

Brief History of St. Alban's Church and W.A.

The district experienced an influx of settlers around the first decade of the 1900's. These were mainly of British stock coming from areas in Eastern Canada and the United States. The families required educational facilities so the South Athabasca School was built first. Then came the church in 1915.

On a donated two-acre plot of land, the south acre from Bert Hayes and the north acre from ^{Harry} Dave Fisher, the new church was to be erected. The money, \$600.00, for the building came to Rev. Robert Little from an anonymous donor in England and the church was named St. Alban's in honour of the donor's parish. This sum of money paid for the materials and for the services of one local man--W. R. Tarrant, the contractor. All the other labour was volunteered by the older men and younger sons, as the (able-bodied) young men had enlisted for World War I overseas service. Memory recalls the names of workers as being: William Minns and son Bryce; George Lewis; Harry Fisher; Herb Cook; Bert Hayes and Fred Pollet, (Mrs. Hayes brother).

Construction of the wood frame building was begun in early spring 1915 and completed by July in readiness for dedication August 17, 1915. One sad note was struck during the shingling June 15, 1915, when word reached the Minns family that their son Jim had been killed in the field of battle. However, the work on the church continued in the knowledge that soon there would be a House of God in which they could seek comfort, help and solace at just such sad times. The outside finish was tongue and groove siding, painted white with green trim while the V-joint interior was finished with several varnish coats. Atop the front peak was placed a steeple and cross given by Vest Lewis. The original wooden gates were replaced by the present iron ones and dedicated in 1962 as the 'Wagstaff Gates'.

The building was heated by a wood burning heater and lighted with Coleman lamps. The church remained much the same until 1953 when it was decided to put the building on a concrete foundation in order to preserve the structure for many more years. Under the general supervision of Herb Cook, who engaged the services of a mover to raise the building and procured concrete blocks, together with the volunteer help of Bryce Minns, Ernie 'Pop' Wagstaff, Rolly Russel and Gil Underwood, the building was placed upon 'a rock' foundation.

The Lectern, pews, Altar and communion rail were built by William Tarrant at the same time the church was built. In 1953 the straight communion railing was replaced by the present curved one built by Walter Klak. The original Altar was replaced by a new one built by Clark Lumber, Edmonton and put in the church by the W.A. to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of the W.A. work in the Diocese.

The furnishings in the church were given principally by the W.A. and churches in Eastern Canada. The organ has always been a fixture with no recollection of where it came from. Likewise the prayer table and chairs have been in the church since its inception. In 1966 St. Alban's W.A. purchased the communion vessels in memory of those who served the church. The Chalice was in Memory of Mr. and Mrs. George Lewis while the Paten and box were in memory of Archdeacons Little and Humphreys respectively who, together, had served a total of forty years---from 1915 to 1955. The Font was a gift from All Saints, Toronto in 1953. According to a partially readable inscription on the back of the Hymn Board, this was a gift from the W.A. in 1924. In 1939, Charlie Conquest had printed at the Echo office the numbers for the Hymn Board which he gave in memory of his father-in-law George Lewis. One of the more recent acquisitions were the candle-

sticks. These were given to St. Alban's by the town police man Mr. Jones who visited the church, was impressed with its quiet simplicity, and wanted to leave something as a keep sake. In 1967 he donated the candlesticks, a family heirloom. Here was another Welshman and non-Anglican who, too, found peace and tranquility in this beautiful little country church. It is an interesting fact that throughout the history of St. Alban's, the majority of its adherents were members of other Protestant denominations but who through work and worship, were Anglicans at heart.

The first marriage to be solemnized in St. Alban's was between Miss Jean Minns and Mr. Bert Halliwell in November 1915 and the first baptism was their daughter Jean Alberta in April 1917. The first confirmation service was November 20, 1921 when four received the Laying On Of Hands by Bishop Fredrick Robbins. The first organist is believed to have been Mrs. Robert Little. In later years others have played for a service or two, but it was Mary Willey who played the organ and organized a choir later on. Miss May Stockford, Matron of the Boy's Hostel, filled this need for St. Alban's for many years after which Mrs. Dave Garton took over and also gave her time for all church services for nearly a decade. Another long time organist was Mrs. Anne McLeod who faithfully fulfilled this duty until her departure from the district, after which Mrs. Joyce Sanger-Davies, our present organist, has faithfully filled the need.

