

Beamsville Bible School

1902-1916

By Edwin Broadus

Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society

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Great Lakes Christian College High School

Beamsville, Ontario

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The first school organized and maintained within Churches of Christ in Canada was the Beamsville Bible School, which began offering courses in the fall of 1902 and continued through the spring of 1916. S. M. Jones (1870-1934) was not only the president of the school during this entire time; it may safely be said that without him the school would never have been established.

Jones, whose full name was Sim Malious Jones, was born in Williamson Co., Tennessee June 16, 1870. He was one of fifteen children born to John and Tabitha Jones, who had a farm near Franklin, a short distance south of Nashville. He studied for five years at Nashville Bible School and was apparently a member of its first class, which began in October 1891. For a brief time after he left NBS he taught school in Gadsden, Alabama, but after coming to Meaford, Ontario in January, 1897, he determined to move to Canada. In 1898 he preached in a five-week meeting in Beamsville, when twenty-eight people were baptized. By 1900 he made Beamsville his home, where, that same year, he married Ida Culp, daughter of John Warner Culp. About six and one-half years after she died in 1921 he married one of his former students, Ella May Johnston, in 1928. He remained in Beamsville until his death October 6, 1934. When he came to work with the Beamsville church, its membership was about 200, making it one of the largest congregations within its Ontario fellowship.¹

After his move to Beamsville, Jones began almost immediately making plans for his school, which was modeled after the one he had attended in Nashville. During Jones' five years at Nashville Bible School James A. Harding (1848-1922) was that school's president and its most influential teacher. To understand S. M. Jones and the Beamsville Bible School it is important to know something about James A. Harding and his views about ministry and education. Harding had graduated from Alexander Campbell's Bethany College in 1869, and for a few years before he began preaching he taught school. By all accounts Harding was a man of strong convictions and some eccentricities who inspired emulation and intense loyalty in many of his students. He was renowned for his abounding faith in God's providential care and for his selfless devotion to what he saw as God's work. In 1910 he wrote, "For thirty-six years I have endeavored to follow the directions of Jesus literally. I have avoided the

¹ Most of the biographical information about S. M. Jones was provided to the author by Wilma Moore, Hamilton, Ontario, who is a niece to Jones' second wife. Additional information about him is found in "'A Church upon the New Testament Alone' (The History of the Beamsville Church of Christ, 1832-1982)," Beamsville, Ontario: Beamsville Church of Christ, 1992, 9-11.

accumulation of property. There have been few, if any, times in these thirty-six years that I have had enough money to bury me if I had died.”

At Nashville Harding shared oversight of the school with David Lipscomb, but when Lipscomb decided to incorporate under a board of trustees, Harding objected. “I could not work as a teacher of the doctrine of Christ under such control. In doing the work of Christ, a Christian should not submit himself to be directed and controlled by any other institution for the advancement of the Lord’s cause than the church of God.” He left NBS in 1901 for Bowling Green, Kentucky to establish Potter Bible College, where he had total control of the school. There, in keeping with his convictions, he opposed endowments, fundraising, and stipulated salaries for teachers, believing that these human efforts showed lack of trust in God. Faculty members shared equally in the net proceeds of the school.²

Jones, who named his second son after Harding, was not only a great admirer of his mentor, but he also shared many of his views. From what we know of Jones’ work, he was ready to make personal sacrifices to do what he believed the Lord wanted him to do. In his later disputes with others in Ontario, he was never accused of greed or mishandling of funds. As far as we know, he, like Harding, genuinely believed that he should not submit himself to be directed and controlled by others when doing the Lord’s work. Both men had an intensity about them that must have made it difficult for others who were equally strong-minded to work with or for them, but Jones seldom inspired the remarkable loyalty that Harding so often received from students and fellow workers. Ultimately this would lead to serious problems in the Bible School and contribute to its demise.

