

A History of St Marks Church

Excerpted from: The Anglican Church in Calgary, Church Activities 1878 – 1974

Century Calgary Publications, 1975

and

the St Mark's Church 50th Anniversary brochure (1962)

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St. Mark's Church, the first wooden church built in Calgary, was dedicated by Bishop Cyprian Pinkham on Wednesday, October 6, 1912. Present at the service were Ven. Archdeacon J. W. Tims, D.D., Canon A. J. B. Dewdney, Canon G. H. Hogbin and the Rev. W. G. James, then rector of St. Stephen's Anglican Church, Calgary.

There were 95 persons present and the offertory amounted to \$19.55. The church building cost \$1,525, the stove \$16, chairs \$60, organ \$60, prayer books and vestments \$13.50, and the bell \$55.

Regular services began at St. Mark's on the 21st Sunday after Trinity, October 27, 1912. Holy Communion being celebrated at 11:00am by the Rev. G. Bousefield. After this date Rev. J. Thompson, curate at St. Stephen's, took charge and later became rector of St. Mark's, together with St. Martin's Church in the Killarney District of West Calgary.

The first confirmation class prepared by Rev. J. W. Thompson and confirmed at the hands of Bishop Pinkham, was held on Thursday in Holy Week 1915. There were eight candidates.

The first congregational meeting was held on January 26, 1913, followed by the first Vestry meeting later in the evening.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact starting date of the church groups but the vestry was asking the women's group for money as early as March, 1913, so it would seem that these organizations are nearly as old as the church itself.

There is no accurate record of when the first parish hall was built but it is noted in the vestry minutes of August 12, 1913, that the rector opened a general discussion on the need for one. On January 12, 1914, there is record of the vestry having established a hall fund, separate from regular vestry funds. Apparently the first hall followed shortly.

Rev. J. W. Thompson resigned on October 25, 1915, and Rev. C. W. Horne (later Canon Horne), the rector of Christ Church took the evening services while the 11:00am services were discontinued temporarily.

From the records available, it would seem that Rev. T. B. Winter (later Canon Winter) took over as acting rector of St. Mark's from June until November in 1916 when he went overseas as an army chaplain. Rev. C. W. Horne from Christ Church came back on another temporary basis until September 1917.

There was a considerable amount of discussion regarding the closing of St. Mark's as a parish and only through the efforts of such stalwarts as Messrs. Miller, Gale, Richmond and Leslie were they able to continue worship here, if somewhat spasmodic.

In February, 1918 Rev. Canon Gale from St. John's, East Calgary, volunteered his services every Tuesday and this continued until August, 1918, when Rev. E. Cox Clarke, then retired, agreed to fill in at the 11:00am services, until a permanent rector could be appointed. Mr. Clarke continued on a temporary basis until ill health forced his retirement early in 1919. There were few, if any services held from Easter until September 1919 when Rev. H. H. Wilford was appointed rector. The Vestry even went so far as to rent a house for the rector at \$25 per month – Rev. Canon Gale having signed the lease.

In the summer of 1920 a meeting was held between the vestry and the women's guild to discuss St. Mark's becoming a self-supporting parish. It was further suggested that the sister parish of St. Martin's make the move also.

It took almost 30 years to implement.

On April 30, 1922, there is record of the death of the first rector, Rev. J. W. Thompson. Mr. Thompson died at Keith Sanatorium and was buried from St. Mark's Church by Mr. Wilford.

On May 1, 1923, a new rectory was leased at 1801 – 33rd Avenue Southwest. The rent was \$35 per month but the vestry would only pay \$30, the new rector being responsible for the balance.

On December 30, 1926, H.H. Wilford resigned as Rector of St. Mark's and St. Martin's to return to his native England, the resignation effective from February 1st, 1927.

Rev. Arthur S. Wiley from Winnipeg accepted the call to St. Mark's and St. Martin's and started his duties on March 15, 1927. Mr. Wiley's induction service was held on March 22.

