

The Early Days of the Toronto Disciples

Presented by Edwin Broadus
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of the Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society
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The first mention of the Toronto Disciples is found in a letter from Marshall B. Stone, Oct. 21, 1834, which told of “a little band of reformers in the city of Toronto, about twenty in number. They . . . meet together every first day and attend to the ordinances of God's house.” (*Millennial Harbinger*, December 1834.)

This 1830s Toronto scene is on the west side of Yonge St., about a block south of King. The Disciples first met a half block north of King, at 104 Yonge, in the home of the the Armstrong family.

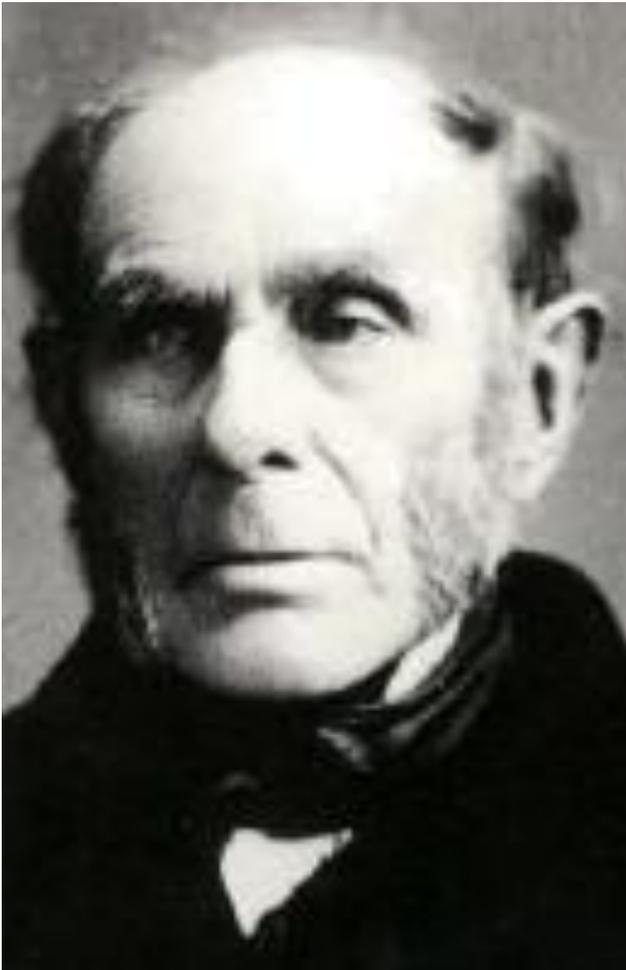


Description by Duncan Sinclair

Who Met with the Toronto Disciples About 1841 or 1842

“The prominent brethren in this little church at the time were **James Beaty, Sr., James Lesslie, and Peter Rutherford**. The two former were leading business men in the city; the latter was a builder and contractor There were several brethren who lived in the country, who were frequent visitors and held fellowship with this church. Among them was, **Elder George Barclay** whose residence was in the township of Pickering, some twenty-five miles east of Toronto Elder Barclay . . . and James Beaty, with six others, organized in Toronto the first church upon the apostolic model known in Canada, several years prior to my coming among them.”

James Beaty, Sr.



- *Born in Ireland in 1792*
- *Went to NYC about 1815 , where Jas. Buchanan, a Scottish Baptist, became Consul in 1816.*
- *Came to York (Toronto) in 1818*
- *Shoemaker and then a leather merchant*
- *Immersed along with Samuel Shanklin in ?? Supposedly they baptized one another.*
- *WHEN?*

We now know more about Shanklin and when he was baptized.

Joseph Ash named Samuel Shecklin (sic) and his wife as charter members of Toronto Disciples..

Thos. Stephens in 1820 hired two young Baptists, Geo. Nixon and Samuel Shankton (sic), to clear 10 acres in Esquesing Township near Georgetown. (James D. Stephens Memoirs.)

In 1832 one of the Lesslies wrote in his diary, "S. Shanklin's wife is in the dust, but he survives and is on the way of recovery" (probably during cholera epidemic).

