

# Auld Kirk Records Tell Story Of Pioneer Church

(Compiled by Mr. and Mrs. Murry Faris from church records obtainable)

The history of the Auld Kirk dates back to January 6, 1822, when the first congregation was organized by Rev. William Jenkins of Markham and Scarborough, one of the ministers of the United Synod of Upper Canada. The communion roll contained fourteen names.

On January 24th, 1824, four elders, Adam Goodfellow, William Sutherland, Alexander Bannerman and John Matheson were ordained by Mr. Jenkins.

In 1827 a small frame church was built on the present site and was the house of worship for the new settlers until 1869 when the present brick structure was built. During that span of years four different ministers served.

The Rev. Peter Ferguson followed Rev. Jenkins and was in charge from 1831 to 1832. In 1833 Rev. James Howie of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland was ordained to the charge but was unable to perform his duties because of a serious illness which brought about his death in 1835. In August 1835, the Rev. William Fraser entered upon the pastoral charge which then composed Tecumseth, Essa and West Gwillimbury.

Mr. Fraser continued in the pastorate of these three congregations for nearly twenty-one years, when in May, 1856, he resigned the charge of Tecumseth, retaining West Gwillimbury and Essa. This arrangement continued for nearly 14 years until February 1870 when the pastorate of Essa was also resigned.

The above records go no further. They were compiled by Rev. Fraser in 1872 at the laying of the corner stone of the present Kirk which leads us to believe that the church was bricked three or four years after being built. In the corner stone they put a glass vase containing these records, along with a copy of the Daily Globe (27th of June); the June 14th copy of the British American Presbytery; the June number of the Home and Foreign Record, Canadian Presbyterian Church; a Report on Home Missions; and Statistics of the Canadian Presbyterian Church.

As to the remaining history we gather that the Kirk remained open until around 1885, when a difference of opinion seemed to arise which brought about the breaking away of some families who went to the fifth Concession and built the present Presbyterian Church.

The Auld Kirk was known as the First Canada Presbyterian Congregation of West Gwillimbury, and the second church has always been known as 2nd West Gwillimbury.

Rev. Fraser makes a revealing insight on the people of the Auld Kirk when he states "The congregation has always been small, but a kind Providence has smiled upon the honest industry of its members and endowed several of them with a competent portion of this world's possessions, and hence desiring liberal things for the honour of their Heavenly Father and bountiful benefactor, the erection of this edifice has been undertaken".

Eventually there were so few left still loyal to the first church, that services had to be discontinued on a regular basis. Finally even occasional services were no longer held and the Auld Kirk was left with its memories of staunch, hardy pioneers filing into their pews, their families with them, seeking spiritual strength and guidance enabling them to face the many hardships in a new land.