

# A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES: THE PRESBYTERIANS OF ROCKLAND AND DORCHESTER

by

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## ***Some Background Information***

by

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*To fully understand the following article, it will be helpful to know that the ‘Covenanters’ were a small dissenting group within the Scottish-Irish Presbyterian tradition that claimed to represent the theology of its founders, Jean Calvin in Geneva and his disciple, John Knox, in Scotland, in its purest—and only valid—form. Among their principles and practices: 1. Virulent rejection of episcopacy (rule by bishops, as in the Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran churches) in favour of governance by a select group of lay elders or ‘presbyters’ (the Greek word for ‘elder’). 2. Simplicity of church architecture and church services with no musical instruments and no hymns, only unaccompanied or ‘a capella’ singing of the Psalms, long prayer and even longer sermons. 3. Daily family worship led by the father. 4. Strict Sabbatarianism, reserving the Lord’s Day to public worship while forbidding all unnecessary labour and frivolous entertainment. 5. An annual communion service spread over four days, organized to renew members’ faith in much the same way as revival meetings among Methodists and Baptists. 5. Insistence that Christ is the only legitimate head of both church and state. The state is to be separate from the church, but must govern according to strict Christian principles (as taught by the church); any state that does not do so is illegitimate and must be resisted.*

*Covenanters harked back to a solemn agreement (called a ‘covenant’) made in 1650 with Prince Charles Stuart, then in exile during the dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, to establish Presbyterianism as the exclusive religion of England, Ireland and Scotland when he became king. An earlier (1643) “Solemn League and Covenant” with the English Parliament against Charles’ martyred father, King Charles I, had promised the same, but it came to naught as Cromwell favoured a broadly-based Protestant church and crushed the Covenanters by military force. When, in spite of the covenant he had made as pretender, King Charles II (1660-85) imposed the episcopacy he had always believed in (moments of political opportunism aside), and the majority of Scots went along with it, many Covenanters took to holding illegal Presbyterian-style services in the countryside and were duly rewarded with persecution and even martyrdom, long remembered as “The Killing Time.” During it, numbers of refugees fled to Northern Ireland to sow the seeds of a Covenanter movement there. Following the deposition of Charles’ Roman Catholic brother, James II, and the accession of his thoroughly Protestant daughter, Mary, and her equally Protestant husband, William of Orange, in*

*the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688, the Presbyterian form of church governance and worship was restored in Scotland except for the official recognition of Christ as head of the state as well as the church. (De facto, it was now the king-in-Parliament). This time, most Covenanters, including the ministers, went along with the settlement, but a few diehards continued to resist, organizing themselves into separate cells called “United Societies” and carrying on the struggle. In the more tolerant atmosphere of the 18<sup>th</sup> century these cells reunited in both Scotland and Ireland to form what was now called the ‘Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland/Ireland.’ Among other things, its members refused to hold public office or vote in elections on the grounds that the uncovenanted state was an illegal abomination. Their traditions were brought to the New World with Scottish and Irish immigrants. The most important founder and leader of the Covenanter/Reformed Presbyterian movement in New Brunswick, and especially the Chignecto region, was the charismatic Irish missionary, Rev. Alexander Clarke.*

*Small in numbers, Covenanters found it increasingly difficult to maintain their narrow doctrines in the face of growing toleration and ecumenism among Protestants, and pressures to join the mainstream Presbyterians, already well established in Canada, finally proved overwhelming. Rev. Clarke himself took one of the first steps by voting in a provincial election, while at least one other leader in the Chignecto region served as a justice of the peace. In 1876 much of the Little Shemogue Covenanter congregation, including the minister, defected to the mainstream church. Not surprisingly, the much smaller Rockland congregation soon followed.*

