200th Anniversary Kick-off Service – Sunday February 11, 2018

Part 1

Some of you may be familiar with this 150th Anniversary yellow book. In fact some of you have already contributed your copies to our archives. For many of our congregation however the information in this small booklet is unknown – after all it was written 50 years ago.

When discussing our plans for the 200th anniversary, the committee decided that it was time to update our history and that the best way of doing that was to let you tell us your stories – your experiences, memories and good times during your life in our congregation.

Last summer we put out a call asking church members to ‘tell us their story’. We wanted to hear how all of you had participated in, led, organized & carried out projects or events.

And you responded with enthusiasm. To date we have received over 40 responses telling stories about the choir, about projects such as Out of the Cold, Heart for Africa, the Vietnamese boat people, about youth groups, Scouting organizations, Sunday School and more. We also had memories from past ministers and staff persons.

Currently all those stories are in the hands of June Yates – many of you will remember June’s work with communications in this church – particularly the newsletter, originally called The Tablet and then simply Tidings. June has agreed to edit the submissions and is spending time reading them over, offering suggestions & in general ‘cleaning them up’ and we appreciate her efforts on our behalf.

Our plan is to have the new book completed by June 27 -in time for the opening of the new AUC exhibit at the Aurora Museum in Church Street School or sooner. Stay tuned!

Part 2

This is the story of William Tyler and the beginnings of Aurora United Church.

Who were these folks who, in the midst of winter 200 years ago chose to attend services in a log church located in the middle of nowhere? According to sources it was the first church to be established north of York Mills other than the Quakers of Newmarket.

William Tyler, his family and friends had endured a long journey before arriving in what is now Aurora. First from Pennsylvania to New Brunswick as Loyalists after the American Revolution and from there to Aurora.

It’s hard to imagine the effort it took to pack up all your household belongings, trek all the way to the east coast and then a few years later pack up again & head off west travelling primarily by water. We can only imagine the difficulties this imposed on the whole family.

There was no village when the Tylers, and their friends and neighbours the Kennedys arrived to take up lots 79 & 80 on the newly carved out Yonge Street. It would be nearly 30 years before shops were established and over 50 years before the name Aurora was chosen.

But obviously one of the first priorities of these early arrivals was their church. The Tylers were Methodists as were many of the scattered families in the area. They probably met in the early days in each other’s homes however travel was difficult and preachers were few. When, 10 years after arriving here, William Tyler deeded one acre of his property for a proper building, the local Methodists had a place to meet, to worship, to marry and to be buried.

For many years services at the Tyler Meeting House would have been sporadic – whenever the saddlebag preacher of the local circuit traveling by horseback could manage to reach them. But they persisted. Long after the Tyler family left Aurora the congregation continued to meet to worship, to pray and to support one another.

And the spirit that drove that early congregation remained – through the construction (and loss) of several buildings, through depressions and wars, through divisions within the Methodist church and later union with Congregationalists and some Presbyterians.

And that spirit remains today – 200 years later as we celebrate and honour our 200 years at the corner of Yonge and Tyler and look forward as our journey continues.