

Olivet United Church Celebrates Its Centennial

“Any church blessed four times is bound to have a bright future!”. So wrote the Rev. T. Melville Bailey, according to Murray Aikman, life-long member and present historian/archivist of Olivet United Church. The quotation was in reference to the Sept 9, 1916 cornerstone laying ceremony for Olivet Union Church. Four ministers, each representing the Methodists, Congregational, Presbyterian and Baptist denominations, placed a hand in symbolic blessing on the cornerstone for the new mountain church.

Mr. Aikman records for us that earlier, on January 10, 1915, eighty-five mountain residents had met to discuss ways of conducting a union service of worship. This followed the first gathering of a Sunday School class for neighbourhood children held in December of 1914 at the Barton Township Hall on the corner of Upper James and Genesee Streets (until recently the Café Palazzo).

The person most instrumental in Olivet's beginnings was an eccentric bachelor and land owner named Joseph Pim who, for many years, lived in Bellevue (mansion) on the edge of the escarpment, near today's Sam Lawrence Park. In the early 1900s he donated land in the Queens Park Survey to support his special passion, **the union of all churches and specifically the establishment of a Union Church on the mountain.** By 1908 he had chosen a site at the southwest corner of Prince George and Empress Avenues. Prior to that the only nearby church was Holy Trinity Anglican Church opened in 1877 at the southeast corner of Upper James Street and Fennell Avenue.

Throughout 1915 worship services and Sunday School were held in the Township Hall. Thus, Olivet was an inclusive congregation ten years before the formation of the United Church of Canada. On January 20, 1916 the formal establishment and constitution of the new Union Church took place. The cornerstone was laid on September 9 and the first church known as the “little white church” was ready later that year. Its dedication occurred on February 25, 1917 when the name suggested by Mr. Pim, Olivet Union Church, was officially adopted. A large Sunday School building opened in 1918. In 1925 Olivet Union Church became Olivet United Church.

Increased church attendance in the 1930s resulted in worship being moved from the original structure to the Sunday School building. Both buildings were demolished in 1949 and during 1949-50 the congregation gathered in the auditorium of the recently opened Queensdale Public School (1948).



The original 1916 white stucco Olivet Union Church and 1918 Sunday School shown here were demolished in 1949 and replaced with the present brick church and Christian Education building. Olivet Archives photo.

On March 1, 1950 worship began in the current basement and continued there until 1955 when the present beautiful sanctuary was completed and dedicated, followed three years later by the opening of the Christian Education building.



Olivet Archive photo

A century after the aforementioned ministers representing four different denominations placed their hands on the 1916 cornerstone, Olivet United Church, with a sense of its past endeavours and accomplishments, looks forward to the next 100 years with anticipation and confidence.

Mountain Memories, submitted by historian **Robert Williamson** on behalf of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society, appears monthly in the Mountain News.