## **Part 1: Rockland**

The Covenanter—or Reformed Presbyterian—was not Rockland’s first church, nor was it destined to a long duration. Today, the church site and its nearby cemetery are largely overgrown by encroaching trees, but it was once very briefly the heart of a vibrant congregation. The man most responsible for its foundation was Thomas MacKelvie (1836-1904), a Scottish Covenanter who as a young man emigrated to Saint John where he married Sarah Jane Armstrong, most likely also a Covenanter, in 1863. Shortly after their wedding, the couple moved to Sackville where MacKelvie managed a shoe store and quickly became secretary of the building committee that erected a new Covenanter church in Middle Sackville in 1870. Soon thereafter, the MacKelvies moved again, this time to Rockland. Here Thomas spread his wings as an entrepreneur in a variety of undertakings. Besides building an ample home with a fireplace in every room, he bought a farm and opened a large general store, which for a time housed the post office. He was also a partner in the Smith and MacKelvie shipbuilding and stone quarrying enterprise. The latter was located between the Petitcodiac and Memramcook rivers off the Beaumont Road. Most of its excellent building stones were exported to the United States and are said to be in some of the finest buildings in New York City.

Although there was as yet no Reformed Presbyterian church in Rockland, the MacKelvies were still firm in their Covenanter faith. In 1871, Rev. Samuel Moffett, a visiting American Covenanter minister hosted by the Chignecto’s Covenanter patriarch,

Rev. Alexander Clarke of Amherst, made a trip to Rockland. Besides the stone quarries and shipyards, he noted that MacKelvie was “still a member of the Reformed Presbyterian congregation of Saint John, of which Rev. A.M. Stavely is pastor” and that there were also other Covenanters in the area, notably Thomas and Marion Adams. Delighted, he conducted a Sabbath Covenanter service, probably in the already existing Union Church.

Inspired by this experience, MacKelvie took the initiative in building a Covenanter church in Rockland. Of course, building a church was not a novel idea in the region. The Baptists had been in Taylor Village since 1849; the Methodists came only somewhat later. There was more than one church, although the Union Church at Taylor Village came to be utilized by both Baptists and Methodists. As Edith Gillcash in her book *Taylor Village* informs us: “Many residents attended church every Sunday ... The people supported ‘the church’ rather than just going alternate Sundays to their own denominational service” Covenanters probably also used it occasionally; there is evidence that Rev. Clarke held services there in the early 1870s, not long before his death in 1874.

Rockland Covenanters petitioned the presbytery (the governing board) for recognition as a congregation and, in July 1876, Rev. S.D. Yates (Clarke’s successor), together with two other presbytery officers, came to Rockland and “organized a new congregation of thirty three members.” The minutes of the meeting are signed, “Thomas MacKelvie, Clerk.” Most likely MacKelvie was elected as an elder in order for the Rockland congregation to be regularly constituted. It may, however, have already been acting informally as a congregation for some time. In 1870, one of the MacKelvies’ eight children died and was buried in what later became the cemetery, although it may at the time have been simply part of a field close to where the church was later erected. In December of 1877 a nine-year-old boy, Robert A. Gunn, was also buried there, leaving us with the intriguing question: which came first—the congregation, the church building, or the cemetery?

The building of the church appears to have been financed largely by MacKelvie, probably from surplus income generated by the general store and stone quarries. His daughter, Grace MacKelvie Estabrooks, (*Memories of Rockland, 1992*) wrote: “my father sold a boat load of potatoes to South America. When he received more money for the potatoes than he expected, he built a church on his property” Although MacKelvie was the chief donor, another prominent figure was John Armstrong, a bachelor brother of Mrs. MacKelvie, and also the church’s precentor (the person who led the singing of the Psalms *a capella*). Although this seems like a small number of donors, the cost of building a Covenanter church was less than for other denominations, as fancy church buildings and elaborate decorations, and especially the expensive organ, were strictly forbidden by Covenanter doctrine. Grace described it as “of quaint Gothic style with family box pews having doors, or gates, to keep the children from roaming.” The building was up and the roof on sometime in 1877—the *Chignecto Post* announced in its October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1876 edition that, “the Rev. Mr. Yates is organizing a Presbyterian Church at Rockland. They are arranging for a place to worship in the spring”—but it may have been some time yet before it was completely furnished. Rev. Yates informed the presbytery in March of 1878

that the Rockland congregation did not desire the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper "dispensed among them until the new church would be [completely] ready."

