

Nineteenth Century Ontario Disciples History: The Oshawa District and the George Barclay Family

During the last half of the Nineteenth Century there were at least twenty Disciples churches on the north shore of Lake Ontario east of Toronto, between Scarborough in the west and Prince Edward County in the east. Some of these existed during this entire period; others had shorter life spans. But only one is still in existence in the Twenty-first Century.¹ This study examines the churches in the more westerly part of the above-delineated area, primarily in what once were Ontario and Durham counties. The exception was Scarborough, on the eastern edge of York County. The two most influential Disciples churches in this area were at Oshawa and Bowmanville, formed in 1836 and 1843 respectively. The latter is the subject of a separate study by Geoffrey H. Ellis, while this paper focuses on Oshawa. Both congregations had capable leaders, some of whom were talented preachers, and both were very much concerned with evangelism in their own neighbourhoods and across the province. Attention will also be given to the Pickering congregation, for it, too, had capable leaders, including George Barclay and several members of his family, whose influence spread not only on the north shore but in Toronto, southwest Ontario, and to a lesser extent in the Georgian Bay area. Barclay himself deserves more attention than has been given him heretofore in the study of early Ontario history of the Disciples.

The Early Years of the Disciples in Oshawa

The origin of the Oshawa² church is obscure but can be pieced together from available references. By 1827 or 1828 a Christian Connexion congregation began meeting in the township (Whitby).³ In 1834, when the Connexion's Upper Canada Conference convened in the same township, Joseph Ash and others in the Connexion attempted to abolish the Conference – a move which Ash believed would lead to adoption of Alexander Campbell's views, which Ash subscribed to after reading Campbell's journals. Two years later, in 1836, Ash helped establish a Disciples church in Cobourg, near his home.⁴ Meanwhile, at Oshawa others also shared Ash's views. This is attested to by the daughter-in-law of Thomas Henry, a Christian Connexion preacher who worked on the north shore and who in 1840 became minister of their church in Oshawa. She wrote: "1834 was remarkable in the Oshawa church, for the beginning of that long and tedious controversy, which arose between those who embraced the views of Alexander Campbell, and those who adhered to the original Christian platform."

¹ Geoffrey H. Ellis lists twenty-six churches that were in existence sometime after 1850. Five of these were a considerable distance north of the lake, in northern York County and northern Durham County. In some instances it is not clear from the records that a church was actually formed, and in other instances there may have been a church formed for which no record has been left. The one church near the lake still in existence is West Lake near Picton. The only one still in existence of the five considerably north of the lake is Pine Orchard. ("Restorationist Churches of the 19th Century Along the 'North Shore' of Lake Ontario, Excerpts from the Periodicals. 1853-1883," 68.)

² We recognize that it is an anachronism to refer to the town by this name, for Oshawa did not exist until 1850. A small settlement had grown up around the intersection of the Kingston road and Simcoe earlier in the century. When the owner of the general store applied for an official post office in 1842, he was told there needed to be an appropriate name for the town. From some natives they learned that the Indians had called it Oshawa, which meant something like "where we get out of the canoe and walk on the trail." The name began to be used in 1849 and became official when Oshawa was incorporated in 1850. For convenience we will refer to the community as Oshawa in the settlement's earlier years.

³ Thomas Henry, who later became a prominent Christian Connection minister in Oshawa, describes a series of events, beginning in January 1827, that led to a church in Whitby Township that later became the Oshawa Christian Church. (Mrs. P. A. Henry, *Memoir of Rev. Thomas Henry*, 1880, 38-41.)

⁴ For a more detailed account of Joseph Ash and the 1834 Conference, see Edwin Broadus, *How the Disciples Came Together in Early Ontario*, 2009, 141-147.

Very likely this controversy led to a separate Disciples church there in 1836.⁵ However, the two groups apparently reunited for a while despite substantive differences and then separated again. Because of their differences, when Henry arrived in 1840 as the new minister, the church, in his daughter-in-law's words, "was in a very unhappy condition. The wearing controversy on Mr. Campbell's theories, still continued unabated."⁶ We know from Ash's testimony that before Henry moved there, several dissidents left the church, but that when he came, they returned, believing he had agreed to changes such as observing the Lord's Supper every Sunday. Weeks went by and nothing changed.

This was the situation in 1841 when Ash moved to Oshawa. Then, as he recalled years later, "about three or four months after my arrival as I was seated with my family one evening, a rap came to my door, and to my surprise and delight, some of my warmest friends came in. They were A. Farewell, Ab'm Coryell and John McGill. They soon made their business known, related the treatment they had received at the hands of Elder Henry, and then said, 'Bro. Ash, we want you to go with us and form a church after the Apostolic pattern, where we can worship the Lord acceptably.'" Ash soon agreed, and seven people began meeting regularly in a school: Joseph and Miranda Ash, Abram and Caroline Farewell, Abraham Coryell, John McGill, and Nelson Pickett. Joseph Ash and Abram Farewell were selected as elders.⁷

Others from the Christian Connexion soon united with them, leading Elder Henry to plead with everyone to return. Despite Ash's reservations, they agreed to go back, but weeks later the promised changes had not taken place. According to Ash, Henry laughed at them and said, "They can't keep up meetings." Feeling tricked, they left again and resumed meeting on their own.⁸ Others soon joined them, including John McGill's brother, Dr. William McGill, a prominent physician in the community who proved in later years to be one of the Oshawa Disciples most capable leaders.⁹ Ash's own relationship with the church lasted more than thirty years, during all of which time he served as an elder.¹⁰

⁵ The 1836 date is the one given by James Menzies in 1843. (*Millennial Harbinger*, August 1843, 376-377.)

⁶ Henry, 70, 93, 96. Joseph Ash describes what was occurring in the church at that time: "The Christian Connection had a queer fashion of purifying their churches. When the bad cases for discipline accumulated, they would disband the church, then a few of the good ones would meet by mutual consent, form a new church and then receive into the new church the good ones, leaving the bad out. About a year before I arrived they had gone through a purifying process." This occurred in 1840. Ash names the "friends of the 'ancient gospel'" who refused to go back until changes were made. They may well have been some of those excluded in the "purifying process." [Joseph Ash, *Reminiscences*, Gospel Herald Foundation [reprint of original articles from the *Christian Worker*], 1998, 19.

