

William Fraser: A Father of Canadian Presbyterianism

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When William Fraser died on Christmas Day 1892 it was, for him, the end of a journey that had taken him from rural Pictou County, Nova Scotia in 1834 to the Simcoe County Seat of Barrie, Ontario. In those fifty-eight years he was involved in many of the major events of the mid-nineteenth century that laid the foundations for the present-day Presbyterian Church in Canada. While he is an almost forgotten figure today, in his time he was highly esteemed and respected by his colleagues and peers at all levels of the hierarchy of the various Presbyterian bodies to which he belonged; and even today his name still appears each year in The Presbyterian Church in Canada's *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly* in the listing of "Clerks of Assembly since 1875." So, who was William Fraser, and what was he like as a person? It will be the object of this paper to attempt to answer that question and to shed some light on his life and times and the part he played in the formation of the present-day Presbyterian Church in Canada.

A description of the man and his bearing and attributes was given in an obituary that appeared in the 12 January 1893 issue of *The Presbyterian Review*. The obituary, possibly written by his long-time friend and colleague, Principal William Caven of Knox College, was reproduced in part in the preface to the printed edition of William Fraser's diary:

In person Dr. Fraser was of medium height, but firmly built and erect and of calm and dignified bearing. In his later years he was a venerable and imposing figure. Of strictest integrity, unvarying punctuality, and rigid fidelity to duty, he yet held to a high ideal of brotherliness. I have never known any man who united in himself more completely two qualities found in the same man, extreme accuracy and perfect courtesy. I never saw him fail in his duty as a Christian gentleman. He was a perfect model for us all. What he was before the public he was also in the more private walks of life, and his hand and his purse were ever open to the poor.²

There is not a great deal known about Fraser's early life. He was born in McLellan's Brook (some sketches say Creek), Pictou County, Nova Scotia, a small village just outside New Glasgow, on 19 May 1808, one of ten children of Donald and Margaret Fraser. His father and

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² William Fraser, *The Diary of Rev. William Fraser (1834-1835), With an Introductory Essay on Early Presbyterianism in Western Ontario* by Harry E. Parker, Transactions of the London & Middlesex Historical Society pt. 14 (London, ON: London & Middlesex Historical Society, 1930) 5-6. Hereafter referred to as *Diary*.

paternal grandparents, Hugh and Sophia (MacPherson) Fraser arrived in Pictou in 1773 from Scotland on the *Hector*.³ They were from Kiltarlity, a small village some ten miles west of Inverness. Records at The Hector Exhibit Centre and Archives in Pictou, Nova Scotia show Grandfather Hugh as being a weaver, who settled in McLellan's Brook on a grant of five-hundred acres with his wife and three children, Donald, Jane, and Mary. A second son, John, remained in Scotland because of illness and joined the family at a later date.⁴ William's father, Donald, is shown as a miller—whether this was lumber or grist is not known, but given the heavy forest that covered most of Pictou County in those early days, perhaps the former is more likely. I think it is fair to assume that the first language in the home was Gaelic because William was thoroughly fluent in “the tongue” and could speak, read, and write it. It was this attribute that in 1834 caused him to accept the invitation to proceed to Upper Canada and become a Missionary of the United Associate Synod. The family must have been reasonably well off because they were able to send William to study under Rev. Dr. Thomas McCulloch at the Pictou Academy. Just when William made his decision to become a Minister of the Gospel is also not known, but, following the completion of his general academic studies he continued on with Dr. McCulloch to study theology. He would also have been accepted as a Student for the Ministry by the Associate Presbytery of Nova Scotia, but the Presbytery Minutes give no details as to when this acceptance took place.

The first reference that I have been able to find regarding his status as a student appears in the Minutes of Presbytery of a meeting at East River, 7 March 1832:

Mr. W. Fraser Student of Theology delivered a discourse in the Gaelic Language from Acts 16.31, which after some remarks thereon was approved of. 2nd Cor. 5 and 7 was assigned to Mr. Fraser as a subject for another Gaelic Sermon.⁵

From the foregoing Minute it is obvious that William Fraser had, at a previous meeting, been accepted as a Student for the Ministry.

Presbytery met again at East River on 8 May and the following reference mentions Mr. Alexander McKenzie, another Student of Theology, who also went to Upper Canada to work as a Minister with the United Associate Synod:

Mr. Wm. Fraser delivered a discourse in the Gaelic language from 2nd Cor. 5.17. Mr. Alexr. MacKenzie [sic] delivered a discourse in the same language from Psalm 2. and 12th which after being criticized were both sustained. Romans 12.1 and 2. was given to Mr. Fraser as the subject of lecture. And as the basis of a similar discourse Col. 3d Chap. first 4 verses was assigned to Mr. McKenzie.⁶

³ *Descendants of Hugh Fraser, Weaver*, table, HECA. There is a discrepancy in the name of William's grandmother, as Henry Beer lists Hugh Fraser's wife as Rebecca Patterson. Henry Beer, comp., *People of the Ship Hector 1773: General Sketches* (Pictou, NS: n.p., 1973) 103, HECA.

⁴ Beer 103-04.

⁵ Minutes of the Associate Presbytery of Nova Scotia, East River, 7 Mar. 1832, SAPA.

⁶ Minutes of the Associate Presbytery of Nova Scotia, East River, 8 May 1832, SAPA.

For much of 1832 and 1833 the Presbytery had been dealing with an on-going series of complaints from the congregation at East River St. Marys concerning the preaching and general conduct of their Minister, the Rev. Alexander Lewis.⁷ While not willing to remove Mr. Lewis from the charge, the Court agreed to provide supply of sermon to the congregation. Both Alexander McKenzie and William Fraser were sent in turn during the summer of 1833 to supply the congregations of St. Marys and Lochaber. Fraser's instructions were noted in the Presbytery minutes: "The Prby. appd. Mr. Fraser to preach at St. Marys on the 1. 2. and 3 Sabs. of July and the two following Sabbaths at Lochaber [. . .]."⁸

What is rather strange, is that while the Associate Presbytery of Nova Scotia minutes record Alexander McKenzie's Trials for License exercises at Merigomish on 4 August 1834 and his ordination as a Minister of Word and Sacraments in Pictou on 29 September 1834, there does not appear to be a record—at least that I have been able to find—of the same proceedings for William Fraser. He, as we shall see, was ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments on Tuesday, 2 September 1834, but there is nothing in the Presbytery Minute Book to record this. According to the minutes there was no meeting of the Court between the meeting in Merigomish on 4 August and the next one in Pictou on 29 September 1834.