Ironically perhaps, it was completed at a critical juncture in Covenanter affairs. The efforts of Rev. Yates, Reverend Clarke's successor as leader of the Chignecto Covenanters, were expended over a wide area, but his health was failing. Attempts to find interim substitutes came to naught. Already frail, Covenanter forces became steadily weaker. At the same time, the newly formed (in 1875) Presbyterian Church in Canada—in which Covenanters had no voice and took no part—was expanding its proselytizing efforts into the region. By 1880, Moncton Presbyterian minister Rev. Joseph Hogg was actively encouraging Covenanters to attend mainline Presbyterian services. Writing in 1881, he reported on a communion service in Dorchester with considerable satisfaction: "Five were admitted for the first time... Mr. And Mrs. MacKelvie, Mr. And Mrs. Adams [joined us]. I have no doubt but that the Rockland people will cast in their lot with us." When Rev. Samuel Crothers Murray of Murray Corner, also a former Covenanter, was serving in the summer of 1884, the congregation at Rockland was firmly in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, although at Dorchester, "there was [as yet] no Presbyterian church building."

Almost imperceptibly, within a few years after it was built, the Rockland Covenanter church was absorbed into the Presbyterian Church in Canada, but without any property transfer. For a time, monthly Presbyterian services were held there. Still, there was no organ until 1917. By that time, the Dorchester Presbyterians had long since had one, and in fact were endowing St. James with a new one. It was duly reported that the old organ "was presented to the church at Rockland on condition that the church building become the property of the Presbyterian Church of Canada."

Life proceeded in the MacKelvie household, sometimes with more than a touch of tragedy. Two more of their children died in 1879 (of diphtheria), followed by an infant daughter in 1883. All were buried in the Rockland Cemetery. Of the four who attained adulthood, two sons left for the west, while their sister married a Presbyterian minister, Rev. L.W. Parker, and moved to Milford, Nova Scotia. Only one of the children, son Norman, stayed in Rockland. Thomas continued for a while in the shipbuilding and stone quarrying business, but by the mid to late 1880s both were in full decline as steel ships replaced wooden sailing vessels and the Americans slapped a crippling tax on imported stone. When these industries collapsed, many Rockland families moved away.

Perhaps anticipating this, Thomas MacKelvie made a significant career shift as early as 1877 when he was appointed general agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society for both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. He traveled widely in both provinces and received a yearly salary of \$400 from each of the provincial auxiliaries. His devotion to Christianity as well as his business experience and his many other talents assured him of success in this career, which he pursued for seventeen years. His annual reports are the chief body of writings he left, and from them we learn that some of his travels were not without adventure. He tells of one memorable occasion after he had "addressed a good audience at Kingston, New Brunswick, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January (1888):"

The 12<sup>th</sup> was bitterly cold and my ear was frozen while walking to the station. Owing to the heavy snow drifts, no passenger car was attached to the locomotive on the "Kent Northern," and I had a two hours ride on the tender to Weldford (near Harcourt, NB) with feet as cold as ice, and seated on a heap of coal, enveloped alternately in clouds of snow and steam. The locomotive, snorting and furiously struggling like a mechanical maniac and bouncing spasmodically ahead, made one momentarily expect a crash or at least an upset in a snow bank; but I reached Welsford unscathed (*Sixty -Eighth Report of the NB Auxiliary Bible Society [1888], 44*).

