

## **Moments in Our History**

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

#### **Worship (Part 4)**

There would be no organ in the first Meeting House (nor in the second - at least not until much later). The cost of such an instrument would be beyond the resources of the people. Even if they could afford one, it is doubtful if they would have one. Calvin frowned on musical instruments in church. In Presbyterian churches, it was unheard of to have an organ or a “kist o’ whistles” as late as the 1870’s. Congregationalists were less strict and organs and harmoniums were common in the 19th century. The earliest reference we have in our records is in 1821 when a Mr. Allan (a Presbyterian?) absented himself from the services because he did not hold with “the instrumental musick commonly used.”

There might well have been a precentor, with a pitch pipe or tuning fork, who would sound the note and lead the singing. In those days, when few could read and hymnbooks were very rare, the common practice was “lining out”- i.e. the precentor would sing the line and the congregation would repeat it. Hymns and psalms had many verses and church singing was a long drawn-out affair. The prevailing posture of these days was to stand to pray and sit to sing. Choirs were already known in dissenting chapels. The first mention of a choir in the Meeting House was in 1809.