⁷ Ash, 19-20.

⁸ Ash, 20-21.

⁹ Dr. McGill was born in Paisley, Scotland in 1806 and came to Canada with his parents in 1820 and to Oshawa a year later. Upon completing his studies at McGill College in Montreal and in New York City, he returned to Oshawa to practice medicine. He was brought up in the Presbyterian church but later joined the Christian Connexion. In 1842 he followed his brother to the Disciples, and two years later he became an elder. He married Julia Ann Bates of Bowmanville in 1849, and they had two children. In addition to his church activities and his medical practice, he was active in business and politics, and in 1867 he was elected to the Ontario Assembly. Dr. McGill died in 1883, after being predeceased by his wife in 1866. Abram Farewell was equally prominent in the community. He was born in the nearby village of Harmony (now part of Oshawa) in Whitby Township in 1812. He joined his father's mercantile business when he was eighteen and seven years later built a large store. The business prospered, and he branched out into grain exports as part owner of several ships that sailed to American ports. When he was forty he was an incorporator of the Oshawa Manufacturing Company, which made farm implements, and afterwards he invested in milling and banking. He won the contract to build the portion of the Canadian Pacific Railway between Fort William, Ontario and Selkirk, Manitoba. Farewell was active in the Disciples church, in the temperance movement, in community affairs, and in politics. In 1871 he was elected to the Ontario Assembly, defeating his fellow Disciple, William McGill. He married Caroline Stone in 1837 and died in 1888. (Information about both McGill and Farewell is taken largely from the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*.)

¹⁰ For information about Joseph Ash, see "Joseph Ash and the Christian Connection" in Broadus, 137-154.

Ash does not tell us how many left the Connexion for the Disciples, but besides those who formed the nucleus of the Oshawa church in 1841 he lists five ministers who made this change: Solomon Rose, Elijah Gleason, Robert Barrie, G. W. Colston, and Marshall B. Stone.¹¹ The last three lived in the area covered in this study. Barrie lived near Pickering and more will be said about him in conjunction with the Pickering Disciples. Stone and Colston both lived in or near Oshawa and need mentioning here. Stone left the Christian Connexion as early as Ash, for in 1834 he sent a report to Alexander Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger*, in which he told about "a little band of reformers" (Disciples) who had begun meeting in Toronto.¹² On the other hand, Colston, who was Joseph Ash's brother-in-law, did not leave the Christian Connexion until many years later, for in 1862, while living in Oshawa, he was President of their Canada Christian Conference. Apparently he cast his lot with the Disciples soon after this.¹³

Some Preachers in Oshawa and Their Impact on the Church

The Oshawa church continued for more than half a century, until 1890.¹⁴ After meeting in a school-house and perhaps elsewhere for a few years, the congregation obtained its own building in 1848, and, in Ash's words, "The church in Oshawa flourished remarkably after we had a house of worship..."¹⁵ Few statistics are available, but what there are indicate considerable fluctuation: 60 members in 1854, 17 in 1857, 25 in 1858, 37 in 1859, 32 in 1861, and 75 in 1875.¹⁶ During the church's existence, census figures show that the town had 1,000 people in 1841, 3,185 in 1871, and 4,063 in 1891. It is impossible to know all the factors that affected church growth, or the lack of it, but preachers sometimes had a positive effect and sometimes a negative one, and repeated attempts to unite with the Christian Connexion also were at times negative, at least in relation to growth. There were also the usual factors that affect most congregations – members, especially key ones, either moving away or dying. Ultimately this led to the demise of the congregation, but despite this the influence of the Oshawa church lived on elsewhere.

Although the Oshawa church often invited preachers from other places to work with them either during special meetings or on a longer term basis, the church's membership, according to Joseph Ash, included three or four good speakers. These included Ash, Dr. McGill, and Marshall B. Stone.¹⁷ One who

¹¹ Ash, 22-23.

¹² Marshall Benjamin Stone was born in Lower Canada (Quebec) in 1810 of parents who had come earlier from Massachusetts. In about 1818 the family moved to the Oshawa area, near Abram Farewell's parents. Marshall's sister, Caroline, later married Abram. Marshall married another neighbour, Emily Blair, around 1831, and the couple had at least nine children before Emily died in 1847. About a year later Marshall married Mary Wallrant, and they had two children. Little is known about his preaching activities, but Joseph Ash mentions being associated with him in Oshawa and Bowmanville in the 1840s and also going on a preaching tour with him for several weeks in 1848 in Prince Edward County. In 1854 Marshall and Mary moved to the Minnesota Territory, to St. Peter, where he was the first Justice of the Peace and where he was active in the temperance movement. Mary died in 1864, and Marshall married a third time, to Anna Johnston. In 1872 he was elected senator in the Minnesota Legislature. He died in Minnesota in 1885.

¹³ George Washington Colston was born in New Hampshire in 1813. After serving as a Christian Connection minister in New York, he moved to Ontario in August 1843, where he continued evangelizing for them. Before 1843 he was married in Canada to Mary Ann Hall, an Ontario native. Colston affiliated with the Disciples in the early 1860s, near the time his "Epistle from Ottawa" appeared in David Oliphant's paper, *Message of Good Will*, in late 1863. After preaching in Oshawa and elsewhere in the province, he moved to central Illinois. In 1875 he returned for a visit and spoke at Oshawa in June. He died later that year in Logan Co., Illinois, while on a preaching tour.

¹⁴ For the date the church stopped meeting see Geoffrey H. Ellis, "An Inquiry into the Growth of the Disciples of Christ in 19th Century Ontario," Unpublished M. T. S. Thesis, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, 1993, Appendix A.

¹⁵ Ash, 21.

¹⁶ *Christian Banner*, August 1854, 222-223; April 1857, 126-127; March 1858, 95; *Banner of the Faith*, March-April 1859, 87; March-April 1861, 76-77; *Bible Index*, September 1875, 275.