Still traveling as an agent for the British and Foreign Bible Society, MacKelvie was staying over with his daughter and son-in-law in Milford one night in 1904 when he died, at the age of sixty-eight. His funeral was held in the Rockland church and he was buried in the Rockland Presbyterian Cemetery. Among the mourners were Rev. Dr. Charles Stewart, Dean of Theology at Mount Allison University, and representatives of the Bible Society from Saint John and Halifax. One of the ministers "spoke in terms of warm affection and highest appreciation of Mr. MacKelvie and his work, dwelling upon his large interest in the [Bible] Society, his generous disposition and his uprightness" (*Presbyterian Witness, 6 August 1904*). Mrs. MacKelvie and her brother, John Armstrong, continued to live in the Rockland home for some time. Mrs. MacKelvie died in 1910, John in 1918. They, too, were buried in the Rockland Presbyterian Cemetery.

Norman MacKelvie took over the general store as well as the farm, and added another farm on top of that. In 1908 he married Maude Letitia Farrer in the Rockland Presbyterian Church, a union that would be blessed by seven children, but also touched by tragedy. The two large farms required a good deal of help, and to secure it MacKelvie engaged a family from Scotland, providing them with a home right on the farm. One of their small children was very ill when they arrived in 1914, but Maude patiently nursed it back to health. Unfortunately, her own small children caught the disease and the three of them joined their grandparents in the cemetery established by her father-in-law. Maude herself fell critically ill and the Board of Health quarantined the home. Nurses came from Moncton and lived in part of the Presbyterian Church during her long illness. Mr. George Shannon took care of the farm animals, living in the hay barn. He milked the large herd of cows, pouring the milk into the brook, as it could not leave the farm.

Even by the time of Norman and Maude's marriage, the Rockland congregation had shrunk considerably and so it made more regular use of the St. James Presbyterian Church in Dorchester, built in 1884. Norman was elected a trustee there in 1905 and later became one of its most respected elders. By the time of his children's deaths, the Rockland church had ceased to be a place of worship, even occasionally. Sometime after 1919/20 it was abandoned entirely, the door fastened shut. A family member recalls the time the door somehow got opened and sheep found shelter in it for a couple of nights. The memory of this invasion haunted Norman MacKelvie for a long time thereafter.

There was, however, an afterlife for the forsaken building. In November of 1925, the United (formerly Presbyterian) Church in Riverside burned to the ground. Fortunately, Alonzo Stiles, a prominent member of the Riverside congregation, was a good friend of

the MacKelvies, themselves now prominent members of the Dorchester Presbyterian congregation. Negotiations followed and the Rockland church was dismantled, loaded on a large scow, and floated down the Memramcook River and across Shepody Bay, landing close to Riverside. There it was unloaded, reassembled and, with some alterations, rebuilt on the spot where the former Riverside United Church had stood. “The new edifice, especially the interior, presents a handsome appearance, the gothic windows of leaded stained glass being particularly pleasing” (*United Churchman*, 17 November 1926, p.8). It remained a United Church until 1975 when it was purchased by the Masonic Order and the Order of Eastern Star and refurbished as a lodge, opening in 1977. In 2002 the Riverside Masons joined the Howard Lodge in Hillsborough. Today, perhaps as a sign of the times, it is occupied by the Winston Churchill Chapter No. 19 Order of the Eastern Star.

Although continuing to farm and run the store into the mid-1920s, by 1929 Norman and Maude found it necessary to close the store and sell their two farms to the Wartime Settlement Board. They moved to Moncton to better educate their four remaining children. Norman kept the deed to the right of way to the Rockland Cemetery as well as to the land where the Rockland Presbyterian Church had stood. As long as he lived in Rockland, he kept the cemetery trimmed and cared for, but he found it increasingly difficult to interest others in it, as many folks had moved away. Finally, the family grown and gone, Norman and Maude moved to Sackville in 1935. Here Norman died in 1937 and was buried in the Sackville Rural Cemetery. After his death, Maude, feeling it a shame that the senior MacKelvies’ stones were being lost to the forest, arranged for them to be moved to Sackville as a lasting memorial to Thomas and Sarah Jane MacKelvie and their infant children, as well as to John Armstrong. The tombstone of Norman and Maude MacKelvie, also in the Sackville Rural Cemetery, is inscribed with the names of their three infant children. Maude MacKelvie died in 1966.

