

Historical Background to the Founding of Peachland United Church

The United Church of Canada was formed on June 10th 1925 by an Act of Union, an act which amalgamated the Methodist, the Presbyterians and the Congregational Churches in Canada into a single unit. All three denominations had been brought to Canada from Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, firstly to Nova Scotia, and by the 1800's they were firmly established in Ontario and Quebec as well as Western Canada. The three Churches each have their own story to tell and each has a long and distinguished history of service lasting from these early days until the 1925 amalgamation.

There is, however, one other player whose arrival in Canada from Europe in the early 1800's has a direct link to our Peachland experience. The Orange Lodge or Orange Order is a Protestant fraternal organization founded in 1796 to commemorate the victory of William of Orange over the Catholic James II of England in 1690. It is a highly structured organization which has at the heart of its activities the Orange Hall. The first such Halls were established in Ontario and Newfoundland in the 1830's and Orangism rapidly became a very important player in the political and cultural life of countless Canadian communities large and small and so it was in Peachland when the Orange Hall was constructed in 1904. But we are getting a little ahead of ourselves.

During the early years of settlement in Peachland the various Protestant denominations were very loosely aligned with little organized activity other than occasional gatherings in private homes. The first organized services are reported to have been held by Rev. A. T. Robinson, a Baptist student, who in 1898 began regular communal services in his own home. This changed in 1898 with the construction of Peachland's first school which provided an ideal location for regular Sunday worship and after school meetings.



Peachland's First School

1898-1908

Shown here as St. Margaret's Church 1908-1991

Rev. Robinson left in the fall of 1900 and was replaced by Rev. C. W. Whyte, a Presbyterian, who after taking the temperature of the Protestant community in Peachland, wrote the following assessment to his superiors:

I found here a united, church-going, religiously-inclined, clean lot of people. The increase in our population will render it necessary, at an early date, to face the question of a building. Peachland has surprised us. Last Fall it was a question with the committee whether it was wise to send a student to this point. A man was appointed at a student's salary, and the result is, now we are considering the advisability of raising the field to the status of an ordained field. It is a rare thing in British Columbia, or anywhere else for that matter, to find a whole community united in a request for church services. Such we have in Peachland, and it augers well for the future of the district. It goes without saying, there is no saloon here.

The last sentence of the above quotation simply confirms the fact that all denominations preached temperance with the Methodists leading the way by embracing total abstinence. They were followed by the Baptists and Presbyterians who were less strict and then by the Anglicans and Catholics who were even less so. The population of Peachland at this time was about 300.

Guiding such a committed (and sober) flock Rev. Whyte wasted little time in creating the interdenominational Peachland Christian Union in 1901 which used both the school and private residences to organize services and meetings. In 1902 Rev. J. N. Richie, a Baptist minister from Manitoba, arrived in Peachland and he and Rev. Whyte would alternate taking Union services until a Baptist Church, the first in the Okanagan Valley, was created in 1903.

In 1904 the Presbyterians, with the assistance of the Methodists, built a Presbyterian church, commonly referred to as the Union Church on Beach Avenue at Third Street.



Presbyterian Church
1904-1920

The year 1904 was a banner year for community buildings as it was also in this year that the Orange Hall came into being. As mentioned above, the highly structured, Protestant Orange Order attracted members of all denominations, except of course Roman Catholics, and their Halls became centres of activity for religious, educational and cultural groups. Peachland was no exception. Junior school grades were taught in this building, cultural activities thrived and in 1906 the Methodists started holding their services there followed in 1907 by the Baptists.



The Orange Hall on 2nd Street
1904-1926

The Orange Hall is the long building in the foreground. In 1926 it was moved a short distance by horses and skids to a lower location on 2nd Street where it was purchased and refitted by the Royal Canadian Legion Branch #69 which received its charter that same year.

