

CENTRAL UNITED CHURCH

160 Spring Street
Sault Ste. Marie



A Report Prepared by the
Sault Ste. Marie L.A.C.A.C.
October 8, 1985

*This is an edited copy of the original document; originals included in the Municipal Heritage Committee Binder.

Central United Church

The work of the Methodist Church in Sault Ste. Marie began in 1851 when Reverend George McDougall established a mission at Garden River. From there, Rev. McDougall and his successors looked after the growing Methodist community at Sault Ste. Marie. In 1864 Rev. Samuel Down was sent to the district. While still residing at Garden River, he is the first Methodist Minister listed for Sault Ste. Marie.

The Methodist meetings in Sault Ste. Marie were held at what is presently known as the Ermatinger Old Stone House, then the residence of the Sheriff, W. H. Carney. Mr. Carney, who also used the House as a courthouse, used to give the service himself when no minister was present.

In 1867 two Ministers looked after the Methodist interests in this area: Rev. Down at Garden River and Rev. Samuel Fear at Sault Ste. Marie.

The two missions were officially separated in 1871 when Garden River became an "Indian Mission" and Sault Ste. Marie a "Domestic Mission". Reverend Thomas Cleworth took over the congregation at Sault Ste. Marie.

A frame building was erected on the northeast corner of Pim and Queen Streets in 1870. In 1872, the first parsonage was erected on Church Street. The church was enlarged some twenty years later by an addition at the rear to accommodate the increasing Sunday School attendance. A steeple was also added.¹

Even with the additions it was becoming obvious that the congregation was outgrowing the existing church building. In early 1897, the congregation purchased the present site of Central United Church at the corner of Spring and Albert Streets for \$700.00 and started making plans for building a new church. A Building Committee consisting of W. H. Hearst (who became Premier of Ontario in 1914), Dr. Shannon, and Mr. Farwell was established in February of 1897.

The Committee was instructed to contact six of the "best architects" and ask them to submit plans for a church with a seating capacity of 450 on the ground floor. The building was also to include galleries. Total cost of the building was not to exceed \$7,500.00.²

By March 1897, the Building Committee was concentrating on the plans of Mr. Henry Simpson, an architect from Toronto. (see appendix A) At the meeting of Trustees held March 23, 1897 the Trustees referred the sketches back to the architect with a request that he alter the exterior to show a church more massive in appearance and of a style of architecture more "indicative of Methodism". The architect was also instructed to remove as many of the porches shown in his sketch as possible and to revise the seating arrangement in the manner suggested by the building committee. All action regarding the appointment of an architect was deferred until Mr. Simpson had an opportunity to submit his plans.³

Further alteration to the sketches were made by the Trustees in May of 1897, including the removal of yet another porch. The May meeting of Trustees also moved to defer building a new church at the present time. In July of that year the new plans by Mr. Simpson showing an above-ground school room were accepted by the Trustees.

At the November 25, 1897 meeting it was reported that Mr. Simpson would be willing to accept \$75.00 as payment in full for the work done to date, and that he would complete the plans and specifications at a future date, as needed. The Treasurer was instructed to pay Mr. Simpson as soon as funds permitted. It would seem the Methodist congregation was having financial problems.

A subscription drive for a building fund was also started around this time.

By July 1899 the Trustees were considering going ahead with building only a Sunday School Room at the new church site. However, it was not until December 1899 that the Building Committee was authorized to procure plans for a school room with a seating capacity of 450.⁵

At the same December meeting an offer by Mr. F. H. Clergue to purchase an additional plot of land 24' x 100' adjoining the church and to donate it to the church was accepted, provided Mr. Clergue supplied proof of title.

A subscription fund for the school room was started early in 1900. The contract for building the school room was awarded to Isaac Taillifer in July 1900 for \$6,445.00.⁶

Building stone was obtained from the ship canal. The building was completed in the same year and the corner stone layed in July 1900 by the Honourable William Mulock, Postmaster General of Canada. The building was dedicated by the Pastor, Rev. S. G. Stone, on March 10, 1901.⁷

In November 1900, arrangements were begun for selling the existing church on Pim and Wellington Streets. An agreement to sell it to Mr. W. H. Plummer for \$2,200.00 was transferred to the Public School Board on March of 1901. Final arrangements for the sale were completed in July 1901.

In March 1901, the Parsonage on Church Street was also placed on sale for \$1,600.00. Mr. George Stone purchased it later that year for \$1,500.00.