¹⁷ Ash, 23.

was invited to come and work with them and who caused a lot of trouble was John Doyle, a preacher known for his work with Disciples in the Maritimes and western New York. When he came to Ontario, he made his home in Oshawa, and he represented the church at the meeting of the Ontario Co-operation at the 1852 June Meeting.¹⁸ He then served as a traveling evangelist for the Co-operation from late 1852 until 1855, but much if not all of this time it was on a part time basis, so he may well have worked with the Oshawa church during some or all of this period.¹⁹ Perhaps the best indicator of when he was there is found in the membership figures: 60 in 1854 and only 17 in 1857, making it likely Doyle was preaching there prior to 1857,²⁰ and probably before March 1855, based on the evidence given in the footnote for the previous sentence. Ash says that “he became turbulent without cause and went so far as to declare he would ‘break up the church, root and branch and all the Alexander Campbells in the universe could not build it up again.’” Ash added, “He crippled the church, but did not obliterate it.”²¹

The brief ministry of Moses E. Lard was a much happier experience. Lard, a preacher and editor who was well-known among Disciples, was a pacifist and moved to Canada to escape the American Civil War.²² He came in 1864 and divided his time between the Bowmanville and Oshawa churches, making

¹⁸ *Banner of the Faith*, June 1852, 165.

¹⁹ Ash, 23. Doyle was born in Nova Scotia in August 1808 and was reared a Roman Catholic. When he was grown he was immersed and joined the Rawdon Calvinist Baptist Church December 13, 1829. He began preaching the following year, but by 1837 when he adopted some of the views of Alexander Campbell, the Baptists withdrew from him. Doyle, his wife Sarah, and seventeen others then formed a Disciples church in Rawdon. Doyle soon joined with Benjamin Howard in preaching in Nova Scotia, but this ended in November 1841 in a dispute resulting in the expulsion of Doyle and the Rawdon church from the Disciples. Doyle then went to Prince Edward Island for about six years to preach there, then to Williamsville, New York in 1849, and finally to Ontario. (Michael Christie and Roland McCormick, *A New Perspective: The Origins of New Brunswick's Free Baptists*, 2011, 144.) After he came to Ontario he was in Oshawa by 1852, when he attended the June Meeting, and by late 1852 he was supported part time by the Provincial Co-operation as a traveling evangelist, a work he continued to do until 1855. There is evidence, other than Ash's comments, that Doyle was sometimes difficult to get along with. Oliphant related an incident when he and Doyle met while traveling among the churches and Doyle did not think Oliphant was friendly enough. Doyle went to Lima, Grant Co., Wisconsin by 1859, where he preached for the Baptists, and in the early 1860s he returned to Ontario with family troubles and in failing health. He died in Oxford County, July 12, 1874. As to the exact time of his difficulties in Oshawa, there is a possible clue in part in his report of March 12, 1855. After noting with approval that a church he visited had no elders, he said, “I think, brother, the best piece of amusement the Devil now enjoys is when he can get a church recklessly to disregard the word of the Lord, and choose for their elder a brother to whom he has shown the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and to whom he has said, pursue these things . . . and you will get them all, and if you plunge into politics, up to your eyes . . . and into all the refined fashions of the age, I will make a great man of you.” (*Christian Banner*, March 1855, 41.) This may well have been an attack on William McGill, one of the Oshawa elders, for he was financially well-off and involved in politics. This suggests that Doyle's difficulties with the Oshawa church may have occurred when he was traveling part time for the Co-operation. His work with the Co-operation ended shortly after this.

²⁰ Membership figures are not available for all the years we are interested in. Those given are from *Christian Banner*, August 1854, 222-223 and April 1857, 126-127.

²¹ Ash, 23.

²² Lard was born in Tennessee October 10, 1818 and was baptized in Missouri in 1841. After he married, he enrolled in Bethany College, where he graduated in 1849. He returned to Missouri to preach but left there for Kentucky at the outset of the Civil War when he refused to take an oath of allegiance to the Union as required of ministers by the Missouri Legislature. As a pacifist he came to Canada in 1864 but returned to Kentucky when the war ended the following year. From 1863 to 1868, which included his time in Canada, he edited and published *Lard's Quarterly*. As an author, he later wrote a commentary on Romans, which was regarded as a competent, scholarly treatment of Paul's letter, and which continued to be used widely in Churches of Christ well into the Twentieth Century. Lard died in Lexington, Kentucky June 17, 1880. (Thomas H. Olbricht, “Lard, Moses E.,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 2004, 451.)

his home in Oshawa. He left in 1865 when the war ended. In 1864 he preached in a special series of meetings in Oshawa with thirty additions, including twenty baptisms. Ash said that as a result of Lard's labors the church had established a Sunday School and was enlarging and renovating its building. He added, "Bro. Lard is truly a great and good man. He is one of the clearest and closest reasoners I ever heard.... He was listened to with profound attention; although the audiences were large, indeed much crowded, the silence was so deep that by times it was really oppressive. For most of the meetings our house was quite too small. This is only the beginning, and we anticipate much more good, as the results of his labors during the year for which he is engaged."²³ Lard's preaching in Oshawa, Pickering, and Bowmanville caught the attention of the clergy of other churches, and, according to Ash, they held "a consultation meeting to devise the best means to stay the wonderful influence Lard's preaching had over the people."²⁴ One wonders what the impact would have been had he stayed in Canada longer.

Two years after Lard left, a preacher named W. S. Patterson appeared in Bowmanville and then Oshawa, claiming good standing with the Disciples in the Maritimes. He was engaged to preach for the Oshawa church for a year (apparently on a shared basis with the Bowmanville church), beginning in March 1867. After nine months he broke his contract at Oshawa but then returned a year later and resumed preaching without the consent of the congregation. Some wanted him to stay, others wanted him to leave, and by various means, some underhanded, he was still preaching there nearly three years later. Then, on January 20, 1870, a committee of seven who had been appointed by the church to look into the matter brought three charges against Patterson. The congregation met two days later and accepted the report and a subsequent motion for his dismissal. He took more than twenty-five members of the church with him and formed a Baptist church in Oshawa.²⁵

