

# THE PROUDFOOT SOCIETY

## *A VENERABLE HISTORY WITH A FUTURE*

### Proudfoot Comes to London

On November 8, 1832, Rev. William Proudfoot arrived in the grim little village of London. He was part of the first wave of English-speaking clergymen to come to Ontario from Presbyterian Scotland. News of this new Scottish clergy group's attractiveness soon spread.

The Rev. William Proudfoot became the first settled minister and officially established a congregation in London on March 17th, 1833<sup>1</sup> from a cross-section of the society that was beginning to grow around the Forks of the Thames.

In 1833, the adherent to the Established Church of Scotland left his congregation to set up their own, later called St. Andrew's Church on land granted by the Queen, in perpetuity which they received in April 1842 at Queens Avenue at Waterloo Street. In October of the same year the foundation stone of the First St. Andrew's Church was laid by Duncan McKenzie.<sup>2</sup>

Both churches followed their separate paths. First Presbyterian and St. Andrew's churches joined the United Church of Canada on June 10, 1925. The two churches that were separated were reunited January 1, 1938. The First United Church property of Clarence Street at Dufferin was sold to London Life and turned into a parking lot. The congregations voted to reunite as First-St. Andrews at the location on Queens Avenue at Waterloo Streets in 1938.

This early society of Proudfoot adherents provides a backdrop for our modern "**Proudfoot Society**". Our founder left an indelible mark on the small community. Proudfoot's expanded his impact through continued missionary work, becoming the minister for several other Presbyterian congregations in the London region for which he established congregations. He helped them raise funds to build churches and faithfully tended his rural charges until other ministers were obtained. Recognizing the shortage of ministers, he obtained the Synod's agreement to start a divinity school in London, the first in Upper Canada. However, with the small budget, he converted the upper floor of the family home into the school. To enhance communication, as he had now become the Clerk of the Synod for Upper Canada, he established the *Presbyterian Magazine* as its editor. His son-in-law John Norval was the publisher.

The Rev. William Proudfoot died on January 16, 1851.<sup>3</sup> The simple inscription on his tombstone in Oakland Cemetery closes with the words:

-----"I have finished my course. I have kept the faith." -----

### Celebrating our History

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<sup>1</sup> Gavin McGregor: The Reverend William Proudfoot An Auld Acquaintance © Gavin McGregor 2011.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Gunn: Almost a Century: A Brief Historical Sketch of St. Andrew's United Church 1930.

<sup>3</sup> "A history of First-St. Andrews United Church, London, Ontario 1938-2007" (175 Anniversary) p.2.

1982 marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of First-St. Andrew's United Church (FSA) as one of the oldest and most colorful institutions in London's history, wrote Jane Foy in the London Free Press<sup>4</sup> of the way we celebrated William Proudfoot at that time.

Dr. Bill Watson, church elder and chairman of the anniversary committee, described Proudfoot's life as *"inspiring, colorful and turbulent. He made an imprint of faithful adventure which has been the hallmark of this congregation ever since."* The society created by his successive congregations is distinctive and committed.

At the FSA 150<sup>th</sup>, the production of the **"The Proudfoot Papers"** by well-known historian, minister and writer, the late Orlo Miller, commissioned by FSA opened November 10, 1982 at the McManus Theatre. A commemorative service was held at Proudfoot's grave in January 1983.

### The Proudfoot Legacy

Congregational projects have repeatedly reflected the generosity and humanity of the original William Proudfoot through projects such as Proudfoot House, a halfway house as a residence and individual programming for women in conflict with the law, which opened in London in 1980.

The traditions continue as First-St. Andrews (FSA) United Church now proclaims a mission of:

**F – Faith,      S – Service.      A - Arts**

### The Proudfoot Society

Church activities continue to take place in Proudfoot Hall below our historic sanctuary. The history and traditions brought to us by William Proudfoot live on through the Proudfoot Society. Our current Board of Trustees is committed to continuing these traditions by offering an opportunity to contribute to the legacy through membership in the **Proudfoot Society**.

For decades, FSA has taken bold action to ensure its success and the empowerment of generations still to come. A gifting protocol was established from the beginning which has resulted in a legacy of generosity and pride in our church community through historical financial benefactor support.

Today and tomorrow, the **Faith, Service and Arts** of FSA will be supported by the members of the **Proudfoot Society**.

**John Eberhard**  
**Board of Trustees, 2021**

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<sup>4</sup> London Free Press (May 3, 1982)