William Fraser started keeping a diary in August 1834. A printed copy of the diary from August 1834 to July 1835, which includes an introductory essay on early Presbyterianism in Western Ontario by Harry E. Parker, and was published as Part XIV of *The Transactions of the London & Middlesex Historical Society* in 1930, is in The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives and Records Office in Toronto. The diary commences on Saturday, 2 August 1834, and from this entry we learn that Mr. Fraser had just returned to Pictou after spending ten weeks on a missionary tour of Prince Edward Island. He seems to have thoroughly enjoyed the six-and-one-half hours the voyage from the Island to Pictou took, but then seems to have had some feelings of guilt for the pleasure he derived from the passage:

At every successive return to my native land this pleasure I feel to be enhanced [. . .] But while these are the feelings which are suggested by the promptings of nature let me remember that I am placed under responsibilities which render it an imperative duty to bring such feelings into subjection & to make them subordinate to the great object which I am bound to promote to the utmost of my ability, that is the extension of the Redeemer's Kingdom in the edification of men. And not hesitate for a moment to go where ever Providence appears to open for me a field of usefulness.⁹

We learn that on the sixth of August Fraser:

Met the Committee and Commission of Superintendence of the Synod at Mr. McKinlay's. After hearing and approving the Report of my labours on P. E.

⁷ Mr. Lewis was a native of the North of Ireland and was ordained to this congregation in 1818. He left in 1835 for the United States and then went to Caledon in Upper Canada, remaining there until his death in 1878 at the advanced age of eighty-eight (William Gregg, *History of The Presbyterian Church in The Dominion of Canada* (Toronto: Presbyterian Printing & Publishing, 1885) 231 and 234).

⁸ Minutes of the Associate Presbytery of Nova Scotia, Pictou, 26 June 1833, SAPA.

⁹ *Diary* 80.

Island the Committee proceeded to deliberate what should be my next destination. To the question if I still persisted in my determination to visit Canada I gave a decided affirmative. At this point of the proceedings a letter was produced by Dr. MacCulloch [sic] from the Rev. W. Peddie, Sect. of the Committee on Foreign Missions of the United Associate Synod of Scotland, purporting to be an application to the Synod of Nova Scotia for preachers acquainted with the Gaelic language for the Upper Canada Mission. The terms on which preachers shd. be employed were proposed to me & I without much hesitation accepted them. My trials for ordination (Lecture on Roms. 5 – 8-10). (Sermon Romans III, 31), were then assigned to me for the 2nd of September.¹⁰

At this point it is necessary to insert a word of explanation regarding the above. In 1832 the United Associate Synod in Scotland had sent out three missionaries—the Rev. William Proudfoot, the Rev. Thomas Christie, and the Rev. William Robertson—to establish a presence in Upper Canada. Mr. Robertson contracted cholera shortly after landing in Montreal, where an epidemic of that disease was then raging, and died. Mr. Proudfoot and Mr. Christie, after spending a short time in York (now Toronto), moved farther West and established their mission headquarters in London. Mr. Proudfoot quickly came to the realization that in order to be able to serve many of the Scottish settlers in the area effectively he would need preachers who had the Gaelic. However, the Synod in Scotland could not assist and the Secretary of the Foreign Missions Committee, the Rev. William Peddie, wrote to the Rev. James Robson, Clerk of the Associate Synod of Nova Scotia, to see if there might be any Gaelic speaking ministers in Nova Scotia willing to go to Upper Canada. Mr. Peddie further informed Mr. Robson that if any men were so inclined, the Synod would provide them with the same monetary support that they provided their own missionaries. Mr. Robson then communicated with Mr. Proudfoot to inform him that two men, William Fraser and Alexander McKenzie, had expressed an interest in the work and were prepared to undertake the move on the terms stated. This letter is preserved in the William Proudfoot fonds in The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives.

On 2 September William Fraser wrote in his diary:

After a good deal of exertion I have reason to thank God that I in so far succeeded in being prepared for public examination—I was enabled to stand in the presence of the Clergy and people to-day with a feeling of that fearlessness which a sense of his high responsibilities shd. inspire in the breast of every herald of the Cross [. . .]. My specimens of preaching have been approved & I have this day been solemnly set apart to the work of the holy ministry by the imposition of hands. Old Mr. Ross presided. And there were present besides Mr. Robson, Mr. McKinlay, Mr. Patrick, Mr. H. Ross and Mr. Roy. Mr. Robson put the questions of the Formulary, Mr. McKinlay gave a most appropriate and feeling address. The principal topics on which he insisted were as follows as far as I can quote them from memory. 1. That ministers are ambassadors for Christ & that in this point of view they are bound to know the will of their Master. 2. That it is their duty to declare his will plainly. 3. Boldly. 4. Fully. 5. Earnestly. After enlarging in the most appropriate & forcible terms on these subjects *he took occasion to*

¹⁰ *Diary* 80-81.

make a number of remarks on Missions generally & then on Missions to the great Northern World. And concluded with an appeal to the people enforcing upon their attention the duty *of contributing to the grand purpose of evangelizing the world.* The business of the day was conducted throughout with the utmost decorum and solemnity.¹¹

On 15 September at 7:00 p.m. William Fraser married Jane Geddie, presumably in what is now First Presbyterian Church in Pictou—the Geddie family's home church. Jane was the sister of John Geddie, who later became the Synod of Nova Scotia's first missionary to the South Seas. William and John had been students together under Dr. McCulloch. But this momentous event in his life rates barely a mention in Fraser's diary and his wife is not even named:

Monday 15th – I have spent the last two weeks in a state of suspense and anxiety. Alternately buoyed up with hopes and depressed with fears. I have however brought my affairs to that state that I am about to enter into one of the most intimate relationships & *then take my departure for the Canadian forests.* 10 o'clock in the evening. At 7 o'clock precisely I was united by Mr. McKinlay to the wife of my choice. I trust that I have not entered into this connection hastily or without due deliberation. [. . .] "He that findeth a wife," says Solomon, "findeth a good thing and obtaineth favours of the Lord." And I fondly trust that this will be abundantly verified in my experience.¹²

On Wednesday, the first of October 1834, William and Jane Fraser left Pictou for London, Upper Canada. The sea passage from Pictou to New York took one month and was extremely rough. According to the diary they both spent much of the time prostrated in their bunks with sea-sickness. From New York they traveled to Buffalo, where they embarked on another boat that took them to Port Stanley, where a wagon and horses were engaged to take them to London. After spending the night in St. Thomas, which he described as "a smart little village about 10 miles from the coast," they arrived at William Proudfoot's residence in a snowstorm at three o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday, 12 November.¹³

Fraser carried with him a letter of introduction from the Rev. James Robson to the Rev. William Proudfoot. The letter, reproduced below, is also preserved in the William Proudfoot fonds in The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives.

Pictou, Nova Scotia, 27th Sepr. 1834

Revd. Dear Sir

I wrote you some time ago, intimating that, in consequence of a communication from the Secretary of the Committee on Missions at home, the Commission of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia had appointed Mr. William Fraser, a gælic Pictouan, to proceed to your assistance in Upper Canada; and I

¹¹ *Diary* 82. Italics in the original.

¹² *Diary* 83. Italics in the original.

