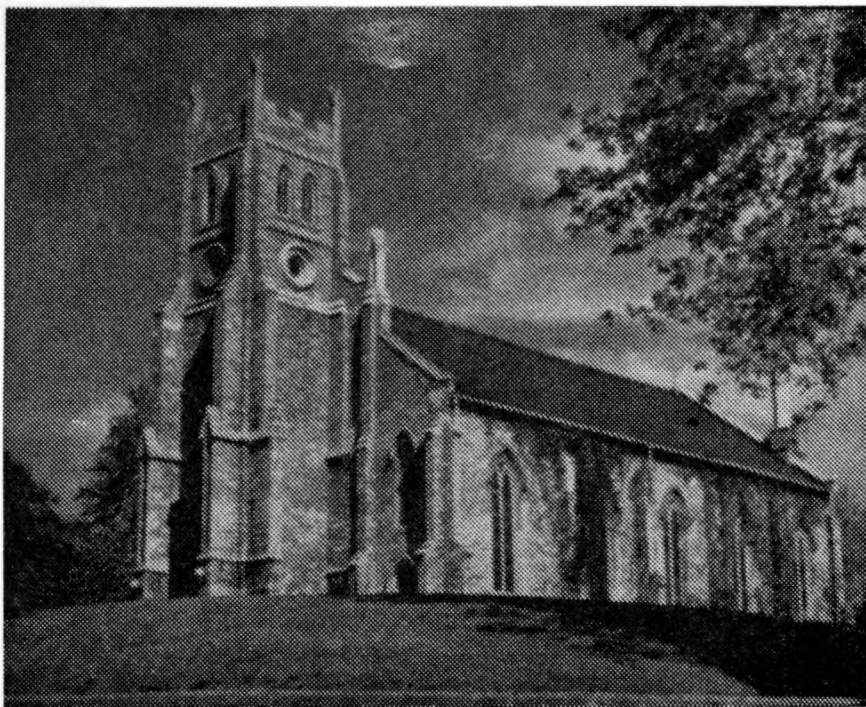


St. Thomas' Anglican Church  
1818 - 1968



The Parish Story

by

Ina Bellstedt

SESQUICENTENNIAL

BELLEVILLE

ONTARIO

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1818 - 1968

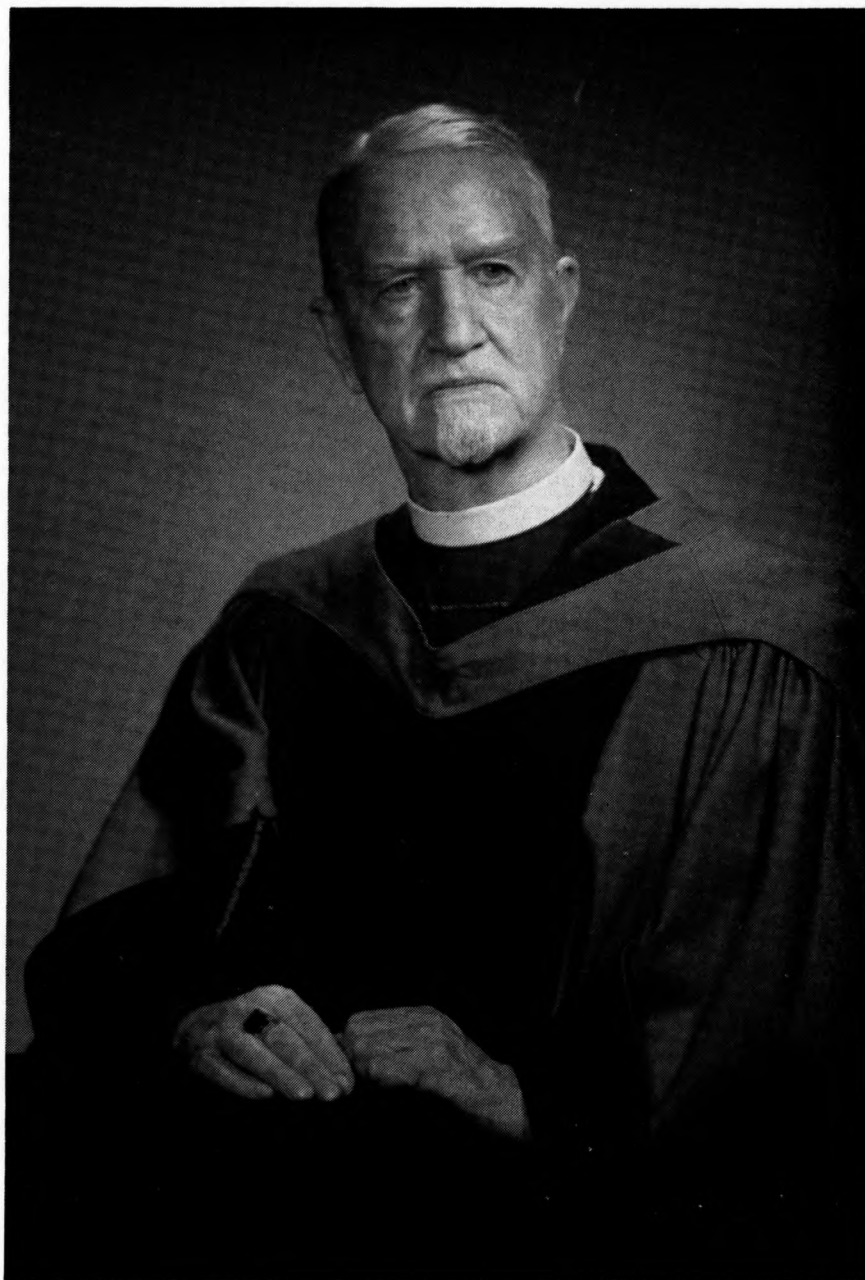
# The Parish Story

by  
Ina Bellstedt

SESQUICENTENNIAL

BELLEVILLE

ONTARIO



Elsewhere in this little volume an account is given of the history of St. Thomas' Church, and tribute is paid to those people who, 150 years ago, founded the Parish, and supported it in its early years. So it is unnecessary for me to speak of them.

I think rather, of the service and ministry that has been performed by St. Thomas' among the people of Belleville almost from the time of the first settlers; not a ministry *to* church members, but a ministry *of* church members to the community, under the leadership of the clergy.

Many people believe that the Church had a greater opportunity to serve people in the pioneer days than it has today. Community services are so much more developed today, and much of what the church did for the love of God is now done professionally by a great variety of agencies. But the opportunities are not diminished; perhaps they have increased considerably. They require in clergy and churchman a peculiar quality of mind and heart, of training and of natural endowments that enable us first to become aware of trouble and need, and then to minister to it.