## **Part 2: St. James Presbyterian Church in Dorchester.**

By the time St. James came to be built, Methodist, Anglican and Baptist churches had long since been established in Dorchester. It is quite possible that some of the village’s earlier inhabitants were Presbyterian, but in the absence of a Presbyterian congregation within practical traveling distance they would, until the 1870s, have either joined one of the existing denominations or satisfied themselves with private worship. As noted in Part I, a Covenanter or Reformed Presbyterian church was built in Sackville in 1870 and another in Rockland in 1876, so Dorchester’s ‘closet Presbyterians’ may have attended one or the other of them when they were able. In any case, the embers of Dorchester Presbyterianism were somehow kept warm enough to ignite when fresh fuel was added in the form of the newly established (1875) Presbyterian Church in Canada, itself an amalgamation of earlier Presbyterian factions.

They were fanned into flame by Rev. Joseph Hogg, the new and aggressively evangelical Presbyterian minister in Moncton. According to an oral tradition that I cannot confirm from documentary evidence, he conducted some services in Dorchester in 1880—whether in one of the Protestant churches or in someone’s house is unclear—that stirred a

number of potential recruits. “One old gentleman, then, for the first time, heard a Presbyterian sermon and was highly pleased with it” [J.D. McKay, “Dorchester Mission Church,” *Presbyterian Witness*, 13 October 1894]. In April of the following year Rev. Hogg was able to report to a meeting of the Saint John presbytery (the governing body of the church in New Brunswick) “that an application had been made by certain families in Dorchester for preaching,” and that they had specifically requested himself and Rev. J.D. Murray of Buctouche to officiate. By May the presbytery was pleased to learn that Rev. Hogg “had fulfilled his appointment at Dorchester” and, after giving him due praise, it empowered him “to take such steps [as] to further the interests of the church in that locality.” It appears that he did so with zeal, and the Dorchester flock grew accordingly. In November of the same year it had grown large enough that the presbytery “authorized Mr. Hogg to dispense the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper and to ordain elders at Dorchester.” In a long letter written later that month to an unknown recipient—probably someone in Shediac—Hogg expressed his satisfaction with the way things were going. “I had Communion Services at Dorchester on the 20<sup>th</sup> [November]. Five were admitted for the first time to full Communion. Three of them were baptized at the same time. Others were received from the Reformed Presbyterian Church. I think our prospects are fair in that neighbourhood.”

From this it is clear that Rev. Hogg targeted the Rockland Covenanters (Reformed Presbyterians) from the beginning of the mission. As we learned in Part I, Covenanters were a splinter group that had once adamantly rejected mainstream Presbyterianism for not insisting that Christ is head of the state as well as the church, but by the late 1870s their resolve was weakening in the face of declining numbers and disheartening defections, and the good Reverend was apparently determined to deliver the *coup de grace*—administered, of course, with Christian charity. “I have no doubt,” he continued, “but that the Rockland people will cast in their lot with us. Mr & Mrs McKelvie and Mr & Mrs Adams did so at our last meeting in Dorchester and more of the people have signified their intention of so doing. More of them would have joined us on that occasion but the weather was so unfavourable that they could not well get to Dorchester.” As also mentioned in Part I, the McKelvies (Thomas and Sarah) and the Adams (Thomas and Marion) were pillars of the Rockland Covenanter congregation; it was McKelvie, in fact, who built the Covenanter church there. McKelvie’s conversion to mainstream Presbyterianism was complete, and his reward condign: He was elected one of the two elders of the Dorchester congregation, thus continuing a position he had held in Rockland. The other elder was John Fraser.

