

THE STORY OF WINDOW 1 – THE ANNUNCIATION

We are now at the beginning of our Life of Christ-stained glass window series in the nave of Grace Anglican Church, the first window being on the south side of the church, just inside the front (Main Street) doors of the church. The subject of the first window in the series is The Annunciation, where Mary is told by the Archangel Gabriel that she has been chosen by God to be the Mother of His Son Jesus. (Luke 1: 26–38). This window was donated by the Rayner Family who were faithful and active parishioners of Grace Church in the 1960's, 70's and 80's and it was donated in memory of past, present and future members of the Rayner Family.

The original Rayner family members, William Rayner and his wife Elizabeth Pay Rayner immigrated to Canada from Mersham, Kent, England in 1884. The family had also lived in Hythe, Kent, England which is located on the SE coast of England on the English Channel, just a short distance south of Mersham. William and Elizabeth had eight children in total, seven born in both locations in Kent, England: William Jr., Henry, Ellen, Ernest John, Percy, Mary and Annie, and their youngest child, Emily who was born in Halton County in 1886, after they had arrived in Canada. Their son Henry, known as Harry, born in Hythe, Kent, England on August 22, 1871, died on March 7, 1892 and is buried at St. Luke's Anglican Church Cemetery in Palermo, Ontario (Highway #25 and Dundas Street), near where the family originally settled. He died of Tuberculosis at the age of 20 while studying to be a doctor. It is from the Ernest John branch of the family that the Milton Rayners have descended. Ernest John Rayner was born in Mersham, Kent, England on November 27, 1875.

Mersham, Kent, England is a large, mostly agricultural village and civil parish about three miles east of the city of Ashford in Kent, England and not that far from the city of Canterbury in County of Kent, England. The County of Kent is in the SE corner of England and is southeast of London, England. It is a farming and orchard tending community with close ties to the local markets in Ashford. The village dates back to Saxon times and is mentioned in the Domesday Book. The village of Mersham was owned by the Archbishops of Canterbury for over 500 years and it has been the home of the famous English Knatchbull family since the times of Henry VIII.

The original Rayner farm where the family took up residence upon arriving in the Palermo area in 1884 was on Highway #25 at the SE corner of Highway #25 and Lower Base Line (the present location of Van Beeks Nursery) and the children went to the Boyne one room public school situated on the east side of Highway #25 just north of

Britannia Road. The original old Boyne school house, although now dilapidated, is still standing in its original position with newer homes built around it. The family lived on the farm from 1884 to 1900 when they moved to Hamilton, Ontario.

Around Hamilton, there were many stories of great opportunities in the Canadian West in the early 1900's that were circulated from the government and land companies. They promised every man who would live six months of the year on the prairies 160 acres of land to homestead. This possibility enticed Ernest John Rayner to leave Hamilton in 1903 and travel as far west as Portage La Prairie, Manitoba on a harvest excursion. When he returned home to Hamilton with tales of large fields and threshing in the open, instead of in barns, as was the eastern custom, he aroused the curiosity of his brothers, William and Percy and his 79 year old father, William Sr. Excited by the realization that the three brothers and their father would be entitled to a whole section of free farmland in Saskatchewan, the Rayner family very happily decided to move out west.

Before returning home from his harvest excursion, Ernest John had paid the \$10 filing fee on his homestead that was then "Foote, N.W.T. on SE 22-24-25-W2", his land filing number. His filing date was November 28th, 1903. In the spring of 1904, William Jr., Ernest John and Percy loaded a rail car with settler's effects such as machinery, household necessities, seed grain, and four horses and travelled to Craik, Assiniboine, Saskatchewan, the closest railway stop to their new land. There they loaded their belongings into wagons and headed back east a short distance from Craik to locate the section of land that William Rayner Sr. had been granted, "NW 14-24-25-W2". To provide immediate shelter for themselves, they hauled lumber from Craik and built a small 12' X 12' shed. They also built a sod barn of prairie sod supported by poplar poles and started the daunting task of breaking some of the virgin prairies and seeding the land.

In August of 1904, William Sr., his wife Elizabeth, and daughters Mary, Annie and Emily joined the three sons in Penzance, Saskatchewan, the site of their plot of land near Craik, Saskatchewan. Ellen, their oldest daughter, remained in Ontario as she had married Frances Newell in 1901. Plans for a stone house were being drawn up for William Sr.'s property but in the meantime, the parents slept in the shack, the boys in the tent and the girls in the sod house. The horses were tethered outside. The weather was beautiful that fall, but as November crept by, the weather worsened and it became necessary to put the roof on the house before it was finished to its planned height, so the upstairs bedrooms ended up having sloped ceilings, something that hadn't been part of their original building plan.

In the spring of 1905, the Rayner family's larger permanent stone house was at last finished on their new land in Penzance, Saskatchewan, finally giving a permanent home to the family and a precious cherry wood organ that Elizabeth had very painstakingly lugged across the ocean from England and out across the Canadian prairies. Also, that spring, the Rayner men bought a 75 horse power J.I. Case steam engine and ground breaking outfit. This was a great event as the prairie sod yielded easily to this type of machinery. They put together a threshing outfit that consisted of the steam engine, a separator, a bunk house, and a cook car on wheels, and travelled around to neighbouring farms to thresh their grain. Many other settlers had moved into the area and they all became friends. In the spring, the Rayners acquired two cows for milking, paying for them by breaking land.