Unity Attempts and Ash's Departure

Shortly after the Patterson episode, a well-intentioned move to unite with the local Christian Connexion congregation, in Ash's words, "nearly ruined the church we had labored so hard to build up."²⁶ There had long been grounds for hoping that the Disciples and the Christian Connexion could unite in Ontario. It had happened in the 1830s in Kentucky and elsewhere under the leadership of Barton W. Stone and others. Both groups claimed to be unity movements. Both were immersionists, although the Connexion did not consider baptism essential for salvation. In Oshawa many of the Disciples, like Ash, the McGill brothers, and the Farewells, had come out of the Connexion and had many friends there. There had been two or three such attempts around the time of Ash's move to Oshawa, and, as he said, "Afterwards several efforts for union were made but all failed."²⁷ Probably George W. Colston reflected the hopes of many when he wrote in November 1863, "I can see no good reason why the Baptists, Disciples, and Christians could not be united together in one body."²⁸ We know little about the attempt that Ash said "nearly ruined the church" other than a report in 1872 that "the Congregation of Christ at Oshawa, which had formerly united with another congregation having affiliations with a 'conference' which claimed the mastery over them, have very properly withdrawn from the bondage and have asserted and vindicated their independence as freemen of Christ, and now meet in a hall...."²⁹

²³ *The Adviser*, October 1864, 56.

²⁴ Ash, 24.

²⁵ Ash, 24-25; *Bible Indicator*, February 1870, 139-142.

²⁶ Ash, 21.

²⁷ Ash, 21.

²⁸ *Message of Good Will*, July & August 1864, 123-124. This was approximately when Colston left the Christian Connexion.

²⁹ *Bible Index*, December 1872, 28. The report about meeting in a hall proved false, for the next issue (p. 56) said the meeting house was not sold but was renovated. The church affiliated with a conference was the Christian Connexion church.

Soon after these twin setbacks – the Patterson affair and the abortive unity effort – the congregation lost Joseph Ash, who had been an elder there for more than 30 years. In the early 1870s, shortly after his wife, Isabella, died, Ash moved to southwest Ontario, where he lived the remainder of his life.³⁰ About this time George Clendenan began preaching, at least on occasion, in Oshawa, and in 1875 he was engaged by the church to serve as minister.³¹ He continued at least two years, and soon several were added and membership increased to seventy-five.³² However, the number soon declined. A visitor reported in the January 1883 *Bible Index* that “the number of members in this congregation has been reduced from removals to other localities. Among these were some who were the more active men.” Dr. McGill died in 1883 and Abram Farewell in 1888. By 1890 the church ceased meeting.

The Church’s Legacy of Evangelism

The Oshawa church’s greatest legacy was its evangelism, and because of this its influence lived on. In 1843 (or possibly 1844) three or four of the Oshawa Disciples assisted the handful of members who formed the nucleus of the Bowmanville church.³³ About the same time some of them began assisting the Pickering church, which was planted in 1843 by two Toronto Disciples, James Beaty, Sr. and Thomas Chalmers Scott.³⁴ The Oshawa and Bowmanville churches often cooperated in missions and established churches at Butterfield, Charlesville, and Clarke Township.³⁵ There were also a number of Disciples in

³⁰ Ash was still living in Oshawa in October 1870 when Dugald Sinclair died. (Ash, 119.) But by November 30, 1871 he had moved to Harwich Township in Kent County, when he married Sarah Ballah, a 36-year-old widow. (She was a Disciple from Dorchester Township in Elgin County, and Edmund Sheppard, the Disciples minister at Mapleton in the same township, officiated at the wedding. [Elgin County Marriages, 1865-1873.]) Ash was apparently still in Harwich Township, twelve miles from Chatham, when his brother-in-law, George W. Colston, visited him in May 1875. (*Bible Index*, August 1875, 233.) In his *Reminiscences*, Ash said that he moved from Oshawa the first of April, but he did not name the year. (Ash, 25.) From the facts cited above it is evident he moved in April 1871. The unity undertaking in Oshawa came before his move, for Ash calls this “the last one I was practically into.” (Ash, 21.) His wife, Isabella, died January 28, 1869. (*Oshawa Vindicator*, March 3, 1865.) (Ash was twice widowed before marrying Isabella: Miranda died November 27, 1855, and Sarah June 16, 1860. [*Millennial Harbinger*, March 1856, 178; June 16, 1860.]) In Colston’s account of his 1875 visit he said that Ash had buried three wives and ten children.)

³¹ George Clendenan was born December 18, 1825 in Louth Township in Lincoln County and was baptized around 1843, presumably at Jordan. He left at an early age and studied at Frankfort University in Kentucky. He returned to Canada by 1849, when he entered business in Hamilton and helped form a Disciples church there. Next he went to California for nearly four years, then back to Rockford, Illinois, where he preached from 1855-60, and then to Rolling Prairie, Indiana, where he preached another five years, during the Civil War. From 1865-67 he preached in Michigan, after which he went to Bethany, West Virginia so his sons could attend Bethany College. But within three months one of them, George, died of typhoid fever. He then returned to Canada, where he preached during the 1870s in Bowmanville and Oshawa and from 1874-75 edited the *Bible Index* in Toronto. Around 1880 he returned to the States, to the Dakota Territory. After spending the winter of 1882-83 at his son’s place in Toronto, he returned to Dakota, where he died May 11, 1883. His body was brought back to Toronto to Mount Pleasant Cemetery. He was survived by his wife, his son, D. W., a barrister in Toronto, his brothers, Amos and Daniel, and a sister, Mrs. Laws, of Jordan, Ontario. (*Witness of Truth*, February 1849, 42-43; *Bible Index*, June 1883, 191-192; November 1885, 352.)

³² *Bible Index*, August 1875, 234; September 1875, 274-275; March 1876, 78; May 1877, 154; July 1877, 219.

³³ Ash, 27-28.

³⁴ Ash, 35-36.

