

A Detailed History of Grace Church

In 1996 Grace Church celebrated 150 years of service in the Markham Village Community. In the early years that service was not only to a widely dispersed congregation in a rural community of mainly farm households, but also to Village residents who were merchants, manufacturers and professionals. While the formal date of the parish beginnings is established as 1846, small groups



Anglicans in Markham were meeting in homes, schools and public buildings often supported by traveling, itinerant ministers/priests. Truly “the little white church in the dell”, the building of the first church, a white clapboard building located on the west side of highway 48, just south of the intersection with Highway 7, began in 1847, and while the history of Grace Church on the one hand is of people and community, it is also a history of its clergy who brought the word of God through the various sacraments and extended love and hope and joy depending on the Seasons of the Church and the Community. It is also a history of the Grace Church parishioners who took that word, its message of love, hope and joy into the work-a-day community and extended leadership, organization and structure to a growing community.

One of the itinerant preachers was **Adam Elliot**, a traveling missionary sent to service a broad area known as the Home District. Equipped only with a prayer book, Bible, surplice and communion chalice, this courageous pioneer of the Anglican Church in Upper Canada would hold services in little log school houses, taverns, barns, and private homes between Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay. Apparently he preached on two occasions in Markham Township in 1833, “From Pickering I proceeded to the township of Markham, and read prayers and preached in the school at the Village, on the eighth concession. On Sunday the 16th of June, I performed the morning service at the same place, preached to about one hundred people, and baptized two children. In the afternoon, I preached in the Reverend Mayerhoffer’s Church (Unionville?). As many inhabitants of Markham understand the German better than the English tongue, Mayerhoffer reads prayers and preaches to them alternately in both languages.”

1829 - 1848 Mayerhoffer, Vincent P. Born in Hungary in 1784 Vincent came to the Markham area via Pennsylvania and Buffalo. Initially a Roman Catholic priest he left that Church due to unresolved issues in the Diocese of Philadelphia and was subsequently married and entered the Episcopalian Church (Church of England) in Buffalo. He came to York, Upper Canada after application to the Bishop of Quebec, wrote entrance exams for the Church of England and was sent as a missionary to Markham and Vaughn Townships in 1829 where he served both German and English language settlers for the next 20 years. In 1837 he became embroiled in the rebellion between the Family Compact Tory government and the many local farmers who favoured the rebels, led by William Lyon MacKenzie. He established worship facilities in Maple, Unionville and Markham Village, where he was inducted as priest in 1847. In that year the initial frame construction was started on the original church building on land given by Captain William Armstrong, a prominent Anglican and area farmer, on the north-west corner of his farm (west side of Hwy 48 south of the gas station).

1849-1873 Hill, George S. J. When George arrived in Markham Village his first task was to complete the church building which had remained in the “frame” stage for two years and was “a desolate sight in a thriving community”. With a seating capacity for 225 people, and a final cost of \$2000, the new church was completed in the fall of 1849. While awaiting completion services were held in a local schoolhouse, for the Rector of the “English” parish was also Superintendent of Schools and later County Inspector; positions he held throughout his 24 year incumbency. Born in India in 1820 to an English military family, which later moved to Toronto (Upper

Canada) in 1835 via Ireland, George was initially an infantry ensign during the 1837 Rebellion. He was influenced to join the ministry and became a priest in 1844. During his incumbency the name 'Grace Church' became the accepted name for the "English" church in Markham Village and by 1854 it had a thriving congregation of "70, with eight habitual communicants". Sunday services were held both at Grace Church and St. Phillips, alternating morning and evening services on a monthly basis with Holy Communion administered on the first Sunday of the month at the church with the morning service. At the time the population was "principally people from Germany" (Pennsylvania Deutch), who were Lutherans and Mennonites and many of whom were pacifists and fled north after the American war of Independence as they were being harassed for not joining the war. It was stated that "a great prejudice exists against the (English) Church (more) of a political nature (it was the church of the 'family compact') than otherwise." Ill health seemed to dog the rector in the later stages of his career at Grace and a succession of clergy assisted at Grace Church under his direction: **Stimson, E. R.; Trew, A. G. L.; Tocque, P.; Fletcher, J; Haskew J. B.**

1877-1888 Hart, Anthony Anthony was born in Leicestershire England about 1844 and came to Canada with his brother in 1861. He worked on his father's farm in Hastings County until he was 27 when he enrolled at Trinity College in Toronto. After graduating in 1875 he came to Grace as a student and was appointed incumbent in 1877. He established a mission church in Stouffville 1879 and as part of a redecoration program commemorative windows for the Hart family were installed in 1885. These multi-coloured stained glass windows are installed in the large north window in Grace Church today.



