

Moments in Our History

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

1775

For Newfoundland, the year 1775 was “a terrible year of storm and suffering” in which 300 lives were lost. Commodore Robert Duff was Governor of Newfoundland, whose winter population was about 14,000. The town of St. John's saw the beginning of the building of Fort Townshend by Colonel Pringle, who also constructed Military Road to Fort William, and the Signal Hill Road. Officers of the Garrison cultivated surrounding lands, although this was officially forbidden. Captain Cook had surveyed and mapped the island of Newfoundland, and the fishery continued to increase, with consequent extra population during the summer months.

The population was approximately half Roman Catholic and half Protestant. The Church of England “as by law established” was the only recognized church in Newfoundland. But at home, the Church had seen revival in the preaching of Whitfield and of John and Charles Wesley. The coming of Lawrence Coughlan in 1765 marked the beginning of Methodism in Newfoundland and perhaps in all North America. Missionaries included not only Methodists to Conception Bay, but also Moravians, who had established a church in Nain, Labrador, in 1771. There was only one church in St. John's, dating from 1699. The Reverend Edward Langman was the Church of England minister and together with Nicholas Gill, Esq., magistrates of the district, when Sergeant John Jones of the Royal Artillery was posted back to Newfoundland in 1775 to found our congregation.

The times about 1775, when St. David's church family originated, were those of striving for independence in the Old and in the New World, both between peoples and their rulers, and between individuals and their wealthier masters.....