

The Story of
GRAND BEND
UNITED CHURCH

J. E. BURR

Fifty years may seem a short time, or a long time, depending upon which way you are facing. Any young person looking down the road to a fiftieth milestone would assume it runs on forever. Anyone who has travelled along for fifty years or more will know that it speeds rapidly by.

The Grand Bend United Church has been here for fifty years. The United Church of Canada has been in existence for fifty-two years. But the church has been a part of the community much longer than that.

To get a picture worth viewing, we need to begin at the beginning. So we will lay out the foundation with a brief story of how we got here in the first place.

BREWSTER'S MILLS

Grand Bend, although it wasn't always called that, was formerly at the southern tip of Huron County. One day it changed its name. And one day it moved, on the map only, to the northern tip of Lambton County.

In 1832 a man named Brewster bought a piece of land from the Canada Company, on which he wanted to build a mill. The first village, for obvious reasons, was known as Brewster's Mills. Ordinarily a grist mill was a welcome addition to any community, as was the saw mill.

The early settler had to carry his wheat in a sack on his back, through the forest trails, to have it made into flour. It was natural that he rejoiced when the mill was close by. But the Brewster mill was an unhappy affair.

The Aux Sables River comes within a few miles of the lake just west of Exeter, but takes a long meandering course out around the town of Parkhill before it finally gets back to the lake.

When it originally reached Lake Huron it could not push its way through the last few rods of clay and sand hill. So it turned south and found an outlet ten miles away at Port Franks. Years later two cuts were made through to the lake.

However the flat land along the route of the river in the days of Brewster was subject to flooding. The dam across the river, to create a mill pond, created even worse flooding. While the mill was a boon to the people close by, it was a headache to the farmers further away.

To make a long story short, someone has said, begin to yawn. Your yawning at this point suggests to cut it short. Suffice it to say a group of angry farmers in the 1860's met at the mill one night and demolished the dam and burned the mill. Too late, they discovered it didn't stop the flooding. But the mill was never replaced.

GRAND BEND

In 1872 a post office was established at what became Grand Bend. Earlier the lumbering business brought to the area French-Canadians. A good many family names in the area declare the French background: Desjardine, Mason, Ravelle, Sharrow. A man named Brenner built a good hotel, the first in Grand Bend, and the village became a lively spot. Interestingly enough, the Brewer's Warehouse and Liquor Store have about the same effect today during the summer.

When the lumber business ended, Grand Bend became a quiet fishing village. Much later it became a noisy summer resort. Both of these developments were a result of its position on Lake Huron.

THE UNITED CHURCH

The United Church of Canada came into being in 1925 when the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Methodist churches united to form a new church.

At Grand Bend the Presbyterian Church was organized in 1872 with Rev. Gracie as minister, and the first elders were John Caithness and William Turnbull who was one of the first settlers in the area.

The name that still is mentioned by the older folk of the district is that of Rev. S. A. Carrier. He was minister of the Grand Bend Presbyterian Church for forty years. He was a French Canadian, and the rumour is that he was converted from Roman Catholicism. It is likely only a rumour.

The Methodist Church, known as "the White Church" was outside the village at the corner of what is now Highway 81 and the Mollard Line.

The Methodist Church was divided into five branches in Canada: the Primitive Methodist, the Wesleyan Methodist, the Bible Christian Methodist, the Methodist Episcopal church, and the Free Methodists. The first four of these joined to become the Methodist Church in Canada.

After some years of talks, the three denominations mentioned above, formed a union in 1925 that was named the United Church of Canada.

THE METHODIST CHURCH

The Methodist Church of Grand Bend was known as "the white church". It was one of three points on a circuit made up of Grand Bend, Shipka and Boston (now Greenway). Boston, in 1913, was the strongest point. The \$850 salary paid to the minister was divided in three ways: Boston \$510.00; Grand Bend \$180.00; Shipka \$160.00. In 1917 they raised the salary to \$1000.

At that time, and for most of the time before Union, the minister was given two weeks holidays.

In 1915, the Rev. Cook was sick from March 31 to April 18th. The church applied for a grant of \$25 from the Contingency Fund to pay a supply. They also asked for \$18 to pay for a nurse, and \$35 for the doctor. We don't know how often the doctor called, but the nurse must have worked for the large sum of one dollar a day. Probably she received her board and room.

The Sunday Schools were prospering. Shipka had 69 scholars enrolled, with 21 officers and an average attendance of 25. Grand Bend had 45 scholars, 14 officers and an average attendance of 31. Boston had 224 scholars, average attendance 106.