That the school even began was a credit to Jones. H. M. Evans, who later quit supporting him, sent a glowing report to the *Gospel Advocate* in Nashville announcing the opening of the school: “The Beamsville Bible School has been established by Brother Jones under great difficulties. Great and many are the trying circumstances through which he had passed in his efforts to establish this school.... No one but a man of great faith and determination could have endured the trials and discouragements that Brother Jones passed through in developing this work.”³ L. E. Huntsman, who taught in the school during its early years before he and Jones fell out with one another, recalled at the end of the fourth year of the school’s operation that “when Bro. Jones spoke to me of starting a school, while I did not try to dissuade (sic), I do not think I gave him very much encouragement. I thought it would be more difficult to successfully start a school here than in the South, and it has been so

² Hughes, Richard T., *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996, 137-141; Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order, Vol. II*, Indianapolis, Indiana: Religious Book Service, 1950, 331-338; Carolyn T. Wilson, “Potter Bible College,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004, 599-600.

³ H. M. Evans, “Opening of a Bible School at Beamsville, Ontario, Can.,” *Gospel Advocate*, November 27, 1902, 27.

in some respects.” But then Huntsman said, “I have no hesitation in saying that the results obtained so far, amply repay all the efforts made in establishing the school.”⁴

Undoubtedly some of the obstacles Huntsman alluded to were the sheer difficulties in arranging classes, finding students, and fulfilling the multitude of tasks involved in launching such a school with limited resources. But besides this there was almost surely opposition or at least resentment by many Restoration churches in Ontario that were involved in maintaining a college that they had launched in St. Thomas in 1896. Forty-one enrolled the first year, but it is doubtful that this school, later named Sinclair College in honor of Dugald Sinclair, a pioneer preacher in Scotland and Ontario, ever had a much larger enrollment during its short existence.⁵ Sinclair College was begun at a time when the Ontario fellowship was fracturing. Those behind the college represented the more liberal element while the conservatives initiated the Beamsville experiment. This was reflected by Evans in his announcement of the school in the *Gospel Advocate*: “This is the only school in Ontario where Christian fathers and mothers can send their sons and daughters with the assurance that they will be looked after and cared for in Christian homes, and where they will be free from the evil influences of sectarianism and digressionism.”

Evans’ statement shows how much the relationship between the liberals and conservatives in the Ontario fellowship had deteriorated by this time. Because the two sides did not care about trying to work together any longer, it was comparatively easy for Jones to ignore criticism from the liberals. But by then there was also opposition to Bible schools like BBS from conservatives like Daniel Sommer (1850-1940), a prominent preacher from Indiana who held evangelistic meetings in Ontario. He and James A. Harding both preached at Meaford in evangelistic meetings, and Sommer married Esther Letitia White from that community in 1927 after his first wife died. Sommer edited an influential religious journal, the *Octographic Review* (renamed in 1914 as the *Apostolic Review*), and traveled widely among Churches of Christ as an evangelist. When James A. Harding and David Lipscomb established Nashville Bible School and when Harding later founded Potter Bible College, Sommer’s vocal opposition to these schools resonated with some conservatives. To Sommer these schools were as unscriptural as a missionary society, which both Lipscomb and Harding vigorously opposed.⁶

During its first eight years Beamsville Bible School was conducted in the lower level of the building that the local Church of Christ constructed on Queen Street in 1885 when it moved into town. When it was built, it was one of the best meeting houses of any of the Ontario Restoration churches. The first quarter century in town

⁴ Huntsman, L. E., “The Beamsville Bible School,” *The Bible Student*, April 1905, 6.

⁵ For the story of Sinclair College see Reuben Butchart, *The Disciples of Christ in Canada in 1830*, Toronto: Canadian Headquarters Publications, Churches of Christ (Disciples), 1949, 150-155. On pp. 149-150 Butchart calls the Beamsville experiment “another ‘conservative’ attempt at educating for the ministry.” He then disdainfully refers to it as a “Middle Ages idea of combining religious prejudices with mediocre training” that water-marked the product.

⁶ For information about Sommer see Hughes, 228-233, and West, 292-301, 392-396.

was one of the most prosperous eras in the history of this congregation that in 2009 is 177 years old. Between 1885 and 1900 the church grew from about 120 members to around 200. During these same years it also became decidedly more conservative, or, more accurately, it did not grow increasingly liberal, as did some of the other Restoration churches in the province.