Actually, the ministry of St. Thomas' Church in the last fifteen years has been broadened in its outreach and deepened in its humanity and understanding under its present beloved Rector, Archdeacon McConnell. Its support of mission work, world and national, and its deep concern for persons and for the community have been an inspiration to us all.

May this great, old Parish Church of the Diocese of Ontario continue to serve in the spirit of its Lord and Master, who said of himself that he "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many". So shall its future under God be strong and bright.

*Kenneth Ontario*

*Let us be thankful for the past. We can learn from our errors and  
build on that which was good.*

St. Thomas' Anglican Church stands majestically on a hill on the corner of Church and Bridge streets. The impressive stone walls, beautiful stained glass windows and grassy hill slopes, always seem to extend a warm welcome to parishioners and visitors. During this year of our sesquicentennial celebrations, let us scan the history of struggle-filled decades. Let us ponder about the numerous events and decisions which contributed towards the establishment of such a beautiful place of worship.

The congregation of St. Thomas' was formed on December 26, 1818, when a meeting was held by a number of "the respectable inhabitants of the town and vicinity for the purpose of devising means to erect a commodious Episcopal Church". At a meeting held on February 20, 1819, Mr. Thomas Coleman was asked to name the church and he named it St. Thomas'. There was a rumour that Mr. Coleman did not really have the apostle's name in mind when he named the church, but only his own. It is thus amusing to find that at a meeting held on April 15, 1819, Mr. Coleman disagreed with other trustees concerning the adoption of a resolution and that it was "resolved unanimously that Mr. Thomas Coleman be hereafter no longer considered as a trustee of the said church and that the secretary do erase his name out of the list of trustees".

Mr. Allan Taylor offered to build the church for £700 and building operations were started in 1819 but in 1820 there seem to have been some financial difficulties and eventually the trustees decided to arrange the completion of the church themselves. The first service was held in the church in June, 1821.

There is evidence that services were held before the completion of the church. For instance, two baptisms were recorded in the pocket register of a missionary on January 17, 1819. The first burial service, however, took place in the church on August 30, 1821, and the first marriage on September 11, 1821.

According to pictures, the first church was an unpretentious brick building. The pews were square with high backs and the pulpit and prayer desk were of the three decker style, placed in the centre of the church. Susanna Moodie's book, *Life in the Clearings*, was published in 1853 and she had this to say about the church:

"The church itself is but a homely structure; and has always been to me a great eyesore.

"The English church was built many years ago, partly of red brick burnt in the neighbourhood, and partly of wood coloured red to make up the deficiency of the costlier material. This seems a shabby saving, as abundance of brick-earth of the best quality abounds in the same hill, and the making of bricks forms a very lucrative and important craft to several persons in the town.



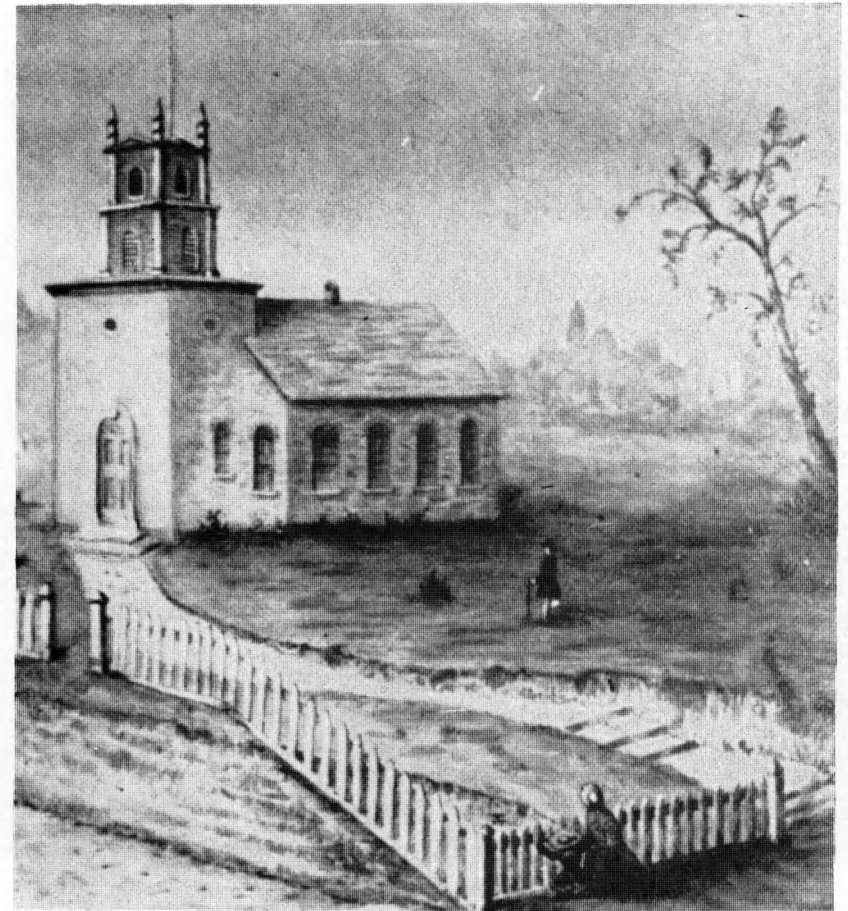
"Belleville was but a small settlement on the edge of the forest, scarcely deserving the name of a village, when this church first pointed its ugly tower toward heaven. Doubtless its founders thought that they had done wonders when they erected this humble looking place of worship; but now, when their descendants have become rich, and the village of log-huts and frame buildings has grown into a populous, busy, thriving town, and this red tasteless building is too small to accommodate its congregation, it should no longer hold the height of the hill, but give place to a larger and handsomer edifice".

Reverend Thomas Campbell, A.M., was the first Rector of the church and worked in that capacity until his death in 1835. His grave can be found on the north side of the church and Campbell street is said to have been named after him.

The Reverend Campbell worked very hard for his parish but the financial burden was apparently more than he could handle at times. In a petition sent to the Lt. Governor by the Reverend Campbell in 1827, asking for the issue of patents for the parsonage and glebe lots set apart earlier, he asked that the costs of these patents please be taken out of the "funds arising from the rents of the clergy reserve". He found that he could not raise the funds from his friends of the church "who have already contributed, even beyond their means, to the erection and improvement of the church which is still unfinished and is in debt to the amount of about fifty pounds".