¹³ *Diary* 84-93.

now beg leave to introduce Mr. Fraser to your personal acquaintance. Since I wrote you last, he has been ordained to the work of the Holy Ministry, and has also taken to himself a wife to accompany him to Canada. I trust you will find him a useful and respectable and agreeable assistant in the work of the Lord, and that he will be a successful instrument of building up the Church in Canada.

Wishing you much comfort and success in the work of the Ministry.

I am,

Revd. Dear Sir,

yours truly,

James Robson, Clerk of Comm.¹⁴

Fraser seems to have been under no illusions as to the nature of the work that was before him, confiding in his diary: "*There appears to be a great field for Missionary exertions open in this part of the world. It is an arduous & difficult undertaking.*"¹⁵ He got right to work, however, and the following week preached twice on the Sunday, once in Gaelic and once in English, and then on the Monday preached in a barn from Hebrews 10:23 to about twenty persons. He noted that the day was "exceedingly cold."¹⁶

On 21 November he wrote to the Rev. William Peddie in Scotland to give him a report on his activities to date and also to request some money.

To the Rev. William Peddie, Laurieston, Edinburgh

London W. C. [sic] Nov. 21, 1834

Rev'd. Sir

In consequence of a communication from you as secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions of the United Associate Synod of date 10th June last addressed to the Revd. T. McCulloch of Pictou N.S. & containing proposals for *missionaries acquainted with the Gaelic Language to emigrate to W. Canada* I have been induced to come out to this country. I arrived here on the 12th inst. and embrace this the earliest convenient opportunity of informing you on Sabbath last I commenced my missionary labours *under the direction in the meantime of the Revd. Mr. Proudfoot. I have come out to this wilderness* with my partner in life and henceforth consider myself as one of the missionaries of the United Associate

¹⁴ James Robson, Pictou, NS, letter to William Proudfoot, London, UC, 27 Sept. 1834, William Proudfoot fonds, The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives and Records Office, Toronto (WPF).

¹⁵ *Diary* 94. Italics in the original.

¹⁶ *Diary* 94.

Synod. As my revenues are not very abundant and as I have to provide myself without delay with the means of travelling I am under the necessity of drawing immediately on the fund of the Synod. I shall now transmit a bill for £50 and wait for advice from you with respect to any further amount to which I may be entitled. I may be allowed to state that I paid for passage to this place £17.3.7.

I have the honor to be Revd. Sir

Most Respectfully yours

W. FRASER.¹⁷

Shortly after their arrival, Messrs Fraser and McKenzie discovered that there was not the urgent need for their Gaelic language skills that had been the main reason for their coming to Upper Canada. Professor William Gregg gives the reason:

On their arrival, however, it was found that the Highlanders, most of whom belonged to the Church of Scotland, preferred to remain in connection to that Church, which had recently sent a large number of missionaries to the Province, among whom were Gaelic-speaking preachers. But although not now specially needed for the Highland population, Messrs McKenzie and Fraser remained to co-operate with the missionaries from the Secession Church, and found opportunities of utilizing their knowledge of Gaelic.¹⁸

A matter that troubled the missionaries of the United Associate Synod in Canada was whether or not they should unite with one of the other Presbyterian bodies in the Province. The major point of contention was the Government Allowance. The United Synod of Upper Canada and the Church of Scotland Synod had no problem with this method of support for their clergy. However,

at this time the United Associate Secession Church had practically adopted what was called the "voluntary" principle, regarding it as at once unscriptural and inexpedient to receive aid from the State for the support of the Gospel ministry. Holding the voluntary principle the brethren who met in Flamborough [Thomas Christie's residence] felt that they could not consistently unite with either of the Canadian Synods, and therefore applied to the Secession Synod in Scotland for leave to form themselves into a separate Presbytery.¹⁹

The missionaries met in York (Toronto) on Christmas Day 1834. They learned that Synod had given its approval on the first of May for them to become a Presbytery under the name of "The Missionary Presbytery of the Canadas in connection with the United Associate Synod of the Secession Church in Scotland." The meeting voted the Rev. Thomas Christie to be

¹⁷ *Diary* 95-96. Italics in the original.

¹⁸ Gregg 509.

¹⁹ Gregg 513.

Moderator and he then formally constituted the Presbytery. For some reason William Fraser was not at that meeting, but he was present for the continued meeting the following day.

For much of the 1834–35 winter William Fraser laboured in what is now Western Ontario, preaching to congregations large and small, in English and in Gaelic, in churches, schools, homes, and even in barns. Then, in the middle of March 1835, William Proudfoot sent him to West Gwillimbury. A congregation had been established there on 6 January 1822 by the Rev. William Jenkins, a Secession Minister, who lived in Richmond Hill.²⁰ The congregation established what became known as “The Auld Kirk” on the Sixth Line of the township and for the first ten years of its existence remained connected with the Synod of the Canadas / United Synod of Upper Canada. While a detailed history of the Auld Kirk is beyond the scope of this paper, it is necessary to point out that following the departure of the Rev. Peter Ferguson, the congregation’s first settled minister, in April 1832, the congregation became divided. A large majority decided to apply to the Church of Scotland—the Kirk Synod—for supply of ordinances and to become a congregation of that body. The minority, which included congregations in the Townships of Essa and Tecumseth, decided to remain with the United Synod of Upper Canada. That body provided occasional supply until 9 October 1833 when the Rev. James Howey, newly arrived from Ireland, was inducted into the charge. Unfortunately, Mr. Howey was suffering from tuberculosis and on the Sunday following his induction he suffered a debilitating seizure and was unable to continue. Shortly after this the entire pastoral charge, seemingly abandoned by the United Synod, aligned itself with the United Associate Synod mission. At this particular time both congregations quite amicably continued to use the Auld Kirk building. According to his diary, William Fraser reached Adam Goodfellow’s house at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday the fourteenth. Here he learned that the Kirk Synod had inducted a minister to the Auld Kirk the previous Wednesday.²¹ There was some indecision as to what should be done about a service or services the following day. We pick up the story from the diary:

I found that I had arrived at too late a period to have general intimation of Sermon on the morrow circulated—and as Mr. McKillican the Kirk Minister who has been ordained only on Wednesday last was to occupy the church it was at first thought best that I shd preach to as many as could be assembled at a short notice in Mr. G’s. [Goodfellow’s]. This project was however on further consultation abandoned and it was resolved that I shd preach in the church (which by the bye belongs to both parties) if it could be obtained. An application was forthwith despatched to Mr. McKillican to know when it wd. be convenient to let us occupy the house. An answer was immediately returned of a very cordial and rather extraordinary nature. Not only did the Revd. Gent express his pleasure at my arrival but entrusted to Mr. G. to lay his *injunctions* on me to preach Gaelic in the morning and at the same time inviting me to breakfast with him. [. . .] Took

²⁰ Andrew F. Hunter, *A History of Simcoe County*, vol. 1 (1909; Barrie, ON: County of Simcoe, 1948) 312.