When Beamsville Bible School began, Jones recruited John Madison Wright (1866-1945) to work with him. Like Jones, Wright had studied under Harding at Nashville Bible School during at least part of the period Jones was there. He was a native of Tennessee, from the Cookville area. Prior to going to NBS he had studied at Grayson College in Whitewright, Texas, a short distance east of Sherman. After completing his work at NBS, he went to Ralston University of Expression in Washington, D. C., where he graduated in 1901. Between his studies in Nashville and in Washington, D. C., he began making preaching trips to Meaford and Beamsville, and July 14, 1896 he married Lavinia White of Meaford, Ontario. Later he established churches in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls, Ontario, and beginning in 1905 he did pioneer preaching in British Columbia. In 1933, while living in Columbus, Ohio, he and Lavinia made plans to go to India to do mission work, which presumably they were able to carry out. Wright died July 15, 1945.⁷

Lution Erotas Huntsman (1856-1949) joined the faculty the first or second year. He was a native of the Tintern, Ontario area where his father, Adam Huntsman, farmed and operated a sawmill on Spring Creek Road. Following studies at Toronto Normal School, which likely included commercial courses, he taught at the Tintern public school. He was once an elder at the Tintern Church of Christ and was living in the Tintern area when BBS began, but he later moved into Beamsville and eventually was an elder at the Beamsville church.⁸

Not surprisingly, Beamsville Bible School in many ways was patterned after Nashville Bible School, where S. M. Jones and Madison Wright had studied. Like the school in Nashville, the one in Beamsville emphasized Bible training but also offered courses in English, Greek, Latin, math, and science. While information about other courses offered at NBS was not uncovered for this article, an advertisement for BBS in January 1904 also listed courses in vocal and instrumental music, French, German, book-keeping, expression, physical culture, philosophy, and art – a rather ambitious

⁷ Information about Wright's birth, death, marriage, and schools attended is from his obituary in the *Firm Foundation*, July 17, 1945. Plans to go to India are found in *Word and Work*, September 1933. Lavinia was very much a partner with him in his work, and led the song services in his evangelistic meetings. (*The Bible Student*, January 1905, 1.) Lavinia was a sister to Daniel Sommer's second wife.

⁸ Most of the biographical information about Lution Huntsman was supplied by his great niece, Myrna Perry, of Beamsville, Ontario. Huntsman was a man of many talents. In addition to teaching school he also engaged in the construction business in Beamsville. After an accident at work he operated a grocery store on the town's main street for about twelve years. He sometimes preached for Churches of Christ in the Niagara area and also wrote for religious journals. He died in his ninety-third year after being hit by a car while he was out walking.

program for a small school with only three or four faculty members. H. M. Evans observed at that time that “the same branches are taught here as in other schools, with the Bible, vocal music, expression and physical culture in addition.”⁹ The intent was not to be a preacher training school, but rather to provide a general education no matter what students planned to do later in life, although Jones hoped that many of those who trained at the school would be involved in preaching.

There were, however, significant differences in the Nashville and Beamsville schools. The one in Nashville apparently ran for about eight months per year, from October through May, while the Beamsville school had two terms lasting a total of five months, from November through March. It was estimated that tuition and boarding at NBS totaled about \$150 per year, while at BBS it was only \$60 at the beginning (later about \$135), although there was no tuition for Bible courses. The class day in Beamsville went from 8:00 a.m. until 5:15 p.m.

Exact enrollment figures for the school are unavailable. It is known that 163 different people took courses through the spring of 1914, but everyone was counted whether he took one course or was enrolled for several years. Most of these students (142) were from Ontario, but there were eight from Saskatchewan, five from Manitoba, three from New York, two from Alberta, one from Tennessee, and two whose residence was not given. The school was co-educational, and of the 163 students mentioned above seventy (forty-three percent) were female and ninety-three (fifty-seven percent) were male.¹⁰ Group pictures of students and teachers are available from eight of the years the school was in operation, and while it is not possible to identify exactly how many of those in each picture were students, they give some idea of enrollment, which ranged between twenty and thirty-five students per year, with an overall average of about twenty-seven.

Even if there had been no other problems during the school’s existence, it is evident that with limited enrollment funds for paying teachers and covering other expenses were inadequate, although it helped that the church provided the physical facilities for classes and that local people provided room and board.¹¹ However, as matters turned out, other problems were far greater. Serious differences arose among some of the persons at the centre of the school, and these difficulties contributed to division in the Beamsville church.

