

# Here is the Church, Here is the Steeple . . .

## *Perth County's Historical Churches*

Soaring steeples, lofty towers and stunning stained glass echo the traditions of the European craftsmen who built the churches of Perth County. Enjoy the beauty of the county while admiring the diversity of the twelve churches selected for this tour.

Perth County's lush and rolling fertile land yielded to the hard work of many immigrants seeking their promise of better lives for themselves and their families. Townships in Perth County were planned in the 1820s as part of the tract of land owned by the Canada Company, a British corporation interested in the development and settlement of Upper Canada. As early as 1828, entrepreneurs were establishing inns and communities along the surveyed roads cutting their way through the Huron Tract.

Next to inns, churches are often the oldest and most prominent organizations in rural communities. In Perth County, their broad based cultural memberships consisting of a mix of English dialects, broad Scots brogue, Irish lilt, German languages, and in later years, the mix of Swiss and Dutch made up the foundation of many of the County's hamlets and townships. Open air services along the banks of the river, founding meetings being held in log schoolhouses or the homes of devote Christians, led the way to the construction of some of the most beautiful churches in the province. The diversity of those early settlers is reflected in the 12 churches selected for this tour. They appropriately reflect the heritage of Perth County.

Begin your tour at the Stratford Tourism Alliance, 47 Downie Street, N5A 1W7. Travel north on Downie Street to Ontario Street. Turn right and travel east on Ontario Street to Waterloo Street. Knox Presbyterian Church will be to your left.

### 1. Knox Presbyterian Church - 142 Ontario Street, Stratford ON. N5A 3H2



When former U.S. president William Howard Taft visited the first Knox Presbyterian Church at 142 Ontario Street, he is said to have called its 211-foot steeple the "most graceful and pleasing" he had seen. When the spire was struck by lightning early on May 13, 1913, the ensuing fire destroyed the sanctuary and killed the city's fire chief, its police chief and a police constable. The present Knox church, of a later Gothic Revival style, was built in 1913-15 for about \$95,000, which included the cost of the organ. The Sunday School addition, which was built in 1907 and was saved from the 1913 blaze, was renovated in 1956. Also in the 1950s, the tower on the southeast corner was removed and extensive renovations were required in the sanctuary after it was discovered that inferior mortar had been used in the original construction.

Travel south on Waterloo Street to where it joins and becomes Downie Street (in front of the YMCA). Continue south to the last set of lights where it intersects with Lorne Avenue East. Turn left and follow Lorne Avenue out of Stratford where it becomes Perth Line 33. Continue on Line 33 to Perth Road 108 and turn left. Follow 108 north, crossing over Highways 7/8 to 4500 Road 108 located between Perth Line 40 and Perth Line 43.

### 2. Knox North Easthope Presbyterian Church, Township of East Perth. Perth Road 108, 911# 4500, N5A 6S1

The cornerstone for the new now North Easthope Presbyterian Church was laid on July 21, 1892, a particularly hot Thursday. After the ceremony, which attracted more than 200 people and resulted in a collection of \$123, tea was served on the lawn of the nearby manse. Until 1902, Knox North Easthope allowed no instrumental music in the service of praise, and only the Psalms were sung, led by a precentor. At least one Knox North Easthope member, Charles Robertson, who had left St. Andrews in Stratford because of its introduction of the big kist o-whistles (pipe organ), in like manner left this church and went to Hampstead, where there were at the time no objectionable innovations. When the pipes came to Hampstead, Robertson moved on, but with no other "pipe-less" Presbyterian church in the area, he elected to stay at home on Sunday mornings.



Continue north on road 108 to the next intersection - Line 43 and turn left. Follow 43 west to its end at Highway 119 and turn right. Following 119 north, you will come a point where 119 curves sharply to the left a begins to run west. Turn right at the first intersection after the curve onto Perth Road 121. Follow 121 into Millbank and turn left at Line 72. Continue on Line 72 to the Riverdale Mennonite Church.