Ernest returned to Ontario in 1913 and married Anna Tuft Macartney on February 19th at St. Luke's Anglican Church in Palermo. Ernest and Ann returned to Penzance and lived in the Rayner stone house with Elizabeth until their new house was built on his land. Ernest and Ann had four children: Jane, William John, who died at two months of age, Ernest William (William) and Gordon. All Ernest's brothers and sisters married and had children, their spouses being members of other families in the area and they all eventually became established on their own land. William Rayner Sr. passed away in November 1908, at the age of 84, after living for four years in this rugged new land. As time went on, William Rayner Jr. came to be considered one of the most successful and up-to-date farmers in Saskatchewan.

Elizabeth Rayner, Ernest's mother, had a stroke in 1917 following which she became a complete invalid. She was moved in with Ernest and his family, and died in March 1921. She and William Sr. are buried in the Penzance Cemetery that was a corner of William Sr.'s property. Ernest contracted pneumonia and died December 10, 1922. After Ernest's death, Ann decided she was going to leave the Penzance area and return with her children to the Milton area where her brother still lived. She brought Ernest's remains along with her three children back to the Milton area by train in February of 1923. She was met by Canon Naftel of Grace Anglican Church at Evergreen Cemetery and Ernest was buried immediately on their return to Ontario. Her brother William Macartney had a farm at the Boyne (Highway 25 and Britannia Road) and she lived with him until her house was built on an acre of land that was given to her by her brother in 1923. She later bought what was to become the Rayner Homestead, Bonyray Farm, on the southern end of the Third Line, now Thompson Road South, in 1947. The rest of the Rayner family stayed in Saskatchewan as their families grew and multiplied.

Ann Rayner passed away in August of 1949 and is buried with her husband Ernest in Milton Evergreen Cemetery. Her son Gordon and his wife Muriel (nee Curtis, married September 12, 1959) and their four daughters, Debbie (married Don Cragg), Helen (partner Shelly Urquhart), Susan (married Keven Reid), and Cathy (married David Gasteiger) continued living on and working the Rayner farm. It was Gordon's family that were long time parishioners of Grace Church and Gordon, Muriel and their daughters were very active at Grace for many years. Gordon was a long time director of the Halton Agricultural Society and also served as President in 1965 and 1966. In 1968, he was elected President of the Ontario Steam and Antique Preservers' Association Inc., sponsors of the annual Steam-Era that was held at the Milton Fair Grounds on Labour Day week-end every year for around 50 years, then moved to Country Heritage Park at Milton Heights and from there moved to the Hume Auction Farm on Fourth Line, Halton Hills where it is still held every Labour Day week-end. He was a member of the Steam-Era Board for many years and his whole family participated in Steam-Era activities. In 1994, Gordon was selected as a recipient of a commemorative metal marking Canada's 125th Birthday. Gordon passed away May 14, 2001, and is buried in the Omagh Presbyterian Church Cemetery on Britannia Road. Muriel Rayner died on August 27, 2020 and is buried with her husband.

Gordon's older sister Jane passed away March 27, 2006, at the age of 92 years. She was the wife of William Proud and mother of Ann and Ken. Jane and William Proud are buried in St. Luke's Anglican Church Cemetery in Palermo, just west of the junction of Highway #25 and Highway #5 (Dundas Street). William Rayner, Gordon's older brother, passed away at the age of 98 on June 11, 2017. He was an active member of the farming community around Milton for several decades. He raised Holstein and Hereford cattle, chickens, and his cherished Belgian horses. He was a long standing and honorary member of Steam-Era, the Milton Fall Fair and the Halton Ploughmen's Association. He was well known in the community to those he delivered eggs to on his weekly route which he continued well into his nineties. He finally quit because "there was too much traffic" around Milton. He was married to his wife Marie Kiernan (died April 13, 2009) for 41 years and was step-father to her children, Gale and Rick Meade and Al and Wendy Kiernan. William and Marie Rayner were members of the Omagh Presbyterian Church for many years and he also served as an Elder of the Church. William and Marie Rayner are buried in Milton Evergreen Cemetery with William's parents, Ernest and Ann.

This beautiful stained glass window was designed and manufactured by the Robert McCausland Company of Toronto, which has made most of the stained glass windows in

our church. The cost of the window when it was installed in Grace Church in January 2014 was \$8700. The theme of this window is the Annunciation, where the Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to announce to Mary, a virgin espoused to a man named Joseph and living in Nazareth, that she had been chosen by God to be the Mother of His Son, Jesus, who would be the Savior of the world. The Feast of the Annunciation falls on March 25th, exactly nine months before Christmas Day (BAS 403). In this window, the Archangel Gabriel stands over a frightened, kneeling Mary. Note the colourfull, threatening sky signifying a major dramatic event and the three lilies which represent the purity of the Virgin Mary and three for the Trinity (Luke 1:26-38). This beautiful stained glass window was donated by Muriel Rayner, her daughters and their families and it is certainly a lovely, fitting and enduring memorial to all of the Milton Rayner family, past, present and future.

Historical information obtained from "The Rayner Family History" written by Jane Rayner Proud, "The History of Penzance, Saskatchewan, a centennial project by the village of Penzance, Milton Historical Society Archives, Canadian Champion Microfilm and personal conversation with Muriel Rayner.