



SPRINGBANK UNITED CHURCH

"The story of the Springbank church . . . lies in the staunch and devoted lives of the men and women who have brought up their families in this community starting back in the days of the homestead and the horse and buggy through to the era of the super highway. Wives and children combined through good and bad times, through drought and wars to give the church their lives and their faith. Through all the changes that have taken place many of the names of the pioneers remain on the active roll as their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren remain faithful to the cause their ancestors loved so dearly."

-Rev. W. J. Dr. Collett



This history of Springbank United Church is adapted from a reflection by Evelyn Buckley on the occasion of the church's 120th anniversary, September 24, 2006. This version was updated in September 2017 by Audrey Waddell

WORSHIP BEGINS IN SPRINGBANK

Three years after the C.P.R. made its dramatic arrival at the sprawling outpost called Calgary, James and William Young settled west of the tiny town, building small log homes for their families, who arrived in November 1886. Shortly after their arrival, James and Lily Young opened their home to any neighbours who wanted to join them in worship and Sunday School. Laymen and, occasionally, ministers would come as preachers.

When no doctor could be found to deliver her son Alan, Lily determined no other woman should experience childbirth alone. She began work as a midwife and delivered at least 100 babies in the area. She also visited the sick, and was Superintendent of the Sunday School for years.

As Lily was endowed with a remarkable faith, so was James with a sense of humour. Frequently late for church, he would choose a rousing hymn and in good voice sing his way to the pew.

1887

A LOG SCHOOL IS BUILT

The Youngs, along with their neighbours, were instrumental in building the log school in 1887. The church was then able to move to the school and Sunday mornings saw the Youngs transporting their grand piano by wagon to worship every week.

1894

SPRINGBANK UNION CHURCH

In 1894, a log church named the Springbank Union Church was built, in much the same way as the school, by the combined efforts of the settlers:

“Then came the building of the church, and if anyone has ever helped to establish one in a small community he will know something of the stir it has caused. Mrs. Young, the prime mover in this enterprise, was a much talked-of person. From the

day the church was started until it was finished, it was the one never-failing topic of conversation. I had no idea that amongst so few people such a difference of opinion could exist. One wanted this, another wanted that. One woman even went so far as to say that the Devil's money helped to build it. Strange to say, Wheeler Mickle, who was not at all a churchgoing man, was the one who put in the most time and work on it, and I think he thoroughly enjoyed it. However, the church went on in spite of all the controversy and, strange to say, it was the people who never contributed a cent or lent a helping hand who had the most to say about it."

-From the memoirs of Helen Hutchinson.

Laypeople and ministers conducted services in the church. One Sunday was set-aside for the Anglicans' service.

SPRINGBANK METHODIST CHURCH

By 1900, the church was already too small and an addition was built to house the Sunday School and a kitchen. From these tiny beginnings came the Fowl Supper, a tradition that continued until the 2000's with the Harvest Supper. The women of the congregation—first the Ladies Aid and then the U.C.W—always worked hard and gave that little extra.

As denominational divisions grew in Calgary, it was inevitable they would invade the ecumenism and joint services in Springbank. In 1909 the Canadian Methodist Church organized an Official Board for Springbank Methodist Church and a new building was built two miles north of the Springbank Union Church. It was dedicated on June 10, 1910 and Rev. Wm. Hollingsworth became the first minister.

However, it was neither spiritually nor economically viable that a community the size of Springbank maintain two churches for long. Nor was it in harmony with the historic unity of the people.

In the early 1900s, a donation of \$5.00 a year was considered a sizeable gift and total church offerings on a Sunday sometimes fell as low as 50 cents. The minutes of the annual meetings reveal deficit financing and a struggle to pay the minister's salary. Several ministers voluntarily cancelled the amount owing to them. The result of these pressures was that on March 16, 1916, the Board of Deacons of the Presbyterian Church passed the following resolution:

“That it is in the best interest of the Kingdom of God and the advancement of the cause of Jesus Christ, and also in the best interest of all the people of the community—morally, socially, and spiritually—that the two congregations of Springbank unite into one body, having one congregation, one church building, one minister, and that we most cordially invite, and in Christian love urge our friends of the Methodist body, to immediately take such steps as are necessary to consummate such a union.”