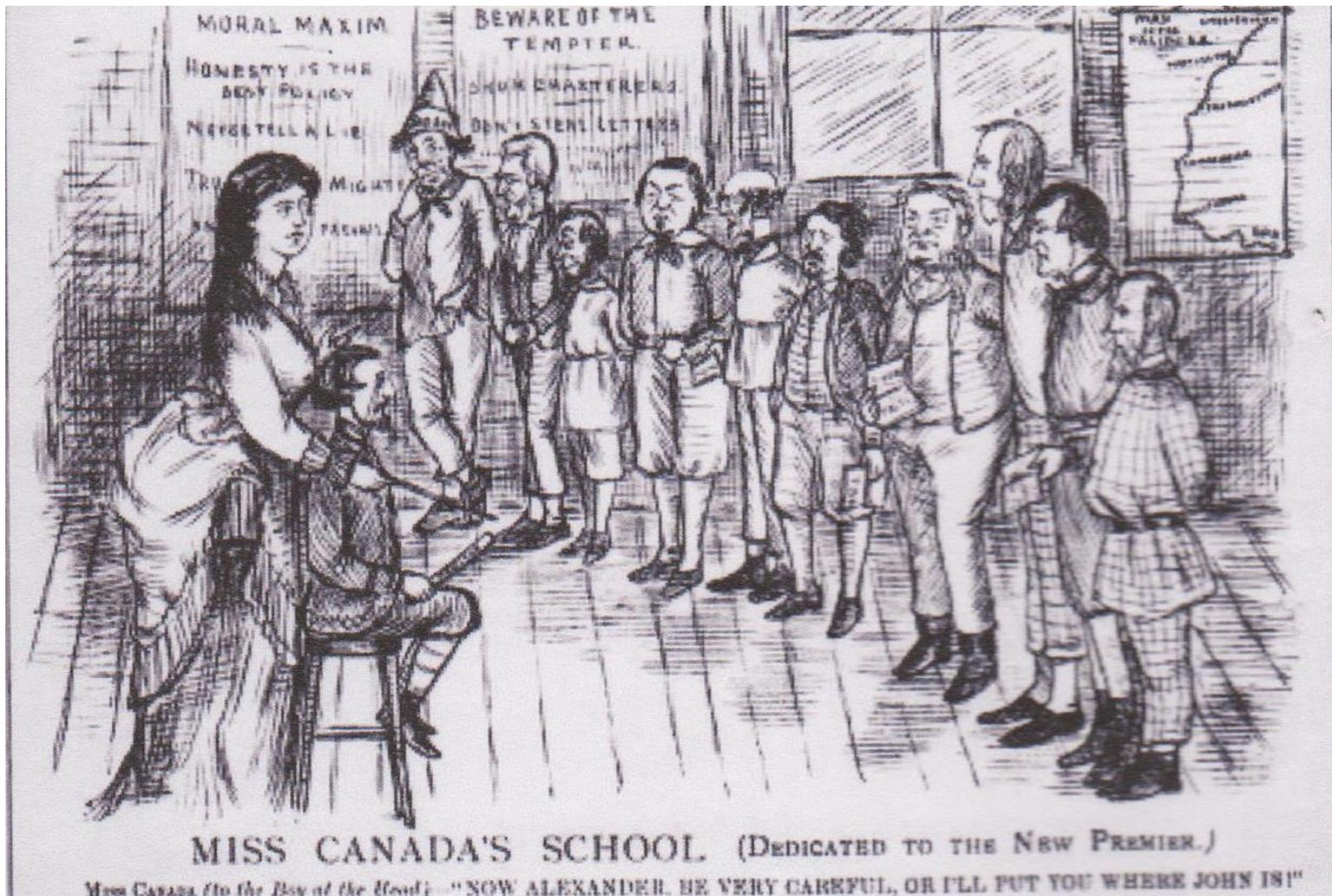
1837 Toronto Directory lists Samuel Shanklyn (sic) as a hatter on Yonge Street.

Samuel Shanklin was probably baptized by 1820. Hence, James Beaty, Sr. was evidently baptized by the same date.

Jas. Beaty Statue in Toronto

While other Toronto Disciples in the 19th Century were prominent in city life, James Beaty, Sr. was most famous of all. He was involved in various business ventures, including his own newspaper (*The Leader*), and in politics, serving as a member of Parliament beginning in 1867. This statue is on E. King St.





Beaty's Prominence in Politics

Cartoon after 1873 defeat of John A. McDonald (with dunce cap). The teacher is Miss Canada; the Gov. Gen. is Monitor. The new premier, Alex. Mackenzie, is at head of the line. Beaty is fourth from the left.

George Barclay, Sr.