He further said that "petitioner would himself at once pay those fees, but having already expended from his private funds, about seventy pounds in the erection of offices on the parsonage lots—and during the last summer upwards of thirty pounds in fencing, improving the said lots, and having also in the past summer advanced twenty pounds, over and above a large personal subscription, towards the improvement of the church and the fence surrounding the church and burial grounds, he cannot consistently with a proper regard to his own private affairs, advance the money required to pay for the above named patents. Petitioner humbly submits, that, with one exception, he does not know another clergyman in the province, who, within the last four years, has expended so much from his private funds, for the benefits and improvements of the church . . ."

During the incumbency of the Reverend Campbell there was a dispute between the Methodists and Anglicans concerning disturbance of Methodist prayer meetings. According to Mr. Gerald Boyce in his book, *Historic Hastings*, "the Methodists charged Anglican interference with the highly successful weekly prayer meetings being held in the Pinnacle Street Methodist Chapel. The Anglican minister was said to have almost immediately established 'a weekly ball on the same evening as near to the Methodist chapel as possible for the professed purpose of enticing the people away from the place appointed for the worship of God.' Although he was not named directly in the attack, Reverend Campbell thought it must refer to him, since the article blamed the interference on 'Rev. Mr. C. in the town of B.' The Anglicans retorted by labelling the writer of the attack, Reverend Gilbert Miller, as a man possessed of an 'envious and malignant mind'. However, rather than



take Miller to court, the Anglicans left him to 'the stings of his own conscience, and the reprobation of an intelligent public.' As to the balls in question, the Anglicans explained, they had been organized without the minister's knowledge, and it was only a coincidence that they were held near the Methodist Chapel on the prayer meeting night."

The main source of income of the church seems to have been the rent received for pews. The oldest pew holder, a Mrs. Benjamin, whose husband founded "The Intelligencer", lived in a small house on the corner of Church and Bridge streets, where the United Church is now situated.

When reading through the minutes of the vestry meetings of the earlier years, one comes to the sad conclusion that too much valuable time was spent on collecting pew rentals. No matter how hard the church officials tried, many parishioners were constantly in arrears with their rentals. Pleas and threats were not always effective in collecting arrears in payment and in the minutes of a meeting held on April 24, 1882, we read "That the church wardens be

hereby instructed that all pew holders who are in arrears of pew rents to the 31st December, 1882, be notified that unless the same be paid on or before the 1st day of May next, the amounts due by them will be placed in a solicitor's hands for collection; notice to this effect to be sent to each pew holder before carrying this resolution into effect."

According to minutes of meetings held in both 1874 and 1882, the envelope system of collection was decided upon because of the difficulty of collecting pew rents. However, pews were still rented in the parish until 1946.

In 1828, when the first church was free from debt, it was consecrated by Bishop Stewart, the second Bishop of Quebec. Eventually, however, the church became too small to accommodate the congregation and in April, 1850, it was decided that "a committee be appointed to procure a plan for a new church from some competent architect in the city of Toronto" and a subscription list was opened to raise funds for building the new church. In 1852 a religious census showed that there were 939 members of the Church of England in Belleville, and 6,915 in the County of Hastings.

On May 30, 1855, the corner stone of a new stone church was laid by Dr. Ridley, a physician in town, assisted by the members of the St. George's Society. In his address Dr. Ridley mentioned that in several instances members had been compelled to leave the church entirely, for want of room. Another reason given for building a new church, was that at every swing of the church bell the building would tremble.

On this occasion a document, printed on satin at "The Intelligencer" office, was placed under the corner stone. This document read as follows:

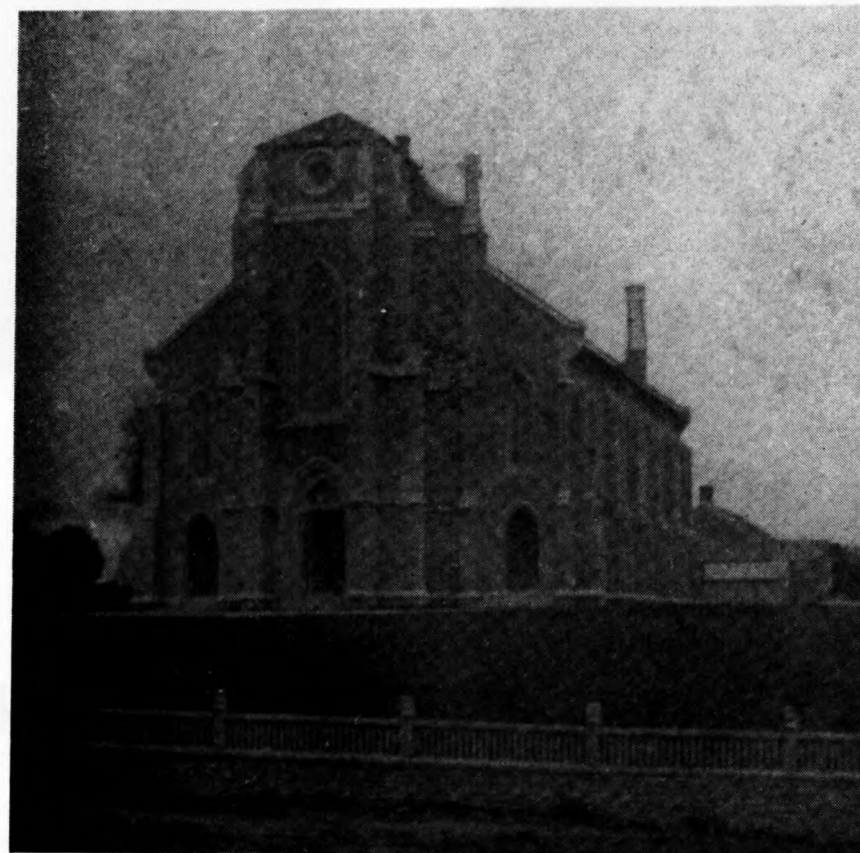
"A memorial deposited this 30th day of May, in the year of our Lord 1855, when laying the corner stone of this St. Thomas' Church, in the parish of Belleville, of which parish the Reverend John Grier, A.M., is Rector, and Francis McAnnany and John Lovel Babcock are church wardens. Should future events lead to the discovery of this memorial, it will be a token to those who follow after what their forefathers have undertaken for the church and cause of religion."

According to the the "Hastings Weekly Chronicle" of May 31, 1855, a box was also deposited in the corner stone wherein was laid "a copy of the 'Belleville Intelligencer', now in the 22nd year of its duration, as well as a copy of the 'Canadian Churchman' in the 18th year of its duration, together with various coins of the realm, and such other tokens of the times as will show our position and state of forwardness and prosperity as a Colony of Great Britain, A.D., 1855 . . ."

Mr. H. H. Horsey was the architect of the church and the builders were John Regan and Andrew Northcott of Belleville. Mr. Percy Geen's grandfather, who was a stone mason, helped to build the church.

