

THE CITY OF OWEN SOUND

There are those who believe that Champlain in his extensive travels in the New World was the first white man to visit this Owen Sound district. When we remember that the actual site of the city, at least the lower part, was very swampy with branches of the trees practically obscuring the river, it is extremely doubtful that either white man or Indian would camp here. However we do know that Jesuit missionaries were likely among the first to hold religious services in this area. The Pottawatomies who had moved up from the Chicago district were mainly Roman Catholics. Then in the 1820's, under the leadership of a remarkable man by the name of Rev. William Case, a Methodist from the U.S.A., a great revival swept through Indian bands in southern Ontario and by the 1830's had reached these parts. One of the outstanding converts was Peter Jones, a half-breed whose father was a Welshman of good standing and his mother an Indian, also of good standing. It was due to the leadership of Peter Jones that the Indians in this part of Bruce and Grey were so reasonable in their demands and so ready to move to their respective Reserves. It was, no doubt, the best alternative for the Indians to take but there is some question as to whether the white man kept his part of the agreement. In any case a strong dose of Methodism had a great deal to do with the early days of Owen Sound and the relationships between the white man and the Indians. There is no doubt that Methodist Missionaries were the first resident ministers in the present City of Owen Sound.

For about 20 years there were two branches of Methodism here, - the Wesleyans and the New Connexion. The latter were the progressive, liberal wing of Methodism and they united with the Wesleyans in 1874 to form the Methodist Church of Canada. The New Connexion Church still stands as a private residence on the south-west corner of 9th Street East and 5th Avenue, and may be the oldest church building at present standing in Owen Sound. The first Wesleyan Church was built on the site of the present Central United Church, - a very swampy area so it is said.

Methodist Ministers were stationed by Conference and not allowed to remain more than three years, - so it is impossible to list them here except to say that Rev. Stephen Brownell and Rev. John Neelands were among the first. Both Central and First United have prepared very good booklets of their early history. Mention might also be made of Rev. John McDougall's book, entitled, - "Forest, Lake and Prairie," which is in our local Library; he spent his early years in Owen Sound.

Some of the more prominent settlers in the city-to-be, were members of the Disciples Church, a break-away group of former U.S. Presbyterians who became impatient with denominationalism and thought the churches could unite together on the basis of simple faith in Christ. The Disciples at one time had churches in Owen Sound, Kilsyth, Meaford and Priceville; their first church in Owen Sound was located near the present Salvation Army Barracks and was built in 1844, - hence the first church to be built. Most of the members of this denomination are now in the United Church.

The Presbyterians brought with them their intense loyalty to their mother church and its doctrines, practices and type of organization but they also brought the differences of opinion which accompanied the disruption of the Church in Scotland in 1845, associated with the name of Rev. Thomas Chalmers. Their first church in Owen Sound, built in 1849 and situated on the "Eighth Street East Hill," was called Chalmers Church. But the congregation was seriously divided on many issues. The farming people could not see eye to eye with the townsfolk; some wanted to have the church downtown, some didn't; some favoured the United Presbyterians and some the Free Church; some wanted to be a part of the Canada Presbyterian Church and some the Presbyterian Church in Canada, - two separate branches that united in 1875. Out of the struggle there emerged two separate congregations, - Division Street