Named by Sinclair as one of those who organized Toronto Disciples



- Born 1780 in Scotland.
- Scotch Baptist.
- Came to Canada in 1816.
- Worked with Association Baptists
- Ordained James Black
- Ordained A. Stewart in 1828
- Disciple in 1834 when he helped organize Toronto church

George Barclay's Early Role

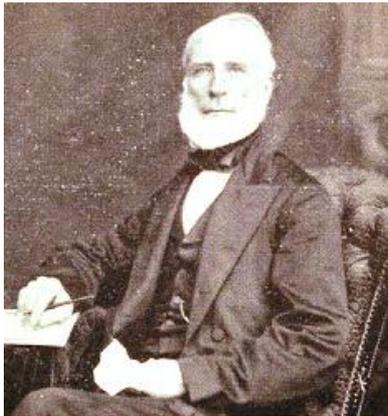
Duncan Sinclair called Barclay “the pioneer preacher of the primitive gospel in Canada,” and he believed that the church Barclay and Beaty organized in Toronto was “the first church upon the apostolic model known in Canada.” While these assertions are disputable, they suggest that Barclay may have played a far greater role in the early days of the Disciples in the province than has been attributed to him. (Duncan married one of Barclay's granddaughters, which may have influenced his view of Barclay.)

James Lesslie

Another Charter Member of Toronto Church



James Lesslie



Thomas C. Scott

Born in Dundee, Scotland in 1802

Sailed ship across Atlantic with his younger brother and sister in 1822

Helped run “Lesslie & Sons stores in Kingston, York, and Dundas

Baptist in Scotland, Dundas and York

He and Beaty started first Disciples congregation in Toronto

Brought Thomas C. Scott to Canada

He and Scott started second Disciples congregation in Toronto

Active in politics and business and was publisher of *Examiner*

Why a second Disciples church?

What brought about the separation between Beaty on one hand and Lesslie and Scott on the other is uncertain. Hugh McDiarmid, in Scott's obituary, said that there were "radical differences" between the opposing parties "in respect to faith and otherwise." (He did not identify the "otherwise.") Also, both Beaty and Lesslie were undoubtedly strong minded men. A hint of another difference is found in a comment by W. M. Wilson, a former Disciple who joined the Christadelphians. He knew both men and described those with Lesslie as "disciples of the old stamp." One interpretation of this is that the second group, led by two ardent Scots, preferred some of the practices of their Scottish Baptist forebears, which may be why in the 1866 city directory the second church is called "Disciples, or Scotch Baptist Church."

T. C. Scott's Home – 99 Pembroke



In 1855 Thomas Chalmers Scott purchased two lots on Pembroke, north of Dundas St., in a new section of the city, and he built a two story brick home on one of them in the 1860s. Scott was not a wealthy man, like Beaty and Lesslie, but held a high post in the Customs Office.

Pembroke Church Building

This was located on Pembroke St., south of Dundas, about six blocks from the Shuter St. Church. The building was 28' x 48' feet and cost \$4,000. Scott paid \$2,000 of this and took the responsibility for much of the loan for the remainder. By this time Lesslie had sold his businesses and had retired to his country estate at Eglinton, near what is now the intersection of Eglinton and University.

Peter and Martha Rutherford

Peter was a stone mason and was involved in some large building projects in early Canada. According to Duncan Sinclair, Peter was one of the leaders in the Toronto church. Martha and Peter died early, in 1844 and 1846, leaving an orphaned son, John. James Lesslie adopted and educated him. John later lived in Owen Sound, where he became mayor.

