

## **A Short History of St. James, Leitrim**

The first documented divine service at this location took place on May 3, 1842 when the Rev. Samuel S. Strong baptized members of the Cowan, Langstaff, and Halfpenny families at the Hunter residence. 1853 is widely regarded as the founding date of St. James however, no documentation has been found confirming it except that the founder, David Cowan, had two sons baptized on January 19, 1853 at an unspecified location. The 1861 census indicates that an English church was under construction during February of that year and this appears to be the current building. Baptisms took place on December 28, 1860 and it is suspected that these were the first to take place in the new church. During the early years, the church was known simply as the Gloucester Mission and the community was known as Cowan's Settlement. In 1864, a second Gloucester Mission church of log construction opened on the Russell Road. This would later be known as St. George's Hawthorne.

The Gloucester Mission was established and initially operated by Christ Church, Sparks Street and the first confirmed missionary was the Rev. Charles P. Emery who served between 1860 and 1862. During the early years, it was also associated with the Osgoode Mission in Metcalfe, St. Luke's, Nepean and St. Bartholomew's, New Edinburgh.

In 1877, a new church was constructed at Billings' Bridge, later known as Trinity Church, Ottawa South and with it, a new separate parish of Gloucester was established. This would include this new church plus the two Gloucester Mission churches. The name, St. James, was first noted in official records in 1878 and when a Post Office was established in 1883, the official community name became Leitrim. This was the name of the County in Ireland in which the Cowan family originated.

In 1899, St. James was attached to Holy Trinity, Ottawa East, which was experiencing financial problems at the time. This would last only until 1904 when the parish of Gloucester was re-established consisting of St. James and St. George's. Immediately, a rectory was constructed next to St. George's, which would remain until 1931 when it was sold.

A new worship community was established approximately in 1919 with worship taking place at Ellwood School on Metcalfe Road. When Trinity, Ottawa South decided to construct a larger church in 1926, the old church was offered to the Ellwood group. The church was torn down and moved to Metcalfe Road and Portland Avenue where it was reconstructed between 1927 and 1930. This church became known as St. Thomas the Apostle and was included as part of the parish of Gloucester.

In 1942, St. James was attached to the parish of Metcalfe but when the Rev. Robert Shannon was transferred to St. Thomas the Apostle in 1949, St. James was transferred with him back to its previous parish. St. James celebrated its centennial in 1953 with visiting ministers speaking at a variety services. That year, the first documented Harvest Thanksgiving Supper was held.

As a result of considerable post-war growth, and because of the widening of the Metcalfe Road, a new basement and parish hall was constructed in 1956. Growth would continue until 1961 when the Greenbelt expropriations took place, dislocating many of the old supporting families. In 1959, St. James' long affiliation with St. Thomas the Apostle and St. George's, Hawthorne ended permanently. For a while, St. James was attached to the parish of Manotick and was served by a member of the church army. In 1965, St. James finally ended its status as a mission church and was attached to the newly created Church of the Resurrection. This arrangement continued until 1987.

In 1970, our well-known Annual Turkey Supper was first held at the Fred Barrett Arena, the old Harvest Supper having been discontinued in 1962. In preparation for the 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1973, a church history was written by the Rev. Francis Dowe and the whole interior of the church was renovated. Over the years since 1956 and into the 1970s and later, expansion plans were periodically examined but the Greenbelt had created a period of stagnation and expansion was not feasible.

In 1987, for the first time in its history, St. James became an independent parish under the supervision of the Rev. Canon Frank Lawler. The realities of being independent gradually set in, with priestly and other costs often exceeding revenue. Through periodic vacancies of the Incumbent position, St. James continued to remain viable. During this period, through the dedication of parishioners, many improvements were made to the building including the installation of indoor plumbing. In addition, as more parishioners participated, more and more ideas were implemented providing a richer parish life. This process continues to this day.

In 2003, St. James celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, with a celebration dinner attended by past and present clergy and parishioners. Commemorative items were sold and in 2004, a time capsule was entombed inside the church. At this time, St. James faces the opportunities and the challenges of the urbanization of the Leitrim community, which is now taking place as the new Findlay Creek Village is constructed a short distance south of the church.