On Sunday, March 21, 1858, the new church was opened and the "Hastings Weekly Chronicle" of March 24, said that ". . . notwithstanding the unfavourable state of the weather, the attendance was very large."

They tried to keep down the costs of the church, as shown at a meeting held June, 1857, when it was decided to heat the new church by stoves and not hot air.



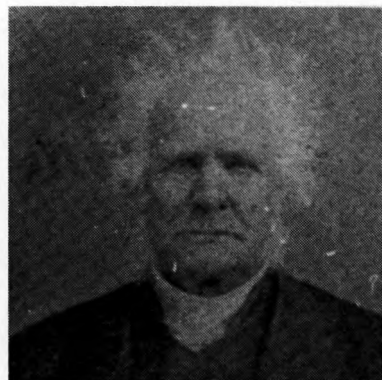
In 1861, while the Reverend Grier was rector of St. Thomas' Church, a very dynamic young curate, the Reverend Septimus Jones, came to Belleville. The difference in age and conflicting personalities made it impossible for these two gentlemen to work together amiably. Thus in 1863 the congregation of Christ Church was organized with the Reverend Jones as their rector. Apparently there were also other reasons for this division as revealed in "The Story of Christ Church" published in 1925: "There were also men of position and influence in St. Thomas' who felt that a church organization along somewhat more democratic lines and earnestly ministering to the common people would fill a long felt need in the spiritual requirements of the city".

Unfortunately the new church stood only 18 years and was then partially destroyed by fire on February 26, 1876. Without being frivolous one almost feels that this fire was a suitable climax to a series of distressing events in the parish. Alan Paton once wrote that "When the storm threatens a man is afraid for his house. But when the house is destroyed there is something to do. About a storm he can do nothing, but he can rebuild a house". As fire is symbolic of both destruction and purification, it was perhaps a needed tragedy.

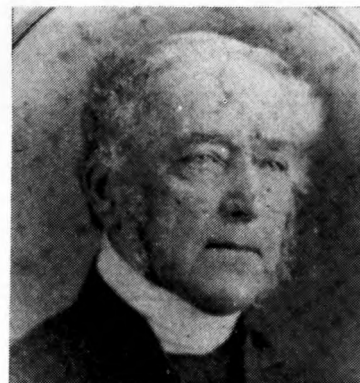


Rev. Thomas Campbell, A.M.  
1821-1835

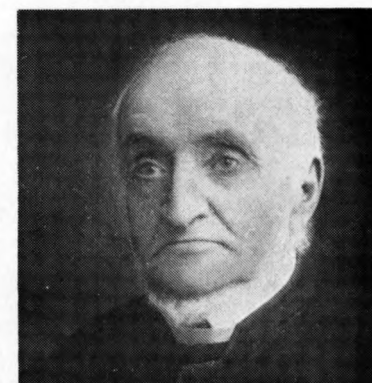
Rev. John Cochrane  
1835-1841



Rev. John Grier, M.A.  
1841-1871



The Ven. H. Patton, D.C.L.  
1871-1874

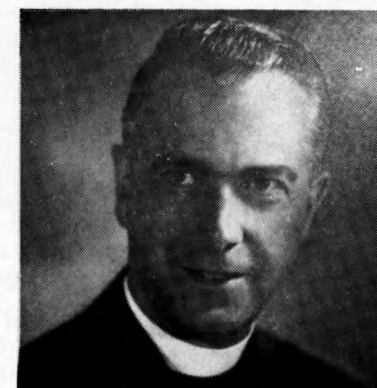


Canon Burke, B.A.  
1874-1902

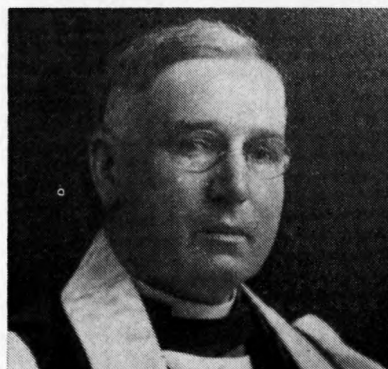


The Ven. Geo. Ross Beamish  
1902-1940

## Rectors of St. Thomas' Anglican Church



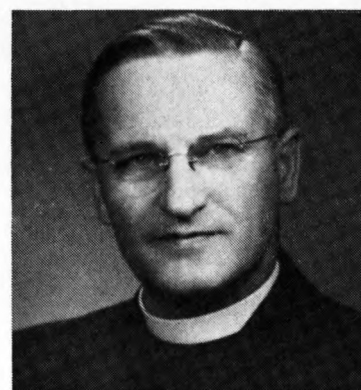
Rev. W. J. Robinson  
1953-1955



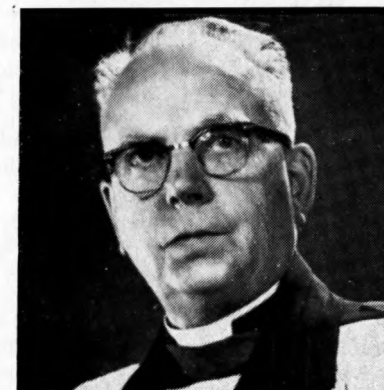
Rev. John Lyons  
Vicar: 1927-1931



Rev. A. Beachamp Payne  
Vicar: 1931-1940 Rector: 1940-1945



The Ven. F. Arthur Smith  
1945-1953



The Ven. A. S. McConnell, M.B.E.,  
C.D., L.Th. 1955-1969

One senses a preoccupation with trivialities in the following quotation from the minutes of a meeting held during March 1869:

"Whereas this Vestry have heard—and with deep regret—the many innovations in the forms and ceremonies that have been made in many churches in connection with the Church of England throughout this country, and which in the opinion of this Vestry are subversive of the best interests of the church and tending to promote disunion—

"and whereas the change now proposed in St. Thomas' Church by the adoption of the white surplice in lieu of the black gown by the officiating clergyman while preaching the sermon, is a marked deviation from the established usage in the said church.

"Therefore be it resolved—that this Vestry do hereby express their most unqualified disapproval of the proposed change—

"And that if the same is carried out will undoubtedly provoke discord and contentions injurious to the said church."

After the death of the Reverend Grier it appears that Archdeacon H. Patton, D.C.L., was most anxious to become rector of St. Thomas' parish and the following letter, addressed to the church warden, was read at a meeting held on November 3, 1871:

"My dear Sir:

As you are aware I visited Belleville for the purpose of endeavouring to ascertain as far as I could from personal intercourse with a few of the parishioners how far my appointment to the vacant Rectory would be generally acceptable.

