

UPPER LONDONDERRY PASTORAL CHARGE
235th Anniversary Celebration
September 24, 2006
Erskine United Church, Glenholme NS

UNDERSTANDING OUR ROOTS.

Deuteronomy 6: 1-15; 20-25

Romans 11: 5-8; 17 - 24

Psalm 80 (#794 Voices United)

I have chosen the scriptures from Deuteronomy and Romans because they encourage us to recall the importance of our "roots" – the OT passage recalls the movement of a people from a life of slavery and persecution to a new start in a new land – Canaan – the creating of a new society in which they were to be faithful to the covenant God made with their fathers when bringing them out of Egypt into the promised land of Canaan – a land that He had promised to their forefather Abraham in the 12th chapter of Genesis. You may have noticed that being "faithful" involved strict adherence to keeping the rules for living that God had given them through Moses.

It is important, I think, to understand our roots, to know from where we have come, to understand and confess our shortcomings in keeping the faith of our church and ancestors who 235 – 240 years ago felt it desirable to come to this Londonderry Township of Nova Scotia from 1760 and establish their homes and farms, their schools and churches in these lands left idle after the expulsion of the Acadians in 1755.

They formed a Christian Congregation based on Presbyterian traditions and faith-principles which were an integral part of their lives, and in due time were able to build a log church, probably about 1767; gather enough financial support to issue a call to a minister as early as August 1769 to come give them leadership in spiritual things, so that they could be the same kind of people and build the same kind of communities that Moses was encouraging in Deuteronomy.

The stories of Rev. David Smith and Rev. John Brown, the first pioneer ministers have been told and recorded. (See booklet prepared for 230th) Smith being the first arrived in the fall of 1771 and divided his time between Londonderry and Truro until Rev. Daniel Cock arrived in 1772.

The family names that signed the call to David Smith, the first called and inducted clergy of the Presbyterian tradition in Canada, are listed in Edith Fletcher's book, Scotia Heritage: Carr; Campbell ; Baird ; Clarke; Cook; Barnhill; Crowe; Corbett; Davidson; Deyarmond; Dill; Denny; Elliott; Fletcher; Fulton, Faulkner; Forbes, Hill, McCully, MacLellen; McKinley; McNutt; Moore; Morrison, Martin; McLane; Mahon. Staples; Vance Wilson, etc.

Mrs. Fletcher suggests that the name of David Smith was requested because someone in the parish knew his father and family, having attended the same University, - St. Andrews, one of the oldest in Scotland. (Not likely – because the Scots of Londonderry had lived in the Ulster area of Ireland for several generations before coming to Londonderry New Hampshire and then to here.

The Londonderry Township to which Smith was called and inducted extended from the Chiganois River to Cape Dore, including the villages of Chiganois, (now Belmont) , Mass House Village (Masstown) Duburt, Folly; Little Dyke; Big Village (Great) Portaupique and Bass River.

The first Presbyterian meeting house for the whole area was built , of log construction about 1767, centrally located as the "mother church" at Folly Village on land donated by James Flemming, as well as the cemetery land of 15 acres – the same site as where we are now located.

FROM WHERE DID THESE FIRST SETTLERS COME ? AND WHY DID THEY COME??

I have already hinted that the majority came from Londonderry New Hampshire, having migrated to America from Londonderry Ireland in the early 18th century.

Several hundred Presbyterians from the area of Ulster, Ireland had come to Massachusetts in 1718, but found they were unwanted in any of the settled areas unless they became "Congregationalists" of the Puritan faith. They moved further West and North to New Hampshire and named their area "Londonderry", near present day Manchester, NH.

John Murphy in his book, Londonderry Heirs gives a lot of background on the political and religious movements of the 17th and 18th centuries that caused these Scottish people to be moving about from Scotland to Ulster and Londonderry Ireland and New Hampshire between 1630 and 1718, and eventually to Nova Scotia after 1760.

[During the reign of Charles I of England 1625 - 1649 many Presbyterian Scots fled to Ulster Ireland, because of the high rents imposed by Charles in Scotland, Charles' persecution drove as many as 4000 Scots/year to Ulster.

Charles had a hatred of all religious groups who were not Church of England and no one of the dissenting groups was more severely persecuted than the Presbyterians of Scotland, who were intent on making the governing power of their country more like that of the Children of Israel when they entered Canaan.