To understand these problems another person needs to be identified. Shortly after the school opened, Henry M. Evans (1862-1931) returned to Beamsville and began publishing *The Bible Student* in January 1904. Evans was from England but had come to Canada with his parents when he was eight years old. He had previously lived in Beamsville about two years, in 1895 and 1896, when he was editing a religious

⁹ H. M. Evans, “Bible School Jottings,” *The Bible Student*, January 1904, 1. The aforementioned ad was in the same issue, on page 5.

¹⁰ “Twelfth Annual Announcement, Beamsville Bible School, 1913-1914,” 17-20. Boarding costs were \$12.00 per month in 1913-1914, and tuition was \$15.00 per month.

¹¹ The Beamsville church assisted BBS “by fitting up three nice rooms which cost several hundred dollars.” (S. M. Jones, “The Work at Beamsville,” *The Bible Student*, February 1904, 1.

journal called the *Gospel Messenger*, which he had started a year earlier. While in Beamsville he also began a newspaper, *The Beamsville Express*, which has continued until the present time under various owners and editors. Most, if not all, of the interim between the time he left Beamsville at the end of 1896 and his return in 1904 was spent at Rodney, where he preached for the Plains congregation. He was an osteopathic physician, having studied at Metropolitan College of Osteopathy in Chicago, and he took up medical practice when he returned to Beamsville. He was also a graduate of Johnson Bible College in Kimberlin Heights, Tennessee, perhaps when it was known as Correspondence Bible College (est. 1886). He later received a B. A. degree from Maritime Bible and Literary College (1909-1914) in West Gore, Nova Scotia.¹² In 1904 he again took up religious journalism while supporting himself as a physician. His new periodical was called *The Bible Student*.

Evans was living in Rodney, Ontario, in southwestern Ontario, when Jones began Beamsville Bible School, and, as already noted, he sent a glowing report about it to the *Gospel Advocate* in Nashville. After he came to Beamsville and began *The Bible Student*, he not only remained supportive of the school, but he also recruited S. M. Jones, Madison Wright, and L. E. Huntsman as staff writers for his paper. Through 1906 the paper continued to carry positive articles about the school at frequent intervals, but by September 1905 Jones had either resigned from the paper's staff or had been relieved of his role. A year later Huntsman began publishing *The Bible School Times* because of his unhappiness with Evans' refusal to publish some of Huntsman's material. These developments were symptomatic of friction that was developing between Jones and others, including Evans, and this may have contributed to Jones' discouragement during the school's third year (1904-1905), a matter openly discussed by L. E. Huntsman in an article entitled, "A Real School," published in *The Bible Student* in May 1905:

"At the beginning and during the third session of the Beamsville Bible School, it was thought that the school would not be continued, at least in Beamsville. I believe that Bro. Jones was thinking seriously of going South, hoping that he could accomplish more good. He has decided, however, to continue the school another session, and I trust the people of Ontario will appreciate the existence of a real school in their midst enough to induce them to fill it with pupils, and so keep it. It would be a great mistake to let it go on account of a lack of patronage.... I trust we will do our best to keep the school going, and to keep Bro. Jones at the head of it. If Bro Jones could do more good some other place and the Beamsville Bible School still go on, I would say amen. But, while I do not think that Bro. Jones is free from faults (and who is?), I know of no one available so fitted to conduct the school as he.... Now I would suggest to Bro. Jones that the very best way to bring about the realization of that wish (to bring more preachers to Ontario -EB), is to keep the Beamsville Bible School running. Running away from Ontario in the hope of doing more good won't help fill Ontario with preachers...."¹³

¹² Eugene C. Perry, *A History of Religious Periodicals in the Restoration Movement in Canada*, 184-185. In the November 1905 issue of *The Bible Student*, Evans provides information listing the places he lived and preached from 1891 through 1905 (p. 4).

¹³ L. E. Huntsman, "A Real School," *The Bible Student*, May 1905, 1.