It is an interesting speculation as to the reason for the low average attendance. One could easily figure it out today. But families, as a rule, took their church more seriously then. Comparing the number of scholars and officers, maybe there were just too many chiefs.

In 1917 there was a dispute over the salary. As you read the record you become aware that the Board ruled on the salary and the minister took what he was offered. At any rate, they finally agreed to pay \$1200, over the protest of those who insisted on \$1100.

Maybe they should have stayed at \$1100. Or maybe those who didn't want to pay the top salary withheld their contributions. For whatever reason, a special meeting was called in September to discuss the finances. They had to go out and get more money.

In November they met to hear a report that the financial campaign was not very successful. After some discussion a motion was passed to "adopt the scheme and make it go". There is no mention of what the scheme was.

The problem with records is that they only contain motions made. The reason for the motion, and the discussion that preceded, or followed it, is not included. But one can draw a mental picture of these gentlemen sitting about the box stove doing their best to keep their little corner of God's vineyard watered and weeded.

It has never been an easy task to keep the church afloat financially. Dedicated men and women, over the years, have given their time, and whatever talents they had, to raise the budget. They have seldom been appreciated. They have often been criticized. Many a person has heard the remark, "You only come when you want money" when the canvasser called. For some reason they always seemed to forget it is their church also. And, in the first place, they should have given their financial support without someone having to ask at the door.

The Board decided they needed more supporters and made plans in 1921 to "wait upon" the Sylvan Circuit to discuss plans to add Centenary appointment to the Grand Bend Circuit. There is no record that anything came of this.

Apparently the circuit had been made up of four points at one time. In 1921 the Board disposed of the Church building at Mt. Pleasant.

But there were other larger questions. It would have been interesting indeed to hear the debate at a November meeting in 1921. A vote was held on "the advisability of giving women the privilege of becoming Probationers and Ministers of the Church". The vote was 4 yes, 4 no. Which, of course, left the issue exactly where it was when they came to the meeting.

By August 1925, the Methodist Church in Canada had become a part of the United Church of Canada. A motion was placed on record in the former Methodist congregation, now calling themselves the United Church, as follows:

"That Grand Bend circuit of the United Church goes on record as being in favour of a re-arrangement of the circuit and suggests a joint meeting of representatives of Grand Bend Brick Church (Presbyterian), Grand Bend White Church, Greenway, Corbett and Shipka churches, along with the Campers at the Bend."

Thus the wheels were set in motion to combine the two churches in Grand Bend, and finally to build a new church.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Presbyterian Church was organized in 1872 with a Rev. Gracie as minister.

Rev. S. A. Carrier was minister for 40 years. This would take him back to 1883.

An interesting item from 1912 was the purchase of an oil burner to warm the choir's corner. No one can sing well when they are chilly. So we assume they had better music from then on. Being Scottish Presbyterians, they probably sang rather sombre music anyway. It could be one reason for the need of a stove. They didn't sing fast enough to keep warm.

Surprising as it may seem, and in spite of the Scottish reputation for frugality, the Presbyterians were more generous with their minister concerning holidays. They always gave their man a month compared to the Methodist two weeks.

In 1912 they paid their janitor \$45 for the year. If there were any extra services he was to receive 50¢ extra per service. But the poor man didn't last. It wasn't a good year for extra services. Within the year they moved to get a new janitor at once.

At the same meeting they voted to install more posts and rings for tying horses. The attendance must have been improving somewhat.

If someone could only invent a retroactive tape recorder. How interesting to pick up the conversation of Feb. 1914. They hired

a janitor for \$4.25 a month with no extra pay for extra meetings. Before the meeting was over they voted him \$2.00 extra for scrubbing after a Sunday School Convention.

There are probably always sound reasons for the things that churches decide to do. Later on it is left to question why. We do not know whether there had been an accident or an unfortunate incident. In any case, in 1915, they voted to have no more coffins brought into the church for funeral services.

Then at the same meeting, they turned their attention to the choir again. They voted to stop passing the offering plate to the choir at the service. Perhaps for the first time the congregation could see what was happening and decided it wasn't worth the bother. For at the same meeting they moved a vote of thanks to Mrs. Gill for a new lamp for the front of the church.

In January of 1913 the janitor's salary was dropped to \$29 a year. Maybe they should have continued to pass the plate to the choir after all. Apparently something affected the contributions.

