

## New church rises on scenic hillside



### Congregation rallies after major fire

By Ross Stevenson, The Anglican, February 2024

The new St. James, Roseneath has risen from the ashes of the devastating fire of “suspicious origin” that destroyed the pioneer church on April 9, 2019. The official opening and consecration service was held on Dec. 9, 2023. St. James is again a notable landmark on the scenic hillside northeast of Roseneath.

Bishop Riscylla Shaw, suffragan bishop with oversight of the diocese’s North and East archdeaconries, conducted a wonderful service that touched on some of the challenges of the rebuild. “This is a day of joyful celebration,” she told the congregation. “We have come to pray for God’s blessing on this house of assembly and worship, which we name St. James.”

Bishop Shaw, a key supporter of the rebuild, said, “The Church is more than bricks and mortar and more than people. It is being the feet and hands of Jesus and doing Jesus’ work in the community.”

The Rev. Bryce Sangster, incumbent, welcomed everyone on behalf of those who worked to make the day possible. “The atmosphere has a feeling of a resurrection and a new beginning after coming through both the tragic fire and Covid, the perfect storm, with new and exciting possibilities for this place going forward,” he said.

Chief Taynar Simpson of Alderville First Nation and John Logel, mayor of the Township of Alnwick-Haldimand, also spoke at the gathering. Seven other Anglican clergy attended, representing regional groups. Wally Brown was the pianist.

Many people remarked about the beautiful new building with its many windows, the brightness, the acoustics, the lofted ceiling, the glass panel doors and other pleasant features of the church. A capacity crowd filled all the chairs, with a few attendees standing by the doorway.

“The opening day was wonderful and I am very thankful for the support of the membership and the community,” said Gail Latchford, deputy people’s warden.

St. James is nestled amongst family farms and small woodlots in the beautiful rolling hills of Northumberland County. Windows that look out over the picturesque hillside and valleys are a prominent feature of the church. The views provide a memorable panorama and offer an invitation to return.



The Rev. Bryce Sangster and Bishop Riscylla Shaw stand with Allan McCracken, people’s warden, Gail Latchford, deputy people’s warden, Helen Lee, deputy rector’s warden, Barry Surerus, rector’s warden, on opening day. Not present at the time of the photo was Laurie Woodruff, treasurer.

The rebuilding of the church was intentionally delayed because the cost of most building materials skyrocketed in 2020 to 2022. The rebuilding process included a redesign to incorporate some cost savings. As part of the revised plan, vinyl siding was used as a substitute for concrete board as the external cladding. The church retained the plan for a steel roof for its longevity and durability. A metal roof was deemed to be important on the wind-prone hillside.

With its off-white vertical siding, black window frames, glass panelled doors, charcoal coloured roof and a green cross on each gable, the new church was dressed and ready for the consecration service and official opening on Dec. 9, 2023.

The first St. James church was built by pioneer families in 1863 and services had been held there since before Confederation. The original church was built with mostly volunteer labour. It was made of pine lumber and cost \$800. The land was donated by William Nichol. The stained-glass window, installed in 1886, was in memory of the Rev. John McCleary. In 1925, the Coyle and Drope families donated the church's huge bell, which is 38 inches in diameter, just eight inches less than the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. The bell marked the centennial of the families' arrival in Canada. In 1977, the vestry and basement were added; in 1980, the bell tower was extended.

St. James Cemetery was also initiated in 1863. Many former parishioners are interred in the pristine and pastoral cemetery. The church's strong emotional link with former rectors is evident, as they later chose this cemetery as their final resting place. They include the Rev. A.J. Patstone (1881-1978), the Rev. Canon Henry Peasgood (1915-1977), the Rev. A.C. Herbert (1906-1993), and the Rev. Canon Bill Hewton (1930-1998).

The devastating fire that destroyed the old church interrupted 156 years of service to the community. The only items to survive the fire were the leather-bound bible and the bell, which was damaged in the fall from the tower. But now rebuilt, St. James returns to its prominent landmark location on the scenic hillside northeast of Roseneath, beside County Road 45. St. James was able to escape the sobering trend towards closures of rural churches and rise from the ashes the fire. With a rebuilt church, the parish can continue its roll in the social and spiritual development of the community.

Ross Stevenson is a member of St. James, Roseneath.