

**Submitted to The Dunnville Chronicle
Via E-mail; March 5, 2003
For Publishing; March 12, 2003
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(Word count 1021)**

Lowbanks United Church has long history!

This will be the last of my series on historic churches in Dunn, Sherbrooke and Moulton Townships. I would like to thank Betty Coldwell for much of the information in today's issue.

In July 1866, forty acres of property on the south side of Lakeshore road at Lowbanks owned by Henry and Margaret Overholt was sold to Wesley Methodist New Connection Church. Reports suggest that the original wooden church was built circa 1866. Due to ongoing lake erosion it became necessary to move inland. In 1903, the present day United Church building was built on the north side of Lakeshore Rd across from the former building. Therefore, this year marks the centennial of the present place of worship.

The Lowbanks church, when erected in 1876, was affiliated with the Wesley Methodist New Connection Church. It would then become the Bethesda United Brethren in Christ Church, and later still the Congregational Church, and finally in 1925, it was formed into the United Church of Canada. Prior to unification it is known that there were at least twelve men who served to administer the Lowbanks church. Here are but five; Rev. G. H. Backus, Rev. Robert Jamieson, Rev. J. Geach, David Dodge and finally Mr. Duncan McCall.

I have always marvelled at how my research takes me to places unexpected! While learning the story of this church Betty Coldwell told me of her mother's, (formerly Gladys Spittal) accounts of how the farmers went into the shallow water off of the Boulton Ditch to harvest the algae as fertilizer for their fields, thus serving two purposes, the second being relieving the neighbours of some of the stench of the rotting algae.

The many generations of Lowbankite's who called this building their house of worship proved to be exceptionally community minded. In the 1930s and 40s, the congregation of Lowbanks United shared their sanctuary with the Reform Later Day Saints who presently have their own church a bit further along Lakeshore Rd. One held Service on Sunday morning, while the other would hold it in the afternoon. Members from both congregations attended both services. If a death occurred in one congregation, the ladies of the other assemblage pitched in to make a reception luncheon allowing the ladies of the stricken group to socialize with their family and friends. For five years starting in 1955, Kay Houser, taught her public school class from S. S. # 6 Moulton, in the church basement. The Girl Guides and Brownies were formed in Lowbanks in 1959 and used the church for their meetings.

Over the nearly century-and-a-half, the Lowbanks church had many affiliations and have formed alliances with other churches such as in the 1960s with Morgan's Point, and Forks Road United, under the one administration and ministership of Rev. Penrose. Following this, a union was formed with Mount Carmel United, where both churches shared one minister but each building was administered separately.

The cemetery was given by Edward Lee for members of the Methodist Church, or anyone attending the Methodist Church. This cemetery remains, but has unfortunately suffered erosion and loss of graves to the waves and cycles of high water from Lake Erie. The cemetery's prestige may have been damaged but the Lee families longtime contribution to Lowbanks is recognized with the naming of a little lane leading from Lakeshore Road as Lee Lane.

At the time of the rebuilding of the present brick church in 1903, the trustees of the Bethesda United Brethren in Christ were; John Burkett, Cyrenus Chalmers *a descendant of William Chalmers a Scotsman who settled in 1834, and who gave the community the name Low Banks as two words*, David A. Furry, Frank Speck, Grant Mitchener, David Uria Minor, and Dave Dodge.

Unfortunately, many of the records from the church are missing, or are scattered among its earlier affiliates. Betty has attempted to keep the history in tact and was able to provide me with a number of names, some still found in the Lowbanks area. To name but of few of the churches earlier members there was; Earl Brady and his wife Ethel Gollop, Daniel Deamude and his wife Ann Pyle, Raymond Minor and his wife Olivia Speck, Adrian Burkett, Everett Burkett, Alexander McGregor, Grant Mitchener, Richard Smithers, Jacob Smith. I believe most of these men had wives, I just do not have their names.

Leon Speck, is by some considered to have saved the church from closing when from 1940 until 1954, he taught the Sunday School even while the church had no church services. From 1951 until Leon's death in 1954 he was assisted by Yvonne Coldwell. From 1970 until 1984, Florence Manning, though not ordained was the first female minister to serve Lowbanks United. A supervising ordained minister had to stand in for weddings, communions and baptisms, etc., but Florence kept the United Members on the straight and narrow the rest of the time!

Today the members gather to find the church heated or appropriately cooled depending on the season. In its earlier days, a wood or coal stove was used to chase out the cold of winter. To provide fuel the men formed wood gathering bees and went into the bush to cut trees, then chop the wood and store it in a woodshed located at the back of the church. Gas lights were used to illuminate the church, and were meticulously maintained by Grant Mitchener and Everett Burkett, while the women took care of housekeeping duties.

Betty related a story to me that she had heard from an old gentleman. It was about lumber which had been used for a temporary but a reusable stage intended for plays and special events. The lumber had been stolen. In an effort to find it, some of the churchmen visited a mystic in Buffalo who told them the lumber could be found in a barn in Wainfleet. Sure enough a visit was made and the lumber was found undamaged. For the safe return of the lumber, no charges were laid.

If you have items, you wish to have written about or pictures you would be willing to lend, please drop me a note. Let me know how you feel about these articles. William (Bill) Arthur Warnick 180 Rosslyn Ave. South HAMILTON, ON L8M 3J5 e-mail wwarnick@cogeco.ca Phone 905 549-6086.