A Committee was then established to arrange for plans for a new parsonage. James Thomson, a Sault Ste. Marie architect was chosen.⁸ (see Appendix B) The parsonage was to be located on the plot of land previously donated by Mr. Clergue.

However, it took two calls for tenders before the contract for the construction of the Parsonage was awarded to Mr. A.C. McLeod on July 8, 1901. The new Parsonage was ready for occupation in January 1902.

Later that year the congregation received a donation of \$5,000 from the estate of Mr. Hart A. Massey for the purpose of building a new church. This donation was on condition that the new church cost not less than \$20,000 on which the congregation would contribute \$5,000 at the start and that the mortgage on the new building not exceed \$10,000. A time limit for building the new church was also imposed as part of the conditions.

On June 19, 1902 the building committee was authorized to secure sketches and estimates of probable costs for a church adequate to the need of the congregation. A committee was also established to carry out a subscription fund for the new building.

Preliminary sketches by Mr. H. Simpson of Toronto were chosen on December 10, 1902 from amongst three submissions and Mr. Simpson was asked to complete the plans sufficiently enough to call for tenders.⁹ It is unclear whether these were new plans by Mr. Simpson, or were the plans sketched in 1897. Apparently Mr. James Thomson also submitted sketches for at the December 17, 1902 meeting. The Trustees thanked Mr. Thomson for his sketches, adding that while they did not accept them they appreciated his services just the same.¹⁰

In May 1903, the tenders were opened, the lowest one being for \$29,150.00. The matter was then referred back to the architect since he had been instructed to prepare plans for a church costing \$20,000.00. Reverend James Allen was also instructed to contact the Executors of the Massey estate to see if the conditions of the donation could be altered so that a mortgage of more than \$10,000.00 would be allowed, and that the time frame for building the church be extended.¹¹

The Sault Star reported in February 1903, that the final plans called for a structure costing nearly \$25,000.00 and having a seating capacity of 1,000, which could be increased to 1,500 by opening folding doors to the existing school room.

On June 25, 1903 the Sault Star reported that Mr. Thomson was revising the plans and that fresh tenders would be called. On July 15, 1903 the contract for the church was given to Mr. George Hughes for \$17,340.00. Mr. James Thomson was also retained as the local architect to supervise the work.¹² The cornerstone was laid by Sheriff Carney on September 7, 1903, but the collapse of the Consolidated Lake Superior Co. and the subsequent depression interrupted the work the very next month.

In December 1904, a new building fund to collect subscription for the church was re-started. Building operations were resumed in March of 1905. At this time the trustees decided that it was inadvisable to attempt more than the completion of the auditorium, leaving the building of the tower, vestries and parlour for a later time.¹³ The auditorium was completed and dedicated of February 18, 1906.¹⁴

The school room and auditorium being completed, the Trustees in 1907 resolved to add the tower. The plans called for the tower to be 20 feet square and 70 feet high. It was to provide the main entrance to the church proper and to the gallery. Mr. A. C. McLeod was again awarded the contract for \$5275.00.¹⁵

In 1910 McIntyre, Haining and Kelly were engaged to build a northeast addition to the Sunday school room containing the vestries, kitchen and meeting rooms. ¹⁶ A basement room was also added at a later date, again because of the need for space.

In 1925, the church voted to join the union of the Methodist Congregationalist and Presbyterian Churches, and it was renamed Central United Church.



APPENDIX A

The Biographical Dictionary of
Architects in Canada
1800-1950

Edited and compiled by:
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April 13, 1984

Prepared for Mr. Hugh P. Walker, Director, Guildwood Hall, Toronto

BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY SIMPSON (1864-1926)

Born in Toronto in 1864, Henry SIMPSON was active as an architect in this city from 1891 (when he is first listed in the Toronto City Directories as a member of the profession) until his retirement from active practice in 1922. He designed a variety of residential, commercial and institutional buildings both in Toronto, and as far north as Fort William, as far west at St. Thomas, and as far east as Picton, Prince Edward County. As a student he served an apprenticeship with the renowned Toronto architect E. J. LENNOX, and completed his training in New York City in the late 1880's before returning to Toronto to open an office as a sole practitioner. He entered into a partnership with James A. ELLIS from June 1897 until September 1898, and practiced on his own again until 1907, when another partnership was formed with Robert M. YOUNG (1881-1911). After the death of YOUNG on 4 May 1911, SIMPSON carried on the practice until 1922, and died at Toronto on 16 December 1926.

