

St. Andrew's celebrates 150 years in Mansfield

It's unlikely many of the St. Andrew's Presbyterian faithful at the Mansfield church celebration of 150 years next Sunday, Sept. 29, will be thinking of it ? but the church survived at least one turbulent decade just to remain what it is ? Presbyterian.

That one turbulent decade was, briefly stated, one in which the majority of the congregation ? comprising Scots and Irish in the main ? opposed a succession of pastors and avoided becoming a part of the Union of the Methodist, Congregational and most of the Presbyterian to form the United Church of Canada.

Prior to that, 150 years ago, the Mansfield church was founded by settlers who, according to a history provided by Nanci Malek and Wayne Townsend at Dufferin County Museum, held family worship in their homes and congregated at homes or schools whenever a minister visited the area.

It was a scant few years before the congregation found the means to erect a log structure to serve as a church, and to build a manse on a 100-acre site adjacent where they could house resident pastors.

The manse was built in a field on the 100-acre site, and it is believed by some that the community of Mansfield was named for ?the manse in the field.?

The origin of the name might very well be that. But it is also possible that Mansfield was named in honour of Scottish-born barrister William Murray (1705-1793), the First Earl of Mansfield, who became the Lord Chief Justice of the King's Court (Supreme Court of England) and whose rulings have had an important influence on the law as we know it today.

Whatever the source of the name, the bygone congregation of St. Andrew's can take credit for its adoption.

But it's of interest to consider that Dufferin County was named for a vice-regal, as was Shelburne and many other centres.

Mansfield could be proud to honour ?The most powerful British jurist of the (18th) century, (whose) decisions reflected the Age of Enlightenment and moved England on the path to abolishing slavery and the slave trade. He advanced commercial law in ways that helped establish the nation as the world leader in industry, finance and trade. He modernised both English law and the English courts system; he sped up the system for submitting motions and reformed the way judgments were given to reduce time and expense for the parties,? according to Wikipedia.

It's unlikely, however, that many of the faithful would be concerned about the choice of community name when they come to celebrate 150 years next Sunday.

It is more likely that they will remember that the earliest family names have remained throughout the past century and a half, and there'll be hope that both the families and the church survive another 150.

By Wes Keller