Jones may also have been discouraged by Madison Wright's departure, which was announced at the close of the third year of the school, but which Jones likely was aware of some time earlier. Wright stated he was leaving to do evangelistic work, and inasmuch as he showed a lifelong interest in this kind of work, there is no basis to ascribe any other reason for his departure, which was reported matter-of-factly in *The Bible Student*. H. M. Evans, who called Wright "one of our intimate friends, and one of the best workers that the Bible Student ever had," said that Wright was a man with a "meek and gentle disposition," with "no ambition, whatever, to be a 'big man,'" and as a person "free from jealousy."¹⁴

As mentioned, beginning in September 1905 Jones was no longer listed as a staff member of *The Bible Student*. No explanation was given, and we have no way of knowing who instigated this, Jones or Evans. That fall Evans moved to West Gore, Nova Scotia and published the paper from there, beginning in December, but this did not preclude Jones' continuation on the staff, for L. E. Huntsman remained on it and continued to write about the Bible School in the paper. The last advertisement of the school in *The Bible Student* appeared in May 1905. These ads evidently had been paid for by the school, for in August 1906 Evans offered, in the columns of his paper, to advertise the Bible school without charge for three months. However, Jones did not accept the offer, for no ads appeared during that time, and, in fact, there were no news items about the school in that period.

Another indication that all was not well between Evans and Jones showed up in an exchange of articles between Evans and L. E. Huntsman, who was working closely with Jones in the Bible School. This exchange occurred between December 1905 and September 1906. The first five articles (three by Evans and two by Huntsman) appeared in *The Bible Student* and were all entitled, "Elders and Their Authority." When Evans refused to print Huntsman's third reply, Huntsman began his own paper, *The Bible School Times*, and in the first issue he published his own article that Evans had been unwilling to print, plus a personal letter from Evans and Huntsman's response to it.

When one reads the entire exchange a century later, it is apparent that the two men were essentially agreed, not only about the role of elders, but also about a congregation's scriptural recourse when an elder sins. The real issue between them was brought into the open when Huntsman printed Evans' personal letter and his own response to it. Evans wrote, "I now have reason to believe that you are defending someone on whose toes my article in the last Dec. issue fell rather heavily."¹⁵ Huntsman replied, "It was plain to many that Bro Evans was attacking an individual in the December STUDENT."¹⁶

Neither Huntsman nor Evans named the individual that each said the other was talking about, but there is little doubt he was S. M. Jones. Evans said enough in his articles and his letter for us to piece together what Jones allegedly had done that disturbed Evans so greatly. After either introducing or entertaining charges against

¹⁴ H. M. Evans, "Brother Wright and His Work," *The Bible Student*, September 1905, 2.

¹⁵ H. M. Evans, *The Bible School Times*, September 1, 1906, 3.

¹⁶ L. E. Huntsman, *The Bible School Times*, September 1, 1906, 4.

one of the Beamsville elders, Jones had publicly rebuked him.¹⁷ (Evans' actual words were that he held him to "public ridicule.") Although Jones later made a private apology, Evans maintained this was not good enough, since the offense was public.¹⁸ With Evans, these events were indicative of a larger problem, for in his private letter he had told Huntsman, "There is no man who can make me 'wilt like a pumpkin' before that Diotrephes whose egotism and dogmatism in the vicinity of his own home is proverbial, even if he did make only 'one mistake' in four years" (an apparent reference to his public action for which he made a private apology).¹⁹

Despite these differences with Huntsman, Evans ended his letter by saying, "I can assure you I hold nothing against you," and "I shall be pleased to have you continue with us if you see fit to do so, but I positively will not reply to anything further upon this question, either publicly, or privately. This is final."²⁰ At that time Huntsman declined this invitation to remain on the staff of *The Bible Student*, choosing instead to launch a new journal, *The Bible School Times*. He was forthright about why he did this. His chief reason, he said, was "a growing feeling amongst the students of the Beamsville Bible School that a paper is needed in Ontario to advocate Bible Christianity, more diligent Bible study every where, and especially in the Bible School," but a second cause was "the refusal of Bro. Evans to continue the discussion of 'Elders and Their Authority' in THE BIBLE STUDENT."²¹