³⁵ Ash, 22. Butterfield, or Butterfield Settlement, was located in Clarington, near the intersection of Concession 3 and Highways 35/115. John Henry, the oldest son of Thomas Henry in Oshawa, was a leading Disciple at Butterfield. It had twenty-five members in 1858 and twenty-seven in 1870. (*Christian Banner*, March 1858, 95; *Bible Indicator*, January 1870, 124.) Charlesville was renamed Haydon’s Village after 1866. Now called Haydon, it is about five miles north of Bowmanville. There was preaching at Charlesville as early as the winter of 1854-55, and apparently a church was formed then, but a year later it was said to be “in a disorderly, cold state.” (*Christian*

Brooklin who likely organized a church there, for representatives from six other churches gathered there in 1861.³⁶ However, it is not clear whether any from Oshawa helped the Brooklin church. Otherwise, Ash mentions helping out in Uxbridge, after C. J. Lister planted a church there in 1862.³⁷ Also, it is significant that when the provincial Co-operation was first proposed in 1849, Joseph Ash, Abram Farewell, William McGill, and David Oliphant, who was then publishing his journal in Oshawa, were the instigators. In the organizational meeting in 1849, Ash, Farewell, and Oliphant, along with two men from Bowmanville and one each from Toronto and Pickering, were put on the “supervising committee.”³⁸ The following year, the “directing committee” was composed entirely of men from Oshawa, Bowmanville, and Pickering. Ash later asserts that all these men were elders.³⁹ In 1851 their direction of the Co-operation ended, but these three churches remained active for many years in evangelism.

The Pickering Church and George Barclay, Sr.

Attention now needs to be given to the Pickering church and to George Barclay, Sr. and his family. As mentioned earlier, the church was established by James Beaty, Sr. and Thomas Chalmers Scott from the Shuter Street church in Toronto. These men had opportunity to know George Barclay when he visited in Toronto, and all the charter members at Pickering were Barclay’s relatives: Abraham and Nancy (Barclay) Knowles, David and Maria Barclay, and Hannah (Parham) Barclay, wife of James Barclay. Nancy, David, and James were all children of George Barclay, Sr.

George Barclay, Sr. was one of the early pioneers from Scotland who figured in one way or another in the early history of Ontario Disciples, yet little of his story with the Disciples has been told.⁴⁰ He and his wife, Janet Tullis, were born in Cupar in Fifeshire, Scotland. His birth date was July 3, 1780, and like many others in his family he worked as a weaver. He and Janet were married January 24, 1801, and by 1809 they were members of the Scotch Baptist Church in nearby Largo, where David Oliphant, Sr. and Sophia Watt also attended before they married.⁴¹ The Barclays later were members of a sister church in

Banner, February 1855, 56-57; December 1856, 383.) There were twenty-one members in 1859, and two years later David Oliphant visited and was “happy to witness the amount of life the brethren possess.” (*Banner of the Faith*, March & April 1859, 87; June 1861, 143.) The Clarke Township church was called Townline and was most likely somewhere on Darlington-Clarke Townline, between Bowmanville and Orono. This church was organized in 1856 by James Kilgour with twenty-three members. (*Christian Banner*, December 1856, 87.)

³⁶ *Christian Banner*, July 1858, 222-223; *Banner of the Faith*, August 1861, 204.

³⁷ Ash, 22, 38.

³⁸ *Witness of Truth*, July 1849, 164-166; October 1849, 237-238. The original advocates envisioned “a union embracing, if possible, all the churches in the province.”

³⁹ *Witness of Truth*, December 1850, 289-290; Ash, 76. Nearly forty years later, Ash thought the provincial Co-operation was formed about 1845 and was under the direction of the Pickering, Oshawa and Bowmanville elders for several years. However, it was actually 1849 when the Co-operation was organized, 1850 when the first evangelists were supported, and 1851 when the work was turned over to the Eramosa-Esquesing-Erin churches.

⁴⁰ He was one of eleven men named by James Black near the end of his life in the *Christian Worker* of August 1885 who came to Canada, some as early as 1817, and who, Black said, “accepted the Bible only as the God-given revelation of His will, and studied it carefully, especially the New Testament, as teaching the Christian religion, which they tried to learn, teach and practice. If such were not disciples, I cannot define the term.”

⁴¹ *Christian Banner*, June 1855, 167. David and Sophia married August 20, 1809, so it was sometime before this date when they and the Barclays were worshiping together at Largo. By Scotch Baptist we mean those who followed after the teachings of Robert Carmichael and Archibald McLean and the church they led in Edinburgh beginning in 1765. Scotch Baptists should not be confused with other Baptists in Scotland in the early Nineteenth Century. Writers in that century, sometimes at least, referred to any Baptist from Scotland as a Scotch Baptist rather than a Scottish Baptist, and this has led many, such as Reuben Butchart in his very influential book, *The Disciples of Christ in Canada Since 1830*, to ascribe to Scotch Baptists (followers of Carmichael and McLean) a dominant role and influence in the origins of the Disciples in Canada. David Oliphant, Sr. and George Barclay, Sr.

Paisley, near Glasgow, which was actually under the direction of the Glasgow congregation. It is thought George and Janet moved to Paisley because of difficult economic times for weavers in Fifeshire.

By the time they left Scotland, the Barclays had six surviving children (one had previously died in infancy), and George had very likely begun preaching. In 1816, with the help and encouragement of James Buchanan, British consul in New York City, George left for Canada ahead of his family, and by October of that year he was teaching school in Newmarket, north of York (Toronto). In 1817 Janet and the children joined him in Canada, and by the fall of 1818 they were living in Cramahe Township in or near Colborne, where George was preaching for the Baptists and teaching school.⁴² Much of the time prior to 1820 he was, as he put it, "Employed as a Missionary."

In 1819 the Barclays purchased 100 acres about a half-mile north of Brougham in Pickering on what is now Brock Road. His farm lay between the two Baptist churches he began serving by 1820 – one in Markham Township and the other in Whitby Township. He continued serving these churches at least six years, and probably longer. In 1821 there was a dispute within the Markham church about paying Barclay a salary. One of the members, Joshua Wixon, said this was unscriptural, since this would make him a hireling, and Jesus said that "a hireling careth not for the sheep." Some others agreed with this view, but Barclay reportedly called them ignorant and ordered them to be silent. Nineteen people were withdrawn from, so they formed another Baptist church, at Claremont in Pickering Township.

