Church on the corner of Russell and Kathleen Streets and with the chairs we had been using in the basement, the main auditorium was ready to hold services.

From 1948 - 1961 radio air time was given to the church about once a month, at first on Saturday mornings, called "Morning Devotions", and later on Friday evenings, called "Evening Vespers". Bro. Bruce Waldeck and his wife studied the scriptures together to prepare sermons which Bro. Waldeck preached on C.H.O.K. Radio Sarnia, for the church.

In the summer of 1963, Bro. Gale Miller and his wife Ruth, of Shock, West Virginia, came to Sarnia on their vacation. Being members of the church, they attended our service. The Vacation Bible School was starting on Monday and they offered their service. Both taught classes through the week of Vacation Bible School. They seemed to like Sarnia and decided to stay longer. Both having been public school teachers, they were good Bible teachers. Bro. Miller taught the adult Sunday School class while here and always used a chart in teaching. One Sunday morning when Bruce and I went in, he was preparing the chart for the lesson and was writing with his left hand. I said, "Bro. Miller you are writing with the wrong hand". He said, "Would you like me to use my right hand?" I said, "All of my family do". He immediately put the chalk in his right hand and started writing. To my amazement, he was writing as good with the right hand as he did with the left. I said, "Unique -- not many do that". He said, "Years back I noticed the majority of people were right handed. I tried it and I'm not doing too bad. Kept practicing. It comes in quite handy sometimes, if writing much, when one hand gets tired, I use the other one. If one tries hard enough, they can accomplish many things that others think impossible." Ethel Dennis and I (Beulah) corresponded with Ruth for quite some time when they went back to Virginia. It sort of runs in my mind that Bro. & Sis. Dennis drove to Virginia and visited them later that fall.

Sunday, June 14, 1964, the opening of the new church building in London, Ontario, was held. Quite a number from Sarnia attended the afternoon service. Bro. Ralph H. Perry was the minister at London at that time.

During 1961 - Baptists in school in London - Norma & Oliver Meakin, Deborah & Tim (Sarnia), Linda (Sarnia) - many at school and in London, Beverly Hibbard, Jeanette Hurley, Susan Hartman, Thomas & Dorothy, during the year - Brothard Tracy Walders, Andy Brown, Bill Miller, John Hurley, Ted Hurley and Jack Hurley, Mrs. Margaret Leckie and Mrs. W. Brown.

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