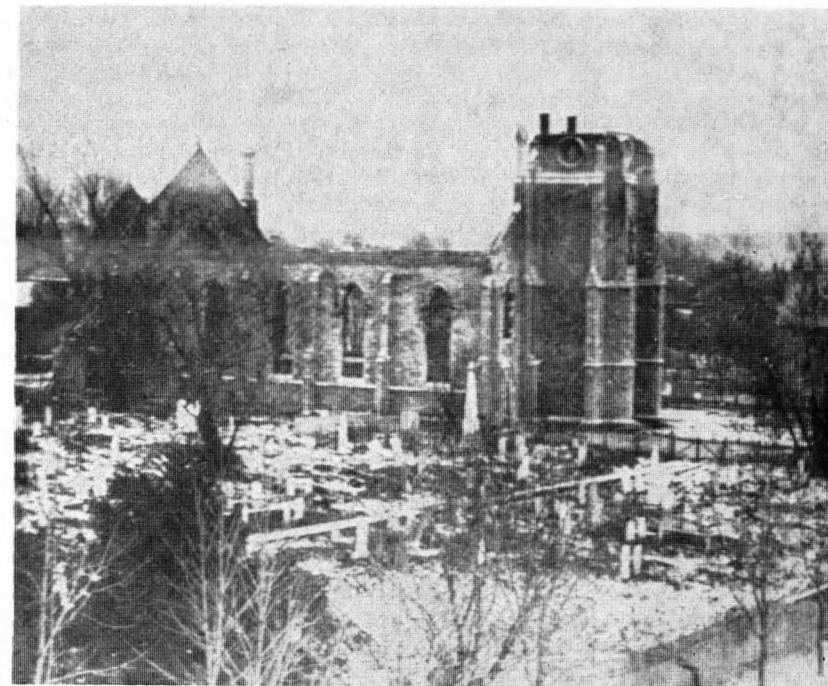
I have had the pleasure of meeting with many of the older members of the congregation and from the kindly feelings generally expressed I feel myself perfectly justified in accepting the Rectory with the hope that by the Divine blessing we may all be enabled to work together in harmony for the glory of God and the prosperity of Christ's church. I shall therefore at once signify to the Bishop my acceptance of the parish.

I remain yours very truly

Henry Patton (Archdeacon)"

After this letter had been read the Hon. George Sherwood said that he had been taken by surprise as he had himself informed the Archdeacon that this meeting was held for the very purpose of expressing the opinion of the congregation as to whether the Archdeacon would be acceptable to the congregation. He then proceeded to read the following resolution which he had prepared in ignorance of the letter:

"Resolved that this Vestry is of the opinion that the Reverend Arthur Baldwin, from his abilities, his zeal in the cause of religion and his untiring industry is well qualified to fill the situation of rector of the parish and the Vestry most respectfully recommends him to His Lordship for the appointment."



The above resolution was carried but the Bishop appointed Archdeacon Patton as rector. After his death in 1874 the Reverend J. Burke became rector.

In March 1875, the financial state of the parish was so bad that it was decided that they could no longer employ a curate or a paid organist. The organist was dismissed but at the very next meeting it was decided to reinstate him.

Mr. Percy Geen of our parish knew Canon Burke and according to him the rector was an eloquent speaker and an uncompromising opponent to every form of evil. Unfortunately there was bitter strife between the rector and a large portion of the congregation for a long time. The following letter from the Bishop to the church warden, dated April 19, 1876, may give an indication of the pettiness of the disagreements:

"My dear Mr. McAnnany:

I have delayed writing to you chiefly owing to the fact that I feel quite embarrassed as to what I shall say. I found while in Belleville that two causes combined to keep the rector and the congregation (or a portion of it) at variance. The first was that stated by Dr. Hope, that Mr. Burke read certain portions of the service with his side face to the congregation and that he insisted on a communion table of a box or panelled shape, while the dissentients required an ordinary table with four legs. As regards these grounds of contro-



ersy I can make no order nor do I find myself in a position of being obliged whenever a few people in my congregation took the same ground as Dr. Hope, to give the same advice and to make myself a partisan. Both subjects of complaint are to be found in a great majority of English churches. I myself approve of the side-face position in reading the prayers, on the old-fashioned principle that when the clergyman is addressing the people, he should turn to them, but when not addressing them but God, he should show the difference by a change of position to say nothing of the great help it is to the minister's own devotion not to face the people while reading the prayers, as what he is sometimes compelled to see, cannot aid him in his worship.

"As regards the question of a table with or without legs I can only say that I think it is most unreasonable to require of Mr. Burke to make any change in the shape of a table which has existed in St. Thomas' Church for the last 18 years, especially as the shape is the most universal usage of the church, even in churches which claim the exclusive title of evangelical.

"But while I so far agree with Mr. Burke I cannot justify the second cause which seems to have alienated a portion of the congregation from the rector. I cannot justify the uncharitable language with which you and others have charged him. I particularly condemn the statement recently read by him, touching the communion table controversy, and I think it is a great pity Mr. Burke did not make an ample apology when he ascertained that the table sent by him had not been stolen.

"My candid opinion is that the congregation should tolerate the points insisted on by Mr. Burke and that Mr. Burke should make an ample apology for any language that seemed to the congregation uncharitable and pledge himself (which I have no doubt he will do) that he will make no further changes whatever, in the mode of performing divine service without reference to me. If this course be adopted I see no reason why harmony should not be restored. Mr. Burke is, I am persuaded, sincerely conscientious, and that we should remember that he has as good a right to make a point of conscience of a table without legs as others do a table with legs.

"Please show this letter or a copy to Mr. Burke and with exhortation to mutual forbearance and a prayer for the restoration for unity in your important parish."

According to a letter from Mr. Burke he did apologize profusely for any errors on his part but the feud continued and on May 26, 1876, a resolution was passed that the Reverend Mr. Burke be asked to vacate his position as rector. This did not happen and then a petition was signed by the congregation for the removal of Mr. Burke. The Bishop, however, did not comply with the wishes of the congregation.

It took some time before the rebuilding of the church could be started as there were financial difficulties which had to be straightened out legally eventually. During this period, services were conducted for a while at City

Hall but in 1877, on account of the feud between the rector and the congregation, the city fathers refused them the use of the City Hall for services. Services were then held in the Metropolitan Hall. For a time there was great concern for the future of the parish as the numbers began to dwindle and as one gentleman put it, everything was literally in "ruins".

Gradually difficulties were overcome and the church was rebuilt on the standing walls so that it would have the same dimensions and appearance. The church was re-opened for services on December 28, 1879, with the Reverend Burke still as rector and the Bishop of the Diocese, the Right Reverend J. Travers Lewis, was present at the opening service.

