

Golden Anniversary in the Adirondacks!

In November 2004, the Lake Placid church, referred to by its members as “a lighthouse to the community,” celebrated 50 years in the current facility on Sentinel Road. The original structure, which was built in 1905, was devastated by fire on February 10, 1954. Sr. Bertha Marshall, who is currently the church’s oldest member, stated that the fire “left an indelible mark on anyone over 50 years old who can remember it.”

Sr. Marshall’s father, Harry Twining, became pastor of the Lake Placid church in 1943, and her family moved there as a result. Eleven years later, she received the news of the church fire via telephone, since her family lived on Adirondack Loj Road. She mentioned that those walking down Mill Hill after school that day got a personal view of the spectacular fire.

On February 12, 1954, the Lake Placid News printed an article entitled “Disastrous Fire Sweeps Pilgrim Holiness Church.” The article relates how “a front vestibule partition and the church steeple gave local firemen the most trouble during their long and hard fight to save the landmark. Hose lines were laid to cover all sides of the three-story Swiss-type structure, but it was some time before the firefighters could get inside the building to get at the flames within due to the dense smoke and heat.”

According to the article, the fire lasted more than three hours, then broke out again at 11:00 p.m. for a short time. Many members of the Lake Placid Volunteer Fire Department answered the alarm and had all available equipment on hand to combat the fire.

Rev. Donald J. Hardy, who was the pastor of the Lake Placid church at the time of the fire, reflected on that grave day that “the financial and spiritual loss is a serious blow to our congregation.” However, the community rallied around the church and its membership. Before the flames were even quenched, Sr. Marshall stated the church had received many offers to use other houses of worship. Instead, church services were held in the church parsonage, then on Averyville Road, during the nine month interim.

William Dustin, an architect from Saranac Lake, NY, drew up plans for the replacement building, according to a March 1954 article. He had also planned the original



structure, and it was requested that the new church be as similar as possible to the original within financial constraints. Sr. Marshall related that \$10,000 was collected from insurance, and Bro. Hardy had estimated the replacement cost between \$50,000 and \$75,000. Hundreds of hours of volunteer labor were provided under the supervision of Erford Shew, who was the main carpenter, and Bro. Hardy. Garth Whalley donated black cherry wood, and many others gave of their supplies and their time. “The community rose to the challenge,” stated Sr. Marshall.

Bro. John Marshall, also a member of the church, said he remembers his mother driving past the church and seeing his father on top of the structure pulling down beams. He also recalls watching people pour concrete for the church the old-fashioned way — by moving it with a wheelbarrow!

In August of 1954, while the building project was in full phase, Bro. Hardy said, “We are striving to build a church that everyone in the community will be proud of and one which will lend a cheery note to its surroundings.” That new church was dedicated on November 28, 1954, less than a year after the tragic fire, by Rev. Orrin Fay, the District Superintendent, who was originally from Lake Placid. Bro. Hardy was unable to attend the dedication, according to Sr. Marshall, since he was sick at the time!

In November 1979, the pulpit in the church was dedicated in Bro. Hardy’s memory during the church’s 25th anniversary service. He had pastored the Lake Placid Pilgrim Holiness Church for 13 years.

Sr. Marshall stated that the standards of the church haven’t changed over the years — the women still maintain a code of modesty, wearing skirts and their hair long, and the services are similar, with singing, praying, and preaching. “We try to follow the Word,” she said.

Rev. Douglas Cox moved to Lake Placid from Cincinnati just over two years ago with his wife and four sons to pastor the church. He said attendance averages about 45 to 50 people at services and the church has about 30 members. The church offers Sunday School, Sunday morning and evening worship services, a Wednesday evening prayer service, a prayer group at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, and has just begun a nursery for Sunday morning. The church has also recently started a school for new or young converts to teach the basics of the faith. Church members also sing in the Uihlein Mercy Center on Sunday evenings.

Many of the congregation have been coming to the church for years with their families, like the Marshalls. Others are people contacted by Bro. Cox, with whom he has made friendships, and then they started attending. Bro. Cox commented that his parishioners “are very cooperative and interested in the church, which is a plus. You don’t find that very many times. The people have a mind to work.”

And these people have worked! Since that day in 1954, members of the Lake Placid Pilgrim Holiness Church have set about building their “lighthouse” up from the ground. They continue today, working to see that their church continues to be a beacon to others.

There is distinct evidence of the effectiveness of the Lake Placid Pilgrim Holiness Church over the years, regardless of the building in use. During the anniversary service, Bro. John Marshall reflected that “we have not just sat still. Our people have gone out and done great things.” Here are a few ways in which this congregation has affected our world for the better:

- Beverly Fay, who attended the church with her family as a child, is now a missionary in Blind River, Ontario, with the All Tribes Lighthouse Mission. Sr. Fay spoke

during the anniversary service, reminiscing about leaning on her father’s leg during the services and watching Bro. Wood’s hightop shoes tapping out a beat to the songs! She recalled the interest that older people had in the young, and admonished the older members to be there for the younger. “Teach children little things,” she said, “train them for Kingdom building.”

- Lena (Strack) Bradford, who came to the church as a child in Sunday School, said that Sr. Bertha Marshall was her first Sunday School teacher. She recalled Sr. Marshall giving her strawberry jam. The church paid for Sr. Bradford to attend her first year of Bible school, and she referred to that year and the following year at the school as two of the best years of her life. When she returned, she met and married her husband Scott Bradford, from Brushton, NY, and they served for more than four years as missionaries to Native Americans in Arizona. They are currently pastoring the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Brushton, NY.

- Faith (Vrooman) Kiser, who had lived in the area and attended the church in the 1970s, also spoke during the service. She stated that one of her earliest memories after moving to Lake Placid is of “Grandma Hardy” stroking her hair while “Grandpa Hardy” was preaching. “I remember the hospitality and generosity that were extended over and over again,” she said. “The energy taken into the hearts and lives of people kindled a flame in my heart.” Sr. Kiser and her husband Thomas now reside in Brooklyn, NY with their eight children. They have a home mission for the people of New York City.

Praise God for a church that still shines a light out to its community, despite adversity and challenge! Thank the Lord that people are still willing to live for him in the 21st century! If He tarries His coming, may the Lake Placid Pilgrim Holiness Church celebrate another 50 years of ministry in the heart of the Adirondack mountains!

Portions of this article were adapted from the piece that appeared in the Adirondack Daily Enterprise on December 4, 2004, which was written by Enterprise staff writer Laurie Besanceney. The picture was provided by Douglas Cox, Jr.

For more information on the work Bev Fay is involved in, visit www.atmccanada.com. For more information on the Kisers’ work in New York City, go to www.faith4living.com.