In 1637 Charles halted this migration by cancelling the charter of the Irish Society in England which facilitated the migrations. Conflicts arose between the resentful Roman Catholic Irish and some of the Scottish clergy and their flocks returned to Scotland – but 140 of the bolder ones set sail for the uncultivated, unclaimed lands of America in a vessel built by their own hands and took some of their clergy with them.

In 1641 Charles agreed to the abolition of the episcopacy in Scotland and agreed that the parliament could now appoint officers of the State, the Privy Council and Judges. This led to the Irish Catholics in Ulster to make attempts to regain the land the Scots had possessed . A massacre began Oct 23, 1641 and Ulster (says Murphy) was converted into a field of blood. Thousands were slain and those Scots who were left returned to their homeland which had now been restored to an independent Kingdom.

Oliver Cromwell following 1652 restored the Irish Society which King Charles II after 1660 endorsed, which issued in protestant Anglicans taking possession of abandoned lands in Ireland, and becoming dominant in government and trade – reducing the land holdings and population of the Ulster Presbyterians in Ireland. But some did remain and survived. In 1661 there were still 68 Presbyterian clergy in Ireland and all but one in the Ulster area, and 61 churches.

Within a year of Charles II ascending the throne all the Presbyterian ministers were driven from their churches, forbidden to preach , baptize, marry or exercise any function of ministry. Presbyterians began to meet in secret and special tokens were issued (the origin of the Communion tokens!) as their pass or key to the meetings. Over 17000 suffered fines or imprisonment for attendance of Presbyterian services. A “hearth tax” was introduced in 1660 , abolished in England in 1689 but held until about 1693 In Ireland . I.e. A tax on household fireplaces. “ a shameful regression of the poor” says Murphy, so that in 1865 of the 184 000 houses in Ireland only 24,000 had one chimney or more, the rest had no chimneys in order to avoid the tax .

The hearth tax rolls of Londonderry County 1663 - 1667 contain many of the same surnames as the people who came from Londonderry N H to Londonderry NS: e.g.

Faulkner, Davidson, Gamble, Morrison, Baird, Miller, Archibald, Logan Barnhill, McLean, McNutt, Wilson Vance. Etc.

At the close of 1688 rumors spread of an intended massacre of the Protestants in Londonderry and until 1714 – 1718 the Scots in Northern Ireland had a very difficult time on political, church, land and famines issues.

Word leaked back of the possibilities for a new start and tax free land in the New England area of America, and in 1718 a group (100 - 160) of Ulster Scots led by Rev. James Woodside sailed from Londonderry Ireland on the vessel McCallum, to arrive in Boston Aug 4 1718. In the next two years an added 3000 crossed the Atlantic to America. By 1739 a full migration had taken place, with most of them settling in Virginia and Pennsylvania.]

Our focus is on the group that landed in Boston in 1718, most of whom, as I said earlier finally located in New Hampshire and named their township “Londonderry”. Many, if not most, who came to this area of NS can traced their ancestry back to these 1718 settlers, and although they went to New England from Ireland they retained their Scottish character and ways. “Nothing offended them more than to be called Irish” says John Murphy.

In New Hampshire these Scottish settlers adjusted to their new location and named their first settlement “Londonderry” after the port of the same name from which they had sailed to America. They brought with them their lowly potato which when planted in America on the virgin soil yielded well. They brought flax seed and planted it and soon set to work making linen, using dams for water power and erecting grist and lumber mills. Trade for their products developed in the Carribean Sea Islands. There was plenty of land for their children to develop, Log homes Schools and churches were erected and staffed. Large families of

8 to 12 children per family was the norm. But, with their large families, a need soon developed for more land for the sons, the most productive lands in NH were already taken up.

That was when Governor Lawrence gave them an opportunity. In Oct 1758 he placed a notice in the Boston Gazette which came to the attention of these people that 100,000 acres of interval and plough lands without the need for manuring, and without crop failures, having been developed by the Acadians, now gone, was available; also the wild adjacent lands abounded with trees of birch and oak, pine and fir etc. 100 acres would be available without cost to grantees,

(AND GET THIS! :)

THERE WOULD BE FREEDOM OF RELIGION WHICH PERMITTED ERECTION OF MEETING HOUSES FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP AND THEY COULD CHOOSE AND ELECT THEIR OWN MINISTERS TO CONDUCT DIVINE SERVICES AND ADMINISTER THE SACRAMENTS ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN SEVERAL TRADITIONS.