Although L. E. Huntsman was the editor and publisher of the new journal, it is inconceivable that he would have begun a paper with this name without Jones' approval and backing. The irony of this entire situation is that Huntsman would soon share Evans' opposition to Jones, but with far direr consequences. By 1907 Huntsman and Jones were estranged. Huntsman left the school, and by March 1908 he was again on good terms with Evans and once more an associate editor of *The Bible Student*. That same month Jones and others began a new journal, *The Canadian Helper*. Evans greeted the new paper cordially but unenthusiastically in *The Bible Student*: "If the interests of the Lord's cause can be served better by two papers than one, we wish it Godspeed."²² The new paper continued until 1914 and, among other things, was used to promote Beamsville Bible School.

In 1910 the Beamsville Church divided. This tragic event was recorded in a Southern Ontario newspaper:

Prominent members and officials of the Church of Christ Disciples, of Beamsville, who objected to what they claimed were autocratic actions of their pastor, Rev. S. M. Jones, on Saturday, notified Mr. Jones that they would not allow

¹⁷ R. L. Walker and Aaron Culp were elders at the Beamsville church in November 1905. Six years earlier Ephraim Comfort an elder along with them. (*The Bible Student*, November 1905, 4.)

¹⁸ H. M. Evans, "Elders and Their Authority," *The Bible Student*, May 1906, 4.

¹⁹ H. M. Evans, *The Bible School Times*, September 1, 1906, 4.

²⁰ H. M. Evans, *The Bible School Times*, September 1, 1906, 3-4.

²¹ L. E. Huntsman, *The Bible School Times*, September 1, 1906, 1.

²² Perry, 161-164

him to use the church the following day, and to make sure their wishes would be carried out, they changed the locks on the church doors.²³

About three-fourths of the congregation wanted Jones to “leave peaceably,” but he and those who sided with him accused the others of “forcing the doctrines of men” upon the church. The elders resigned, and the seventy-nine members who left built a new meeting place half a block away on the same street (the present Presbyterian building) for about \$5,000. Jones moved Beamsville Bible School to the new location.²⁴ In one of the more civil gestures during this difficult time, non-pejorative names were used for the two congregations: the old one was called “the brick house” and the new one “the cement house.”²⁵

There was little civility, however, in the printed materials circulated by each side. In 1911 S. M. Jones sent out a lengthy circular letter, responding to criticism that had been launched against him. In 1913 “the brick church” distributed a pamphlet called, “The Responsibility for the Continued Division in the Church of Christ at Beamsville, as Shown by the Correspondence between the Parties.” Soon “the cement church” responded with “Our Reply,” which in turn was rebutted with a pamphlet by L. E. Huntsman entitled, “The Division of the church of Christ at Beamsville.” Clearly, the chief antagonists were L. E. Huntsman and S. M. Jones.²⁶

Daniel Sommer became involved in 1914. He was scheduled to preach in evangelistic meetings that summer both at Tintern and at “the brick house” in Beamsville, but Tintern cancelled his meetings with them. In a letter to Sommer, penned by Norman Comfort, they said:

It was agreed some time ago to have you help in a meeting at Tintern, but since that decision we have had reasons to believe that you are to hold a meeting in Beamsville for the people who caused division contrary to the doctrine. If you are going to fellowship these people we, myself and others, could not conscientiously and consistently agree to have you help us in a meeting. We cannot fellowship the people worshipping in the brick house at Beamsville, and, of course, could not fellowship you if you are going to fellowship them.²⁷

²³ Cited by Steve Courson in an unpublished manuscript, “Niagara District.” It is not clear whether this was published by a Toronto newspaper or by one in St. Catharines.

²⁴ “‘A Church upon the New Testament Alone’ (The History of the Beamsville Church of Christ, 1832-1982),” 10. The number of members who left is from the pamphlet, “Our Reply,” published by Jones and those who left with him.

²⁵ A few years later a member at “the cement house” who held the mortgage foreclosed on the church, which moved next door to a converted residence, and the congregation became known as “the frame house.” This structure is now an optometrist’s office.