In 1824 Barclay was chosen to serve as Moderator of the Haldimand Baptist Association (District of Newcastle, which included Markham and presumably Whitby).⁴³ Also we have record of two ordinations Barclay was involved in which are of special interest in Disciples history. Barclay, William Marsh, and Alexander Stewart ordained James Black, the future Disciples leader, at Whitby November 12, 1826, and then on May 18, 1828 Barclay ordained Alexander Stewart as pastor of the York (Toronto) Baptist church "according to the principles of the Regular Baptists in Britain and America."⁴⁴

George Barclay and the Disciples

It is evident that during at least his first decade in Canada Barclay worked with what were called the "Association Baptists." Some of these people were from the United States and some from the British Isles, and because of their practices many Baptists from Scotland refused to work with them. John Menzies, in a letter to a friend in Scotland in 1841, said, "We have no fellowship with what we call the association because we do not see any precept or example in the New Testament for many of the proceedings...." David Oliphant, Jr. expressed similar sentiments nine years later, and the views of

are the only known early leaders who were Scotch Baptists. Oliphant married a Haldanean Baptist, and once in Canada he did not conduct himself like an exclusivist Scotch Baptist. As we shall see later in this study, there is a serious question about how good a Scotch Baptist Barclay was.

⁴² James Buchanan was a member of the Scotch Baptist church in New York City, which later became a Disciples church. Buchanan was a devout Christian, and he assisted a number of people either in coming to Canada or after they arrived. When he retired, he moved near Niagara Falls. Information about Buchanan's relationship with Barclay and where Barclay lived and worked in 1818 is found in a letter from Alexander Stewart in *New Evangelical Magazine and Theological Review*, Vol. V, 1819, 78. Reference to Barclay's work in Newmarket and his family's arrival in Upper Canada is found in his land petition to Samuel Smith in 1817.

⁴³ Information in this paragraph is taken from John W. Sabeen, "The Barclay Houses," October 2004. This booklet includes an update of Barclay family information found in a publication by Robert M. Fuller, "The Barclays of Pickering," 1976 and 1997. Sabeen includes several source documents not found in Fuller's work.

⁴⁴ Brian K. Narhi, *Early Niagara District Court Records*, Vol. II, File 2-35 2006, 34; Glenn Tomlinson, *From Scotland to Canada: The Life of Pioneer Missionary Alexander Stewart*, 2008, 164-167. Both Barclay and Marsh were with the Markham church at the time of Black's ordination, which took place before he became a Disciple. Stewart never became a Disciple, but he, John Menzies, and others planted the Norval church that eventually evolved into a Disciples church, and later Stewart planted the Baptist church in Toronto from which James Beaty, Sr., James Leslie, and others separated in 1834 to form a Disciples congregation.

Menzies and Oliphant were probably representative of many of the early Disciples in Ontario.⁴⁵ Barclay, however, chose to work at least ten years with what was the main body of Baptists in Canada, but by the early 1830s he seems to have despaired of continuing to associate with them, for Joseph Ash recalled, more than fifty years later, that in 1830 or 1833 Barclay “broke his connection with the regular Baptists and worshipped occasionally with some Scotch Baptists in Toronto.” Elsewhere Ash indicates that when James Beaty, Sr. and others withdrew from the Baptists that Barclay “met with these in Toronto, as often as convenient.” Available evidence shows that separation of the Disciples in Toronto took place in 1834.⁴⁶

During the early 1830s, then, it became apparent where Barclay’s sentiments and convictions lay. As to how and why this occurred, some insight is available from a lost letter which he wrote May 12, 1855 from his home in Brougham. In it he supposedly said that after he broke with the Baptists in Paisley he came to Upper Canada and preached among them, attempting to convert them to the Disciples’ doctrine. He failed in this mission, he said, owing to “the gross ignorance of the people at that time and their small acquaintance with the Book of Books.”⁴⁷ In assessing this, it is obvious Barclay could not have converted anyone to Disciples’ doctrine in 1816, for Alexander Campbell did not begin publishing his periodicals until 1823. But Barclay may be claiming that in 1816 he held to some of the same views Campbell and the Disciples later promulgated, for many of these restorationist views were similar to those he learned while with the Scotch Baptists and definitely not the sole property of Campbell.

Barclay’s Activities in Pickering Township

Barclay’s work with the Pickering Disciples began in 1844, the year after the church was organized, leaving the question of what he was doing for a decade before this, other than occasionally meeting with the Disciples in Toronto. He likely preached some, either among the Baptists or the Disciples or both, and there are records of marriages he performed beginning in 1831. He and his younger sons had a farm to look after, including additional land he purchased in 1835 and 1839. From August 1836 to December 1837 he was Brougham’s first Postmaster, but he soon lost this job because of his involvement in the political reform movement leading to the Mackenzie Rebellion in 1837. His farm was a meeting place during the months leading up to William Lyon Mackenzie’s march on Yonge Street, and his son, George, Jr., took an active part in the rebellion, which led to his arrest and conviction of treason. George, Sr. was later depicted by an army officer as a “vile old preaching traitor that stimulated the people of Pickering . . . to take part in the late Rebellion.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Broadus, 188, 190. When I included Menzies’ letter in my book, I used the transcriber’s reading, “apocation,” but included a footnote that it was likely “association.” Menzies used an old style “s” which, in his script, looked much like a “p.” David Oliphant, Jr. distinguished between “*Regular or Particular* Baptists of Canada” and “*Scotch, English, Irish, or Welsh* Baptists.” (By “*Scotch*” he meant to include all Scottish Baptists.) He specifically drew a line between the Baptists in Pickering and Markham (the church where Barclay had once been pastor) and Baptists in the shires of Scotland. “They are as free from creeds, priests, and sects as the Disciples.” Then he added, “Neither are they all Strict Canadian Baptists who are Baptists in Canada.” He said, “We have much respect for many of the Baptists in the province, with whom we are as willing to unite, co-operate, love and be loved, as we are free to confess that they are spiritual men in Christ.” (*Witness of Truth*, August 1850, 175-176.)

⁴⁶ Broadus, 74-77; Ash, 35, 43. When Ash spoke of Scotch Baptists, he referred to what we would call Scottish Baptists. Alexander Stewart, the minister in Toronto, was from the same county in Scotland as Barclay and had been trained in the Haldane school in that country. Some others in the Baptist church Stewart served in Toronto had also been Baptists in Scotland.

⁴⁷ Sabeau, 11. Sabeau’s information about the “lost letter” is from Orlo Miller, “Descendant of Famous Barclay Family Clerk of Lobo Tp, 57 Years,” 8.