Further, no taxes would be levied on the subjects in the new land of NS.

Governor Lawrence's proclamation met with a quiet response. As early as April 1759 agents began to arrive seeking details and inspecting the offered lands. Land was available for up to 12,000 families in Annapolis Valley, Sackville, NB, Amherst, Yarmouth, Onslow Truro and Londonderry. Thousands of New Englanders, farmers, fishermen, and tradesmen made their way to NS. – the Pre-loyalist settlers.

In the fall of 1759 20 men came from New England up the Bay to Truro and Onslow, probably landing at the Board Landing Bridge of the Salmon River. A cairn erected on the grounds of the Palliser Restaurant in 1960 marks this movement.

The pattern of settlement in these new lands was similar to that employed in New Hampshire, years earlier. Everything was organized and regulated in Townships, which were divided into farm lots, dyke and wood lots. If the land was poor, additional quantity compensated. Lands were set aside for public use called "parades", churches, schools and burial places. E.g. The Truro Parade was what is now Victoria Square, while the Onslow parade was at the crossroads of what is now Mingo's corner, the school there was still called the "Parade" School a few years ago. Each Township appointed a Moderator (A church term) and clerk and committees to administer the business.

The majority of these 20 families settled in what was to be the Township of Londonderry in 1762. It was officially recognized as a township in 1765 by the government in Halifax. It consisted of 53,000 acres. And the Census in 1766 gave a population of 145 people in the township – all Protestants!!, 50 having arrived since 1765.

In 1763 the people of Truro and Londonderry Townships petitioned the Presbytery of Glasgow, Scotland for a minister, but the petition never reached its destination. (Maybe lost at sea! - no email then!!) So, in 1764 they applied to the Associate Synod of Scotland for ministers, and in August 1769 (5 years later) The synod agreed to appoint Rev. Daniel Cock to Truro and Rev. David Smith to Londonderry. Cock delayed taking the trip by one year, but Smith arrived in the late summer of 1771 and was able to preach from the log church erected at Folly Village in 1767.

That brings me to the last "root" connection I wish to make – The Associate Synod of the Church of Scotland and the name this very church here at Glenholme bears – "ERSKINE" !!

The records show that it was only named "Erskine" after 1865 when the present building was erected and dedicated. And that was done on the suggestion of Rev. Ebenezer Ross, the minister here at that time (1849 - 1870), who also built the Manse. He was the son of Rev. Duncan Ross who came to NS on the same vessel in 1795 as Rev. John Brown, the second minister here, in fact they were college chums. Duncan Ross took a church in West River, Pictou Co., and Brown, of course, came to succeed David Smith, who died while Brown was on passage here. Rev. Ebenezer Ross, who followed Brown, was related to, and no doubt was named after Ebenezer Erskine who formed in 1717 the Associate Synod of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland – a reform movement within the Church of Scotland. Rev. Ebenezer Ross received his formal education under Dr Thomas MacColloch at his famous Pictou Academy and Theological Training school, and was one of the students who received part of his theological training at Malpeque, PEI in the home of Rev. Dr Keir, finishing his training in Scotland and was actually ordained by Truro Presbytery in this church Oct 31, 1849. (Apparently they didn't celebrate Hallowe'en in those days !!)

It was just prior to his pastorate here that the parish of Londonderry was divided into Lower and Upper Londonderry – Lower consisting of Great Village, Portauisque and Bass River and under the ministerial leadership of Rev. James Bayne who had come to Londonderry parish to assist Rev. John Brown in his aging and failing years. Later, Rev. A.L Wyllie served Lower Londonderry, which brought the Wyllie family to this area.