3. **Riverdale Mennonite Church**, North side of Perth Line 72 at #4138, Millbank ON N0K 1M0.

In 1856, Knox Presbyterians formed the first congregation in the Millbank area, and in 1891 they erected at the west end of the village the impressive brick building that since 1946 has served the adherents of what today is called Riverdale Mennonite Church. In 1925 most of the Millbank Presbyterians joined the Millbank Wesley Methodists in the newly created United Church of Canada, and the combined congregation divided its worship between the Knox building (summer) and the Wesley building (winter). In the 1940s, by which time the Knox building was no longer in use, word spread that brothers named Horst planned to turn it into a three-storey chicken barn. But before that could happen, the mission board of the Amish Mennonite Conference bought the former church for \$1,900. In the years since, the resident congregation, which today numbers at about 225, has adopted the name Riverdale and has updated and enlarged the building.

Continue along Line 72 heading west to Highway 23 and make a right-hand turn. Take 23 north to Listowel and turn right onto Highway 86 where 23 ends. Follow 86 into the downtown where it becomes Main Street West to Livingstone Avenue. Turning right, follow to 220 Livingstone Avenue.

4. **Knox Presbyterian Church**, 220 Livingstone Avenue North, Listowel ON N4W 1P9.

With its lofty towers and turrets, Knox Presbyterian Church was designed by London, Ontario architect, George F. Durand (1850-1889), a leading Canadian exponent of the Queen Anne style and the man who designed Stratford's first general hospital and the Perth County Courthouse, also in Stratford. Proposed in 1883 but not built until 1887-88, this Knox church replaced the congregation's first building, which had been erected in 1868. The cost of the new building was \$18,000, but the installation of a pipe organ and other extras brought the total to more than \$20,000. In 1937, at a time when the congregation numbered about 575, the organ was rebuilt. In 1993, when a large Sunday School was added, bricks from the old Andrew Malcolm furniture factory were used to match as closely as possible to the original building materials.

Return to Highway 23 via Main Street West and turn left onto 23. Follow 23 south through the villages of Atwood and Newry to Monkton where 23 will appear to end at the main intersection in town. At the stop sign, turn right onto Maddison Avenue West which will turn back onto 23 once you have left the village. Continue to follow 23 south through the intersections at Kennicott and Bornholm to the 42nd Line (one concession south of Bornholm) and turn left. Follow 42 east right into Kinkora where St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church can be found along the main street (also the 42nd Line).

5. **St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church**, Line 42 at County Road 145, Kinkora ON.

Built by 105 Irish families in 1882-83 at a cost of \$30,000, St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in Kinkora continues to boast the architectural ambition more commonly found in the great medieval Gothic cathedrals of Europe. In designing the church, Irish-born architect Joseph Connelly used a basilican (longitudinal) plan with a polygonal apse and incorporated pointed arches, slim pillars and stained-glass windows. He also added a 200-foot spire and a rose window, set within a pointed enclosing arch and surrounded by a lattice pattern. Extensive, costly and ongoing renovation to the church have included removal of the deteriorating spire, reconstruction of the 42-meter steeple, and restoration of the mostly wood interior.

Return to the 42nd Line heading east, away from Highway 23 to Perth Road 135 and turn left. Follow 135 to where it ends at the edge of Sebringville, and turn left at this t-intersection onto Highway 8 /Huron Road and head into the village. Follow through the village to the set of lights where you will turn right onto Perth Road 130. Take 130 south past Perth Line 20 and turn right onto the 16th Line. Continue along the 16th Line through Avonbank and Motherwell to Perth Road 163 and turn right. Within the first concession you will find the Motherwell Presbyterian Church.

6. **Motherwell Presbyterian Church**, *Fullarton Township. RR 7 St. Marys, ON N4X 1C9*

In 1882, at a cost of \$6,000, the growing congregation of Mitchell Road Presbyterians replaced their 25-year-old frame church with a white building on the southeast corner of Lot 23, West Mitchell Road. The characteristics are English Gothic Revival which enjoyed a universal popularity throughout the early to mid-Victorian era - led by Sir Gilbert Scott. The proportions are rather lovely and the Gothic trim details are just enough to add dignity and interest.