²¹ Rev. William McKillican, M.A., a Licentiate of the Presbytery of Nairn, was sent out by the Glasgow Colonial Society and ordained and inducted to the Auld Kirk, West Gwillimbury Township, Upper Canada, 11 March 1835. He was translated to St. Thomas in 1838 and returned to Scotland in 1842. (Hew Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae; The Succession of Ministers in The Church of Scotland from the Reformation: Volume VII, Synods of Ross, Sutherland and Caithness, Glenelg, Orkney and of Shetland, The Church in England, Ireland and Overseas* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1928) 643.

breakfast & after discoursing church affairs for some time [. . .] I preached to the folks in Gaelic from [no text given]. Mr. McKillican gave us a harangue in English from the words "Who is sufficient for these things" [2 Cor. 2:16]. I then preached in English to a very attentive audience. Mr. McK. had gone to lecture elsewhere.²²

Thus ended William Fraser's first encounter with the congregation that he was to serve for forty-four years. He further noted in his diary that he had written to Thomas Christie to let him know that he was to remain in West Gwillimbury for four Sabbaths.

Fraser did not confine his travels to the immediate area of the pastoral charge but also travelled to the Townships of North and East Gwillimbury. In the latter he visited the village of Hope (now Sharon) and met the leader of the Children of Peace religious sect, the Davidites, David Willson. Fraser was not very favourably impressed with him, but went on at some length in his diary to describe the temple and other buildings in the village. He concluded by saying "Whatever be the end of the Davidites—whether the Society flourish or decay remains yet to be proved. At all events the temple will probably stand for a number of years a striking monument of infatuation, extravagance & folly."²³ I wonder what his reaction would be today if he knew that 176 years later the Sharon Temple is still standing, even though the Davidites have long since disappeared?

A brief note in the diary of 31 March 1835 states that since he arrived in Upper Canada on 12 November 1834 Fraser had travelled upwards of 1,234 miles.²⁴ Another entry in his diary, from the second of April, indicates that a dispute had arisen between the Kirk and Secession congregations regarding ownership of the Auld Kirk. He felt very fortunate that he had left Adam Goodfellow's the previous day and was not drawn into the dispute:

The church property is in dispute between the Kirkmen and Seceders in this place and it appears that Mr. McKillican is determined to espouse the quarrels of his people. Last evening in company with 3 others he called upon Mr. Goodfellow demanding possession of the Deed of the property in question. Some pretty sharp words I understood passed between his Reverence & Mr. G. The Deed however is still withheld and the Session Book Mr. G. absolutely refuses to give up. How the business may terminate 'tis difficult to say, but if Mr. McK. is resolved to intermeddle in the Secular affairs of his people he is spreading for himself a bed of thorns which ere long will render his situation anything but agreeable. I hope I may have judgment enough to keep myself clear of an interference in those affairs.²⁵

On 3 April Fraser left West Gwillimbury for Tecumseth. He preached to an audience of some forty people and baptized a daughter for a couple who had originally been with a Secession congregation in Ireland. He commented in his diary on the situation in the charge following the

²² *Diary* 113-14. Italics in the original.

²³ *Diary* 121. See pages 116-21 for the full account of William Fraser's encounter with David Willson.

²⁴ *Diary* 125.

²⁵ *Diary* 125.

untimely demission of Mr. Howey, and whether or not it was appropriate for him to administer the Sacrament of Baptism:

As a question may arise on what principles I administered the Sacrament in this quarter, I may be allowed to make two or three statements which I conceive rendered it perfectly competent for me to do so. Tho' this congregation had been in connection with the United Synod, by a letter from their late Pastor the Rev. Jas. Howie²⁶ of date 6th Feby. last they were strongly advised to join our Presbytery. At a meeting held in Tecumseth on the 27th ult. it was unanimously agreed that this advice shd. be taken & complied with. It was intimated to me that the congregation shd. be henceforth considered as under our inspection. As the Sacraments had been dispensed by all their previous ministers only to church members and as I considered the election & ordination of Elders as valid I cd. not see how else I shd. regard the congregation otherwise than as a vacant charge. With the advice then of the Session it was that I in the instances that I have mentioned proceeded to the distribution of the ordinance.²⁷

On 10 May 1835 Fraser wrote a very lengthy letter to Mr. Peddie in Scotland giving a full description both of his travels and the state of religion in the Western Region. He commented on the visit to all the congregations connected with the Missionary Presbytery by Messrs. Christie and Proudfoot early in 1835. However, they did not visit the West Gwillimbury pastoral charge, which led him to remark:

West Gwillimbury however is one of the places which the deputation did not visit and therefore I may perhaps without impropriety say a few words respecting the aspect of affairs there. A considerable number of the people in that township are from Sutherlandshire and of course were connected with the Kirk in their Native Land. All their attachments and prejudices have been imported along with them and though at one time the great part of them fell in with the Settlement of Mr. Ferguson²⁸ in connection with the United Synod yet circumstances which occurred subsequently have occasioned the complete separation of that part. They have recently obtained the settlement of a Kirk minister a Mr. McKillican. The other part of what was formerly Mr. Ferguson's Congregation hearing of the demise of their late pastor Mr. Howie held a meeting during my stay among them in which they unanimously agreed to unite themselves with us. Besides the attachment of those people to the Secession to which most of them belonged in Scotland and Ireland the broken and dispersed state of the United Synod was another strong reason for the adoption of this resolution. It is very probable that

²⁶ I have seen his name spelled both Howie and Howey.

²⁷ *Diary* 129.

²⁸ Rev. Peter Ferguson, a Secessionist, arrived from Scotland in the Autumn of 1830, was received by the United Synod and inducted to the Auld Kirk in April/May 1831—the exact date is not known. He was there for one year and then moved to Esquesing Township (Gregg 373).

at the first meeting of Presbytery they will be forward with a call for one of our number to take charge of their spiritual concerns.²⁹

At this point in his letter to Mr. Peddie, Fraser expressed his concerns that the main reason for his coming to Upper Canada, because he was a bilingual Gaelic/English preacher, had not been fulfilled. He continued:

And though there is no doubt abundant necessity for missionary exertion independently of the Gaelic folk I have been sometimes led to doubt the propriety of being a Dependary on the bounty of the churches when the object of my emigrating hither has failed. [. . .] At Goderich it is very probable that we may succeed in securing a permanent interest and in that neighbourhood Gaelic will be required. There will be no necessity for it however in West Gwillimbury.³⁰

Early in June 1835 William Fraser received a letter from Adam Goodfellow on behalf of the West Gwillimbury congregation extending a Call to him to become its minister. He replied, and indicated that he was very interested but that due process had to be followed now that there was a Presbytery in place. He pointed out that while in previous times it was permitted for a congregation to deal directly with a minister, this was no longer allowed. However, a letter received at the same time from the Rev. Thomas Christie, the Presbytery Moderator, must have indicated to him that the Call would be sustained, so he told Mr. Goodfellow that he was prepared to accept. He was also concerned about the propriety of moving his family the long distance from London to West Gwillimbury (Bond Head did not yet exist), especially since his wife had just presented him with a son, born prematurely on 31 May. He felt that he could move in the middle of July, but was concerned about accommodation for himself and his family.³¹

According to Andrew Hunter, in his massive *History of Simcoe County*, William Fraser preached his first sermon as Pastor on 9 August 1835, but his formal induction did not take place until 17 June 1836.³² There was as yet no church building in what would become the Village of Bond Head and it appears to me, from a comment made by Mr. Fraser to Mr. Goodfellow, that joint usage of the Auld Kirk had ceased.³³ From that point on, until a church was built in Bond Head in 1837, services were held, as they had been in London, in homes, schools, and barns. On 5 January 1836, Fraser purchased fifty acres, the North-East quarter of Lot 1, Concession 6, Township of West Gwillimbury, from Gideon Phillips of King, for £250.³⁴ From this property it appears to me that he donated one acre for a church site and one acre for a burying ground.³⁵ Later, on 23 May 1840, he purchased an additional eighteen acres, part of the North-West quarter

²⁹ *Diary* 141.