Cemetery

The cemetery did not become a part of St. Alban's church until 1930 due to the fact that the donor of one acre of land, Mrs. Fisher, gave it with the understanding that no cemetery be established on the land. In due time, Mrs. Fisher had retired to Vancouver and was no longer a part of South Athabasca District. The difficulties with transportation

from St. Alban's to Athabasca cemetery, especially in winter, made it imperative that the possibility of establishing a local cemetery be looked into. Mrs. Fisher's approval was sought and granted in 1930. Dave Jones surveyed the cemetery plot, and on June 1, 1933 it was consecrated. Fifteen were present for the service.

Two burials, Harold Wagstaff and John Frame were held in the first year of its existence, the former believed to have been the first buried.

Over the years it has been the policy of the men of the district to dig the graves gratis for the departed—a policy which continued up to 1974. Like changes in everything, it was inevitable that change in this charitable deed would also come. Now a digger, Joe Jewells, has kindly offered his service in this field of good deeds. Another service which has been rendered over the years has been that of snow removal from the church yard and cemetery. It is in this regard that the district's good friend and neighbour, and faithful adherent of the Roman Catholic church, 'Red' Loiselle, has given unstintingly of his time and effort—a truly Christian gesture and appreciated beyond words.

Members of the first vestry were: George Lewis, Rector's Warden; William Minns, Peoples Warden; and Mr. Bannerman—Secretary-Treasurer, a job he held until 1930, a period of 15 years. Mrs. Hazel Minns then took on the job and it was some 25 years later before she was released from this office. Another parishoner whose long service must be recognized was Ernie 'Pop' Wagstaff who for 30 years was Peoples Warden. Anne Cook was envelope secretary for 15 years from 1944 to 1959, which, after the Well's visitation, was centralized for the whole Parish of Athabasca in All Saints.

St. Alban's A.C.W.

After a church service on April 18, 1915, a meeting was held in the school house for the purpose of forming a branch of the Womens Auxiliary in South Athabasca. Rev. Robert Little chaired the meeting. Eight ladies present were: Mrs. George Lewis, Mrs. William Minns, Mrs. Charlie Soper, Mrs. Harry Fisher, Mrs. Bert Hayes, Miss Jean Minns, Miss Burns and Miss E. Philip.

Mrs. Kate Lewis was elected President, Mrs. William Minns Vice President, and Mrs. Harry Hayes Secretary-Treasurer. The membership for the first year totaled ten and of these eight attended meetings regularly which were held in members homes monthly. They did the usual things, knitting, crocheting and sewing and selling articles to local people. The first year's financial statement showed a total revenue of \$137.65 and disbursements of \$133.20. Funds purchased the Bible, Collection plate and carpet in 1915 and paid for the lighting expenses of the church.

In 1916 only two meetings were held, one in April and another in August. At the latter it was decided to hold monthly meetings with fees paid quarterly, which, by the way, were forty cents. This is the last record entered in the minute book until on May 5, 1941 when a meeting was held in the school house to discuss reorganizing the W.A. again. At this meeting Archdeacon Robert Little chaired the meeting and the Diocesan President of Athabasca, Mrs. Robert Little was present to explain the function and purpose of the W.A.. The executive elected were: Mrs. George Soper (Sr.) Acting President, Mrs. George Soper (Jr.) Vice-President and Mrs. Dave Kier Secretary-Treasurer. The first meeting was held on November 25, 1941 with fifteen members out of the total enrollment of twenty present. Two meetings were held in 1942. Mrs. Kier had resigned and Mrs. Esther Russell filled in pro-tem.

These were war years and many of the same people were active in Red Cross work. So in order to increase participation in W.A. work, it was decided to hold both meetings on the same night. The men attended the Red Cross meetings so after the adjournment, they played cards while the women carried on with the W.A. business. It was rough going for the W.A. and there was speculation that it would fold up. Much discussion and soul searching ensued. Finally on a motion by Mrs. Hazel Minns and Anne Cook, it was decided to continue the W.A. with meetings held on a monthly basis in order to keep interest from waning.

New officers were elected. Mrs. Mary Minns--President, Mrs. Marian Underwood--Vice President and Mrs. Esther Russell--Secretary-Treasurer.. Interest increased. Membership grew as every woman in the district, whether Anglican or not, became an active member and the organization prospered.

In recognition of the first Presidents service, Mrs. Kate Lewis was presented with a Life Membership in St.Alban's W.A.. Others in the W.A. have subsequently received similar honours.

Archdeacon and Mrs. Little always held a warm spot in their hearts for the South Athabasca community--where, Robert Little as a young minister, had been accepted with the affection as a local son, and it seems fitting that, today, as had been their wish, their last earthly remains lie buried in a quiet corner of the cemetery behind St. Alban's church, the place they loved so well.

Anne B. Cook
Secretary
St. Alban's A.C.W.