When the United Church of Canada was formed in 1925, the Mitchell Road congregation became the Motherwell United Church, and those opposed to the union left to establish a Presbyterian church in nearby Motherwell. In 1968, when Motherwell United was one of the many congregations dissolved by the United Church of Canada, many of its



members joined the congregation of Motherwell-Avonbank Presbyterian. That union resulted in the closure of the rug-brick church in Motherwell and a new lease on life for the Mitchell Road building, once again as a Presbyterian church. Through the years, at least four members of the Mitchell Road congregation have gone into the ministry, and a fifth, Arthur Meighen, in 1920, became the ninth Prime Minister of Canada.

Continue south on Perth Road 163 to where it ends at the t-intersection in Rannoch. Turn left onto Perth Road 139 and follow it to St. Marys. Perth Road 139 will become Queen Street West once you are in town. Follow Queen Street to the set of lights at Water Street and turn left onto Water Street North. Follow Water to Widder Street East and turn right. Continue on Widder to 147 where you will find St. Marys Presbyterian Church.

#### 7. St. Marys Presbyterian Church - 147 Widder Street, St. Marys ON N0M 2V0.

In the early 1870s the members of the First Presbyterian Church in St. Marys decided to replace their small frame house of worship on Widder Street with a new limestone structure, a decision that required second thought after dissension led to part of the congregation breaking away to form Knox Presbyterian. Poor weather in the fall of 1879 slowed construction, and it wasn't until March 20, 1881, that Reverend John McAlpine and his First Presbyterian parishioners moved into their new quarters – five months after the opening of the new Knox Church, an imposing brick structure on Church Street South. While the stone buttresses, Gothic arches, lancet windows and 139-foot steeple of the new First Presbyterian pointed to the heavens, there was some earthly regret about the schism that had split and reduced its congregation.



Travel east on Widder Street East to King Street North and turn left. Follow to 149 King Street North.

#### 8. Holy Name of Mary Roman Catholic Church – 149 King Street North, St. Marys ON .



When Holy Name of Mary Roman Catholic Church was built in 1892-93 on the site that includes the south end of the block bounded by Peel, Widder and King Streets, its location was said to make it “the most imposing of all the churches.” Built with white limestone that was quarried in St. Marys, the Gothic-style landmark featured a 61-foot slate-covered spire that stretched 130 feet from grade level to the top of its gilded cross. It is the fourth church but just the second stone structure for the congregation, whose first services were in a general store on the southeast corner of Queen and Water streets in 1854. In the confessional of the present church is a solid wooden cross that dates to the original parishioners. When the Holy Name of Mary Catholic School at 161 Peel Street was enlarged, the cross was dragged from a pile of rubble and restored, before it was returned to a place of prominence by Mary Bannon, long-time parishioner, historian and teacher.

Continue north on King Street to where it ends at Egan Avenue and turn right. Follow Egan one block to James Street North and turn left. Follow James Street out of St. Marys where it will become Perth Road 130. Follow 130 to Perth Line 20 and turn right.

Follow Line 20 to Highway 7 and turn left. Continue on 7 into Stratford where the street name becomes Erie. Take Erie Street into Stratford's downtown and turn left onto St. Patrick Street. Follow St. Patrick one block to Church Street and turn right. Take Church one block to St. Andrew Street and turn left.

#### 9. St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church - 25 St Andrew Street, Stratford ON N5A 1A2.

In that the land was granted to the congregation by the Canada Company in 1839, the current St. Andrew's Presbyterian building sits on the oldest church site in the city. In 1868 the parishioners replaced their small frame building with a Gothic structure that continues to serve as the church's education wing. In 1911, a year in which the church paid the transportation costs of those unable to walk to “a service for old people,” the board of managers decided to build a new sanctuary, and to that end used the church property as collateral to borrow \$12,500. The resulting edifice could seat between 600 and 700 and featured an imposing, flat-topped square bell tower high above the north entrance. Removal of the tower in 1950 was the first of many structural changes that have transformed the St. Andrew's sanctuary, as well as its education wing and burial grounds.