On March 24th, the Annual Congregational Meeting of the Methodist Church accepted the principle of Union. It took two years to work out the details, but on June 14, 1918, Mr. Longeway and Mrs. J. D. McLaurin moved that *“we hold services and Sunday School in the two churches on alternate Sundays, for one year, always providing that there shall be an English church service in the Union Church (the original church) on the first Sunday of each month.”* This was years before the United Church Union in 1925.



WORLD WAR I & THE POST-WAR YEARS

WWI had had a terrible impact on the community. Many young men joined the Armed services and some sacrificed their lives. The post-war years were ones of readjustment and change. Some families moved away and church attendance suffered. Years of dry weather and poor crops had a devastating effect on the economic life. Financial problems constantly haunted the church. There were three buildings the North and South churches, as well as the

parsonage to maintain. The Methodist Board of Canada ordered the Springbank Pastoral Charge to unite with the West Calgary Charge. Springbank valued its independence and was not inclined to accept edicts lightly. The congregation agreed only if the minister lived in Springbank.

The two churches lived in harmony and struggled financially during the early twenties and the depression. People always knew which church to go to, and there was no dissension. However, on October 16, 1933, the board was told the amount raised that year was \$488.01. Rev. Horricks voluntarily agreed to accept only \$1000 for the entire year, and forgave them their debts from 1932. The Ladies Aid, as usual, donated \$100 to the deficit.

The years were beginning to take their toll on the great men of the early days. In 1935, J. T. McKnight, who had borne the burden of the church's financial problems, was forced to ask to be relieved of his duties because of ill health. This was also the year that William Aberhart of the Social Credit Party, wanted to hold a rally in the church, but the church board emphatically said it was not getting involved in those politics.

Things kept getting worse. In 1936, Rev. Dr. Dwight Powell, Superintendent of Home Missions for the United Church in Alberta, decided that Springbank should be joined with Cochrane, instead of West Calgary. This pioneer congregation was in no way disposed to give up its historic sense of independence and agreed to the change only if the following conditions were met: the minister must reside in Springbank, Cochrane recognize the road conditions may prevent the minister from traveling there on occasion, and Cochrane was to make an annual contribution to pastoral support of not less than \$500 per year.

Cochrane wanted a new minister; Springbank did not. Calgary Presbytery stepped into the fray and declared the Cochrane-Springbank Pastoral charge vacant and the Rev. R. E. Pow was appointed. The pioneer spirit and independence once again came to the fore: *“We wish to express our disapproval of the unofficial representation of our work to the officers of Calgary Presbytery, and record our disappointment that Presbytery should take any notice of such representation. . . . We believe that an apology is due from Presbytery.”*

TRADITIONS

Throughout the years, three church events have played a prominent role in this congregation's life—the Christmas concert, the church picnic, and the Fowl Supper.

Preparations for the Christmas Concert began weeks ahead of the event. Plays, songs and drills were carefully prepared and received enthusiastically by the entire community. They welcomed an opportunity to socialize with their friends and neighbours.

The picnic was a joyful occasion, which lasted all day. Enough food was brought for two meals and people drove horses and buggies many miles to enjoy a day with their friends. The picnic was held in various places—the Cullen Grove, Turner Valley, Camp Kiwanis. The Fowl or Turkey Supper continued until the 2000's. In spite of the Provincial Government's concerns, there has never been a case of food poisoning.