Biographical references: obituary in the Globe 17 December 1926 page 12
obituary in the Mail & Empire 17 December 1926 , page 14
obituary in the Star 17 December 1926 page 13
biography and list of works in Toronto Illustrated 1893
page 151 (see attached)

SELECTED WORKS (arranged chronologically)

STATUS

1891 Cooke's Presbyterian Church, Queen St. East, Toronto	demolished
1891 Girl's Industrial School, East Toronto, Ont.	
1891 Boy's Industrial School, Mimico, Ont.	
1892 Bethel Chapel, University Street (Avenue), Toronto	demolished
1892 Isolation Hospital, Gerrard Street East at Don River, Toronto, Ont.	demolished
1893 Presbyterian Church, East Toronto Village, Ont.	demolished
1895 Grand Opera House Hotel, Adelaide Street West, Tor.	
1896 Presbyterian Church, Hillsdale, Ont.	
1897 Oddfellows Hall, Parry Sound, Ont.	
1898 True Blue Orphanage, Picton, Ont.	
1900 Central Methodist Church, Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.	
1900 Public School, East Ward, Parry Sound, Ont.	
1900 Public School, Sturgeon Falls, Ont.	
1900 Showroom for the Metallic Roofing Co., King St. West at Dufferin St., Toronto	
1900 Presbyterian Church, Parry Sound, Ont.	

April 13, 1984

Selected works of Henry SIMPSON (con't.)

STATUS

- | | | |
|------|---|------------|
| 1903 | Furniture Store and Warehouse for J. F. Brown, Yonge St
Toronto, Ont. | |
| 1904 | High School, Midland, Ont. | |
| 1906 | High School, Wingham, Ont. | |
| 1906 | Port Arthur Collegiate, Port Arthur, Ont. | |
| 1907 | St. James Public School, Port Arthur, Ont. | |
| 1907 | Strand Hotel, Richmond Street East at Victoria Street, Tor. | |
| 1907 | Musson Book Warehouse, Richmond Street West at Duncan Street,
Toronto | |
| 1907 | Northern Hotel, Yonge Street near Scollard St., Toronto | |
| 1909 | 8 storey Hotel for L Soloman, King Street West at Simcoe
Street, Toronto | demolished |
| 1912 | Sellers-Gough Warehouse, 291 Yonge St., Toronto | |

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APPENDIX B

The Biographical Dictionary of
Architects in Canada
0-1950

Edited and compiled by:
Robert G. Hill, B. Arch.,
Architect, OAA, MRAIC

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FILE: THOMSON, James (1870-1951)
architect of Sault Ste. Marie, Barrie and Toronto, Ont.

- born in July 1870 in Simcoe County, Ont.
- educated at Public schools in Simcoe Co., and graduated from Barrie Collegiate about 1890
- served an apprenticeship with the architectural firm of KENNEDY & HOLLAND, at Barrie, Ont. from 1893 to 1896
- commenced practice in Sault Ste. Marie in 1896 and remained there until 1905, when he moved to Toronto.
- from 1906 to 1910 he maintained his own office in Toronto
- in 1910 he joined in partnership with the architect Franklin E. BELFRY of Toronto, and this practice lasted until 1912, when THOMSON again opened his own office. He practiced in Toronto from 1912 until after 1945.
- died in Toronto on 11 March 1951

Sources: Application form to the Ontario Association of Architects, dated 30 September 1931

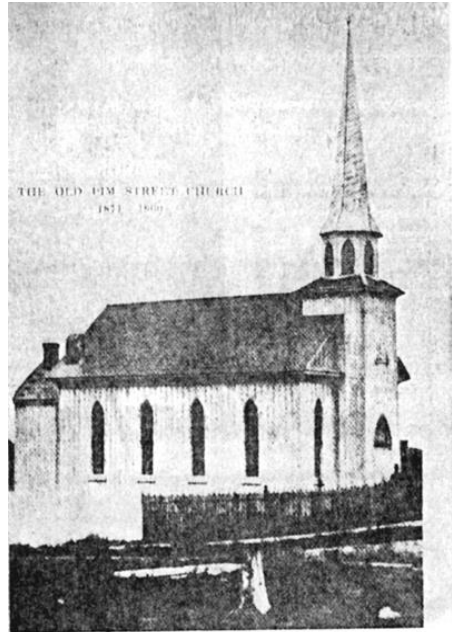
Obituary: Globe and Mail 13 March 1951 page 5 (see below)

THOMSON, James—At his home, 935 Avenue Rd., Toronto, on Sunday evening, March 11, 1951, James Thomson, beloved husband of Sarah Elise Vaillancourt, and father of Berence Nocomme, Berence James Iveyson, James and George Berthelme. At the Chapel of Morley S. Bedford, 159 Eglinton Ave. W., at Lascelles Blvd., for service on Wednesday at 3 p.m. to Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