The following is an excerpt taken from Mr. Miller's "History of St. Mark's", written for the 25th anniversary in 1937:

"In Rev. Mr. Wiley's time the idea of re-orienting the church was evolved, apparently what was acceptable to the 'high church' was not so to the 'low (church)', thus the East-End became the West-End and vice-versa. This meant working "bees" in close succession between Sundays but the job was achieved and we have faced "Mecca" ever since."

On November 30, 1927, Bishop Sherman re-dedicated the church, and while the service attracted 72 parishioners, the collection only amounted to \$8.05.

Rev. Mr. Wiley resigned his care of St. Mark's and St. Martin's on October 13, 1931, and Rev. R. C. Brown became rector on October 25 of the same year. No vestry records are available for this period in

the history of St. Mark's but the parish register indicates that Mr. Brown (later Canon Brown) was inducted on April 30, 1931. Monthly contributions averaged only about \$50 to \$70.

Once again quoting from Mr. Miller's 1937 booklet, here is what was written about Rev. Brown: "A happy memory to many, especially the young people. Convincing preacher. Regretfully spurred to bigger fields."

Mr. Brown left St. Mark's and St. Martin's on July 15, 1934, and the "bigger fields" have taken him to many parishes over the years.

Rev. Robert Axon (later Archdeacon Axon) took over as rector on September 2, 1934, and many firsts were recording during his stay as Minister. One of the "first" is on Christmas Eve, 1934, the first midnight communion service ever held in an Anglican Church in Calgary, took place at St. Mark's with Mr. Axon officiating. There were 71 in attendance on that noteworthy service.

A highlight that Archdeacon Axon probably remembered well was the relining of the old hall walls which took place during his stay at St. Mark's. It was recorded that: "Rev. Axon's black cloth turned to gray under the avalanche of flying plaster."

Archdeacon Axon left the parishes of St. Mark's and St. Martin's on June 14, 1936, but we are pleased and proud he did return...and he and Mrs. Axon were among the favorites of the faithful attendees.

On October 2, 1936, Rev. Frederick Vaughn-Birch (later Canon) was inducted as rector. During Mr. Vaughn-Birch's stay, the 25th anniversary was celebrated. At the anniversary church service, held October 6, 1937, Bishop Sherman preached to an overflow crowd of 158 persons, the largest attendance recorded up to that time.

Mr. Vaughn-Birch must have faced a particularly difficult task during his term at St. Mark's, what with so many young people gone to war and further just coming out of a terrible depression. It is noted regretfully that there were many 8:00am services where no one attended at all, and attendance was down considerably at the other services.

When reading Mr. Vaughn-Birch's letter to the parishioners, one cannot help but admire his spirit, never-ending faith and sheer determination to carry on.

The following is taken from one of his letters in 1940: "St. Mark's is a struggling church, but it is probably more alive in some ways than any church in the city. I have tried to make it possible for everyone to have the help of the Church and God bless everyone of you who are helping me to do this. Some of you tell me that I am too serious about my job, well it's not the services and ministrations I am concerned about, but a church is a business too, and I have, therefore, to be a business man as well, and it is a wonder that my "bald spot" isn't any larger."

A copy of the 1939 budget showed an expected income of \$1,769.77, which included a whopping \$1,220 for rector's stipend. Later records reveal that the rector received less than \$1,000 that year.

Mr. Vaughn-Birch left in April, 1941, moving to High River. The Rev. J. R Davies succeeded him that same month. He was the first of four ministers who attended the needs of parishioners through the difficult war years. Canon W. E. Herbert took over in December 1943 and then Rev. R. G. Spellman

helped on a temporary basis from June to October 1946. The Rev. Major W.H. Morgan came to St. Mark's and stayed until June 1947.

