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An Architectural History of the Pilley's Island United (Methodist) Church

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Introduction

Pilley's Island United (originally Methodist) Church was constructed in 1896 and opened in 1897. It is a wooden, vernacular Gothic Revival style church with steeple situated within a fenced churchyard. The property is adjacent to a later two-room United Church School, and a First World War memorial erected in the 1920s. This report traces the architectural history of the building from the time of its construction to the conversion of the church into a museum, and is based on field research and interviews conducted by Dale Jarvis in Pilley's Island, August 2017, and on subsequent archival research.

History of Pilley's Island

Archaeological evidence shows Pilley's Island was occupied by the Beothuk peoples in the pre-contact period. Local tradition says that Richard Rideout was the first European settler at Pilley's Island. Buried in the Pilley's Island Salvation Army Cemetery, his grave marker reads, "Richard RIDEOUT beloved husband of Eliza RIDEOUT died Aug. 25, 1928 aged 88 years." Seary's Family Names of the Island of Newfoundland (444) supports this local story, stating "Richard (1840-1928), from England, came to Newfoundland in 1870 and was the first settler of Pilley's Island."

A 1988 article in the magazine Decks Awash states:

The island is said to be named after a miner named Pilley who arrived in 1750 and discovered the deposits, but no mining took place until 1889 when the Pyrite Company Limited of England opened the mine. From 1891-1899 the company shipped 300,000 tons of ore to New York. The mine closed for two years but was re-opened by the locally-owned Pilley's Island Pyrite Company, and they shipped 225,000 tons of ore until the mine closed in 1908.

In 1899, Pilley's Island could boast of having a courthouse, six merchant establishments and a hotel serving not only the town's population of 700 people, but much of the Western Notre Dame Bay. By 1901, the population of Pilley's Island

was 699, with nearly half being Methodists, a third Salvation Army members, and the remainder a mix of Roman Catholic and Church of England. The town boasted two clergymen, a teacher, six merchants, three clerks, two government officials, four mechanics, nine lumbermen, and 80 miners working in what would become the first electrified mine in Newfoundland.

The turn-of-the century mining operations in Pilley's Island were responsible for the community's period of largest growth. Following the closure of the mine, the population declined, though the town continued on with its primary industries being fishing and lumbering. .

Early History of the Methodist Church at Pilley's Island

Methodism arrived in Newfoundland in 1766 with the work of Rev. Laurence Coughlan. Though he was originally supported by the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, it was Coughlan, based at Harbour Grace, who effectively established Methodism in Newfoundland (Piper).

It took close to a century for Methodism to spread to the area around Little Bay Islands, and one of the first Methodist clergyman to visit Pilley's Island is reported to have been James Pincock, a native of Yorkshire, England, who served the Little Bay Islands missions between 1874 and 1875 (ENL 302). David W. Johnson, in his "History of Methodism in Eastern British America" notes that "these communities were supplied from Exploits previous to 1873 when this mission name appears on the Minutes with Charles Myers as its pastor. Sometimes Pilley's Island and Long Island missions were connected with Little Bay Islands and sometimes worked separately."

In nearby Triton, the first Methodist school/chapel was built between Great and Little Triton circa 1887, and the first Salvation Army citadel was built in 1896. By 1901 the majority of people were Salvation Army, and Triton continued to be mostly Salvation Army after that point (Town of Triton).

A distinct Methodist presence in Pilley's Island proper had emerged by the 1890s. The name Pilley's Island first appears on the Methodist station sheet in 1892, "in connection with Little Bay Island, which continued for years to have two men, the second man living at Pilley's Island" (Johnson 319). Johnson goes on to give the following list of Methodist ministers for Pilley's Island:

1891, Edwin Moore; 1893, Edgar Jones; 1895, C. Squires; 1896, Supply; 1897, J. W. Bartlett; 1898, R. H. Maddock; 1900, Supply; 1905, Elijah French; 1906, Supply; 1907, A. W. Dycer; 1908, Supply; 1911, the circuit name was Little Bay Islands, Long Island and Pilley's Island, with three men, the third being Henry Allenby; 1912, A. J. Waterman; in 1913, Long Island and Pilley's Island were separated from Little Bay Islands and had two men, Ernest Davis at Pilley's. In 1914, the three places are again together with J. N. Scevior at Pilley's; in 1916, all three are separated and Pilley's Island appears as head of a mission with Supply (J. A. Spencer); 1917, E. S. Moulard; 1919, Supply (S. R. Cooper); 1920, Supply (J. Osmond) ; 1921, E. Lacey; 1922, Supply (F. J. Little) ; 1923, G. S. Johnson; 1924, Wm. S. Bishop; 1925, L. A. W. Curtis. The appointments on Pilley's Island are Triton, Card's Hbr., Robert's Arm, Brighton, Sunday Cove Island. Baxter Warr, of the N. S. Conference entered the ministry' from Pilley's Island. Dr. Grenfell has a hospital on this island.