1888-1892 Osborne, Alfred W. Although born in England, Alfred came to Markham via Nassau, Bahamas where he entered the ministry, Charlottetown, PEI, Regina, Sask. and a few months in Minnesota and Gravenhurst. He arrived, a widower with six children, his wife Emily having died in Charlottetown in 1897. In 1902 he remarried Louise Thomas of Markham. A studious man he won an international prize for Hebrew studies presented by the American Institute of Sacred Literature. In 1889 the Anglicans 50 years in Ontario and Grace Parishioners built a new rectory immediately south of the Church, at a cost of \$2131, on land given by Captain Rolph, a prominent Markham merchant and parishioner. For some reason the rectory was rented out to private individuals (F.K. Reesor in 1906) and clergy continued to utilize the old rectory in Unionville into the early years of the 20th Century. Services were held in Grace Church on Sunday mornings and evenings with Stouffville services held Sunday afternoon. To support the Stouffville congregation a special vestry allocated one Sunday morning each quarter to Stouffville for Holy Communion. Early in 1892 Alfred resigned from the parish for an extended visit to England. He died in 1910 and is buried in Grace Church cemetery.



1893-1897 Croft, Otto T. B. Born in Dorset, England in 1852, Otto came to Canada as a young man and was priested in 1888. He arrived in Markham and Stouffville via parishes in Stayner and Streetsville. During this period the church held many social events and the congregation grew with a usual Sunday attendance of 43 adults and 27 children in Sunday school. In 1893, the Churchwardens approved the purchase of the Milne Family burial grounds, which became known as the Church of England Cemetery. In early 1894 a newly installed pipe organ was used for the first time. During the summer of 1896 Otto vacationed in England and Scotland and during his absence The Reverend Scott of Cookstown served as rector. The "sorrowful." Parishioners bade farewell to this popular minister in 1897 when he left for his new parish in Dunkeld, Scotland.

1898-1905 Lawrence, Samuel A. Sam was a popular minister not only in the Markham and Stouffville parishes but among the people of both villages. He was an engaging preacher to large congregations, as well as speaking to such groups as the Masons, with his topics covered verbatim in the local papers. While the horse was the most common method of conveyance, Sam, an unmarried man at the time, was one of the first to use the then “new” bicycle and was referred to in the press as “The Clergy on Wheels”. Despite his vigorous lifestyle Sam became seriously ill with typhoid fever and had to relinquish his clerical duties for a time, spending the summer of 1899 at Lake Rosseau for restorative purposes. During 1900 Stouffville became attached to Claremont and Unionville parish replaced it as a “second charge”. Considerable negotiation ensued at the Diocesan level as both the Stouffville and the Markham congregations wanted the popular Sam, but the Bishop confirmed his continuing appointment at Markham/Unionville. During his illness services were conducted by a divinity student, Bill Bain, who was an organizational boon to the parish and was instrumental in forming the Women’s and Girls’ Auxiliaries out of the Ladies Aid group. He conducted an active youth ministry and formed the Boys’ Brigade. His ministry was vital to the parish throughout 1899. In 1905 Sam left for Calgary, but not before marrying Helen Rolph a member of a local Anglican family.

1906-1912 Fenning, James E. Born in England, James arrived in Markham after serving in Minden, Ontario and on his arrival, a third point parish, St. Paul’s L’Amoreaux was added to Markham and Unionville. Three of the Fennings six children, were born in Unionville at the rectory there. He held the office of Rural Dean of East York from 1909 to 1911 and is remembered as a gracious and enthusiastic person regarded with respect and affection by his parishioners.

1912-1917 Johnson, George I. B. George arrived in Markham via Minden, Sunderland and Scarborough. These were difficult years in the parish as many local area men went overseas to serve in “the Great War”, World War I, for “King and the Empire”. According to local press reports George immediately made his mark as a preacher of note.