³⁰ *Diary* 142.

³¹ *Diary* 147-50.

³² Hunter 314.

³³ *Diary* 149-50

³⁴ Instrument 1433, Simcoe County Registry Office, Barrie, registered the same date.

³⁵ Hunter indicates the donation as one acre for a Church and Burying Ground, but a later scan of the Abstract of Title seems to indicate two acres in total, although nothing is shown on the Abstract to record such a donation.

of Lot 1, from Henry Carter of Tecumseth for £142/10/-.³⁶ To supplement his rather meagre income he also farmed his land. Times were hard, and his three congregations were often unable to meet his stipend. In a letter to William Proudfoot in London he rather apologetically stated that he had had to draw on the Mission Fund to supplement his income: "The amount is very small and I fear that this congregation will fall through unless they obtain some for their assistance."³⁷ In another letter to Proudfoot the following year, he outlined the situation with regard to the prospects for the congregation:

When I last wrote I advised you of my having drawn upon the fund for £25 and signified my fears that for the next six months one quarter of that amount would not be raised here for my support. I exceedingly regret to say that the whole amount which I have received in that time is 16/9d. Though this has been the case however the result for the year in the way of contributions is 2 or 3 pounds more than in former years that are past. Experience will perhaps in some measure have prepared you for the reception of such intelligence but no experience can I feel persuaded induce you or the Committee to admit the agreeableness or it may be the propriety of the continuance of such grants. And nothing I can assure you induces me to continue a stipend on your bounty than these considerations that the salary is sufficiently small that I know that many of my few people are far from being wealthy and that I have some hopes that the cause of true religion will not be prejudiced by my remaining here. The number of members in connection with us has not diminished any for the last year tho the increase has been very trifling. I formerly stated to you the number of families belonging to the congregation and the great proportion which the heads of families have to young people and others in the membership. From this you might suppose that with proper management somewhat more ought to be done towards the support of religion and the conclusion is perfectly just. I have more than once suggested the propriety of fixing Stated times at least twice a year when it shd. be understood that payments shd. be made. But though at the time, the propriety of some different plan [to] that what had hitherto been practiced was admitted yet nothing was arranged and the old systemless course is still pursued—with the same result with which it will always attend, that is that many do not pay at all. Beyond suggesting on this point I have not dared to proceed and even in what I have done I have received warnings against incurring the reputation of being a money-hunter, in the publick estimation a most odious character. I must however make one attempt still to stir up the people to a just sense of their duty in this behalf—I fear that the great and general failure of our Stapling Wheat last harvest will operate most prejudicially on the state of our finances this winter. Half a crop in many instances has not been gathered and in some cases whole fields were not harvested at all.

At the end of the same letter he writes:

³⁶ Instrument 3321, Simcoe County Registry Office, Barrie, registered 25 May 1840.

³⁷ William Fraser, West Gwillimbury, letter to William Proudfoot, London, UC, 18 Apr. 1838, WPF. See also Michael Millar, "The Growth of Presbyterianism in the Simcoe District of Upper Canada," *The Canadian Society of Presbyterian History Papers* 25 (2000): 60.

With regard to the general state of the mission. My remote situation and the infrequency of my intercourse with the rest of the brethren precludes me from having it in my power to give you any information. But I suppose it is scarcely necessary—I have commenced to give a Sabbath in 3 months to a dozen of families connected with us in the township of Innisfil 17 miles distant besides my Stated appointments in the 3 old stations. I am about to take up a station in the township of King commenced by Mr. Jennings where I propose to give them a Sermon at least once a month. This station is also 16 or 17 miles distant - - - I should like extremely well to have some intelligence respecting the determination of the church at home as to the future management of this mission.

I am Revd. Dr. Sir truly yours
W. Fraser

P. S. I have drawn upon the Treasurer for £49-3-3.³⁸

The group in Innisfil Township mentioned in the letter above met in the home of Gavin Allan at Churchill. Hunter records the date of the first service there as 2 August 1836.³⁹ The statistical return from Fraser's congregations to the Missionary Presbytery for 1840 notes that all of the money contributed by the three congregations for his stipend amounted to £16/13/4d Cy. and that no money was contributed to the Presbytery Fund. The number of members is reported as: West Gwillimbury, thirty-eight; Tecumseth, twenty-nine; and Essa, twenty-eight. Number of "Souls" in the congregations is given as 143, 122, and 117 respectively.⁴⁰

While his pastoral charge was quite remote from the other congregations in the Missionary Presbytery, William Fraser's punctiliousness with his record keeping attracted the notice of his brethren. William Proudfoot had established a Divinity Hall in London in 1844 and in order to take some of the Presbytery workload off his shoulders, William Fraser was appointed Deputy Clerk in 1846 at a salary of £6 Cy. per annum. When William Proudfoot died in 1851, William Fraser was appointed Clerk. It was a position that he would hold, through three Presbyterian unions, for the next forty-one years.

The Missionary Presbytery continued to grow. In 1843 it reorganized as the Missionary Synod of the Canadas in connection with the United Associate Secession Synod in Scotland, with three Presbyteries: London, Flamborough, and Toronto. The number of ministers at that time was eighteen. In 1844 it was joined with the Missionary Presbytery of Canada East and in 1847 it reorganized again, this time as the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church in Canada, with sixty-eight ministers on the Roll.⁴¹

The Canadian Disruption that witnessed the formation of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada—the Free Church—took place in Kingston, Canada West, on 10 July 1844 when twenty-three ministers broke away from the Church of Scotland Synod. Almost from its

³⁸ William Fraser, West Gwillimbury, letter to William Proudfoot, London, UC, 23 Nov. 1839, WPF.

³⁹ Hunter 315.

⁴⁰ Extracted from "Tabular View of the Missionary Presbytery of the Canadas for 1840", MS, WPF.