With the institution of elders late in 1881 the Dorchester Presbyterians became a duly constituted congregation, but as yet they had no church building of their own. In an act of ecumenical generosity typical of the village, the Methodists allowed them to use theirs, and they also met in Robb’s Hall. Only monthly services were held until May 1883, when the Mission Board appointed a catechist (a teacher but not an ordained minister), a Mr. Carson, to serve in Dorchester and Rockland for the summer. Rockland still had its Covenanter church and it was now used once a month for mainstream Presbyterian services. At this time Rockland and Dorchester made up a joint Mission Station [*Acts and Proceedings, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1882*] and would continue to do so for

some time.

Plans for a church in Dorchester clearly emerged in 1884 when the congregation had grown large enough to warrant one. The initiative came from Rev. Godfrey Shore, the Saint John presbytery Superintendent of Missions, and catechist Samuel Crothers Murray who had been appointed by the Mission Board to work in Dorchester and Rockland that summer. Beginning in August, several meetings were held in Robb's Hall, most of them chaired by Rev. Shore. The decision was made "to try and build a church ... to be situated in Dorchester village." A committee was appointed to select a suitable site and a subscription list opened: \$280 was pledged at once. At succeeding meetings various plans submitted by R.C. Donald of Moncton were examined, as well as estimates of costs involved. When potential sites came to be discussed and worries mounted over the price, Dorchester's ecumenical spirit showed itself in its full splendour. The Baptists even offered to share their church with the Presbyterians, but this was declined with thanks. In the end, the Presbyterians did not have to buy a site. All but a small portion of it was donated by W. K. Chapman, H. R. Emmerson and Alexander Robb, none of them members of the faith, a fact duly noted and appreciated [*Presbyterian Witness*, 4 October 1884]. Chapman and Robb were Anglicans while Emmerson was a leading Baptist. All this was in good Dorchester tradition. John Hickman, a brother of the shipbuilding entrepreneur who once owned the Bell Inn and a vestryman in the Anglican Church, donated the land on which the Baptist church stands, while Albert J. Smith, also an Anglican, did a similar good deed for the Catholics in 1880. The Presbyterians were delighted with the location and commissioned catechist Murray to write a letter of gratitude.

Among the early matters considered by the new congregation at its annual meeting in September 1884 were the appointment of trustees and the question of who was eligible to serve. It was decided that they would be "male adherents who are enrolled as regular contributors to church funds and members, male and female, in full communion." The trustees were duly appointed and authorized to receive the deeds of the church and to borrow money sufficient to meet liabilities without mortgaging the church land and premises. Eleven members and adherents signed the accompanying petition: John Fraser, James Reid, James McDougall, Nathan Tattrie, Scott Dickie, Alex Sutherland, Dr. J. E. Church, William Ross, G. H. Dalzell, John Alynay, Mrs. John Fraser and Mrs. James Reid. As noted above, John Fraser was one of the two elders, Thomas McKelvie being the other. Curiously, McKelvie's name was not on the Dorchester listing. His contributions were probably made through the Rockland Presbyterian group, about whose day-to-day activities we know next to nothing. It was also decided to name the new church after the apostle St. James. Plans were drawn up and the "Laying of the Corner Stone of the Dorchester Presbyterian Church—a Notable Event," took place on 23 September 1884, even making the headlines of the *Chignecto Post* [25 September 1884].

With their Dorchester and Rockland flocks safely in the fold, the mainstream Presbyterians next looked to bring in the Covenanter holdouts in Sackville, and no one wielded the shepherd's staff more effectively on this mission than catechist Samuel Crothers Murray, a former Covenanter himself. Born in 1857—at Murray Corner,