Construction of the Church

Little is known about construction or development of the first Methodist Church at Pilley's Island. The current church is the second on the site, as the original Methodist Church at Pilley's Island was destroyed by fire in June of 1896. The Evening Telegram reported:

FIRES AT PILLEY'S ISLAND.

Forest Fires Raging — Court House, Methodist Church and Salvation Barracks Burnt —
Thirty-Five Families Rendered Homeless.

By a message received in town to-day, dated from Pilley's Island on Saturday last, we learn that forest fires are raging fiercely in the neighborhood of Pilley's Island, and that the flames have created terrible havoc at that place. The



FIG. 1: PILLEY'S ISLAND METHODIST CHURCH, LEFT, WITH POST OFFICE, CENTER, AND SCHOOL, RIGHT. • FIG. 2: PILLEY'S ISLAND METHODIST CHURCH. • FIG. 3: PILLEY'S ISLAND METHODIST CHURCH, FROM THE REAR. (PHOTOS COURTESY PILLEY'S ISLAND MUSEUM)



Court House, the Methodist Church and the Salvation Army Barracks are completely destroyed, besides numerous dwellings, and thirty-five families have been rendered homeless. The mine, however, has escaped, and is safe.

The fiery destruction of the church was further noted in a September 1st article in the same newspaper, under the heading "Religious News":

Rev. Mr. Davenport Delivered an Eloquent Sermon at George St.
— Behold an Israelite Indeed. —

The Rev. Mr. Davenport, who arrived here on the Carthaginian on Sunday, and who is appointed as an assistant on the Pilley's Island mission, preached a very acceptable sermon, in George St. Methodist Church, last night, from i Cor., i. c, 23-24 vs. Mr. Davenport takes a comprehensive grasp of his subject and his manner of delivery is forcible and impressive and calculated to render his services, as a preacher of the Gospel, attractive and Fruitful of Good Result. Rev. Mr. Paine, who was at the service in George Street last night, announced that Mr. Davenport would preach in Cochrane Street Church this evening, and that a collection would be taken up in aid of the rebuilding of the Methodist Church at Pilley's Island, which had, not long ago, been destroyed by fire. Mr. Paine strongly urged that Mr. Davenport should be privileged to convey this practical expression of sympathy to the people to whom his ministrations had been given; and the Rev. Mr. Newman announced, immediately thereafter, that A Collection Would be Taken up in George Street Church this evening for the same object.

The new Pilley's Island Methodist Church was begun in 1896 and opened in 1897. The new church was constructed by a builder named William T. Locke. According to an oral history interview with Mr. Ernest (Ern) Simms in 2017, "his name [William Locke] is on one of the sills up and under the church.... I got up there one day when they put that oil furnace in. I had to go up and hold onto the tubing and drag it out through so they could hook it up to the tank."

Little is known about William T. Locke, though William Locke was a local name at that time. In "A Brief History of Settlement and People of Little Bay Islands," H.T. Burden notes,

William Anstey and John Locke came here the same year, 1851 or 1852, Anstey from Twillingate and Locke from Tizzards Harbour. They both settled at Anstey's Cove, but later moved to this harbour. They both had large families, one fourteen and the other thirteen.... John Locke had two sons; William still living at New York, and John, who married Sarah Jones, was the father of Lionel and Frank.

The Evening Telegram of 28 July 1897 also notes that one William Locke, of nearby Boot Harbour, Hall's Bay, was made a "Surveyor of Lumber" by His Excellency the Governor in Council. While it is uncertain if this is the same William T. Locke, he would seem to fit the time period and was in a related industry.

In less than a year from the destruction of the first church by fire, the new church was operational. The building was officially opened on January 18, 1897.

Architecture and Early History of the Church

The church is a wooden structure built in the Gothic Revival style, with a tower and steeple to the south, and a more modern porch entrance to the back of the church at the north. The nave is punctuated on each side by four Gothic 6-pane windows, each with a three-pane pointed arch at the top. The building is of painted white clapboard, with a gable, asphalt shingle roof, and brown trimwork.