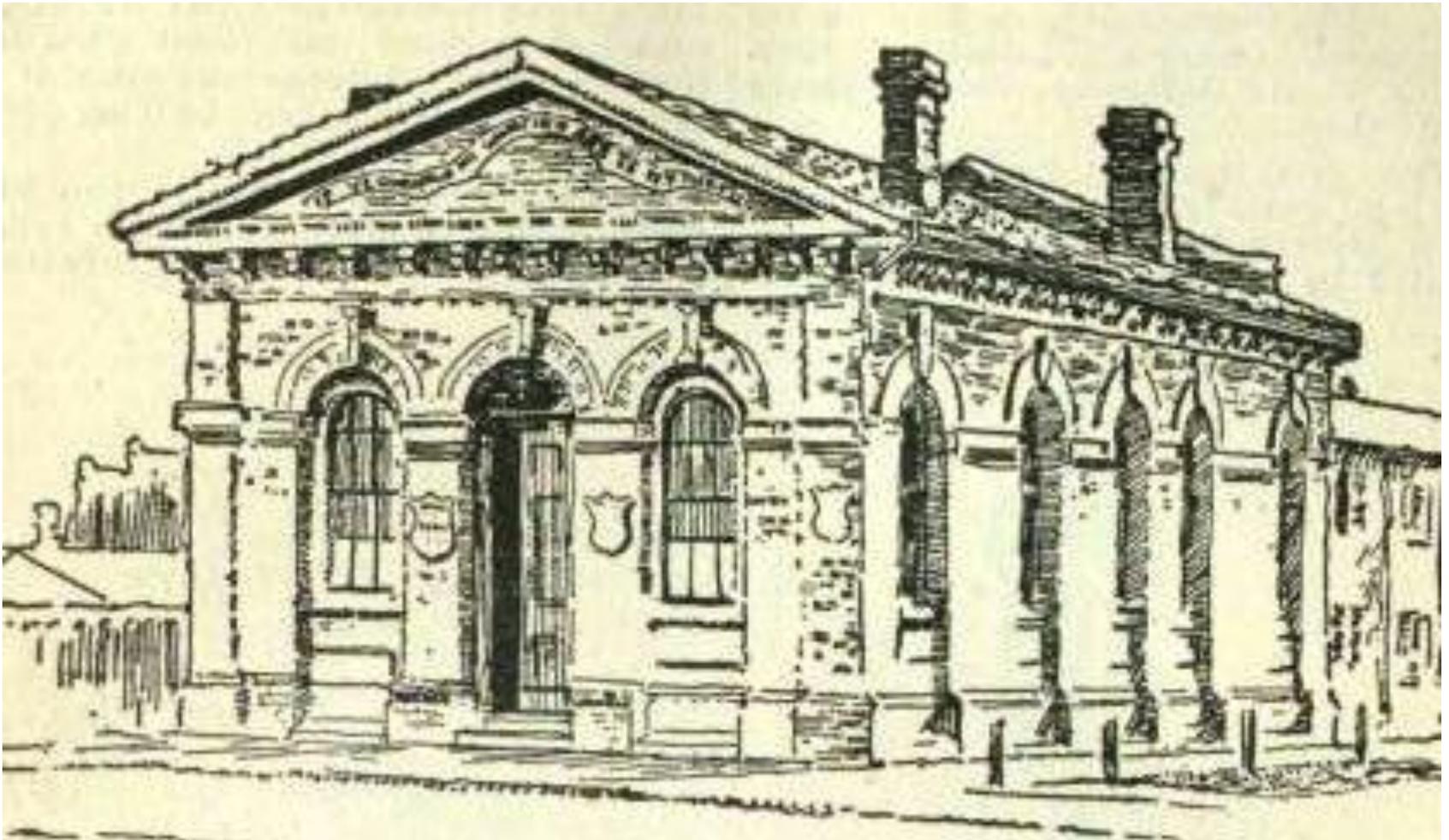
First Shuter Street Building

The Disciples' first church building in Toronto was provided by James Beaty in 1841 and was located at the southeast corner of Shuter and Victoria



Second Shuter Street Building

Also provided by James Beaty, in 1862



Description of Second Shuter St. Building by David Oliphant, Jr.

“Of the thirty or forty structures called churches, but more correctly styled chapels, in the city of Toronto, we are not acquainted with any so simple, so suitable, so serviceable in its proportions and furnishing as the edifice in Shuter street. It is constructed of the most tasty brick; is between sixty and seventy feet in length; nearly forty feet wide; proportionate height; plain neat seats; no pulpit – not even the sign of a clerical ‘sacred desk,’ but a convenient stand for bible, hymnbook, and candlestick; a christian laver for the emblematic burial and resurrection with Jesus; and one or two convenient rooms for sundry purposes. “

***Inscription from front of second Shuter St. Bldg.
Now on the Front of Strathmore Building
John 8:31 (KJV)***



Does anyone recognize this picture?



Toronto's Seventh Post Office – 1853-1873

In recent years this building on Toronto Street was the head office of Conrad Black's Argus Corporation. It was here that the famous picture was taken of Black carrying boxes of documents from his office.

The building was completed in 1853 at a cost of \$16,000 and for 20 years served as the city's seventh Post Office. It sold in 2006 for \$14,000,000.

Joseph Lesslie, brother of James Lesslie and an early member of the Shuter St. Disciples church, was Postmaster during at least part of the time the building served as Toronto's Post Office.

Lesslie was likely a charter member of the Toronto Disciples church when it was formed in 1834, and he left there when his brother and Thomas C. Scott departed.