1918-1920 Curliss, Thomas O. Born in Bolton, Ont. Tom entered the Ministry at age 35 following a successful business career and came to Markham via the Algoma Diocese and Streetsville. He was actively involved in the Boy Scout movement and was keenly interested in youth work and was instrumental in starting a boys’ choir here.

1920-1923 Nind, Thomas A. Born in England in 1877, a third generation clergyman, Tom began his ministry in Japan, being priested there in 1902. He came to Markham, still a three point parish with Unionville and Stouffville, back in the fold, via Minden and a variety of rural Ontario parishes. With missionary zeal the Ninds (Mrs. Nind was also very active in the church) built up the congregations and were highly respected by all for their participation in community activities and their charitable work.

1923-1925 Templeton, James Born in England, James appears to be more of scholastic bent than an administrative minister. In 1911 he studied at Wycliffe College in Toronto at the behest of the Commonwealth and Continental Church Society and later attended the Anglican College at Bishop’s University in Lennoxville, Quebec. While he did not earn a degree, he was priested by the Bishop of Algoma in 1921. Married with one child he was keenly interested in working with community youth through sports and religious education.

1925 – 1935 Robbins, John J. Born in Manchester, England in 1880, Robbins was apparently an active Methodist until coming to Canada where he graduated from Wycliffe College and was priested in 1916. He came to Grace Church via Stoney Lake, Cartwright and Coldwater. During his time here he initiated major repairs to the rectory and the interior of the

church was completely refurbished, but the main issue impacting his ministry here revolved around the Stouffville parish and a parishioner's legacy. Christ Church, Stouffville was built in 1892 and was a very important link for both communities. In 1899 Stouffville's long serving Treasurer, Mary Ann Kennedy died leaving her entire estate to the Diocese in trust for Christ Church to support its incumbent, but the will was not without conditions as a codicil stated that this support was not to be provided if the parish church was linked to Grace Church Markham. This resulted in Christ Church being maintained as a separate parish until 1917, when with its congregations dwindling George Johnson with a three point parish (Markham, Unionville and L'Amoreaux) was required to provide services at Christ Church as well.

Soon after Robbins arrival in 1927 the Diocese, during a review, came across the codicil and realized that all payments under the legacy over the prior ten years were legally incorrect. Accordingly, Robbins stipend was reduced (\$300 annually) immediately, creating noticeable hardship for the Rector. This also created major embarrassment and issues between the congregation and the Minister, so much so that he resigned in 1928, but a new incumbent could not be located to carry on the heavy responsibility at the stipend offered and Robbins was forced to remain in strained circumstances until 1935.

Another controversy arose for Robbins over the required relocating of the Church building from the south side to the north side of Highway 7 due to the Province's desire to straighten that highway at the 8th concession (Hwy#48) to remove a major "jog" which had resulted from varying ways of measuring concession roads.

An argument over whether to move the current building as



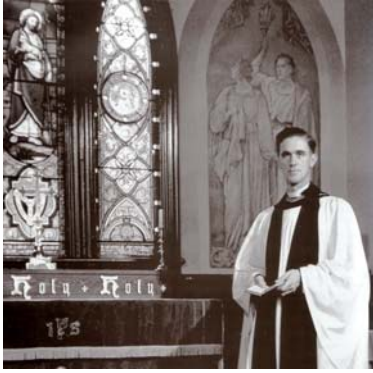
opposed to requiring the Province to build a new one ensued with Robbins supporting the latter. While the Bishop, apparently, intervened with the government, it was to no avail and the building was moved.

With major controversies upsetting all concerned and the continuing unhappiness of Robbins with his lot efforts were made through the Bishop to have an incumbency change, however, from the congregations' point of view this was not universally acceptable as many people held Robbins in esteem. Ultimately the Bishop proposed an exchange of parishes (under Canon Law 10) between

Robbins and Frank Herman, Rector of Bolton and despite last minute objections, mostly from Markham, the exchange took place in November 1935. (Strangely, the same Canon was used for an exchange under much different circumstances in 1996.)



