

History of St. George's Church, Georgeville Nova Scotia

This venerable old church where you sit tonight dates back to the 1850's. Originally, there was a chapel at Morar that was constructed around 1830. It was situated about two miles east of here. The first pioneers, disbanded Barra soldiers and the first Highland Catholic families, were buried at the site. The cemetery was abandoned when the present church was built and some head stones still stand at that location.

The first resident priest of St. George's Parish was Father Alexander MacGillivray. He was stricken with TB and had to relinquish the pastorate of Grand Narrows in June of 1853 and come to live with his mother at Morristown. He was named pastor of St. Columba, Lakevale, St. Mary's, Malignant Brook (now called Maryvale) and the chapel at Morar. Father MacGillivray was a dying man and could do little but attend to the most urgent calls of his new parishioners. He died on October 8, 1854 and is buried in the old cemetery on Main Street in Antigonish. After his death, the new parish of St. George temporarily reverted to the care of the pastor of Arisaig.

Father Hugh MacDonald took charge as resident priest on September 5, 1856. It was he who built the present glebe house at Georgeville. On October 1, 1858, he was succeeded by Father Andrew MacGillivray. A note signed by him in an old register states "High Mass was celebrated for the first time in St. George's Cape George (in old Morar chapel), by his Lordship Bishop Mackinnon on May 29th, 1859. On the same day, the sites for the new church and cemetery were laid out. A year or so later the foundation of the present Georgeville church had been completed and on Sunday, July 22, 1860, Bishop MacKinnon laid its cornerstone. A Sealed bottle containing several coins of the realm and a document in Latin and English was buried under the cornerstone. The document made the usual ceremonial references and then listed the names of the following laymen: Peter MacKenzie, architect, John Smith, framer. Thomas Brown, mason, Hugh MacDonald, Alexander MacDougall, John MacLean, and Donald MacNeil, committee men. The Bishop offered Mass on a temporary altar erected on the site and five priests were present and "a large assemblage of people". The vestry of this church was part of the old chapel in Morar and was moved to this site.

It is unclear when the first mass was offered in this church but one may theorize that it was shortly before the end of the year 1860 (most likely a Christmas celebration). As was the case of many other new churches, there was still much work to be done and it was almost a decade before the church was completed. At the time there were a large number of parishioners. Exact figures are not available but at one point there were 46 families in the Back Settlement alone. Before the construction of Holy Rosary Church, the faithful from Cape George Point would walk to Georgeville on Saturday night, spend the night with friends here and attend Mass on Sunday morning. At the beginning of World War 1, seventy-nine young men from Georgeville Parish volunteered (seven were wounded and three were killed).

One can only guess at the number of baptisms, marriages and funerals that have taken place within these walls. Mass was celebrated here to say good-bye to the young men of the Parish at the beginning of two World Wars and to welcome them home again. There are two recorded instances of fires threatening the Church, one in the 1930's and again in 1947. Each time, the men of the parish kept a 24 hour vigil (often with buckets of water on the roof) to save the church.

In the 1960's, major renovations took place. Most of the old altar was removed and the original steeple and cross replaced with a smaller one. The photograph on the back of this page shows the original church as it was around the year 1940