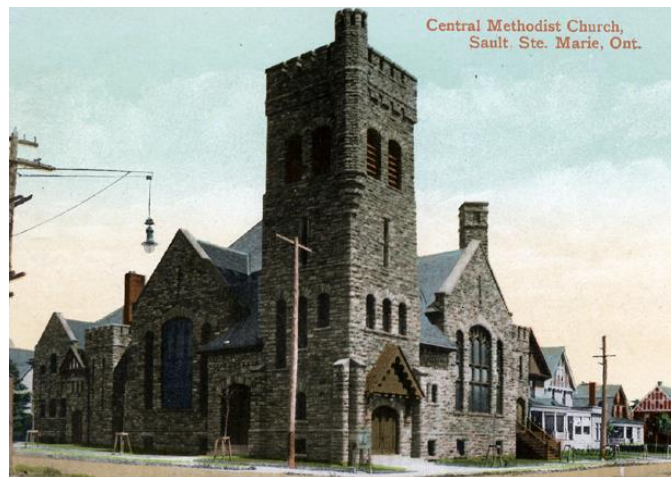
James Thomson

A member of the Ontario Association of Architects, James Thomson, 80, died Sunday evening at his home, 935 Avenue Rd. Mr. Thomson was born in Innisfil Township. He worked as an architect in Barrie and Sault Ste. Marie where he had offices. Coming to Toronto in 1905, Mr. Thomson built many homes in the Avenue Rd. Hill district, as well as churches, schools and industrial buildings in the city. One of his last jobs was remodeling the Barrie Town Hall. He leaves his wife, the former Sarah Elise Vaillancourt, and two sons, Berence James, Toronto, and George Derlwyn of Montreal.

Photos courtesy of the Sault Ste. Marie Museum



THIS WAS PIM STREET METHODIST CHURCH
... as it looked between 1871 and 1900



Photos courtesy of the Sault Ste. Marie Museum



Following the sale of the original Methodist church to the Public School Board in 1901, the building was turned with its side to Pim Street, given a brick veneer, and converted into a double dwelling. Civic Address 118-120 Pim Street.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 No author. 79 Years of Progress: Central United Church Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario: 1851-1930 - Cliffe Printing, Sault Ste. Marie p. 7-8 No date.
- 2 Minutes of Trustee Board, February 16, 1897
- 3 Minutes of Trustee Board, March 23, 1897
- 4 Minutes of Trustee Board, November 25, 1897
- 5 Minutes of Trustee Board, December 7, 1899
- 6 Minutes of Trustee Board, July 1900
- 7 Sault Star, February 22, 1906 p. 1; "New Church Was Opened"
- 8 Minutes of Trustee Board, May 21, 1901
- 9 Minutes of Trustee Board, December 10, 1902
- 10 Minutes of Trustee Board, December 17, 1902
- 11 Minutes of Trustee Board, May 16, 1903
- 12 Minutes of Trustee Board, July 13, 1903
- 13 Sault Star, February 22, 1906 p. 1 "New Church Was Opened"
- 14 No author. 79 Years of Progress: Central United Church Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario: 1851-1930 - Cliffe Printing, Sault Ste. Marie p. 7-8 No date.
- 15 Ibid p. 9
- 16 Ibid p.9

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- 1 No author. 79 Years of Progress: Central United Church Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario: 1851-1930 - Cliffe Printing, Sault Ste. Marie p. 7-8 No date.
- 2 Minutes of Trustee Board, April 26, 1893 to June 17, 1942
- 3 Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950
- 4 "Will Build Church" - Sault Star, February 19, 1903; p. 8
- 5 "Will Go On With Church" - Sault Star, February 26, 1903; p. 1
- 6 "Real Estate and Building" - Sault Star, April 23, 1903; p. 1
- 7 "Real Estate and Building" - Sault Star, June 25, 1903; p. 1
- 8 "New Church was Opened" - Sault Star, February 22, 1906; p. 1
- 9 "Will Erect Tower" - Sault Star, February 14, 1907; p. 1
- 10 "Parish of Central United 83 Years Old" - Sault Star, March 24, 1934
- 11 "Methodists Built Structure in 1871" - Sault Star, February 14, 1969

