

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MOUNTAIN MILL UNITED CHURCH 1906 TO 2016

In 1879 the Federal Government established a sawmill on Mill Creek, 8 miles west of Pincher Creek in order to provide lumber for the settlers and Indians and to encourage the growing of crops. In 1881 Senator Peter McLaren bought the sawmill and soon a community of about 75 workers was formed.

By 1902 the timber was mostly cut down, and a flood washed the mill away, but McLaren still maintained a horse and cattle ranch on his leased land between the Castle River and Mill Creek. Meanwhile "homesteaders" were moving in with young families and there was a desire to have a local church. So Mr William Gladstone (a Hudson Bay Co trader of Gladstone Valley and Gladstone Mountain fame) donated 4 acres of land, and after canvassing of the locals by Mr J.J. Skeene, \$480 was raised, together with plenty of offers of labour to help with the building.

Work started in April and with Mr Ballantyne as foreman (Doug McClellands Grandfather) windows and doors were brought from Blairmore and with lumber from McLaren's Mill the church was soon finished.

Mr. Gladstone wrote to his uncle in Montreal who was a Superintendent of a Sunday School, telling him about the new Mountain Mill church that had no money left for chairs, so a collection in Montreal was taken and \$32 was sent immediately.

Also Mr. Chalmers wrote to a Sunday School he attended in England and they sent \$37.

A few years later the Ladies Aid bought the organ and built the vestry. The Ladies Aid continue to support the church and pay the yearly insurance. There is no water electricity or gas to pay, with heating by two wood burning stoves.

Mr and Mrs McIlquham donated the pulpit, Messers Tom and George Berry donated the table, and Mrs J.S. Ledingham donated the lace table covering. Other items were donated such as Bibles, and a communion table made by Mr John Buchan in 1958, but unfortunately these were vandalized or stolen over the years. More recently a bell and a permanent bench was donated by Norman and Hila Simmonds.

The church started as a Presbyterian Church, but there were already talks underway across Canada to merge with the Methodist and Congregationalist Churches which finally happened in 1925 to form the United Church of Canada. However 8 years before this in 1917 the Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Pincher Creek had already joined together to form one congregation.

The first Minister at Mountain Mill who inaugurated the church on June 7, 1906 was the Rev Gavin Hamilton, who continued to serve for 4 years till 1910.

The first Board of Managers was J.J. Skeene, W.R. Lees, J.S. Ledingham, and R. Lang (with descendants still in the district) Everyone came to church by horse and buggy, and Sunday Church was a big occasion in the community.

By now the coal mines in Beaver Mines was the new centre of activity and the Kootenay and Alberta Railroad was being built, with one of the highest wooden trestles in Canada located virtually right over the church. So Mr Grant Smith the railway contractor moved the church a few hundred yards further south to its present location. During construction of the trestle, one of the large wooden beams blew over in a wind storm and would have demolished the church if it had not been moved. Also one of the workers fell to his death one Sunday morning while service was being held.

The Great War of 1914-1919 took its toll on the district with the coal mines being closed and the rails from the Railway being torn up and made into steel for the war effort. In addition many young men from the congregation gave their lives such as Douglas McDowall, John Gaunt, John Hodgkins, James McDonald, John Catterill, Albert Beasley, George Tennant and Louis Fillmore.

The church has been continuously serviced by the Pincher Creek Ministers except for a brief period from 1949 to 1951 when the church was closed, by Reverends Gavin Hamilton, J.H.Gorden, G.H. Vilette, N.M. Whitmore, R.E. Pow, R. Magowan, J.G. Goddard, R.M.Moriartey, W. Dormer, Larry Edwards, Ken Jordan, Bob Putman, K.V Jordan, and by Deaconesses, Margaret Brown, and Marian Hodgins, Eileen Graham, Colleen Erb, and by student Ministers in the summers of the 1950's such as Warren Burleigh, Ian Gilchrist (son of a much revered missionary in Angola) Ernest Royal, and later Peter J. Pace.

More recently the church has been services by Rev Jim Hemming, Joyce Sasse, Colleen Bryant, Debbie Widrer(?) Brent Woodard, and today by Rev. Lloyd Nyarota. (from Zimbabwe).

43 years ago the minutes of the church stated: "What lies in the future for our church is not known; attendance is poor, most of the young people take no interest, and the older ones are leaving for various reasons, many called by God".

Although aspects of these issues still remain, today we can say, attendance is up, the young are being baptized, and with the continued support of inspired Ministry and unfailing congregational belief and support, we fully expect the future parishioners will celebrate the 200 anniversary of Mountain Mill United Church.