appropriately enough—he attended local schools and became a schoolteacher. “At 19,” he wrote, “I made a public profession of faith, and had united with the Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanter) Church at Murray Corner, my home congregation.” After graduating from Mount Allison in 1881 he decided to enter the ministry and so went to Princeton to study theology. While there he determined to leave the Covenanters, not, apparently, for doctrinal reasons, but because “the Reformed Church had grown weak, and I decided that I should be identified with an expanding church—the Presbyterian Church in Canada.” Accordingly he “asked for a transfer to the home congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Canada” at Oulton’s Corner. About his Dorchester experience, Murray wrote: “I had a good summer in 1884. Before I left I visited the Presbyterians of Sackville, a small group that still adhered to the Reformed Presbyterian Church.” Murray understood their situation: they were faithful followers of a failing cause. “I preached three Sundays and from that time forward, the Sackville Presbyterians cast in their lot with the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and become one station with the Dorchester charge.” Thus, beginning in 1885, Dorchester, Rockland and Sackville were organized into one Mission Station [*A&P*, 1885]. Small wonder that Murray was termed “a very successful catechist” [*Presbyterian Witness*, 4 October 1884], and that the Mission Station invited him to serve as its minister when he had completed his theological studies at Princeton. He did not accept, however, choosing instead to go to Western Canada, where he had a distinguished career. When he left Dorchester St. James was not yet built, but, he wrote, “The church is assured.”

Assured it was. “The Opening of [a] New Presbyterian Church at Dorchester,” took place July 8 1885 [*Daily Transcript*, 9 July 1885]. A number of clergy were present at the two inaugural services, among them Rev. Hogg. The church was described as “a neat, unpretending edifice, 40 x 28 feet, with arched ceiling, with a neat tower and spire over the doorway. It is seated for 180 people, but will comfortably accommodate 200. The seats, pulpit, and base ceiling are of native ash, and the windows of coloured glass. The total cost, including the portion of ground that had to be purchased, is in the neighbourhood of \$2000.”

In spite of these promising beginnings, the Presbyterians continued to face the challenge of small numbers and the difficulty of securing a regular ministry. This led to a series of amalgamations and proposed amalgamations, not all of them free of controversy. Rockland was the first to go. The old Covenanter church remained there until 1926 but after 1892 it was no longer part of the Mission Station although it hosted occasional services, weddings and funerals. On the other hand, the Dorchester congregation remained healthy for some time. At the close of its annual meeting in 1892, Rev Herdman, then serving, “made a few remarks expressing his pleasure at hearing of the satisfactory condition in which the church stood financially, being entirely free from debt. He thought the congregation deserved credit for doing so much, considering the smallness of numbers.” This was echoed by a fellow Presbyterian clergyman, J. D. MacKay: “At Dorchester and vicinity are some seventeen families, which adhere to the Presbyterian Church. The number is small, yet this Mission Station for zeal, loyalty, and liberality, is perhaps unsurpassed by any other Maritime Synod, and excelled by few congregations. We own a beautiful little church, ideal in design, finish and

furnishings...and clear of debt” [*Presbyterian Witness*, 13 October 1894].

Clearly, enthusiasm was not lacking, but the ministry was a bigger challenge, and the Saint John presbytery attempted to address it. At a special meeting held in St. James in February 1896, Rev. James Ross, the presbytery’s Superintendent of Missions, “spoke of the desire of the Synod Committee to group the mission stations and to have ordained missionaries located at certain places who could have oversight of two or more such stations.” He outlined two possible options: 1.that Dorchester connect with Riverside or 2.that it connect with Shediac. The response was somewhat less than enthusiastic. “Messrs Fraser, Reid, Tattrie and others thought that we are better situated as at present than we would be under either of the plans suggested. The distance is too great to Shediac, even in summer, and the difficulty of reaching Albert Co. in winter, as well as the long distance, makes that scheme quite impracticable. After further discussion it was moved by Mr. Fraser, seconded by Mr. Reid and carried unanimously, “That this congregation desires to remain as now constituted in preference to being connected with either Shediac or Riverside.”