The move of the Methodists and likely the Baptists from the Union Church was the result of conflict over access to the Presbyterian/Union church. Some of the reasoning behind this conflict which rocked the community is contained in the official minutes of the Methodist Board meeting dated 19th August 1907. The Union Church advised the Methodists that they could only have use of the church for two services a month and that there would be a charge of \$1.50 per service for the main part of the church and \$1.00 for services in any other part of the church. While there was obviously more to the dispute than this, the minutes reflect that directly after this letter was read the following motion was made: "Moved by Bro(ther). Ferguson, Sec(onded) by Sister J. B. Robertson that we in future hold (all) our services in the Orange Hall. Carried." As interesting as this historical footnote is, a subsequent motion made as the result of this disagreement is of significant importance. It reads: "Moved by Bro(ther) Dr. Lipsett sec(onded) by Bro(ther) Douglas that we shall be called the Peachland Methodist Church. Carried." Thus, Peachland United Church can positively trace its lineage to 19th August, 1907. (A full transcript of this meeting is reproduced elsewhere in this booklet.)

The year that followed this redirection of Methodist affections was important in a number of ways. The 1908 construction of the much larger Peachland Primary School on Beach Avenue allowed the Anglicans to take possession of the vacant 1898 school building and name it in honour of St. Margaret. It also marked the appointment of Rev. J. J. Nixon as the first resident Methodist minister for Peachland who lost no time in striking a committee to build the first Methodist church.

This desire to have a place of their own was also shared by the Baptists who in 1910 constructed a unique 8 sided building also on Beach Avenue which was to become their church home for the next 54 years.

The Methodists finally achieved their goal in 1911 and on November 5th celebrated the dedication of their brand new church on 4th Street. The service was conducted by Rev. J. J. Allen with the dedication given by Rev. J. N. White, the head of the Mission Boards of the Methodist Church.



Methodist/United Church 1911

In 1919 the church held a service to celebrate the burning of the mortgage and in the following year, old animosities long forgotten, the Presbyterians joined with the Methodists in sharing the new church. The Presbyterian congregation had dwindled to such an extent that it was not practical to go it alone so a joint venture with the Methodists involving alternating ministers became a logical solution. This jointly occupied building was generally referred to as the Union Church. The 1904 Presbyterian Church thus became redundant and was sold to the Municipality of Peachland in 1920 and used as a municipal office, a library and meeting rooms.

The term “Union” took on a much greater significance in 1925 when on June 10th in Toronto the Methodist Church, the Congregational Church and 70 percent of the Presbyterian Church joined together to form the United Church of Canada. To quote from the official United Church of Canada history – “It was the first union of churches in the world to cross historical denominational lines and hence received international acclaim. Impetus for the union arose out of a concern for serving the vast Canadian northwest and the desire for better overseas mission.”

With the new church came the requirement for a residence for the minister. Proceeds from the sale of the Presbyterian Church were used to build a manse on 6th Street.



United Church Manse

Built by volunteer labour on four lots donated by Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Hogg in 1925 it was occupied by a succession of ministers, subsequently converted to a rental property, sold in the 1980's and demolished in 1996.

Notes:

While 1925 marked the date of the formal creation of the United Church, the spirit of union, especially between the Methodists and the Presbyterians, was certainly not a new concept in Peachland. In fact, Methodist minutes of March 9th 1916 report that a meeting was held in the reading room of the Presbyterian Church attended by the Boards of both churches ... “to try and agree on some basis on which the two paid congregations could form one united organization.” While the minutes reflect no clear cut resolution, there was unanimous agreement to consult both congregations, to place before them a series of propositions ... “and (for) the congregations (to) take such action as in the circumstances they deem wise.” Subsequent minutes are not available but while joint usage of the Methodist Church did take place in 1920 complete union did not. However, Peachland was clearly in the vanguard of events that would transpire nine years hence.