Ebenezer Erskine (1680 - 1759) was a very important leader in the creation of the Associate Synod of the Church of Scotland; also, his younger brother Ralph. (1685 - 1752) Historians tell us that Ralph was actually the better preacher, being “full of the love of God and the offers of Christ in the Gospel” (See: John Brown of Haddington, by Robert Mackenzie, 1964)

The division began over a theological issue called “The Marrow Controversy”. Marrow coming from a book by the title, “The Marrow of Modern Divinity” which upheld the evangelical view that faith in Jesus Christ is the very essence of the Gospel. The Erskines and another preacher by the name of Rev. John Brown (not our John Brown, but I suspect, the one after whom he was named!) and nine others, rebuked the assembly by standing by the “Marrow Principals”

Another issue at the time was over how clergy were to be appointed to the churches. The official church – the Assembly - decided it would take from the congregations the right to call and elect their own ministers, which had been given in 1690 and was taken away by parliament in 1712. This power was given to the Patrons or landowners, and the Assembly of the Church of Scotland supported this move.

Ebenezer Erskine blazed out against such disloyalty to the church’s charter in 1732; he was thus suspended from the ministry by the Assembly. However he and brother Ralph continued to preach and administer the sacraments in their own parishes and wherever they were invited. Erskine chastised the official church for supporting patronage which allowed the wealthy land owners to select the clergy in the “burghers” or villages. This led to a further rift in the church, the “burghers” and the “anti-burghers”.

On Dec 5th 1733 they met in an Inn and formed “The Associate Presbytery” The Assembly repented of their dismissal action and attempted to get these men to return, but they refused to do so. They now had a “free platform” towards “religious liberty” and faithfully followed the course of the church courts as directed by church law rather than civil law and patronage. By 1744 the Associate Presbytery had grown to 26 ministers and they constituted themselves into a Synod. It was that Synod in 1749 that accepted David Smith as a candidate for Ministry and endorsed him for study at St Andrews University, and ordained him Oct 19, 1763. He was appointed as minister of Hope Park Church, St Andrews, and was serving there when the call came from Londonderry. He preached his last sermon there May 29th 1770.

So, these are some sketches and highlights of our roots in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and, in particular, the Associate Presbytery and Synod.

I cannot believe that the choice of Rev. David Smith as the first minister here was by accident. Like Edith Fletcher, in her book, I support the view that the Scots who migrated to Londonderry N H knew of the stands of the Associate clergy and churches and appealed for a minister from that “root stock” !!

235 years have passed since Smith came to serve the Londonderry Churches.

[Keep in mind that the present day community of Londonderry as we know it today did not even exist in 1771. Only the township carried the name Londonderry. The Londonderry Co of NS was only formed in 1847 and applied to the mining Co. only. Londonderry was only officially adopted to the area of Acadia Mines in 1903.]

These 235 years have seen many changes and we are facing the challenge of many of those changes today.

Sometimes we look at our churches and the few people who attend and support on a regular basis and get depressed. We need to hear again the truth of what Paul wrote in that passage read from Romans 11. If we feel we are a dead church, or dying branches, let us recall what Paul said:

It is not we who are the source or power of the root, it is God – If branches have broken off and seem dead because of unbelief and faith – do not lose heart, but stand firm in the faith. If God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare us if we are unfaithful. God can in His mercy, grace and kindness, graft us to the root again and bring us alive so that we can do His will and His work and produce the appropriate fruits.

I believe that we must re-examine the roots and the essentials of our faith and bring ourselves within the obedience of the Gospel. Wherever the Gospel is faithfully proclaimed, I believe, God can renew and re-invigorate us to serve His will and Purpose.

The roots of this Pastoral Charge are deep and lie within the purposes of God and His Son and Spirit. Let us give up looking at what we once were, and what we once did, and look to the future with living faith in God and Jesus Christ that will bring us renewed faith and vigor to serve Him in our time.

In 1921 at the celebration of 150 years of the work of this Pastoral Charge a Rev. Wm. Hutchinson sent a poem in honor of the occasion:

THE CHURCH THAT FAITH BUILT

**Was it “folly” to dyke the meadow lands
To shut out the swirling tide?
To fell the forests with calloused hands
And build the homes that abide?**

**But first, in the midst, with a faith serene
They reared the House of Prayer.
Though hardship come and want be keen
God should not be lacking there.**

**Church of the Fathers, Church of the Sons,
Fountain of Faith and Power.
While the tide flows and the river runs,
Our noblest, richest dower (Faith).**

Let us seek out and regain that Faith.

Sermon preached by the Rev. Lester M Settle, September 24, 2006