⁴⁸ Sabeau, 8-9; Richard J. Stagg, “George Barclay,” *Canadian Biography Online*. George, Jr. was sentenced to three years imprisonment, to be followed by banishment from the province, but he was released after two years in the

Beginning in 1844, he was involved with the Pickering Disciples church, where he frequently spoke. In 1855, when he was in his seventy-fifth year, he said that he intended, "with the help of the Master, to speak every first day," although the distance from home was six miles. He also mentioned that he was active as an agent of the Bible Society.⁴⁹ He was also involved in community affairs as township clerk from 1844 through 1848 and a participant in the direction of Mount Pleasant School near his home.⁵⁰

When George Barclay died August 10, 1857 he left little in the way of material goods other than his land. His other earthly possessions were one horse, a buggy and harness, two cows, and some household furniture, valued, in all, at \$246.00.⁵¹ His widow, Janet, died in 1866 in Pickering Township. But their influence lived on in the lives of their children and grandchildren who were involved in the work of the Disciples, not only in Pickering and Oshawa, but also in Toronto, southwest Ontario, the Georgian Bay area, and as far away as Wisconsin.⁵²

The Pickering Church Through the Years

Having related the story of George Barclay, we can return to the story of the Pickering church, where Barclay spent the last thirteen years of his life and where many of his relatives were members. When the church first began meeting at the schoolhouse near Post's mill,⁵³ none of the members were public speakers, so Joseph Ash agreed to come from Oshawa once or twice a month, which he continued to do for twenty-seven years. At first James Beaty, Sr. and Thomas Chalmers Scott also came occasionally from Toronto to speak.⁵⁴ Shortly after the church began meeting, a young Disciple from Nottingham, England, Edmund Sheppard, came to Pickering to teach school, and he united with them.⁵⁵ Two years

general amnesty. He was involved in the rebellion with a neighbour, Peter Matthews, who was hanged for treason. Matthew's wife said that George Barclay, Sr.'s views persuaded her husband to join the rebels.

⁴⁹ *Christian Banner*, June 1855, 167.

⁵⁰ Sabeau, 11.

⁵¹ Sabeau, 35.

⁵² Many of George and Janet Barclay's children were involved with the Disciples throughout the province and elsewhere. (1) Their daughter, Nancy, was one of the founding members of the Pickering church, and Nancy's husband, Abraham Knowles, was one of the church's leaders. Their daughter, Mary, married William Forrester, a talented leader in Pickering and later in Toronto. Another daughter, Jane, married William H. Trout from the Meaford area, and they helped plant the Disciples church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Their son, Henry, married Amelia Whitelaw in the Meaford area. (2) George and Janet's daughter, Jane, married Randall Bentley, who after her death moved to the Mapleton area, where he donated land for the Dorchester church and served as an elder. Jane and Randall's daughter, Nancy, married Edmund Sheppard, a prominent Disciples preacher. (3) A third daughter of George and Janet, Margaret, married Robert Barrie, a Christian Connexion preacher, who in 1849 affiliated with the Disciples in Pickering. (4) George and Janet's son, James, whose wife was a charter member at Pickering, had two sons, George James and Eli David, who were well known among the Disciples. The former was a leader at Oshawa and later at Toronto's Bathurst Street church, and the latter taught in several colleges in the United States, including Bethany. (5) Another son of George and Janet, Eli Gorham Barclay, had a daughter, Eliza, who married George Burton, and George and Eliza's son, Charles Luther, who was head of the Robert Simpson Company, was a prominent Disciple in Toronto with Cecil Street and later Hillcrest. (6) Another son of George and Janet, David, was a founding member of the Pickering congregation.

⁵³ Post's mill was located near the spot where Brock Road crosses Duffin's Creek.

⁵⁴ Ash, 35. Since the Pickering church was soon blessed with talent within its own membership, it speaks well of their love for Ash and of his preaching abilities that they continued to have him preach there.

⁵⁵ Edmund Sheppard was born in Newark, England February 3, 1823. He was brought up as an Anglican, but as an adult he identified with the Disciples in Nottingham, England. After teaching school in Pickering from about 1843 to 1846, he left Canada to attend Bethany College in Virginia. He returned, perhaps for awhile to Pickering, and then by 1849 to Mapleton in Elgin County to teach school. He very likely selected Mapleton because Randall Bentley had recently moved there. (Randall married George and Janet Barclay's daughter, Nancy, who died in 1838, after the birth of her seventh child. He then remarried, and he and his family moved to the Mapleton area by 1848.

later he left to attend Bethany College in Virginia, but his short stay led to the conversion of Jordan and Matilda Post, who later were some of the leading members of the congregation.

Although the church began with no qualified speakers, within a comparatively short time there were at least three. As mentioned in the story of George Barclay, in 1844 he began meeting with the congregation and doing much of the preaching. Why he waited a year to join them is uncertain, but his service with them from that time until his death seems uninterrupted. In 1847 William Forrester, who was about eighteen years old and a Presbyterian, arrived in Pickering Township from Fifeshire, Scotland. The following year, on April 17, 1848, he was immersed by James Beaty, Sr. Before long, he married Mary Knowles, daughter of Abraham and Nancy Knowles and granddaughter of George and Janet Barclay. About a decade after his baptism he began speaking publicly, and later he became the main speaker for the Pickering church. Sometime after 1883 he moved to Toronto, where he continued to be a church leader.⁵⁶ Then, in late 1849, George Barclay reported that his daughter Margaret's husband, Robert Barrie, who had been a Christian Connexion minister, had cast his lot with the Pickering Disciples. Ash called him "a strong, clear, energetic preacher," but his service to the church was cut short when he lost the use of his legs and lingered several years in extreme suffering.⁵⁷

Membership figures for the early years are not available, but are recorded beginning in 1857: 1857 – 33; 1858; 43; 1859 – 68; and 1861 – 85.⁵⁸ It would be helpful to have figures for subsequent years, since the church may have grown larger before decline set in. William R. Wood, who in 1911 wrote a history of Pickering, said that the congregation grew until it had a membership of nearly 250, but this seems high if he meant actual members. But growth was sufficient to encourage the congregation to build a brick meetinghouse in 1859. This and the adjacent cemetery were located at the southwest corner of Kingston and Brock roads, on land donated by George Leng, one of the members. The church did not receive the deed to the property until 1863, probably after the indebtedness on the building was paid.⁵⁹