This man only lasted a year and was replaced by a man who received \$39 a year.

One would like to assume that the yearly change of janitor, the low salary, and the need to deal with the coffin situation, had no connection. Although it seems like starvation wages.

In 1920 the Presbyterians at Grand Bend decided to meet with the Methodists to discuss union. There seems to be no record of the meeting, if it was held.

The Brick church was evidently not in the best repair. On Feb. 18, 1924 a meeting was called to discuss estimates for a new church building. With the possibility of union in the air, the decision was made to meet with the Methodists to discuss the new building.

On Jan. 6, 1925 the Presbyterian Congregation met to arrange for the vote on union. They decided to vote by secret ballot and to meet on Jan. 21st to count the ballots. Unfortunately no one entered such a meeting in the book. We know from a meeting in June that the Congregation voted for union.

Stephen Webb, John Love and Josiah Oliver were appointed a committee to meet with the other churches to work out a plan of union. It was suggested that Greenway Methodist and Corbett Presbyterian form one congregation, and the two Grand Bend Churches form one congregation. The two new congregations then could become a two point charge.

The Methodists were also working on plans for uniting the congregations. They were calling themselves the "United Church" before the Presbyterians took on the new name.

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

On July 8th, 1926, the first congregational meeting of the new United Church was held to organize according to the policy of the Basis of Union of the United Church of Canada.

The first elders elected were: John Taylor, Stephen Webb, John Love, John Gill, W. J. Holt, Wm. Patterson.

Stewards: John Eagleson, Arthur Baker, Albert Morenz, Josiah Oliver, Thornton Shirritt, Wm. J. Holt.

Trustees: Andrew Turnbull, Aaron Ireland, Thomas Love, A. Mollard, W. J. Lovie, I. Bestard, J. Gill, W. J. Holt, T. Shirritt, Wm. Baker.

In 1926 the congregation met with members of a committee from the Camp Services to discuss joint services. To meet the requirements of the new congregation a new church building was needed.

For many years there had been an open air camp service held each Sunday during July and August. The Camp Service Committee promised to pay half the purchase price of a new site for a church building.

Two sites were considered. One was near the cemetery, the other between Queen and Warwick Streets. After several meetings, and much discussion, it was decided to purchase the site where the church now stands, between Queen and Warwick. The land was bought for \$1700.

Many meetings are recorded as the congregation worked toward a new church building. It was finally agreed to opt for red brick even though it meant an investment of \$500 more than white. They also voted for a slate roof for \$475 more than wood shingles.

Fifty years later their wisdom is evident. The \$475 was a good investment. The slate roof is still intact. That extra investment so far has cost \$9.50 a year. A bargain at today's prices.

The contract for carpenter work and plumbing was let to Beaver Brothers of Crediton for \$7100. The mason work was let to Robert Crellin of Ingersoll for \$3253. A bee was organized and the brick was hauled from a rail siding in Parkhill with teams and wagons.

If the memory of such work serves well, it seems it would take a man most of one day to travel to Parkhill with his team, load a load of bricks, come back to Grand Bend and unload, and get home for the night milking. That would be difficult for a modern youth to visualize when he sees a self unloading truck deliver in one load what a large number of teams and men would take several days to do.

The seats, communion table, pulpit and two chairs were purchased from Globe Seating of Waterloo for \$2200.

Have you ever wondered why the church bell rings twice each Sunday morning? Well on Nov. 3rd, 1927, the Session decreed that this should be done, and it was to be continued "until otherwise directed by the Session". The Session has not seen fit to direct otherwise, and the intent of the motion has been carried out for fifty years.

At this point we should digress from the story to get the corner stone laid. The event is recorded and we simply make a copy.

LAYING OF CORNER STONE

In the village of Grand Bend and on the site of the new church building, on the afternoon of May 27th, 1927, the Laying of the Corner Stones of the new building was celebrated.

After due preparations on the part of committees in charge: the Session, the Trustees, the Stewards and the Ladies Aid, the ceremony began about two o'clock P.M. with Rev. Mr. Hibbert of London representing the London Conference acting as Master of Ceremonies. Also Rev. M. Clark of Seaforth representing the Huron Presbytery, also some of the neighbouring ministers. Rev. A. M. Kent, Rev. D. Williams of Thedford, and Rev. D. McTavish and Rev. Mr. Clysdale of Exeter assisting.

There were four stones laid, representing the Sunday School, the Y.P.S., the W.M.S. and Ladies Aide and the Trustees.