²⁶ Courson. These publications about the division are very rare, perhaps because people realized after awhile that they were better suited to the fire. It is evident from what was written by both sides that there were no substantive doctrinal differences. Even though Jones and Huntsman were at the centre of the difficulty, there was more than enough blame to include many others. It is significant, however, that the division was not ended until two years after S. M. Jones died in 1934.

²⁷ Daniel Sommer, “An Appeal to the Friends of S. M. Jones of Beamsville, Ontario,” 1914, cited by Courson.

Sommer attempted to arrange public meetings with Jones to discuss the problems associated with the division, but Jones declined. When this failed, Sommer held meetings lasting more than an hour on two different evenings at “the brick house,” discussing the issues between the two congregations, but even though Jones and the other members at “the cement house” had been invited, none of them attended. Sommer’s own summary in his pamphlet charged that Jones was guilty of “undue severity” and had “done much harm here at Beamsville by using it, likewise at other places.” He was also critical of Jones’ views about civil government, the “right hand of fellowship,” kneeling for prayer, special providence, and insurance.²⁸ None of these issues were germane to the Beamsville division, at least at the outset, but they were matters of dispute, not only between Sommer and Jones, but also Sommer and James A. Harding.

Although this war of words was detrimental to Beamsville Bible School, the school not only survived the turmoil but, for awhile at least, maintained and even increased its enrollment. Jones wrote in the middle of 1913 that at the previous session (1912-1913) “we had the best attendance yet.” He went on to say, “We are more determined than ever to push on in the glorious work....”²⁹ One reason the school did not fail immediately was that Jones continued to be accepted and invited to preach at many places in the province. Some, like the nearby Tintern church, openly sided with him and severed fellowship with Huntsman and the brick church, holding them responsible for the division.³⁰

Yet, three years after Jones wrote this, the school closed in 1916. Little information is available to us as to why this happened when it did. Schools open with great fanfare and close with a whimper. Jones had kept his dream alive against great odds and with amazing determination for fourteen years. He was still comparatively young in 1916 (forty-six years old), but he may have already developed health problems. He was diabetic, and eventually he suffered the loss of one arm because of his illness. Also, it was more difficult to keep the school going when the country was at war. Other schools closed during this time. But the overriding reason BBS did not endure was that it was built around one man and was predicated on a concept of divine providence that precluded legitimate and appropriate human efforts that might have prevented its demise. In this regard it was too much like Harding’s Potter Bible College and not enough like Lipscomb’s Nashville Bible School. The marvel, then, is

²⁸ Sommer, 14, cited by Courson. Jones’ mentor, James A. Harding, was opposed to a Christian’s participation in civil government, believed it was scripturally necessary to literally extend “the right hand of fellowship” to new Christians and to kneel when praying, and was opposed to the purchase of insurance by a Christian. (This last belief grew out of his view of divine providence, discussed earlier in this paper.) Of all the issues mentioned here by Sommer, insurance was the only one discussed extensively in contemporary journals of the Church of Christ in Ontario. L. E. Huntsman wrote articles in *The Bible Student* against a Christian buying life insurance.

²⁹ “Twelfth Annual Announcement, Beamsville Bible School, 1913-1914,” 4.

³⁰ “Our Reply,” cited by Courson.

not that it closed in 1916 but that it remained in operation this long under such limiting circumstances.

However, this does not mean Beamsville Bible School was a wasted effort. It obviously did not meet with the kind of success attained by Nashville Bible School, which evolved into a Christian college and eventually Lipscomb University, but size and length of years are by no means the only measures of success. The church in Ontario and other places undoubtedly benefited from the secular and biblical training that those attending received. Some became preachers and church leaders. Churches in the immediate area around Beamsville as well as more distant places were often aided in their work by students from the school. Undoubtedly many ties were formed at the school that lasted through life and into eternity. Some found their spouse there, for which their children who are yet living are undoubtedly grateful. For all these reasons it is good that Beamsville Bible School existed, even for awhile.

Beyond this, the school's existence underscored the value of Christian education and helped plant the desire for a larger and better school in the future and played a role in the establishment of Great Lakes Christian College thirty-six years after Beamsville Bible School closed. It is one of the ironies of our history that the cause of Christian education, which seemed to have ended among Ontario Churches of Christ in 1916, was resurrected in the same small Ontario town in 1952 and is still alive in the 21st century.