Thus, the Dorchester-Sackville Mission Station struggled on by itself, determined to maintain the principles of Presbyterianism, neatly summarized by J.D. MacKay: “We believe in a church, which stands for simplicity in its forms of worship, honestly in the methods of support, and scripturalness and scholarship in its teachings. We remind ourselves that we are an integral part of such a church, and take courage” [*Presbyterian Witness*, 13 October 1894]. The early ministers and catechists like Rev. Hogg and Samuel Crothers Murray must have done their work well: the Mission’s faith in its principles was still strong enough in 1925 to resist pressures from other Presbyterians to join the Methodists and Congregationalists to form the United Church of Canada, even though their own minister, Rev. Christopher Munro, who had been serving in Sackville and Dorchester since 1923, was among the defectors. (Samuel Crothers Murray made a similar ‘leap of faith’). Munro became the United Church minister in Riverside and, perhaps in a final symbolic act, was probably involved in moving the old Rockland Covenanter church across to there, as described in Part I.

Although the Mission had rejected administrative union with the congregations of Shediac and Riverside in 1896, there seems to have been no resistance to a similar arrangement with Port Elgin many years later when the Great Depression brought a precipitous decline in prosperity, while the advent of the automobile made commuting between small rural centres easier and more practical. In 1939 the decision was taken to combine the Presbyterian congregation in Port Elgin with those of Sackville and Dorchester to form a single three-point charge. At first the manse was located in Port Elgin, the largest of the three congregations, but in 1967 it was moved to Sackville where the influx of Mount Allison students, among other factors, had put the Sackville Presbyterians in the numerical lead. The St. James congregation fully supported the merger and faithfully assisted in the building of a new manse in Sackville in the mid 1960s. As late as 1946 St. James was still doing well enough to make a small addition to the church, but the war had taken its toll. Numbers grew smaller and smaller until a meeting was called in early 1968 to discuss whether to amalgamate with Sackville or

dissolve the Dorchester congregation altogether. After due discussion, the latter course was adopted with the proviso that if the church property was to be disposed of, organizations in the Dorchester community be contacted and given first chance to acquire it. Thus, "on or about May 21, 1968, the monies in the account of St. James Presbyterian Church, Dorchester, N.B. were transferred to St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Sackville, N.B., at which time our church was permanently closed."

### **Epilogue by W. Eugene Goodrich, a Past President of WHS**

After it had languished for some years in an increasingly dilapidated condition, Presbyterian authorities in Saint John deeded St. James to the Westmorland Historical Society. This occurred at a most opportune time, as we knew exactly what to do with the building. During the 1970s Pam Black, a passionate life long weaver, established a textile studio in the Beachkirk United Church in Upper Cape after it had been similarly decommissioned. There she began amassing a wonderful and diverse collection of artefacts representing not only the weaving and textile traditions, but also examples of the other kinds of craftsmanship that facilitated daily life in a pre-industrial agrarian society. By 1978 the Beachkirk Fibrecraft Museum, as she called it, included such gems as a hand-made loom dating from about 1800, a complete set of all the tools required to turn raw fibre into cloth (carders, breaks, clock swifts, spinning wheels etc.), a fine collection of historic textiles, many workshop and farming tools such as hand made rakes, lathes etc., and much else besides. It was valued at \$100,000 and Pam began to worry about its security and eventual fate when she could no longer look after it. She offered it to the Westmorland Historical Society if and when St. James could be restored and renovated into suitable museum space. Under the leadership of Sylvia Yeoman and Alice Folkins the Society procured a number of grants from the provincial government and began the restoration, which included having the beautiful stained glass windows completely redone by Cuppon's Studio in Saint John. A number of local people were hired to work on the project while our friends at the Westmorland Institute contributed a new paintjob through their work release programme. By 1985 all was ready and Pam's collection was moved to St. James where it is lovingly preserved and proudly displayed as the Beachkirk Collection. Together with the expert hands-on demonstrations offered for many years by Betty Adams and more recently by Denyse Milliken, it has become a valuable part of our museum experience.