⁴¹ Gregg 532-33.

foundation the Free Church commenced a dialogue with the United Presbyterian Church to see if a union could be effected between the two bodies. From the *Digest of the Minutes of the Free Church Synod* compiled by the Rev. Alexander Kemp, minister of St. Gabriel Street Church, Montreal, it would appear that William Fraser was not actively involved in the union negotiations.⁴² But, as Synod Clerk, he would have been very much involved behind the scenes keeping all of the correspondence and other documentation in proper order. Given that the negotiations between the two synods dragged on for sixteen years before a final agreement was reached, one can readily appreciate just how much paper was generated. The files in William Fraser's study on this one issue alone must have been voluminous. However, finally agreement was reached between the two bodies and, by prior agreement, both held their final synod meetings as independent churches in the City of Montreal. The meeting to effect the union was held in the Wesleyan Church, Great St. James Street. The Rev. Dr. Robert Thornton, Moderator of the United Presbyterian Church, as the senior Moderator, commenced the proceedings:

giving for praise the 102nd Psalm (long metre), verses 13-18. The Psalm being sung, Dr. Thornton read the 132 Psalm, and engaged in prayer. The Clerk of the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church in Canada [William Fraser], called the roll of that Body, the members answering to their names. [. . .] The Clerk of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada [William Reid] then called the roll of that Body, the members answering to their names. [. . .] The Moderator of the United Presbyterian Synod [Dr. Thornton] called upon the Clerk of that Synod [William Fraser] to read the last minute of that Body. [. . .] The Moderator of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada [Rev. William Gregg], then called upon the Clerk of that Synod [William Reid], who read the last minute of that Synod [. . .].⁴³

Following the above formalities, the moderators of both synods in turn declared that their two churches were now united under the name of The Synod of The Canada Presbyterian Church. They shook hands, and signed the Basis of Union on behalf of their respective synods with William Fraser and William Reid signing as witnesses. Dr. Thornton made the formal declaration of the union and Mr. Gregg gave out for praise Psalm 122, verses 6-9, engaged in prayer, and then gave out Psalm 100 which was also sung. The election of the first Moderator of the new church then took place. On motion of the Rev. W. B. Clark (Chalmers Church, Quebec), seconded by the Rev. Dr. John Jennings (Bay Street Church, Toronto), the Rev. Dr. William Taylor (Lagauchetiere Street Church, Montreal), was elected unanimously, and

[t]he Moderator was conducted to his place by the retiring Moderators, Dr. Thornton and Mr. Gregg, who occupied seats on either hand of the chair. On motion of Mr. Roger of Peterboro', seconded by Mr. Caw of Paris, Mr. William Reid, M.A., and Mr. William Fraser, formerly Clerks respectively of the Synod of

⁴² Alex. F. Kemp, *Digest of the Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada: With a Historical Introduction and An Appendix of Forms and Procedures* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1861) 279-336.

⁴³ *Minutes of the Synod of the Canada Presbyterian Church at its First Session in Montreal, C.E., June 6-13, 1861* (Toronto: Chewett, 1861) 9-11.

the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and of the United Presbyterian Synod, were unanimously chosen joint clerks of Synod.⁴⁴

This was the start of an association between Reid and Fraser that would continue unbroken for the next thirty-one years until Fraser's resignation as a Clerk of the General Assembly because of age and increasing infirmity in June 1892.

Evidence of co-operation between the two Churches prior to the Union is found in an article that appeared in *The Ecclesiastical & Missionary Record for the Presbyterian Church of Canada* in May 1858. The Rev. Thomas Wightman, pastor of the Barrie Presbyterian Church, now St. Andrew's, submitted a report detailing the opening services for the Town Line Presbyterian Church on what is now Simcoe County Road 27, South of the Village of Thornton:

The Township of Essa contains a pretty large number of Presbyterian families, whereof only a small proportion toward the south-east have been able to avail themselves of the service of the Rev. W. Fraser, of the U. P. Church, one of whose churches is situated toward the south-eastward extremity of the township [First Essa]. [. . .] Sometime in 1856 the congregation [Town Line] commenced building a church, which was finished last fall, with the exception of being seated. The church, which is a comfortable one, was formally opened on the first Sabbath of March last [7 March 1858]. The opening services were conducted by Rev. W. Fraser of the U. P. Church, who has laboured for many years in the neighbourhood, and by Mr. Wightman, the Pastor.⁴⁵

William Fraser came to occupy positions of increasing responsibility both in the Church and the community. When the Presbytery of Simcoe, the forerunner to the present-day Presbytery of Barrie, was erected from the Presbytery of Toronto in 1868, he was elected as the first Moderator. The Canada Presbyterian Church continued to grow to the point where it outgrew its original Synod and Presbytery organization. In 1870 it reorganized itself as a General Assembly with Synods and Presbyteries. In 1872 William Fraser was elected Moderator of the Second General Assembly of The Canada Presbyterian Church.

Commencing in 1870 The Canada Presbyterian Church put out feelers to the other three main Presbyterian bodies in the country to see if there was a possibility of a union of all four groups. Negotiations were commenced and by 1875 a Basis for Union had been agreed upon. The Canada Presbyterian Church was the largest group of the four and to William Fraser fell the rather unenviable task of calling over the Roll of close to five hundred Ministers and Elders. Once again he and William Reid were appointed joint Clerks of the General Assembly. In this appointment they were joined by Professor John Hugh Mackerras of Queen's College (now University, where he was Professor of Classical Literature) and the former Clerk of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada in Connexion with the Church of Scotland. Regrettably Mackerras died following a lengthy illness on 9 January 1880 and for the next eleven years Fraser and Reid continued on alone as the Joint Clerks of the General Assembly.

⁴⁴ *Minutes of the Synod of the Canada Presbyterian Church* 14.

⁴⁵ Thomas Wightman, letter, *Ecclesiastical & Missionary Record for the Presbyterian Church of Canada*, 14.7 (May 1858):77.



The Clerks of the General Assembly, 1875. Rev. William Reid, Professor John Hugh Mackerras, Rev. William Fraser.⁴⁶

In the community in which he lived William Fraser was also very much interested in educational matters. Andrew Hunter commented:

While in this charge, in addition to his regular church work, [Fraser] took an active part in educational affairs [. . .] He was the first Township Superintendent for schools in West Gwillimbury in 1844, and indeed the only one to hold that office in the township, having been again appointed on the resumption of Township Superintendents in 1850 and re-appointed for twenty-one years in succession, until the office was finally abolished and County Superintendents appointed.⁴⁷

A valuable resource on the on-going affairs of the First, West Gwillimbury Congregation is the Minute Book of Congregational and Trustees meetings in the possession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives. A prefatory note written on the first page by Rev. William Fraser on 2 February 1847 reads:

The congregation of the United Secession Church (now the United Presbyterian) was received into the connexion by the Missionary Presbytery of

⁴⁶ Image courtesy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives and Records Office, Toronto, taken from the large group photograph of the Ministers and Elders at the First General Assembly, Montreal, 15 June 1875. The photograph hangs on the wall of the Rev. Dr. T. M. Bailey Reading Room in the Archives.