Prior to 1907 Anglicans met in private homes and probably the Orange Hall, a situation which changed in 1908 with the appointment of Rev. Herbert Solly who had previously traveled from Summerland to conduct services. His arrival coincided with the construction of the Beach Avenue Primary School, a much needed larger building designed to accommodate Peachland's increasingly youthful population. The now vacant 1898 school building was quickly acquired by the Anglicans, consecrated as St. Margaret's and it remained the seat of Anglican worship until 1991 when they moved into their current home on 4th Street. After much trial and tribulation the 1898 school/church was by 2002 saved and transformed into a much admired and loved historical site known throughout Peachland as *The Little Schoolhouse*.

There is little historical reference to Roman Catholics in the early or even later religious life of Peachland. Protestantism was by far the largest belief system with Catholics forced to travel to Penticton, Kelowna and later Westbank in search of a Catholic church, a situation which continues to the present time.

The United Church is the largest Protestant denomination in Canada ministering to close to half a million members in over 3,200 congregations. At the time of the 1925 union about thirty percent of the Presbyterians refused to enter the merger and chose to continue as the Presbyterian Church of Canada which is the situation today. In 1930 the Synod of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Bermuda joined the United Church as did the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968.

The 1910 Baptist Church on Beach Avenue, one of three similar octagonal structures in Canada, was sold to the Municipality of Peachland in 1960 but continued to be used as a church until 1964 when the Baptists moved into their new home on Lake Avenue. It was converted into a museum in 1981 and remains as such today.

The battle against alcohol was not solely seen as a church based responsibility. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) which arrived in the Okanagan as early as 1898 began holding valley-wide rallies in 1910 and frequently held their meetings in the Methodist church. This was a relationship that continued with the local United Church right up until the mid 1950's. The WCTU took considerable pains to recruit young people to their cause and held regular elocution contests.

The gold medal pin shown below was awarded by the WCTU to Shirley Mae Gerrie at a poetry reading contest held in Peachland United Church in 1947 or 48.



The following document provides an interesting historical side-light on the work of the United Church Women's Association during World War II. The phrase "...enter with strength and confidence upon the new responsibilities which the post-war years will bring." was certainly a huge leap of faith especially with the state of the war in 1941.

The United Church of Canada

WAR SAVINGS COMMITTEE

"My Loan to My Country and My Gift to My Church"

Chairman, J. J. GIBSON, 14 King St. W., Toronto.
Vice-Chairman, Mrs. G. ERNEST FORBES.
Chairman, Special Names, A. J. MITCHELL.
Chairman, Publicity, JAMES FISHER.
Sunday Schools and Y.P.U., T. E. PLEWMAN.
Director, DENZIL G. RIDOUT,
299 Queen St. W., Toronto.

408 WESLEY BUILDINGS,
299 Queen Street West,
TORONTO, May 7, 1941

Conference Directors

Maritime:

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105 Bank of Nova Scotia Bldg.,
Halifax, N.S.

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100 Bridge St. E.,
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Alberta:

A. K. McMINN,
10082 MacDonald Drive,
Edmonton, Alta.

British Columbia:

G. A. WILSON,
801 Georgia St.,
Vancouver, B.C.

On behalf of the United Church of Canada we wish to thank your Woman's Association for its recent gift, the official receipt for which is enclosed. This amount, as you know, is given to help free the Church from the debt which has been hampering the work for several years, and thus to enable her to enter with strength and confidence upon the new responsibilities which the post-war years will bring.

Your gift is being loaned to the Country for seven and a half years to help in the struggle for Christian Democracy and will then revert to the Church to make possible fuller achievement for the Kingdom of God. We believe your generosity will stimulate others to make similar gifts.

Much greater effort will need to be made if the total amount of the Deficit is to be secured by September 1942. We appreciate the enthusiasm and loyalty of the women of our Church and ask for your continued interest and support.

With every good wish for the success of your Association,

Yours sincerely,



United Church Women's Association,
c/o Miss Alice E. Elliott, Secretary,
Peschland, B.C.

HELP . . AND BE GLAD THAT YOU CAN!

p.s. A receipt in the amount of \$4.00 for the purchase of War Savings Certificates accompanied the above letter. In 2011 dollars the amount would be nearly \$58.00.