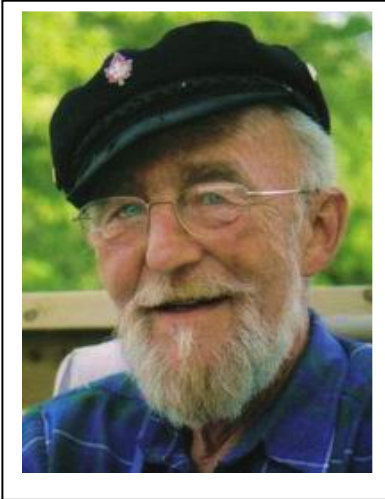


The Family Historian Patrick Wohler

Column #48

Adventures in Research



Calls and e-mails from readers are always bright points in my day. I enjoy meeting you and I almost invariably learn something new from the contact. Sometimes it starts me on new research.

I got such a call in from one of my oldest readers, John Waddell, of Ramsay. He is 93 years old and he can remember as a boy seeing a few tombstones on the site of the old Free Presbyterian Church on the 8th line, kitty corner from the Auld Kirk. He wondered if I knew what had happened to them.

The short answer was "No". The longer one was that I had never heard of the Free Presbyterian Church. Nonetheless I undertook to see what I could find out. I had a steep learning curve on this one but I found a lot of help.

Morton's book, *Lanark Legacy*, got me started, Beldon's *Atlas* showed me the site, a visit to the Land Records Office armed me with some hard data, and with this background I

started on human resources.

Pastor Matthew Dick of the Almonte Reformed Presbyterian Church was very helpful. He clarified the distinctions among Free, Reformed, and Established Church Presbyterians for me and then directed me to other people who could help me further.

Dr. Robert More, a former pastor, was at the top of the list of these resources. I phoned him at his home in upstate New York and we spoke for over an hour on the phone. He is an historian and readers will have an opportunity to meet him when the Reformed Presbyterian Church has its 175th Anniversary celebrations later this year. Dr. More will be a guest speaker.

He really went out of his way to help. He took the trouble to visit me twice and was even able to obtain for me copies of a history written by Rev. Robert Shields, who was pastor through the 1860's and 70's and died in 1883. The history was in a journal in their Seminary in Pittsburg.

Reader Ruth Bowes, who has a strong interest in the history of the church, was the next source and she has been very generous in sharing the fruits of her research. You are likely to run into her at the Lanark County Archives, where she is a very active volunteer.

By now I knew that the Free Presbyterians had split from the Established Church (Auld Kirk) in the 1840's and built a wood-frame church across the 8th Line. They discontinued services there around 1870 and the building was taken over by the Cameronian (Reformed) Presbyterian Church. They used it until the beautiful stone church facing Almonte Bay was ready for occupancy in 1891. The old church building was sold and it burned down in 1926.

The one thing that none of my informants knew was the definitive answer to the original question about what had happened to the graveyard.

At this stage, almost 4 months later, I got back to John Waddell and we drove to the site so that he could show me exactly where the gravestones had been. On the way I got a fascinating running commentary on the history of the various buildings that we passed and I was a lot wiser after that short drive than before.

I spoke to the property owner and he told me that the previous owner had told him that the stones had been moved to the Auld Kirk. This certainly supported the opinions of a number of the people I had spoken with and, in the absence of written documentation, is the best answer to date. Perhaps Gary Byron, in his work on the Auld Kirk records, will find something more definitive.

You must know that I love this job. Where else would I meet so many wonderful people and be able to justify spending so much time doing what I enjoy so much?