Return to Church Street via St. Andrew, turning left onto Church. At the Ontario Street stop sign, turn left travelling across the bridge where the road becomes Huron Street. Follow past the first set of lights to 96 Huron Street.

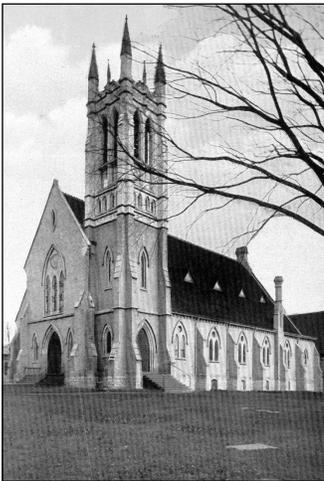
**10. St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church – 96 Huron Street, Stratford ON N5A 5S6**

Though thought to have been part of the original plans in the late 1860s, the 44-foot spire and 10-foot cross were not built atop the bell tower of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church until the summer of 1961. That was soon after the construction of a parish hall and rectory, and a total renovation and rededication of the church. Those upgrades, as well as the addition of a convent, are part of the legacy of Reverend Joseph O'Rourke, who spent as much of his 13 years at the church in coveralls as he did in clerical dress. When the aged 30-foot oak alters were torn out of the sanctuary to make way for marble replacements, O'Rourke made crucifixes from the wood and sold them for \$10 each to help pay for the improvements. The church and hall have been renovated since, and the convent was demolished in 2005, but St. Joseph's, with its spire and cross, remains a city landmark.



Head back on Huron Street toward the downtown. At the set of lights just before the bridge turn left onto Mornington Street. Take Mornington north to 41 Mornington Street.

**11. St. James Anglican Church – 41 Mornington Street, Stratford ON. N5A 5E7**



A frame building that went up in 1849 and a red-brick "architectural monstrosity" that followed in 1855 were forerunners to the Anglican church atop the hill at the corner of Mornington and Hamilton streets. The present St. James', designed by a Toronto firm as an example of early decorated Gothic dedicated in 1870. The church's first pipe organ, installed in 1874 and probably powered by water, was rebuilt in 1902 and several times since, most recently in 1992. The biggest of the 11 bells in the church tower weighs 955 kilograms (2,100 pounds) and is nicknamed Big Joe. According to a custom of the day, the parishioners established a cemetery on land adjacent to their church. Called God's Acre, the cemetery includes members of the Sargent family (founder of Stratford and owner of the Shakespeare Inn) but there have been no burials there since 1871.

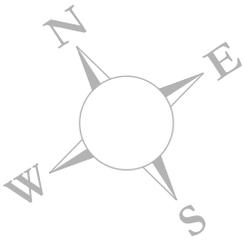
Continue north on Mornington to the next intersection at Elizabeth Street and turn right. Follow Elizabeth one block to Waterloo Street and turn right again. Travel south on Waterloo Street to where it joins and becomes Downie Street (in front of the YMCA). Continue south to 707 Downie Street.

**12. Jubilee Christian Fellowship Church, 707 Downie Street, Stratford ON N5A 1Y8.**

It is a non-traditional church in search of a non-traditional home. That's what members of Jubilee Christian Fellowship got when they built their \$900,000 dome in the fall of 1989. Actually, the inflatable, free-standing air form was built by Monolithic Domes in California and assembled on land adjacent to Anne Hathaway Park. With a diameter of 120 feet and rising almost 38 feet at its centre, the church was designed to accommodate about 450 people. The interior was sprayed with urethane foam and concrete, whose insulating properties made the building easier to cool in summer and easier to heat in winter. The congregation, which grew from a Bible study group in a farmhouse south of Stratford in 1981, worshipped in several rented quarters in Stratford before building its landmark dome, the first in Canada for the Monolithic company.

This concludes the Historic Church tour.





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