CLOSING THE UNION CHURCH

Keeping up two churches took its toll on the congregation. The south church was cold and, in 1944, they very reluctantly decided to worship in the North Church for the winter. It was the beginning of the end for the first historic church building in the community. One last effort was made in 1947 *“to fix the South Church so that it may be a suitable memorial to those stalwart pioneers who worshipped there and have now passed on. To enlarge the North Church by the addition of a part of the South Church; to modernize the parsonage; to remove the old shed and build a garage and to repaint the North Church and parsonage.”*

The monies could not be raised and the South Church was put up for tender, the piano moved to the home of Fred Young, and the pulpit donated to the Balzac church. The Young family purchased the church and a Cairn was erected on the site of the South Church.

1951

SPRINGBANK JOINS THE NEWLY FORMED FOOTHILLS PRESBYTERY

The congregation continued to add to the church. The North church was raised and a basement was put under it for the use of the Sunday School. Up until this time, the older children used the office in the manse for Sunday School and the boys, according to Clarence Buckley, met in cars! Clarence fondly remembers an old Rio.

1961

THE CHURCH ADDS A CHRISTIAN EDUCATION BUILDING

In the Fall of 1961, the congregation was growing, post war baby boomers were being born, and the congregation decided to build a Christian Education Building. For the first time in the history of this church, finances were not an issue. Youth work was flourishing and the faith of the homesteaders was growing into fruition. CGIT, Explorers, and Youth groups abounded.

This congregation has always been moving, now it was just between the church and the education building. On busy Sundays—Easter, Christmas, and Mother’s Day—all the pews would be moved from the church into the C. E. building. Finally, one Sunday, mild-mannered Jack Crawford had had enough. He said, “This is it. I am not moving another pew.” By default and not decision, the pews remained in the C. E. space, which became the church from then on.

1989

RENOVATIONS

In 1989, the interior of the sanctuary was renovated by volunteer labour. Morris Smith gave the talk on May 28th at the dedication service:

“Volunteer labour is something this community has always thrived on. It’s not only been in the church that volunteer labour has kept this a close knit community, but also in other areas as well. During the war years of the 1940’s, we outgrew the community hall. It was doubled in size—all volunteer labour. We wanted a curling rink. We raised enough

money for the materials. All volunteer labour. Those helping hands are the hands that make a community and hold it together. Let the complainers and such talk their heads into the clouds, but they can't break the bonds that are created by the co-operation of volunteer workers."

On April 4, 1994, the sanctuary was renovated once more to accommodate a growing congregation. The current sanctuary was dedicated on December 4, 1994.

†

PEOPLE OF THE CHURCH

In addition to the many pioneer families already named, others have contributed much over the years: Marion Smith who played the piano so faithfully for many years; Minnie Barnes who at the same time played the violin; Roland Winspear, who counted the numbers in church every Sunday, and kept us all in place around special Sundays and communion; Jim McKnight, like his father before him, took over the Treasurer's job from Thom Hodgson (iIn those days,

there was no such things as reports, if there wasn't enough money, he just reached into his pocket, never telling anyone); the women—Eva Bateman, Nancy Toews, Eva Wills, and Grace Munro (born during a Ladies Aid meeting, the first baby baptized in this church, married here, buried here in 2006); Rex Young's family; the Wallaces; the Hennings; the Hodgsons; the Robinsons; the Cullens; the Willard George family; the Johnsons; the Crawfords; the Calverts; the Longeways; the Andersons; and many more.

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CHURCH CEMETERY

Cemeteries at both the South and North Churches contain the graves of many of the pioneers. The beautiful spruce trees were hauled in by horse and wagon from the foothills. In 1974, the South Church cemetery, by Springbank Community High School, was closed to further burials and now is recognized as a historic site.

“Be doers of the word and not merely hearers only.”

James 1:22



“Those who established this church knew and did this. They not only built churches, but a community. We have been given this legacy; it is our responsibility to keep it up. Even if we are new, the Youngs started the first Sunday they were here. We cannot always wait until we have time, or have more money, but we must be faithful now, giving generously of our time and gifts.”