June 2009

Appendix: Enrollees in Beamsville Bible School Through the 1912-1913 Session

Archibald, Alex	Foster, Eva	McCartney, Ray	Stewart, Carol
Bailey, T. W.	Foster, Irene	McIntosh, Irene	Stewart, Grace
Bailey, T. W., Mrs.	Fox, Della	McLeoud, Edith	Stewart, Jennie
Baker, Howard	Gedge, Herbert	McLeoud, John D.	Stewart, Kate
Blong, George	Giles, Lena	McMurchie, J. D.	Stewart, Leona
Book, Inez	Gladwell, John	C.	Stewart, Lillian
Bridgeman, Walker	Graham, Morgan	Merritt, Lillie	Stewart, Stanley
Brown, Benjamin	Granger, Nettie	Moore, Luton	Stirling, Ethel
Buck, Kenneth	Greve, Frank	Moore, Winifred	Stirling, Harvey
Buck, Oliver	Gardiner, Andrew	Morris, Edith	Stirling, Stanley
Cann, Frank	Harper, Melvin	Morrison, Wm. J.	Swartz, James
Clark, E.	Helka, Zella	Muntz, Christina	Shepherd, Frank
Claus, Ethel	Hoover, Romeo	Perry, Ernest	Strom, Olaus
Claus, Laura	Hoover, Vincent	Perry, Fred	Tallman, Charlie
Colton, Libbie	House, Bert	Prudhomme, Chas.	Tallman, Cora
Comfort, Edna	Huffman, Ethel	Purcell, A. D.	Tallman, Gertrude
Comfort, Willie	Huntsman, Sidney	Purcell, A. T.	Tallman, Goldie
Conn, Frank	Husband, Wm. W.	Richardson, Herman	Tallman, Grace
Cook, Wesley	Immel, Myrtle	Richardson, H. L.	Tallman, O. H.
Cox, Frank	Jamieson, George	Richardson, H. M.	Tinlin, George
Cox, Lemuel	Jones, Rose	Richardson, Laura	Thompson, Eva
Cox, W. F.	Jones, S. M., Mrs.	Ranicar, Roland	Thompson, Florence
Cox, W. F., Mrs.	Jones, Tena	Saunders, Garfield	Vidal, Muriel
Cox, Edna	Johnstone, Albert	Saunders, Kathleen	Walker, Fred
Cox, Herbert	Johnstone, Bessie	Saterlee, Willie	Wardell, Bert
Culp, Archie	Johnstone, Ella	Schell, Ralph	Waterworth, C. C.
Culp, Flossie	Johnstone, Hattie	Smart, Frank	Waterworth, Charles
Culp, Lillie	Johnstone, Olive	Smart, Louie	Waterworth, C., Mrs.
Culp, Milford	Johnstone, Sadie	Smart, Mary	Waterworth, Elva
Culp, Reuben	Johnstone, Willie	Smart, Norman	Waterworth, M.
Culp, Robert	Kelly, Percy	Smith, Cora	Waterworth, Roy
Culp, Rose	Lane, Ella	Smith, Frank	Williams, Isabella
Disher, Grace	Lane, Hannah	Smith, Myrtle	Williams, John
Dale, Bert	Lighthouse, Willie	Snure, Charles	Wood, Mabel
Dart, Harry	Lumley, Clifford	Snure, Cora	Wright, M., Mrs.
Dart, J. J.	Louie, Mart	Snure, Edna	Yates, W. J.
Eckhardt, Elmer	Lorentzen, Hulda	Snure, Lila	
Evans, H. M.	Mann, Sampson	Snure, Lloyd	
Evans, H. M., Mrs.	Mason, Robert	Snure, Luin	
Evans, Nelson	Matheson, Gordon	Snure, Marie	
Everett, Emma	Matheson, Jean	Stephens, Margaret	
Everett, Harry	Matheson, Rosalie		
Ellsworth, Leslie	McArthur, Tressa		

Addenda

Probable students
(From 1913-14
BBS class picture):

Colton, Libbie
Culp, Mina
Hoover, Leslie

There may have
been
additional students
from the 1913-14,
1914-15, and 1915-
1916 school years.