⁴⁷ Hunter 315-16.

the Canadas in 1835. The Rev. William Fraser was inducted into the pastoral charge in June 1836.

The congregation has hitherto been small. A church was built near the village of Bond Head in 1837 on an acre of ground granted for that purpose and for a burying ground, by Mr. Fraser.

Meetings of the congregation were held from time to time as occasions required, but most of the minutes of those meetings have been irrecoverably lost. At the Annual Meeting in February 1847 it was unanimously agreed that henceforward the proceedings of congregational meetings should be recorded in a Book to be kept for the purpose. The minutes of former meetings to be as far as practicable collected and first entered in said Book.

Bond Head (Wm. Fraser)
February 2, 1847.⁴⁸

From this Minute Book we learn that William Fraser twice attempted to demit the charge, citing lack of financial support on the first occasion in 1856.⁴⁹ The Minutes note that his stipend for that year was £45/5/- Cy., or roughly \$227.50. He withdrew his demission after the congregation agreed to do more for his support. As an aside it should be noted that at this time he had not only his wife to support but also eight children. His stipend for the twelve years from 1858 to 1869 inclusive averages out at \$230.25. His stipend for 1869 came down to \$199.25. In December 1869 he presented his demission to the Presbytery of Simcoe and at a meeting called for the purpose in Bond Head Church on 2 January 1870 he gave a very lengthy "Reasons for Demission." These, and the extract Minutes of Presbytery, cover seven pages in the Minute Book, and while of considerable interest are simply too lengthy to reproduce here. In essence, First Presbyterian (Braden's) Church, Essa felt that it would be better served by being on its own—First Presbyterian, Tecumseth had gone on its own in 1856, so by this time the charge consisted of First, West Gwillimbury and First, Essa. Mr. Fraser felt that First, West Gwillimbury had no room to grow, was only averaging three new members per year, and that there was no possibility of opportunity for establishing any new preaching stations. However, he did reconsider and I reproduce the following from the Minutes:

Statement read at the close of Divine Service
Bond Head, February 13, 1870

On the 12th December, last, I intimated to this congregation that I intended to resign my charge at Essa and here.

On the 15th December that resignation was laid on the Presbytery's table.

On the 17th of January a Special Meeting of the congregation was held, at which a resolution was adopted, and measures taken with a view to my services being continued here. The Presbytery met at Barrie on the 1st instant. The

⁴⁸ Minutes of Congregational and Trustees meetings, First Church, West Gwillimbury, ON, 1847-1908, PCCARO.

⁴⁹ Minutes of Congregational and Trustees meeting, First Church, West Gwillimbury, ON, 10 Nov. 1856, 31, PCCARO.

Commissioners of both congregations appeared, and after a full hearing of the case, and the resignation of Essa being adhered to, I was loosed from that congregation, and my offered resignation of this congregation being withdrawn, the Presbytery resolved to continue me in this charge.

We enter upon a new phase in our relations to each other. This small congregation is now my sole charge. I am deeply indebted for the earnestness and zeal of my friends in this place by whose energetic and prompt intervention I have been induced to remain here. I will say nothing more on this subject now but that I trust the step may be approved in a higher court, and that the blessing of heaven may more abundantly descend and rest upon this congregation, and that I may have grace and strength to discharge the duties which, in this new form, devolve upon me. I trust I shall have what I greatly need, what no minister can do without, your moral support and your prayers.⁵⁰

At the May 1878 Convocation of Queen's University in Kingston, William Fraser's contributions to the Presbyterian cause, over more than forty years, were recognized by the conferring of a Doctor of Divinity degree upon him.⁵¹

In January 1879, Dr. Fraser was well into his seventy-first year. His health seems to have been failing and in that month he tendered his demission of his little congregation to the Presbytery of Barrie. Appendix A has all of the Minutes of both the Presbytery of Barrie and of the Fifth General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada pertaining to Dr. Fraser's demission from First, West Gwillimbury. The Presbytery of Barrie submitted an application to the fifth General Assembly for a retiring allowance for Dr. Fraser and also to be able to retain him on the Roll of Presbytery. This application was dealt with by the Assembly's Committee on Leave to Retire from the Active Duties of the Ministry. It reported to Assembly during the ninth sederunt that both parts of the application had been approved by the Committee, and upon the vote being taken the recommendation was sustained by Assembly. The General Assembly's approval of the application came back to Presbytery and was read at its meeting on 30 July.

Dr. Fraser retained his position as Senior Pastor of First, West Gwillimbury for a further sixteen months. At the Presbytery of Barrie meeting on 30 November 1880, he presented a petition requesting that he be relieved of the position (see Appendix A). On 29 March 1881, Dr. Fraser sold his sixty-six-acre property to Thomas Cross of Tecumseth for \$4,020⁵² and moved from Bond Head, his home for the previous forty-six years, to Barrie, where he spent the rest of his days. He assisted in the life and work of the Barrie Presbyterian Church (now St. Andrew's), sitting with the Kirk Session and taking an Elder's District. At the same time he continued his work with the General Assembly as one of its Clerks. At the eighteenth General Assembly in 1892 he was absent for probably the first time since he was appointed Clerk of the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church in 1851—an unbroken chain of service that had lasted forty-one years. He gave failing health as the reason for submitting his resignation as a Clerk of the

⁵⁰ Minutes of Congregational and Trustees meeting, First Church, West Gwillimbury, ON, 13 Feb. 1870, 78-79, PCCARO.

⁵¹ Gregg incorrectly notes the year as 1876. Deirdre Bryden, Archivist (University Records) at Queen's, has confirmed 1878 as the correct date.

⁵² Instrument 689, Simcoe County Registry Office, Barrie, registered 31 March 1881. Dr. Fraser took back a mortgage on the property in the amount of \$3,620—Instrument 690—which was later discharged.

General Assembly. The Court appointed a Committee to prepare a Minute of Appreciation for his long and faithful service (see Appendix A).

Regrettably, William Fraser only lived for another six months, passing away at his home in Barrie on Christmas Day 1892 at the advanced age of eighty-four years and seven months. Interestingly enough, the certificate of his death lists his place of birth as "Scotland." The reader is referred to Appendix B for all of the Presbytery Minutes relative to Dr. Fraser's passing, as well as all of the obituaries extracted from various newspapers, Presbytery Minutes and General Assembly *Acts & Proceedings*.

Both Barrie newspapers carried obituaries in their 29 December editions. The obituary in the *Northern Advance* had several similarities to the one in the *Barrie Examiner* that could almost make one wonder if they were written by the same person; although it does give details of the funeral service, which the *Examiner* did not.