"The Daily Ontario" of Monday, December 29, 1879, had this to say about the re-opening of the church:

"The long and anxiously looked for event of the re-opening of St. Thomas' Church took place yesterday when three services were held, all of which were largely attended.

". . . Thus ended one of the most important days in the history of St. Thomas' Church, and the hearts of the rector, church wardens and pew holders must have been gladdened by the success which attended their restoration of this fine old church.

"The choral services throughout the day, conducted by Prof. Whish, were very beautiful, the choir being a very strong one. The magnificent organ was handled in such a manner as to bring out its sweetest strains and all those who attended the services came away delighted with this part of the proceedings".

After the re-opening of the church the "Hastings Chronicle" said: "The pews with those in the gallery are calculated to seat 850 persons . . . The carved railings of the pulpit and altar are elegant, yet chaste and correspond with the brackets in the roof . . . The cost of the building so far is over four thousand pounds, and we are told not a sixpence towards it has been solicited outside the town and congregation".

A more friendly spirit reigned again in the congregation and in the minutes of a vestry council meeting held on April, 1891, we find these words: "After a lively discussion in which the greatest unanimity and good feeling existed . . ." More proof of good relationships is found in minutes of a meeting held in 1898. A curate was appointed and the congregation could afford a salary of only \$400 per annum but a few members made personal contributions so that the salary could be raised to \$550.

Canon Burke might have acted oddly at times, but he was known to be very generous and Mrs. Burke often found her pantry practically empty because her husband had given the food to some needy family. Canon Burke also came home one day without his new overcoat because he had met somebody who was sorely in need of one.

In 1904 the church was consecrated by His Lordship Bishop Mills. Canon Burke was succeeded by Archdeacon Beamish in 1902 and the latter remained rector of St. Thomas' Church until 1940. Archdeacon Beamish left the parish



in 1926 to live in England where he was associated with the British Chaplaincy service. He also lived in Trieste for some years and in his absence the Vicars, Reverend John Lyons, and Reverend A. Beauchamp Payne, carried out his duties.

During the incumbency of Archdeacon Beamish there was much controversy over the disposal of the income from the Rectory lands at Belleville. The basis of settlement of this dispute was that all income over \$2,000 was to be given to the parish of Christ Church with the exception of a small amount to St. John's Point Anne. It was also decided by Canon Law that a local committee control the finances.

When the Reverend John Lyons left Belleville he went to Prescott as rector and shortly afterwards became Lord Bishop of the Diocese of Ontario.

The next rector, the Reverend A. Beauchamp Payne, left in 1945 when he was appointed Diocesan Commissioner.

Our present rector, Archdeacon McConnell was preceded by the Venerable F. Arthur Smith and the Reverend W. J. Robinson.

Archdeacon McConnell has had a lengthy stay in Belleville and we find the sesquicentennial celebrations of St. Thomas' Church a fitting climax to a pleasant and fruitful part of his career.

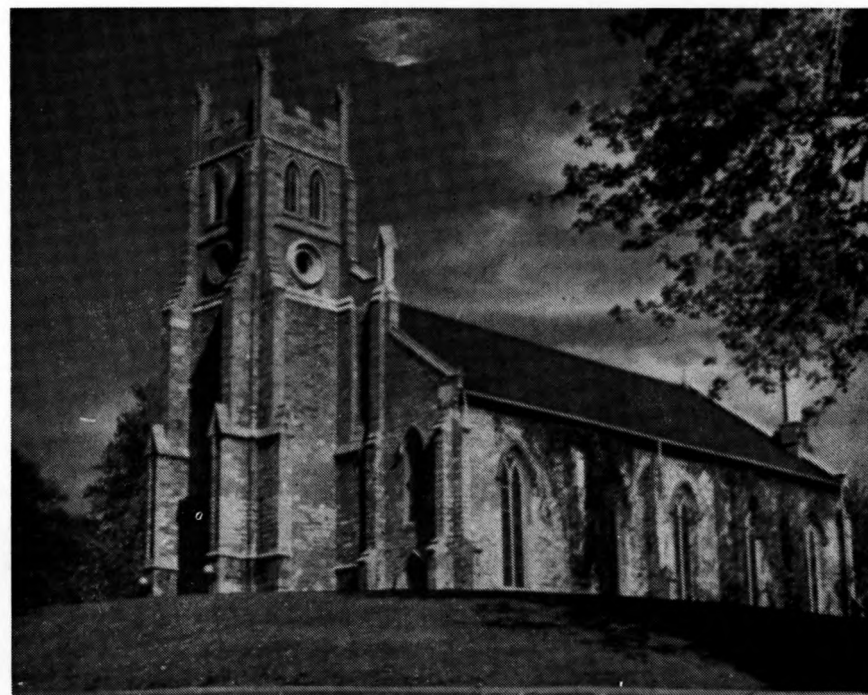
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The women's organizations have always been a vital factor in the life of the parish. The names of these organizations have sometimes changed but basically the duties of the women have been the same throughout the decades. They have worked diligently to support missions, Sunday school and other spiritual and material needs of the church. To many women the names Women's Guild, Women's Auxiliary, Altar Guild and Anglican Church Women will always be identified with happy Christian fellowship and service to their fellow man.

In the minutes of a meeting held in April, 1892, we find these words: "That the cordial thanks of this vestry be, and are hereby tendered to the president and members of St. Thomas' Women's Guild for their most valuable and efficient exertion in paying off debt due by church at last Easter, amounting to \$500." In 1887 a committee of women was appointed to solicit subscriptions for the building of a Sunday school, and in 1897 when the financial situation of the congregation was not very sound, again women were appointed to canvass the congregation for funds.

The worth of the women has perhaps not always been fully recognized as women were never chosen to serve on the vestry council but a change has come about and we now have two ladies serving on the council.

The Brotherhood of Anglican Churchmen did much to foster Christian fellowship among the men in the congregation for some years. They had regular dinner meetings with good speakers and in 1964 they organized a very successful inter-church men's dinner. However, this organization has not been very active lately.



In 1965 the Parish Education Committee was formed to look after the work of the church school.

In 1967 an organization, known as the Forum, was founded to promote the arts and dialogue among members of the congregation. Any person outside St. Thomas' parish is also eligible to join this club and the efforts of the Forum have been very successful.

St. Thomas' parish has always sponsored scouting and the Parish House has always been at the disposal of the young people who participate in scouting activities.

The Parish House is also often made available to other organizations in the community and in this manner the church does valuable work to promote fellowship and understanding among the people of the city of Belleville. For instance, the A.A. have been holding their meetings in the Parish House for 25 years.

