

Our History

19th Century

In 1833 a section of land in east Scarborough was surveyed for the establishment of a church and burial grounds. Two acres were donated by Toronto lawyer Simon Washburn, a warden at St. James, York, for the purpose of developing an Anglican parish in the township.

In the years preceding John Strachan, then Archdeacon of York and Rector of St. James, had become increasingly concerned about the “spiritual destitution” of the districts surrounding York. At the time of Washburn’s donation, the only church in Scarborough was St. Andrew’s Presbyterian (1819). By 1830, the population of Scarborough had reached 1,135. Recent Church of England settlers in the area were holding services in makeshift facilities (houses, taverns, schools, etc.), and Strachan was anxious to build a permanent structure in an attempt to create a unified Anglican parish.

The first St. Margaret’s church was a wooden structure built progressively between 1833 and 1839 as funds permitted by local settlers Ignatius Galloway and his sons. It is thought that at the time of the church’s consecration in 1841, the name chosen was intended to honour Simon Washburn’s wife Margaret, rather Queen Margaret of Scotland (d. 1093, wife of Malcolm III). Services could only be held in the warmer seasons due to its simple frame and lack of insulation.

A variety of travelling clergy and missionaries served St. Margaret’s and other parishes in the Home District surrounding York. Scarborough’s first permanent incumbent, Rev. William Henry Norris of Cambridge, England, was appointed in 1840 by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), the imperial missions organization. Norris served St. Margaret’s and the newly built St. Paul’s L’Amoreaux until 1843. Joint appointments of this form lasted until the late 1940s, such that the history of St. Margaret’s was strongly linked to those of other Anglican parishes in Scarborough.

Norris resigned in 1844 and was replaced by the Rev. William Stewart Darling, who held the post for a decade. Following population patterns across Upper Canada, Scarborough flourished into a major township in this period; by the early 1850s, its population exceeded 4,000. Foreseeing this growth, Christ Church – a large building suitable for services in all seasons – was built in 1845-1846 with funds raised locally and through the SPG in England. This “original” Christ’s Church was situated near Kingston Road about half-way between St. Margaret’s and the present-day Christ Church (Markham & Kingston Rds.). Construction of the new church led to the virtual abandonment St. Margaret’s, which for the next 40 years was used seasonally for funerals and special events. Further changes occurred in 1849 when donated land in the Wexford area was used to build St. Jude’s, expanding Darling’s ministry. Each Sunday, the rector held separate services at Christ’s Church, St. Jude’s, and St. Paul’s at 10:00 am, 2:00 pm, and 5:00 pm.; service times rotated monthly. Once every three years John Strachan (Bishop of Toronto since 1839) travelled to Scarborough to conduct confirmation

services; this tradition continued until 1864, three years prior to Strachan's death at age 89.

Few records remain of the parish's history over the next 30 years. The incumbents during this period were as follows:

- 1853-1869 William Belt
- 1869-1877 John Fletcher
- 1877-1878 C.R. Bell
- 1878-1882 E. Horace Musson
- 1882-1884 H. B. Owen
- 1885-1890 Frederick Burt

When Rev. Frederick Burt arrived in 1885, he set about renovating St. Margaret's to re-establish it as a location for regular services. It is unclear to what extent Burt was successful; however, records exist of a Christmas service held at St. Margaret's in 1888, and of an organ transported to and from St. Margaret's each week, loaned from the home of a church warden. Burt's efforts split in two the now-established congregation of Christ's Church, and a spiritual division followed this physical division. Several members of Christ's Church strongly objected to Burt's actions, and disputes arose with the incumbent and between parishioners. The conflict became so problematic, Bishop Arthur Sweatman eventually advised Burt to resign in 1890. Robert Bonis, former rector of St. Margaret's, states in his history of the parish that a slight sense of superiority from Christ's Church was still palpable at the time of his arrival in 1938, whereby some viewed St. Margaret's as "only a funeral chapel". A year after Burt's departure, Rev. Thaddeus Walker was appointed to the parish; Walker stayed 11 years, until being replaced temporarily by Rev. William Farncomb in 1902. The re-activation of St. Margaret's led to a realignment of church jurisdictions by the diocese that year so that the number of parishes served by the Scarborough incumbent would remain at three; St. Paul's L'Amoreaux joined the Parish of Markham and Unionville.

20th Century

Tragedy struck St. Margaret's in the spring of 1904 when the wooden church was hit by a grass fire near the building, causing the entire structure to burn in less than an hour. For several months St. Margaret's had neither a church building, nor a rector since Farncomb's incumbency had also ended. Following the appointment of Rev. George I. B. Johnson, a meeting was held in February 1905 to discuss rebuilding St. Margaret's. Over the course of the next year the new church was built within the cemetery grounds, using donations from parishioners. All able-bodied men in the closely-knit rural parish assisted with its construction. This church, now affectionately known as "St. Margaret's Chapel", officially opened for services May 13, 1906 and stands today beside the present church building. A centennial anniversary celebration of the chapel took place on Sunday, May 7, 2006 with close to 300 current and former parishioners in attendance.