The February 1893 issue of *The Presbyterian Record* carried a lengthy obituary on Dr. Fraser. It concluded: "He was an earnest and faithful pastor and preacher, a pattern of neatness and accuracy in his department of the Assembly's work, and, as a man, he was marked by a gentle, dignified, kindly courtesy, which at once commanded respect and won affection as few men can do. To know him was to love him."⁵³

It was observed by Dr. John Moir, Emeritus Professor of Church History, University of Toronto, in a private conversation, that nineteenth-century ministerial obituaries are "uncritical accounts of pious lives." This would certainly seem to be so in William Fraser's case, but, I feel, wholly justified. He laboured long and hard in the service of the Master he loved, often under very trying circumstances. He was married three times. His first wife, Jane Geddie, died shortly after they were settled in Bond Head, on 27 October 1841, leaving him with three small children aged six, four, and two. On 3 October 1844 he married Nancy McCurdy of Onslow, Colchester County, Nova Scotia, a small village just outside Truro. They had five children, of whom two sons, James Bruce and Robert Douglas, followed their father into the ministry. All were under the age of eighteen when Nancy died on 7 April 1862. The causes of death of Jane and Nancy are not known because they pre-dated the mandatory registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths.⁵⁴ On 8 March 1866 he re-married again; his bride was Maria James Nicholas, a native of Guernsey Island and they had two children, a boy and a girl, who were twenty-five and twenty-two respectively when their father died. On 25 September 1885 William Fraser was widowed for a third time when Maria contracted malaria and died. She is not buried with her husband at Bond Head, but rather in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, where her family was from. As well as losing two of his wives during his time in Bond Head, he also lost his oldest daughter, Mary Jane Fraser, on 4 October 1874 at the age of thirty-seven years and six months. She was his only daughter from his first marriage to Jane Geddie. Her death certificate states that she died of "Morbus Brightii"—Bright's Disease, or as we would know it, kidney failure. The certificate indicates that she had suffered from the disease for two years. She, too, is buried in the family plot at Bond Head.

⁵³ *The Presbyterian Record* 18.2 Feb. 1893: 33. The obituary is transcribed in full in Appendix B.

⁵⁴ 32 Victoria, Cap. 30, Ontario, An Act to Provide for the Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths. Assented to 23rd of January 1869 to be effective the 1st of July 1869. Amended 33 Victoria, Cap. 22, Ontario, An Act to amend an Act passed in the thirty-second year of Her Majesty's reign, chaptered thirty, of the Statutes of Ontario, intituled, "An Act to provide for the Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths." Assented to 24th of December 1869.

It is worth noting, I feel, that some of the information that is literally carved in stone on the Fraser grave marker at Bond Head is incorrect. It states that William was the minister of First Presbyterian Congregation of West Gwillimbury from 2 September 1834 to 30 November 1880. Technically the latter date is correct, although 30 June 1879 is the date when he was moved by the Presbytery to the position of Senior Pastor. But the first date is completely inaccurate. This is the date that he was ordained in Pictou as a missionary to the United Associate Synod's mission to Upper Canada, and not designated specifically to West Gwillimbury or anywhere else in the region. In fact, as we have seen, he wasn't sent to West Gwillimbury until March of 1835 and likely hadn't even heard of the place until shortly before he was sent there by William Proudfoot.

Several of the testimonials have noted his very meticulous and careful record keeping. Since I started to work on this paper I have had the opportunity of reading quite a lot of his letters, meeting minutes and other papers that came from his pen. His writing was very clear, very even, and very easy to read. I attach a sample taken from the Kirk Session Minute Book of First Essa Church, the original of which is in The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives. This is the Minutes of a Session meeting held in the Vestry of the church on 21 August 1864 respecting setting the date for the next Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.⁵⁵

Vallack. *St Essa, and within the Vestry of the First
Canada Presbyterian Church, Here, Vallack,
the Twenty-first day of August, One Thousand
Eight Hundred and Sixty-four years.
The Session of the First Canada Presbyterian Congrega-
tion of Essa, met and was constituted with prayer.
Present, - The Rev H. Foster, Moderator, Messrs. George
Simonds, Thomas Hogg, James Dickson, Richard McRae Thomas
Munro, Elders.
The Session agreed that the Lord's Supper should
be dispensed in this Congregation, on the Second Vallack, being
the Eleventh day of September, ensuing.
Closed with the Benediction.
Wm. Foster
Moderator and acting clerk.*

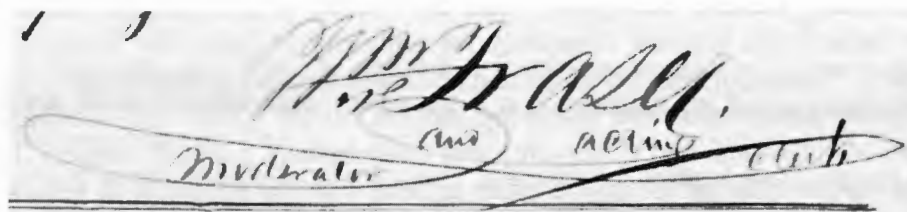
CXIF.
Sacrament.
Lord's Supper appointed.

⁵⁵ Image courtesy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives and Records Office, Toronto, taken from the Kirk Session Minute Book of First Essa (Braden's) Presbyterian Church, Essa Township, ON, 71.

To conclude, I think it is a fair question to ask why this obviously well educated, articulate, and fluently bilingual man chose to remain in what was, essentially, in the mid-nineteenth century, a cultural backwater. It is my understanding, although I have not seen anything to confirm or deny the point, that at some time in the 1850s a call came to him from the Bay Street Congregation in Toronto. Obviously he turned it down. I think it came down to a matter of loyalty. He had been called to this struggling three-point pastoral charge in 1835 and perhaps he felt that this was God's Divine intervention in his life, that this was where God wanted him to be. Perhaps too, coming as he did from rural Pictou County, Nova Scotia, he felt more at home with the farm people in rural Simcoe County, Ontario, than he would have in the big city of Toronto. Also, he was one of them. He farmed his property on part of the north half of Lot 1, Concession 6, West Gwillimbury. He could identify with crop and livestock failures and successes, because he was there right along with his people. When they suffered, so did he. As we have seen earlier in this paper, in an early report to the Rev. William Proudfoot he noted the failure of the wheat crop. In addition, he had small children to look after and likely didn't want to disrupt their lives by uprooting them for an unknown and uncertain big city pastoral charge. And finally, he was involved with education in the area as Township Superintendent of Education for West Gwillimbury for many years. His work with the various Synods and General Assemblies from 1851 to 1891 would have served to keep him connected with his colleagues across the Church. We can read very clearly in the testimonials and obituaries the esteem and respect in which he was held. Truly he can be regarded as "A Father of Canadian Presbyterianism."

I leave the final word to William Fraser. What follows was written in his diary in the evening of the day on which he was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacraments. In my respectful opinion he more than fulfilled the objectives he set for himself:

I have this day then avouched my self to be the Lord's. I have laid myself under the most solemn promises to perform his service and to live at all times devoted to the great object of promoting the divine glory in the edification of men. O that the Great Shepherd of the sheep may qualify me for the discharge of the arduous duties which now devolve upon me, & that he may make me a successful minister of the New Testament to the praise of the glory of his grace.⁵⁶



Handwritten signature of William Fraser, Minister and Acting Clerk.

⁵⁶ Diary 82.