On June 23, 1947, the Rev. W. E. Askew was inducted as Rector at St Mark's and St. Martin's. There were many post-war problems but St. Mark's seemed finally to start to come into its own. Quoted is Mr. Askew's message taken from the first monthly bulletin issued by St. Mark's Church in March, 1950. "There is only one way for our Church to go in 1950 and ensuing years, and that is ahead. Let's everyone get ahead and push. Our objective: - a new church. It is a worthwhile goal to shoot for, so let's shoot straight and hard. Support the organizations behind your Church and have fun while you are doing so."

In the fall of 1951 it was decided to build a new church. This was a momentous occasion at any time in the life of any Church but even so since the Church only had \$2,000.00 in the bank. The sod for the new Church was turned by Bishop Calvert on May 14, 1952. Prayer brought in much needed finances to pay for building materials which had been ordered. On March 31, 1953, Bishop Calvert officiated at the Dedication of the new Church. A congregation of 500 attended the unforgettable service.

It was decided early in 1953 that St. Mark's and St. Martin's would attempt to become self-supporting parishes. Mr. Askew resigned and Rev. Murray Starr took over until August, 1953. The Rev. R. N. Wright took over in September of that year, after the Rectory at 1807 33rd Avenue SW was purchased. These were difficult financial times as St. Mark's had gone into considerable financial debt in building the Church and buying the Rectory. Laying the Cornerstone of the new Church was delayed by two years due to financial issues but was finally achieved in September, 1954. Mr. Wright showed great leadership and so it was with regret that he resigned in December, 1956. His replacement was Rev. Gordon Hendra, who was inducted on March 3rd, 1957 by Bishop Calvert, assisted by Archdeacon Axon.

In the summer of 1957 the pipe organ was purchased from St Augustine's in Lethbridge. In May, 1960, the sod was turned for the new Parish Hall. The home and property next door was purchased to build the Hall. The building at 1816 33rd Avenue SW became the new Rectory. In October, 1960, the new Hall was dedicated by Bishop Calvert.

For 49 years, Walter St. John Miller, who died July 6, 1961, in Victoria B.C., was a member of St. Mark's Church. He was on the first vestry of the parish and was an honorary life member at the time of his death. Over the years, Mr. Miller served in nearly every office in the church. His service, over almost half a century, was climaxed by his key role in building of the new church and the new parish hall. He also obtained the stained-glass Chancel windows, which were dedicated in June, 1961. Mr. Miller had designed and hand-painted a scale drawing of the stained-glass, and arranged for the windows to be specially made in England.

As of the 50th Anniversary of St. Mark's in 1962, Rev. Hendra was still in charge. Church leadership at that time included well-known names like: Archdeacon Axon, Gordon White, Jack Routledge, Bert Mould, Jack Morris and Alan Gale. Some of these men continued to guide the Church to its 75th anniversary in 1987 and 90th anniversary in 2002.

In 2012, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of an Anglican presence in the Marda Loop community of Calgary. This event was made possible by the amalgamation of St Philip the Evangelist Church and St Mark's in 2007. The resulting Church is called **St Mark and St Philip Anglican Church.**

The words that Rev. Wright wrote in his first bulletin to the parish in 1953, seems as appropriate today as when he wrote it: **“Expect great things and we will achieve them; I of you and you of me. Let us go forward in the days which lie before us to make our church a house of prayer, a temple where the praises of God ring out from thankful hearts. Let us foster and create such enterprises in our parish life together as will show to the world about us, that we are workmen that need not be ashamed. “**

Highlights of the first 50 years (from the St Mark's Church records)

April 7, 1913 – It is recorded that the first communion silver was donated by the women's group at St. Mark's and St. Stephen's, the altar cross by Mr. Walter St. John Miller.

Mrs. Miller recalled that the original altar frontals in the old church were made from cut white velvet which had been part of Queen Victoria's wedding gown.

February 3, 1914 – The first audited report showed: “That while our finances are not exactly in the pink of condition they were not too bad considering the year just past.”