The stone representing the Sunday School was dealt with first and was laid by Mr. G. W. Meadd, M.P.P. for S. Huron after which a very able and suitable address on behalf of the Sunday School was rendered by Mr. Meadd in which he outlined some of the work the United Church Sunday School had taken in the S. Huron S.S. Association.

The next in order was the stone laid in honour of the Y.P.S. (Young Peoples Society) and was dedicated by Mr. Henry Hueston of Exeter, after which Mr. Hueston made a very suitable address outlining the privileges and duties of Young People in the community.

The next in order was the stone laid in honour of the W.M.S. (Women's Missionary Society) and Ladies Aide, which was duly dedicated by Rev. S. A. Carrier who had been pastor of the former Presbyterian Church in Grand Bend for forty years previous, after which Rev. Mr. Carrier gave a short and pointed address on the work and place the W.M.S. and Ladies Aide had in the community.

Then the stone in honour of the Trustees was duly laid and dedicated by Mr. Thomas McMillan, M.P. for S. Huron, after which Mr. McMillan gave a very able address, choosing a passage from Scripture, he expounded in an able way what the Christian Church has stood for in the world also what she has done toward the upbuilding of this great Canada of ours, also the place the church has filled in this part of S. Huron and N. Lambton.

In this stone in honour of the Trustees there was left an indenture large enough to contain a glass jar in which was placed copies of the records of the two United Churches: the former Presbyterian and the former Methodist.

The Clerk of Session, Mr. John Love, in a very able manner gave the history for the past fifty years taken from the records of the two uniting churches in which he gave the names of former ministers and some of the leading officials of said churches during the half century and which was written on parchment and placed in the glass jar along with other records and placed in corner stone to be preserved for future generations.

On a table standing on a raised platform erected for speakers, a donation box was placed and throughout the whole program many liberal donations were placed in honour of the new Church Building.

At five o'clock P.M. in the closed shed the celebration was continued by a hot supper provided by the ladies of the congregation, the proceeds of which were used towards the furnishings of the new church building.

At 8:30 o'clock P.M. refreshments being cleared away and seating provided in the closed shed where a suitable platform was erected, the evening programme was commenced and continued till eleven P.M.

The pastor of Grand Bend Church, Rev. J. M. Colling being indisposed through illness, the chair was taken by Rev. D. McTavish of Exeter.

The Sunset Male Quartette of London furnished the music. Addresses were presented by the chairman Rev. D. McTavish also Rev. Mr. Clark, Rev. A. M. Grant, and Rev. I. Williams.

After an excellent and interesting program the National Anthem was sung by the Sunset Quartette as leaders and by the audience.

The greatest day in the history of Grand Bend Church closed with the Benediction.

T. Love,
Secretary

Not only was the laying of the Corner Stones the greatest day in the history of Grand Bend Church, it was probably the longest. It went on from two o'clock until eleven in the evening. Nine hours was a long time to celebrate. Most of the men, and probably their wives, would have to go home in the late afternoon and do the evening chores. The cows would not wait until midnight.

Soon after the great day the business of running the new church had to go on. An early piece of business was to order five cords of dry wood and two tons of soft coal to mix with it.

To keep up to date with modern conveniences the Board purchased (in 1928) a wheelbarrow to make it easier for the caretaker to bring wood from the shed to the church. Arthur Baker volunteered to deliver it, free of charge, from Dashwood.

Over the years a good many cords of wood and tons of coal were tossed into those furnaces. The wheelbarrow served well.

There were many short term custodians over the years. All did their job well. In later years they stayed on the job longer.

During the author's years at Grand Bend Church, Russel Wanner, John Gill, Albert Morenz, and Wm. Love are remembered. Many a gallon of water was pumped up to the overhead storage tank before a pressure system was installed.

The first choir leader in the new church was Solomon Pollock. He tried repeatedly to resign, but the board wouldn't accept his request. After he did resign he remained in the choir for years until he was unable to sing any longer. Following Sol Pollock was Ezra Webb and Mrs. Mac Holt, also long term members of the choir.

For fifty years the congregation has kept its end of the bargain and gone through the ritual of hauling out the outdoor seats and placing them on the lawn for the summer services.

Each time the church introduces a new hymn book there is considerable controversy. The introduction of the new red books in cooperation with the Anglicans created a stir recently. It was merely a repeat of the introduction of the United Church Hymnary in 1930. It took five years before the Grand Bend Church finally accepted them.