At present the Sunday school classes are conducted in the Parish House but originally there was a separate Sunday school building, north of the area which is now used as the B.C.I. parking lot.

The first Parish Hall was built approximately where the B.C.I. parking lot now is. The present Parish House was built in 1910 as a memorial for Canon Burke. In 1963 an addition was made to the Parish House at a cost of \$40,000 and at the end of 1968 the building was completely debt free.

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of St. Thomas', consideration was given to the close relationship which had existed between St. Thomas' Church and St. Agnes' School, and it was then decided that the chapel be called St. Agnes Chapel.

The first rectory of the church was situated on the south west corner of Campbell and Pinnacle streets.

The present rectory was built in 1871 and in 1945 it was converted into three apartments.

On May 29, 1955, the 100th anniversary of the laying of the corner stone of the stone church was celebrated.

As one of Belleville's centennial projects, flood lights were installed outside the church in 1967, and the beauty of the church at night is much appreciated by those passing by.

\* \* \*

The stained-glass windows contribute immeasurably to the beauty and stateliness of St. Thomas' Church. The sanctuary window is composite in form, the left side depicting the beginning of the life of Christ, and the right side the end of His life.

The windows on the north and south sides of the church portray the following biblical themes: Purity, Mothers of Salem, Raising of Jairus' Daughter, Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Calling of the Disciples, Visit of the Shepherds, Resurrection Morning, and the Crucifixion.

The above-mentioned windows were erected in memory of the following people: the father and mother of Henry Corby; Reverend John Cochrane and his children John and Mary; the wife and son of Quentin McNider; Francis McAnnaman who was church warden for 40 years; Harry James Smith; the wife of Sir Gilbert Parker; Henry Corby, who was a member of the Canadian Senate; Joseph Docter and Cecilia Docter Briens.

In a tiny cupboard in the former Corby pew there is still a prayer book which belonged to the senator.

\* \* \*

There are also several memorial plaques in the church and three of them are in memory of outstanding personalities in the history of Belleville.

The first plaque is in memory of Captain John Walden Meyers. He was born on January 22, 1745 and died on November 22, 1821 and he was the founder of Belleville. Captain Meyers was a loyalist who served during the American Revolution often carrying dispatches from New York to Quebec. He settled in Sidney and Thurlow townships in 1787 and he built the first brick house in this area in 1794. He operated batteaux on the Bay of Quinte and the St. Lawrence, and he traded with the Indians who called his house Meyers' castle. He operated the first grist and lumber mill on the Moira river. He was also the master of the first Masonic Lodge in Belleville.

One of the former names of Belleville was Meyers' Creek but charges that Captain Meyers had failed to aid the war effort in 1812 were, according

to Mr. Boyce in *Historic Hastings*, responsible for lessening "the possibility of Meyers' name being permanently attached to the settlement".

The second plaque is in memory of Sir Gilbert Parker who was probably one of the most versatile parishioners St. Thomas' Church ever had. He was born in Camden East, Ontario, in 1860 from U.E.L. descent. He became a teacher and taught at the Ontario Deaf and Dumb Institute for a while. He then studied theology and did ministerial work in Trenton. He also taught elocution at Queen's University but his main interests lay in the field of literature and he became a poet, dramatist and novelist. He also did journalism in Australia and travelled extensively. He lived in London, England, from 1889 onwards and in 1900 he became a member of the British House of Commons. In 1901 King Edward VII conferred a knighthood upon him for his achievements in the literary field. In 1915 he was created Baronet for special services to the country and in 1916 he was made Privy Councillor.

Sir Gilbert died in 1932 and was buried here in Belleville.

The third plaque is in memory of Mr. and Mrs. George Wallbridge, the parents of Miss Amy Wallbridge, a member of St. Thomas' parish and the grandparents of Mrs. W. Hurst, another member of the parish. The Reverend Grier officiated at the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Wallbridge and they lived to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary in Belleville.

Mr. George Wallbridge was co-founder of the Ontario Business College in Belleville in 1868. In 1871 he established his own grocery store and he and his partner, Mr. Joseph Clarke, succeeded in having an extensive wholesale and retail business for many years.

\* \* \*

Many ex-service men have had close ties with St. Thomas' Church and a number of regimental colours have been deposited in the church. The oldest colours are those of the 15th Battalion which were made and donated to the regiment by the ladies of Belleville in 1863 and deposited in the church in 1906. Other colours in the church are those of the 39th Battalion, C.E.F., donated by the Women's Canadian Club and presented by Sir Sam Hughes, 7th June, 1915; those of the 80th Battalion C.E.F. donated by the Ketcheson family, 20th April, 1916; those of the 155th Battalion C.E.F., donated by the Argyle Chapter of the I.O.D.E. on the 29th of July, 1916, and the colours of the Argyle Light Infantry, donated by the Soldiers' Wives League and deposited in the Church in November, 1951.

\* \* \*

The churchyard is situated north of the church and Susanna Moodie wrote about it that it had the "finest view of the town and surrounding country".

When walking through the churchyard now we do not see familiar names as there have been no burials at the church since 1874. In 1873 the consecration of the Belleville cemetery took place.

In the early days the parishioners had trouble with cows wandering into the churchyard and at a meeting held in April, 1871, it was decided "that the sexton be directed to impound every cow found in the churchyard or burying ground and that he be paid 25 cents by the church wardens for each cow so impounded."

In the first church they had no musical instrument for accompanying the singing, but someone led the singing with the aid of a tuning fork. Eventually an instrument known as a "Chest of Whistles" was acquired and a few members of the congregation were so perturbed at this innovation that they left the church.

When the new church was built a Warren organ was installed and in 1904 this organ was rebuilt by Casavant Frères, and this rebuilt instrument was used for over half a century. In 1956 a new organ was designed by the organist, Mr. Robert Bell, in collaboration with Mr. Mark Fairhead of Wm. Hill & Son and Norman & Beard Limited. The new organ contains pipes from the two older organs of St. Thomas'. This organ is known as the War Memorial Organ and on January 27, 1957, a special service of dedication of the organ was held and at this service tribute was paid to those members of the parish who had died in the two world wars.

In 1965 a Schulmerich Carillon was placed in the tower in memory of Robert A. Pringle, Q.C., by his wife and family. At the time of his death Mr. Pringle was Chancellor of the Diocese.

\* \* \*

St. Thomas' Church established three missions - Huff's Island, St. John's on Herchimer Avenue and St. Paul's in Belleville south.

The mission on Huff's Island ceased to exist many years ago, but Mrs. G. Beamish, the widow of Archdeacon Beamish, says that she can vividly remember the monthly visits she and her husband paid to Huff's Island. Services were held in the school house and people from all denominations gathered to worship.

