



**Upper Kent United Church**

# Upper Kent United Church Celebrates 150 Years

(Robert LaFrance – 2005)

## *Original church burned 1873, rebuilt 1875*

Members and friends of Upper Kent United Church got together on Sunday, June 5, 2005, to observe the church's 150th birthday. The service, organized by a special church committee over the period of months, was held in the church itself and was followed by a meal - including a huge birthday cake - at the United Church owned Camp Woolastook in Kincardine.

Among the congregation were two members who were descended from the first church workers in 1855 - Aileen Spence and Shirley Miller. They are descendants of William Acton and Alexander Thompson respectively.

The 10:30 AM service, conducted by Rev. Maynard Rector, was preceded by the skirl of bagpipes played by Isabel Morton of Beechwood and Darlene Morton of Kincardine, and piano selections by Mark Morton, a grade 12 student in Hammonds Plain, Nova Scotia. All are descendants of original settlers of Kincardine, whose United Church is part of the Upper Kent charge.

The following is part of the information supplied to the Star by Cari Grierson of Kincardine and outlines some of the Upper Kent church's history:

"A simple, whitewashed, square building sits atop a treed hill on Stewart Road overlooking the St. John River. Now known as Upper Kent United Church, this hallowed site has served Christians in the upper river valley for a century and a half. Pastors over the years have been itinerant missionaries, ministers with many churches on a circuit including Upper Kent, student ministers appointed for summer duty, up to the present when this church shares its minister with the Andover-Kincardine Pastoral Charge.

The only living descendants of the early workers in Upper Kent Church in this community are Aileen (Harry) Spence, and Shirley (Harold Jr.) Miller. Aileen's great-great-grandfather was William Acton who came to Canada from Donegal, Ireland, in 1849 and settled on what is now the Acton Road. He was one of the first trustees of the church. Shirley's great uncles were the ministers, the brothers Penna, who followed one after the other serving here in the 1870s and 1880s.

Research into the census tells us that the early settlers in the area around Upper Kent were Northern Irish, like William Acton who followed the Methodist tradition, coming to Canada around 1840. It was probably in 1855, although the exact date is not known, a church was built on this present site, but was destroyed by fire in 1873. The door on the present Upper Kent United Church was the only thing salvaged from the ruins. Also saved from the fire was a copy of 'Wesley Hymns' dated October 24, 1863, and inscribed as follows: "This book belongs to the Wesleyan Chapel in Upper Kent", signed: Seth Squires. We infer this was the name of the first church, and in the minutes of church meetings in early days reference is made to chapel stewards.

The little church was rebuilt in 1875 on land that was donated. The trustees at this time were Joseph Armour, Wm. Acton, Alex Thompson, John Thompson, Thomas Wharton, Elisha Wharton, John S. Armour, William Squires and George W. Hawthorn. The minister in charge was Rev. Edwin Turner in 1873.

The records show that until the year 1899, Upper Kent was associated with Florenceville and was known as the Upper Kent Mission. Centreville, Upper Kent, Tobique were all names which have been given to this Circuit in the past. Tobique was the same as Andover and Perth. The minister's circuit included Wicklow, Bath, Perth, Arthurette, Three Brooks and Upper Kent. The Circuit Account for the year 1873 and 1874 shows that the amount raised for Year was \$250. Of this the minister was to receive an annual salary of \$150.

At the time, he received \$60 for his room and board and washing and \$55 to pay for the keep of his horse. So the amount of givings did not quite cover in that year. On September 23, 1874, the Trustees thought it most desirable to build a Methodist Mission House in this circuit, to be situated at Upper Kent as it was spelled in old records. The mission house was actually the manse for the traveling minister.

In 1964, in another boundary rearrangement, Upper Kent United Church became part of the 4-point Andover-Kincardine Pastoral Charge served by one minister. From 1962 to 1979, Reverend Frederick Garnett served as minister of the 7-point Andover Charge. During that time there were many summer students who stayed at the manse in Kincardine and spelled off the minister. Among those names are Frank Gosbee, 1964-65, Fred Kitson, 1966, Lloyd Fraser and Kirby Nowlan, 1967, Cyril Reid, 1968, Malcolm Sinclair, 1969, and Alan Riches, 1970, Robert Whitmer and John Moses. From 1975 to 1986, the ministers were Alan Riches, Janet and David

Shearman, and Mr. Garnett again. In 1986 Reverend John and Joan Smith served the charge. They were followed by Reverend Glen Lemon, Vera Sampson and Martin Carnahan. In 2002, Reverend Maynard Rector became minister. Summer services would be held in Kincardine and the winter services held in the more accessible Upper Kent church.

Through the years the Upper Kent Church has worked to raise funds, to send children and to help the camp project in any way. In 1974, the beautiful stained glass window from Kilburn, dedicated to Benjamin Kilburn, was donated to the Upper Kent United Church. It was moved from the unused Kilburn Church to its present site in 1974. The window depicts Jesus praying in the garden and the disciples asleep near the gate. For the 2005 anniversary, a weatherproof banner was hung on the wall over the vestibule outside for all passersby to see. On it was printed, "Upper Kent United Church, 1855 to 2005. Proclaiming Christ for 150 years". The banner was donated by Millie Girvan to the Anniversary Committee, in memory of her sisters, Ruby Phillips and Eva Hicks."