There was a strange event in 1931. Was it the stuffy sermons, the dry music, or winter clothing brought out of mothballs? Something prompted the congregation to request the Stewards to pay more attention to the ventilation of the church.

Over the years the Missionary offering seemed to be constantly plagued by a lack of funds. Almost every year it had to be bolstered by a donation from general funds.

Was someone helping himself to the wood? It would be interesting to know why the Board voted in 1933 to "put a padlock on the shed for a time."

The 1930's were a bad time for everyone. The Depression made money scarce. Keeping the finances in order for the church was a task demanding the constant attention of the Board of Stewards.

Yet the bills were paid and in 1944 preparation was made to burn the Mortgage on the church. The official lighting of the match was carried out by the oldest Elder, Mr. Stephen Webb.

In 1946, after some dissent, it was agreed to buy a Hammond organ costing \$2771. Later, due to an increase in price the order was changed to a Minchell Organ. It would have been better to have paid the extra price for the Hammond, as the next years clearly showed.

The 25th of May, 1952, was set aside as a day to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Grand Bend Church. A booklet containing a brief history was published.

In 1954 the Congregation voted to build a new Manse. A committee was formed to choose a site. Since horses were now obsolete, the Committee recommended disposing of the church shed and building on the site. There was some opposition to this move as the building was in good repair and was, at the time, the only good sized building in the village. The Young People had plans to make it into an auditorium. At that time there was a large, active Young People's Group under the leadership of Earl Burr. They put on a number of evening performances and donated the proceeds to various church projects. A new electric water heater was one example. However, the majority voted to sell the shed, being 44 in favour, and 9 opposed.

In 1957 the church was decorated inside and out. A new furnace was installed and paid for, and a new organ was purchased. In 1958 the kitchen and Sunday School room were remodeled.

For thirty-five years the church held two services on Sunday. By 1961 the evening service was very poorly attended. It seemed not worthwhile to continue. Some of those who liked a place to go on Sunday evening wanted to keep on, but again the majority spoke, and the evening service was dropped.

In 1962 the sanctuary was remodeled.

In 1966 the church considered buying the property next door to square off the property and make room for building a Christian Education building.

During the 40's and 50's the Sunday School was well attended. Finding room for the children was at times a problem. The Senior Sunday School met in the Sanctuary and was often in session when people were coming to the service. At times those coming for the church service joined in singing the closing hymn of the Sunday School. Thomas Love was a long time Senior Superintendent. Garnet Patterson was Secretary Treasurer of the Sunday School for over twenty-five years. He was, he said, always afraid to resign as they would likely give him a worse job such as teaching.

The Junior department was held in the Sunday School rooms. Many faithful teachers gave their time Sunday after Sunday over the years. And many people in the area are better citizens because of them.

In the summer months the Sunday School attendance increased considerably. Many vacationing children wished to keep their attendance record, and each was given a record card to take to their home Church

school. The Young People's class swelled to 35 or 40 during July and August.

However, the picture was changing. Attendance was beginning to decline. The property was not bought and the building was not erected.

Time has shown the wisdom of the decision. It would have been a heavy debt for a building that is no longer needed. By 1968 attendance in the summer had dropped to the point where the decision was made to close the Sunday School for the summer months. An era has closed.

We can only record facts and interesting sidelights. No one can put a value on the presence of the church in the community. Surely, though, the village of Grand Bend would have run a different course if the influence of the church had not been there.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldring heap,
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

No farther seek their merits to disclose,
Or draw the frailties from their dread abode,
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)
The bosom of their Father and their God.

Thomas Gray

MINISTERS

Methodist

Presbyterian

?	D. J. Thompson	1913	Rev. Gracie	1872
	J. E. Cook	1914	S. A. Carrier	1883-1923
	D. W. Williams	1916		(40 years)
	W. J. Maines	1923	A. M. Grant	1923
	J. M. Colling	1926		

United Church

J. M. Colling	1927-1930
S. J. Mathers	1930-1934
J. B. Moore	1934-1938
C. E. Peacom	1938-1942
W. T. Cleave	1942-1947
K. W. Wood	1947-1951
W. C. Smith	1951-1956
A. E. Holley	1956-1961
E. J. Roulston	1962
C. A. Brittain	1962-1965
G. E. Morrow	1965-1975
H. G. Dobson	1969-1975
H. J. Moore	1975

Candidates for Ministry

Mervyn Love	1938
J. Earl Burr	1958
M. M. Irwin	Missionary Seoul, Korea