July 16, 1914 – “Owing to the bank balance being not enough to meet all payments, it was decided to pay them all except the rector's stipend and to pay him \$25 on account. The rector then read a letter from the Bishop of Calgary stating that a grant from the Colonial and Continental Church Society which had been asked for by the rector would be forthcoming, this grant to be used for stipend only. This met with much approval by all present.”

September 7, 1915 – “It was suggested that the hall be used for social purposes and that a rifle range might be popular. City by-laws prevented this and the proposal was shelved.”

September 5, 1917 – “Concern was expressed by the vestry over the possibility of temporary closing of St. Mark's as Rev. Mr. Horne felt he could no longer look after Christ Church as well as St. Mark's.”

November 7, 1917– St Mark’s temporarily had no rector and the lay-readers carried on. “It is agreed to pay any clergy who at any time may conduct a service in the church, the sum of \$5, which they are at liberty to return if they desire.”

January 12, 1920 – The report of the Sunday school at the annual meeting stated the total number of children at 73.

December, 1920 – “Mr. Miller spoke feelingly of the drafts to which the choir were subjected when occupying their places in the church.” (It is said that in the winter months, one of the male choir members put one shovel full of coal in the heater just before the service, and a second just before the sermon.)

January, 1921 – “The diocesan assessment for 1921 has been set at \$99.”

June 6, 1922 – “A group representing St. Mark’s and St. Martin’s churches was appointed to investigate the pooling of resources of both churches to see if one church could serve the needs of both.”

February 4, 1923 – “The skating carnival held at the Crystal rink on January 15, realized a profit of \$16”

July 3, 1923 – “The vestry gave approval to the recreation club and women’s help society to put on a garden fete with the rector offering his garden [the rectory was the house next door to the church] for the purpose.” The fete was held August 29 was a pronounced success as a profit of \$116.37 was realized.

January 8, 1924– At the 1924 annual meeting, it was reported that there were 105 children registered in the Sunday school, 53 of those being in the primary.

November 3, 1924– “The vestry approved the proposed new kitchen for the hall and the work was completed in quick time with the vestry meeting held in the new kitchen on March 3, 1925.”

September 28, 1926– “It was agreed that the price for the harvest supper should be 50c each, which amount would include a chance on a raffle for a live calf.”

In November, the vestry debated what to do with the calf, as it appeared that they had won it.

December 7, 1926– “The vestry received a cheque for \$20 from Mr. Lloyd for the sale of the “fatted calf”.

December 2, 1930– It is noted that the janitor was sick in bed and the church was cold, and there was a dust storm during both the 11:00am and 7:30pm services.

During the early 1920s, many would recall Viscount R. B Bennett speaking at St. Mark’s. The highlight was not always what he said but that he was noted for the loud-coloured socks he wore!

There was a story of the family which, during the 1930’s, attended St. Mark’s regularly and each Sunday the mother would stop father and the children and have them all deposit their chewing gum in the big pine tree that used to grow on the north-east corner of the church property. No one could recall whether she let them pick it up again after the service!

Many used to remember the incident of the windstorm during the fall of 1935. At the Sunday evening service, the lights and building were swaying so badly that Mr. Axon eliminated his sermon, offered the prayers, and the congregation hurriedly departed. Tie-rods for support were soon added. These tie-rods were supposed to eliminate the sway and keep the walls from falling in, but later supports had to be added to keep the walls from falling out.

During Mr. Wilford's time at St Mark's (1919 – 1926) and while he was living on 31st Avenue, it was recalled that the Wilfords were expecting a blessed event. Two or three of his neighbours across the street, one of whom was the Miller family, had arranged a signal to announce the birth. If it was a girl, Mr. Wilford would raise the right blind on his front window and if it was a boy, he would raise the left one. Each morning the neighbours would peer out and check to see if there was any news. On a Sunday morning, the neighbours noticed both blinds up and assumed Mr. Wilford had forgotten the signal but found out later that day when he announced in church that his wife had given birth to twins – a boy and a girl!