1935-1952 Herman, Frank Frank, a Canadian, was born in 1879 and originally trained as a mechanic. Turning to the ministry in his thirties, he was ordained priest in 1903. One of Grace's longest serving pastors, as indicated above, he came to the parish from Bolton, Ontario through an exchange of incumbencies, having spent his ministry to that time in rural parishes throughout Ontario. He came at the height of the Depression with this three point parish struggling to maintain its financial status, as well as, coping with internal issues and facing declining revenues. Christ Church Stouffville was operating at a deficit and its stipend was often in arrears. With the controversy over the "exchange" his arrival was not universally accepted as a positive event by parishioners, nevertheless, he soldiered on faithfully, creating a loyal and respectful following over the years until his reluctant retirement in 1952.



1952 – 1954 Bournes, Fraser J. Fraser, a Navy man, came to Markham from the Nova Scotia Diocese shortly after Mr. Herman's retirement. Until his arrival, worship services were provided during the summer months by an American, the Reverend F.M. Brunton. While here for only two years Fraser, along with his counterpart in Agincourt, was instrumental in reorganizing the "point" parishes responsibilities, with Grace Church becoming a "stand alone" parish and Unionville combining with Stouffville. Fraser was also responsible for a pipe organ, which was purchased from Oak Street United Church in Toronto, being installed. As well, he redecorated the rectory with the help of his wife, Ruth, who was a daughter of "the manse" (her father was a United Church minister and may have been the catalyst in the organ deal). Shortly before returning to Nova Scotia as Chaplain at the Clearwater naval base in 1954, Hurricane Hazel hit the Markham area toppling several large trees on the church property with one narrowly missing the rectory when it fell.

1954-1968 Wigby, R. Allan Born in Brandon, Manitoba in 1919, Allan entered the ministry following five years with the RCAF, which he joined early in World War II, when he was 21. Allan was a tireless worker at Grace Church and in the local communities. A tall, rugged individual he often assisted the local police chief (Fred White, also an Anglican) in dealing with crowd control emergencies which occurred in the Village. Interested in youth, he introduced the Church Boys' League to replace a struggling boy scout troop and organized the Jack Lake conference for men (later became the (Sides-) "Men's" Breakfast), supported the initiation and development of the Grace Church Nursery School, as well as initiating the start up of a Markham Alcoholics Anonymous group.

In the post war period there was an unprecedented period of expansion in population to the suburbs and outlying areas around Toronto, which reached to the Markham area, and Allan arrived just as the "kettle began to boil", so to speak. As change seems to always accompany growth both Allan and the congregation were caught up in a variety of issues, which ultimately involved the Diocese. The core issue involved providing larger accommodation to meet potential growth, and hand in hand with it, the raising of the necessary financing. With strong opinions arising, a polarization of distinct views between refurbishing present facilities and building new premises on a new, larger site, developed. As is common in such situations, the rector in his role as an advocate often found himself the "man in the middle".

The eventual result was the demolition of the "little white church at 7 and 48" in 1963, because of its reported "unsafe" condition and the move to the present location on Parkway Avenue. Allan Wigby guided the congregation through arguably the most difficult period in its history as very few parishes survive such an ordeal without major loss, that Grace church survived and prospered in the years ahead is due in no small part to his leadership and conviction of faith. When he left for St. Elizabeth's, The Queensway in 1968, Markham was no longer a small village centred around a major highway intersection, but was just emerging as the rapidly growing metropolitan community it was to become.



1968-1977 Peasgood, David David came to Markham via St. Timothy's, Toronto where he was assistant curate. He was a young man with a young family and the Markham Village community was experiencing the first growth cycle of the many it was to experience well into 21st Century. The parish worship area was the main floor of the parish hall (often called the Upper Hall) and as growth continued (several new large subdivisions were in initial development stages), it was apparent that new worship area was becoming a must. David seemed to know

instinctively that change needed careful management. Being “an organizer” he called a series of three special vestry meetings, which were the source of much discussion, but the decision to plan a new building was reached and the relative committees selected to complete the project. The sod-turning ceremony was held in mid 1971 and featured John Armstrong, the great, great grandson of Capt. William Armstrong who gave the land for the original church site and Dorothy Russell, whose grandfather had owned the land for new church, which was officially opened in late 1972, on Parkway Ave.

Subsequently, the stained glass windows which were originally installed(1885)in the original church building had been removed, remodeled and installed in the north wall of the new building in 1974, a gift of the Shea family. Another significant artifact, the Grace Cross, was designed in the early ‘70’s by Tom Browne, who also designed much of the interior furnishings and décor of the new church.