That same year, Sheppard married Randall and Nancy's daughter, Nancy.) Sheppard set about to evangelize the adjacent area and established several churches in that region. He also cultivated relations with Dugald Sinclair and the churches he served, helping lead Sinclair and these churches into the Disciples fold. T. L. Fowler said, "He was the peer of any preacher in the land, and qualified to stand before any audience. Intellectual people were attracted and charmed by his originality of thought and the richness of his language. In his palmiest days he was a powerful and eloquent proclaimer of Christ's gospel. His earnest and stirring appeals to the heart and conscience were always through the understanding.... He had the qualifications in a high degree of a great preacher. He was serious in his deportment, devout and reverent by nature, and thoroughly in earnest. His voice was melodious, his utterance rapid, his language always choice and rich, and his conceptions original and lofty. He had his moods. Sometimes he was on the mountain top, at other times in the valley. This, however, was less an indication of weakness than an evidence of genius. But while he experienced a fluctuation in feelings, in his religious experience he was always the same – he never entertained a doubt." He and his wife, Nancy, had twelve children, nine of whom died young. Nancy died in 1884, and in 1887 Sheppard married Marjory Stevenson of Michigan. Sheppard died at Rodney, Ontario May 30, 1894. Butchart, 140-141; *Canadian Evangelist*, July 16, 1894, 1.

⁵⁶ Ash, 37-38: *Pickering News*, January 20, 1911; Geoffrey H. Ellis, "The Restoration Churches in Toronto," 2004, 12-13. Ash states that Forrester was still in Pickering in 1883. Before 1889 he moved to Toronto, when he, George J. Barkley, James Menzies, and others withdrew to form the Spadina Avenue church, which later moved to Bathurst Street. (*Bible Index*, January 1890, 21.) Forrester was a member at Bathurst when he died January 14, 1911. He was buried in what is now called Post Cemetery, at Kingston and Brock roads. The obituary in the Pickering newspaper states that "until a few years ago (he) was one of Pickering's best known residents." It also says that he was a farmer most of the time he lived in Pickering and that he was also a minister in the Disciples church.

⁵⁷ *Witness of Truth*, December 1848, 287; Ash, 38. Ash thought Barrie left the Connexion in 1850.

⁵⁸ *Christian Banner*, April 1857, 126-127; March 1858, 95; *Banner of the Faith*, March & April 1859, 87; March & April 1861, 76-77.

⁵⁹ A copy of the bill of sale (for one dollar) for the property was given to the author, along with other valuable items related to the Pickering church, by Terry Codling. The building is gone, but the cemetery remains.

The Pickering church had an active interest in evangelism. As noted in the story of the Oshawa Disciples, when the provincial Co-operation first existed, in 1849-51, the Oshawa, Bowmanville, and Pickering church directed it. During the organizational period in 1849, George Barclay represented Pickering, and afterwards Robert Barrie, Daniel Knowles, and Jordan Post were the representatives of the church.⁶⁰ After the Co-operation was placed under the direction of churches in the Eramosa-Erin-Esquesing area, the Pickering church continued to contribute toward the support of Co-operation evangelists for many years.

In 1856 the church conducted an unusual evangelistic effort in Pickering and nearby communities of Brougham, Claremont, and Scarborough in a half dozen different halls and schools. Meetings were held four weeks in September and were moved from place to place in these communities. Charles Lister, John Butchart, Jr., and Joseph Ash were the speakers, and there were five baptisms.⁶¹ There were no Disciples churches in Brougham or Claremont, but in Scarborough a congregation had been established soon after 1843 when James Beaty, Sr. baptized Daniel Knowles, who was Abraham Knowles' brother, and several others who lived near Highland Creek. It continued for several years and had thirty-six members in 1859, but for some reason this dropped to nineteen in 1861.⁶²

Conclusion and Assessment

As the century neared its close, many Pickering members had died, others had moved away, and the membership declined. In 1881 George James Barclay, whose mother, Hannah, was one of the charter members of the Pickering congregation and whose grandfather, George Barclay, Sr., had preached there several years, began coming from Toronto to preach one Sunday a month.⁶³ Not long after this William Forrester, one of the elders, moved to Toronto, and John Tripp, who was apparently the last surviving overseer, died in 1906.⁶⁴ According to William R. Wood, services of the church were discontinued after Tripp's death.⁶⁵

The Pickering church lived a little more than sixty years and the Oshawa church slightly less – in each case the equivalent of about two generations. Along with Bowmanville these congregations included some of the more talented leaders among the Nineteenth Century Ontario Disciples, and together they formed a triumvirate for evangelism in this section of Lake Ontario's north shore that was effective for a time. Although it seems that these churches were well-positioned to have continued into the Twentieth Century, especially in the population centres of Oshawa and Bowmanville, deaths and removals took their toll, as so often happens. But even though these churches no longer exist, their influence lived on their members who moved and faithfully served elsewhere, as well as in many of the descendants of these Christians. Thus, though the demise of these congregations is disappointing, the work of these pioneers was not in vain.

Edwin Broadus, August 2011

⁶⁰ *Witness of Truth*, October 1849, 237-238; December 1850, 289-290.

⁶¹ *Christian Banner*, October 1856, 319-320.

⁶² Ash, 38; *Banner of the Faith*, March & April 1859, 87; March & April 1861, 76-77.

⁶³ *Bible Index*, September 1883, 285.

⁶⁴ Tripp and Forrester were elders as early as 1875. (*Bible Index*, April 1875, 112.) John Tripp was born in 1815, near Cobourg. He moved to Scarborough and then Pickering with his parents and siblings about 1837. In his earlier years in Pickering, Tripp operated a saw mill and a farm, but in the 1860s he retired from these and moved into the village, when he married Rachel Forrester. He had become a Disciple about ten years earlier and was "an active and exemplary member for nearly half a century." He died in Pickering September 6, 1906, about a month shy of his ninety-first birthday. William Forrester helped conduct his funeral. (*Pickering News*, September 21, 1906.)

⁶⁵ William R. Wood, *Past Years in Pickering*, 1911, 134.