The mission of St. John's on Herchimer Avenue was established in 1931 by the Reverend John Lyons and this mission developed into what is now St. Margaret's Anglican Church.

St. Paul's mission was established in Canon Burke's time and although there was a period in which the mission was closed, it has generally operated as an active little parish with its own chapel and Sunday school.

Mrs. J. McKenna tells us that during the incumbency of the Reverend John Lyons, a certain Mr. Stewart, a candy maker, was the superintendent of the Sunday School of St. Paul's mission and the children were apparently so fond of him that he was known as Grandpa Stewart. The Reverend W. Robinson was also very interested in the work at St. Paul's and during his incumbency St. Paul's had quite a large boys' choir.

These words spoken by the Reverend John Lyons on January 27, 1928, serve as a sesquicentennial message to each member of the parish:

"Christianity begins where we start to help others. After the expenses of our own church are paid, our real Christianity is in that which we give to missions. When maintaining the church solely we are merely paying for something we ourselves receive."

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# The Intelligencer

BELLEVILLE, ONTARIO, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1969



First Church Was Red Brick



Present Building of Stone Construction

## St. Thomas' Anglican Church Celebrates 150th Anniversary

By HARRY MULHALL  
Staff Reporter

On the day after Christmas 150 years ago a band of Bellevillians decided to erect a new church in their community.

The result of that decision was St. Thomas' Anglican Church — the heritage of which is being singled out for special attention this year.

Tomorrow St. Thomas' ventures into celebrations marking the christening of its early beginnings — a sesquicentennial that lasts through the month of February.

Today, St. Thomas' is an impressive structure, dominating the entrance to the East Hill area of Belleville. Its venerable stones impart that silently dignified price of place that comes only with endurance of time — in this case 150 years.

And today, the parish is as active as ever — preparing to celebrate its anniversary with a church newly decorated and a lively roster of events.

The church — like many another — has had its struggles. Yet it survives, not only intact, but emphatically present as both a place of worship and a local landmark.

The history of St. Thomas'

goes back to a Boxing Day. On Dec. 26, 1818, a meeting was called in Belleville of "the respectable inhabitants of the town and the vicinity for the purpose of devising a



CANON A. S. McCONNELL

The church's present rector, Canon A. S. McConnell, appointed in 1955, is the eleventh clergyman to head parish affairs since the first appointment of Rev. Thomas Campbell in 1821.

means to erect a commodious Episcopal Church."

All went well, apparently. So well that in February 1819 Thomas Coleman was asked to name the new church and he christened it St. Thomas.

The matter was not without note, according to a new history of St. Thomas' prepared by Mrs. Freidl Bellstedt.

Her records show: "There was a rumor that Mr. Coleman did not really have the apostle's name in mind . . . but only his own."

If this was so, the reckoning was not long in arriving.

At a meeting shortly after Mr. Coleman disagreed with adoption of a resolution.

It was there and then decided that "Mr. Thomas Coleman be hereafter no longer considered a trustee of the said church and that the secretary do erase his name out of the list of trustees."

Meantime, construction of the church itself was proceeding apace.

An Allan Taylor offered to build the church for £700 and the project was begun in 1819. The following year there were some financial difficulties and the first service wasn't held until June 1821.

The first burial service took place on Aug. 30 of that year

### Special Events Mark Sesquicentennial

Special events marking the sesquicentennial of St. Thomas' Church range from a visit by Bishop Kenneth Evans to a drama presented in the church.

The anniversary officially opens with formal ceremonies in the parish house at 2 p.m. tomorrow. There will be tours of displays in the parish house and church from 2:15-4:30 p.m. and again from 8-10 p.m.

Sunday, the sermon at the service will be preached by Ven. William Robinson, rector of St. Thomas' during 1953-55.

— followed by the first marriage 12 days later.

But the first notable description of the church was not recorded for posterity until nearly 30 years later.

But the first notable description of the church was not recorded for posterity until nearly 30 years later.

Sunday, Feb. 16, Bishop Evans will present the sermon at the service, followed by a reception in the parish house.

Sunday, Feb. 23, the sermon will be preached by Canon F. A. Smith, rector during 1945-53.

Feb. 27-28 will see a presentation of the drama "A Sleep of Prisoners" in the church by the Forum Players. Written specifically for presentation in a church by British playwright Christopher Fry, it is believed the first such production of its kind in the Quinte district.

It comes in the 1853 publication of Susanna Moodie's "Life in the Clearings." And this is how she spots St. Thomas' of the day:

"The church itself is but a homely structure; and has always been to me a great eyesore.

"The English Church was

built many years ago, partly of red brick burned in the neighborhood, and partly of wood colored red to make up the deficiency of the costlier material. This seems a shabby saving, as abundance of brick-earth of the best quality abounds in the same hill, and the making of bricks forms a very lucrative and important craft to several persons in the town."

Mrs. Moodie, whose husband was a district sheriff, is even colder in her recollections of St. Thomas' earlier days:

"Belleville was but a small settlement on the edge of the forest, scarcely deserving the name of a village, when this church first pointed its ugly tower toward heaven.

"Doubtless its founders thought they had done wonders when they erected this humble looking place of worship; but now when their descendants have become rich . . . and this red tasteless building is too small to accommodate its congregation, it should no longer hold the height of the hill, but give place to a larger edifice."

However, work already was underway by the congregation to remedy the situation.

In 1855 the cornerstone of a

new church was laid — this time in stone.

Almost three years later the new structure was opened.

Just two decades later tragedy struck the congregation



REV. W. J. ROBINSON

— fire gutted St. Thomas'.

Gradually rebuilt, it was once more the scene of rededication ceremonies on Dec. 29, 1879.

But the memorabilia of the church reaches far beyond its own establishment.

Among its memorial plaques is a commemoration of Capt. John Meyers, the founder of

Belleville who came north after the American Revolution to start the settlement of Meyers Creek that eventually became the core of the Quinte district.

There also is a plaque to Sir Gilbert Parker — a parishioner knighted in 1901 for his literary gifts.

Patriotic service also is closely linked to the church, the interior of which is emblazoned with regimental banners. Oldest of the proud old flags to be seen are the colors of 15th Battalion, made in 1863.

Still extant is the churchyard, immediately north of the church itself. No burials have taken place there since 1874 — the year after Belleville cemetery was consecrated.

Buried there is the first rector of St. Thomas' — Rev. Thomas Campbell, who died in 1835.

St. Thomas' Anglican church today stands as a symbol of faith to its congregation, a sign of continuity to the community at large.

Its congregation proudly places its community history on view in the coming month.

Sesquicentennial celebrations open tomorrow with special ceremonies in the parish house at 2 p.m.