(Tom’s father Peter was responsible for the frescoes in the former church building, which were lost in the demolition process).

It was a time of great activity at all levels, which mainly focused on children, youth and young married couples with families (a replication of the rector’s circumstances, so to speak). Study groups, Young People’s group, Junior Auxiliary and Girls Auxiliary; the Sunday school, Scout group and Nursery School all flourished.



The Couples’ Club and (sides-) “Men’s” breakfast were innovative groups, which offered opportunities for fellowship, entertainment and a mixing-place for new and established parishioners.

1977-1985 Greene, Thomas M. Tom arrived at Grace via New York City where he had served as senior assistant at St. Thomas’s, Fifth Avenue parish. Born in the Niagara area he was ordained Deacon at St. Christopher’s, Burlington in May and priested in December 1970. The growth in the “Grace” area communities continued, aided by a major political boundary change, with Markham Village being amalgamated with Markham Township in 1971 to become the new Town of Markham. Significant changes within the parish and the Anglican Church also occurred in the years leading up to Tom’s incumbency which required ingenuity, as well as organizational and interpersonal skills.....all of which were possessed by the pastor, Tom.

To accommodate the increase in worshipers there were three Sunday morning services. Tom introduced women into the Churchwarden ranks, as well as having girls as Servers. Anglicans in Mission (AIM) was introduced as a new stewardship-fundraising program by the Diocese and the parish raised twice the amount set as its goal. A new pipe organ was installed and paid for from a major successful fund raising campaign.

A Lay Ministry group was established to assist with the growing pastoral needs and to keep pace with the “new” technology the first computer was installed in 1983. Popular with all segments of the congregation, Tom enthusiastically embraced a Mission program “Living Grace Fully” which sparked a “new beginning” for many parishioners and featured “The Rainbow Club” for children, which was “hugely” successful.

Changes in liturgy, with the advent of the “Book of Alternative Services”, began to replace the Morning Prayer service and re-emphasize the Eucharist, as well as diminishing the use of The Book of Common Prayer, so familiar to generations of Anglicans, began to emerge throughout the parishes in the Diocese. These changes were greeted with enthusiasm by many, but became a difficult adjustment for others.

1985-1996 Van –Lane, J. Jeremy Jeremy came Grace via St. John the Baptist, Norway in Scarborough where he had served for ten years and prior to that had served in Etobicoke. His main challenge was to organize and administer a congregation at a peak growth period while introducing major liturgical change relating to the Book of Alternative Services. As well, he had to manage the change and lead the parish in a time of Church renewal. To this end he was

charged and encouraged by many sources to phase in the changes as quickly as possible. Physical expansion of the administrative facilities was also seen to be needed due to the rapid expansion of the congregation as well as to meet building code requirements.

An extensive consultation process ensued which resulted in the upgraded, enlarged facilities being completed in 1987 at a cost of \$500,000. Successful fund raising campaigns to meet the major capital costs ensued, but the spiritual aspect continued a priority with successful parish conferences and a Mission "Grow in Grace". In the community, parish groups established a clothing exchange and food bank and a determined effort was launched to establish an assisted housing project "Dairy Lane". While not for a lack of enthusiasm by the congregation and its leadership over these years, attendance began to diminish, which seemed to be a "sign of the times" as most main line churches were dealing with a similar phenomenon.

Jeremy for his constant management efforts and "hard work" was honoured by being appointed a Canon by the Diocese. In the midst of the parish's 150 year celebrations Jeremy was requested to be a party in an exchange of parish incumbents (with St. Paul's, Newmarket) by the Area Bishop in 1996 under the rarely used Canon Law 10, the same arrangement which occurred in the parish in 1935.

1996 -2003 Walker, Paul G. Born in Toronto in 1942 Paul was priested in 1968 and came to Grace via Newmarket, Port Hope, service in the UK and a stint at St. James Cathedral. A second generation clergyman, as is his brother Peter, who was involved in the creation of the new Anglican hymn book "Common Praise", Paul was also an accomplished organist and brought many gifts to the liturgy at Grace including music (a hymn) at the "early" Sunday morning Eucharist service. A scholarly person, Paul, utilized his sermons (homilies) to teach, and he brought a new biblical understanding of the faith to many parishioners. Shortly after his 60th birthday in 2002, Paul retired.