Rev. N. A. Fitzroy Bourne succeeded Rev. Johnson in 1908, followed in 1911 by Rev. A. M. I. Durnford who remained until 1928. On Christmas Day 1918 disaster struck Christ's Church, when history repeated itself and it caught fire and burned to the ground. Its reconstruction became the major project of Durnford's incumbency. The second Christ's Church opened in May 1922.

During the pre- and post-WWI period the population of Scarborough increased dramatically, reaching approximately 12,000 by the early 1920s. This growth gave way to the construction of a number of Anglican churches including the Church of the Epiphany (1911), St. Nicholas (1911), St. Timothy's, Agincourt (1919), St. Crispin's (1922), and St. Simon's (1925). Several changes to incumbency jurisdictions resulted from this development. The Agincourt area was given its own incumbent who also ministered to St. Jude's. St. Simon's in Highland Creek was partnered with Christ's Church and St. Margaret's.

Most changes at St. Margaret's over the next several years involved administration and property. Electric lighting was installed in 1924. In 1928 members the cemetery was cleared for expansion and beautification. The deed of 1832 meant that the church property was still Crown land, such that special legislation was required to accommodate the renovation project; as a result, a cemetery board was created by order of the Ontario government. Within three years the expansion project was complete with the addition of shrubbery, flowerbeds, a gravel driveway, and a new entrance with stone pillars and a wrought-iron gateway.

In 1938 Rev. Robert R. Bonis became the incumbent and remained at St. Margaret's until 1957. During the post-WWII migration to the suburbs, Scarborough's population doubled, reaching 56, 292 by 1951. It became very obvious to Bonis and Scarborough's three other incumbents that more clergy were needed, and the parishes would have to be divided. Students from Wycliffe College had assisted Bonis with Sunday services since his arrival in 1938, but even this was no longer sufficient. Parish independence eventually came in 1949 when Christ Church (rebuilt at the present Markham Rd. site in 1936-1937 to accommodate the expansion of Kingston Rd.) and St. Simon's were each given incumbents.

At the 1949 vestry meeting, the congregation agreed that the first priority should be to build a parish hall to accommodate the activities and meetings of church groups. The hall, which opened in January 1951, was built on the east end of the property adjacent to Lawrence Avenue.

Rev. Thomas W. Harpur replaced Bonis in 1957; Harpur's seven-year incumbency would see much of the conversion of the property to its modern appearance. In 1958 a new rectory was built on the eastern side of the church. By this time it was also clear that the size of the chapel building was no longer suitable for the ever-increasing size of the congregation. A building committee was established to discuss the construction of a large, modern building. The architectural firm of Yamazaki and Ridpath was given the contract to design the structure. On June

26, 1960 the parish gathered to witness the turning of sod for the new church to be located between the old one and the newly built rectory. It took one year for the building to be sufficiently completed for services. The dedication by the Right Reverend F. H. Wilkinson, Bishop of Toronto took place on June 21, 1961.

The building of the new church and rectory put the church into considerable debt (\$150,000 by 1964). To resolve this problem it was decided to sell a large section of property to the east and south of the church. The Borough of Scarborough purchased some of this property for parkland, while the rest was sold for the development of townhouses. The former parish hall was demolished to make room for the new housing. With the money from the property sale, the church was able pay its debts and still be left with a surplus of funds. The surplus funds were used to build the Canon Walter Dyer Wing, named for St. Margaret's rector from 1964 to 1978. The new wing was to be used for the large Sunday School and as a meeting space; an apartment was also constructed on one side for assistant clergy.

Beginning in 1989, through discussions with Rev. Canon Dr. Jack Roberts (rector, 1978-2001), a congregation of Tamil Christians began using St. Margaret's for services on Sunday evenings. Between 1990 and 1993 meetings and negotiations took place with the Diocese of Toronto, eventually resulting in the formal inclusion of the Tamil Congregation – after known as St. Margaret's Tamil Anglican Church – as a separate congregation within the diocese.

A further addition to the church was constructed during the 1990s as a social services project: St. Margaret Community Homes, administered by the City of Toronto, provides supportive housing for marginalized residents of the community. Inside the church itself, the addition gave additional office space, as well as the Canon Jack Roberts Room for church meetings.

Recent clergy serving St. Margaret's include: Rev. Canon Philip Wadham (interim, 2001-2002); Rev. Ronald Scott (2002-2011); Rev. Karen Hatch (2011-2020), our present incumbent is Rev. Andrew Kaye

– *Information compiled and written by Danielle Terbenche*

Sources

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