Central United Church Architectural Design

Massing

The main element of the church is the sanctuary, a grand, vaulted space completed in 1903. It is octagonal in plan, and positioned in the southwest corner of the site with Albert Street to the south and Spring Street to the west. A massive octagonal peaked roof covers the sanctuary. To the southwest of the sanctuary, directly fronting the corner of Albert and Spring Streets, is the bell tower. It is square in plan, and solidly attached to the sanctuary. The bell tower is one of the principal features of both the south and west façades, as well as serving to mark the main entrance to the sanctuary, off Albert Street, contained in its base. It was built after the sanctuary, in 1907. To the southeast wall of the sanctuary is appended a robust semi-octagonal stairwell and secondary entrance. North of the sanctuary is the smaller hip-roofed Edwards Hall, the first part of the church to be built in 1901. East of Edwards Hall is a flat-roofed area which extends south to join the northeast side of the sanctuary, and terminates at the organ chamber immediately to the east of the sanctuary. Constructed in 1911, it was the last portion of the church to be built.

Materials

The church is constructed primarily of roughly squared stone coursed in a rubble pattern. The indigenous red sandstone used is rock-faced; that is, the exposed face is left in the rough-hewn state in which it was quarried, thus producing a bold texture over the entire building. A matching red mortar is tuck-pointed on all joints except those on the flat-roofed portion to the northeast of the sanctuary, where the joints are flush. Copings are of salmon coloured cement as are the pitched capstones of pilasters.

Window sills and banding are of sandstone. Diamond paned leaded glass is used in most of the windows and some of it is coloured. Almost all the windows have four-centred arches. The main roof over the sanctuary is covered by black asphalt shingles with wooden soffits and simply carved brackets.

Spring Street Elevation (west)

At the extreme left of the Spring Street (west) façade, the northwest corner of Edwards Hall is angled at forty-five degrees, a continuation of the octagonal geometry of the plan. Just to the right of the corner is a gabled wall with three long openings, the centre one being taller than the others. In each arched opening, there is a window at the top, a recessed spandrel of stone below, and a window below that. To the right of this is a rectangular stairwell and secondary entrance which projects forward slightly. It has battlements, narrow slit-like windows and a shallow but steeply pitched gabled canopy constructed of wood over the entrance. This element marks the division between Edwards Hall to the left and the wall of the sanctuary to the right. The sanctuary is strongly articulated on the façade as a large gabled wall, compositionally providing a

centre to the elevation; it is balanced by the massive bell tower to the left and several smaller elements to the right. The gabled sanctuary wall contains a large arched opening divided into three equal windows by vertical wooden mullions and divided horizontally by deep wooden spandrel panels. This opening is flanked on either side by slightly shorter windows, about one-third the width of the large opening, with similar horizontal spandrel panels. The upper windows in this set have simple wooden tracery near their tops. A long, narrow vertical recess is centred in the otherwise unornamented gable.

Next to this gabled wall, at the extreme right of the elevation and on the corner of Spring and Albert Streets, stands the bell tower. It is approximately four storeys in height with walls which step-back slightly as they rise. The short angle buttresses at the base of the tower have pitched capstones and its walls are pierced by small arched windows, or, as in the belfry, the openings are louvred. The belfry is capped by battlements, and corbelled out from the corner of the belfry is a narrow turret, also with battlements.

Albert Street Elevation (south)

The south elevation of the bell tower facing Albert Street is almost identical to the west elevation; except for the main entrance to the sanctuary at its base. Six steps up from grade, the entrance is an arched, double width doorway, with a wooden canopy having a steeply pitched gable and scalloped fascia. The main doors are varnished oak with Gothic lights and long Gothic sidelights. The sanctuary is again articulated on the façade to the right of the bell tower, with a large gabled element similar in size and proportion to that on the west façade. The large central window flanked by two smaller windows is also repeated. The façade steps back to the right with the battlemented semi-octagonal stairwell adjoining the sanctuary. This element contains an arched doorway eleven steps above grade. Beyond this is a square chimney, and beyond this the façade ends well back from the street with the wall of the organ chamber.

East and North Elevations

The minor elevations of the church are the north and east, facing adjacent houses and parking areas. These elevations are regular, and run parallel to the north and east boundaries of the site. Both contain minor entrances, as well as deep, unornamented rectangular windows. These façades are not as grand and formal as the west and south.

Central United Church, designed by Architect Henry Simpson of Toronto, cannot be slotted easily into any particular architectural style. It may be that the succession of building stages together with the strong design input of the Building Committee severely modified Simpson's original concepts. Nevertheless, the church stands today as a very powerfully modelled building in warm local stone, well reflecting the 1897 request of the architect to create a more massive appearance "indicative of Methodism".