

Moments in Our History

(Excerpts from the Dissenting Church of Christ at St. John's 1775 – 1975)

The Conversion of John Jones

The conversion of John Jones came in 1770. The Rev. Samuel Greatheed, Jones' friend and biographer, tells us that it was caused by "a fight, where a fellow-soldier died blaspheming." Life suddenly was changed. But it was lonely for Jones for "not one at that time in the place apparently sought God" and Greatheed speaks of Jones' "spiritual distress." Comfort came the following year in the person of the Reverend Lawrence Coughlan of Harbour Grace.

Lawrence Coughlan was sent as a missionary to Harbour Grace in the year 1765 by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts. Although ordained by the Bishop of London and appointed Justice of the Peace for the district, Coughlan was a convinced Methodist, the first minister of that persuasion in the New World.

In 1771, Coughlan preached once or twice in St. John's, "much to the advantage of John Jones." They afterwards corresponded. From that date until his company was posted back to England in 1773, Jones met with two or three soldiers of the garrison for "social prayer."

Back in England, Jones joined the Independent Church at Chatham in Kent "which went by the name of the Whitfieldites of that place." Of the congregation, Jones writes "too much cannot be said for its discretion, love, humility, and zeal for God's glory." In the summer of 1775, he was appointed to return with another company of the Artillery "to the same spot where he had so lately served for eight years."

It was a different John Jones who sailed through the Narrows in 1775 from the rough and ready soldier of ten years ago. Strengthened by his fellowship with "the saints at Chatham" Jones "during the long, tedious and dangerous voyage" had prayed for the first time in public and even tried his hand at preaching, though he admits "his struggles on these occasions are not to be expressed, but the duty was binding 'Let your light shine'." He was now a sergeant but more important, "a soldier of Jesus Christ." The long spiritual pilgrimage that started with the godly home in Wales and the influence of Harries' revival, recently fortified by the preaching of Coughlan and the Chatham Church had prepared Jones for his life's work - the establishment of a congregation at St. John's that stands and grows to this day. As Mr. Greatheed concludes "Thus the Lord often accomplished his gracious purposes."