Early photographs of the church show the steeple in a very similar configuration to the building as it stands in 2017. The Pilley's Island Museum, located in the nearby United Church schoolhouse, has three photographs that show the building as it was early in its history. The first [Figure 001], a sepia-toned photograph, shows the church to the left with the steeple in the foreground, and the former post office building and the original schoolhouse to the left. The steeple has three parts: square two-storey base housing the vestry, with a door to the north on the ground level and a gothic 4/4 window with 3-pane triangular peak, and a gothic 6 pane with 3-pane triangular peak window on the west ground floor,



FIG. 4: DOME TOWER ON PILLEY'S ISLAND METHODIST CHURCH, NEWSPAPER DATE AND SOURCE UNKNOWN, COURTESY PILLEY'S ISLAND MUSEUM. • FIG. 5: COMMEMORATIVE PLATE SHOWING THE DOME TOWER OF PILLEY'S ISLAND METHODIST CHURCH, IN COLLECTION OF PILLEY'S ISLAND MUSEUM.

with a partially a hipped-roofed rising to the tower above; a very short square tower with truncated corners; and then an octagonal spire rising to a decorative finial and star of wrought iron. The photograph shows what appears to be a stand-alone flagpole between the church and the old post office.

The other two photographs showing the church at this period show the addition of a flagpole to the south end of the steeple [Figure 002]. One of the photos [Figure 003], taken from the west side of the church, shows a ladder on the wood-shingled roof of the nave, leading up the central stovepipe chimney, and gives a glimpse of the original 4/4 and 6 pane gothic windows on the west side of the vestry.

According to local oral tradition, the steeple had consistent issues with leaks, and eventually, the spire was cut down, and replaced with an octagonal dome [Figure 004]. This domed tower can be seen in a few historic photos of the building, and was also illustrated on a commemorative china plate, manufactured by Can Art China of Collingwood Ontario [Figure 005].

Structural problems and leaks continued to plague the west end of the church, and eventually the entire vestry and tower was removed and rebuilt. The current addition and steeple was constructed by 2000, under the direction of carpenter Bert Moores, and was based on historic photographs of the building [Figure 006].

The original wrought-iron finial and star were replaced atop the steeple upon its reconstruction, and stands there today [Figure 007]. According to Ern Simms, the finial was built in the one of the mine forges, at the time when the mines were in operation. When the dome replaced the original steeple, the finial was brought inside the church for safekeeping.

The first baby baptized in the church was Melina Elizabeth Simms, the mother of Jeanette Marie Whalen [Figure 008]. Whalen remembers:

“My mother was from Pilley’s Island, she was born out in Little Harbour, a place called Little Harbour.... Baptized in the church in 1897. She was born 26th of May 1897 and she was the first!”

The church was well-established by the 1910s, and the congregation, under the direction of Rev. E. Davis, contributed the sum of \$25.45 to the Marine Disasters’ Fund in May of 1914. By September of 1916, the church at Pilley’s Island was able to solemnize marriages, as evidenced by another article in the Evening Telegram:

Under the provisions of chapter 133 of the consolidated statutes of Newfoundland second series entitled of the solemnization of marriage, his Excellency the Governor has been pleased to issue licenses to solemnize marriages to Messrs. John A. Spencer and Arthur Brett representing the Methodist church at Pilley’s Island and Hamilton Inlet Labrador respectively.

The Methodist church became part of the United Church of Canada after church amalgamation in 1925.

Use of the Gothic Revival Style

The Gothic Revival style had been introduced to Newfoundland early in the nineteenth century, and architectural historian Peter Coffman (8-10) notes that one of the earliest churches built in this style was the 1814-1818 Anglican St. Paul’s Church in Trinity, now replaced by a second Gothic Revival church of the same name. Coffman (187) argues that the objective of Anglican builders of Gothic Revival churches in Newfoundland was “to assimilate the principles of Ecclesiology, adapt them as necessary to the locally available material (wood) and to the skill level of local craftsmen, and to produce buildings that would be clear and vivid statements of the principles they embodied.”

While Anglicans seized upon the Gothic Revival as their style of choice, Methodists in Newfoundland and Labrador did not share the same clear architectural vision, and earlier nineteenth-century Methodist buildings were inspired by Romanesque or Classical Revival styles. For example, the 1816 Gower Street Wooden Chapel (the ancestor of present-day Gower Street United Church) was a simple building with Romanesque rounded arch windows, and a Classical pedimented entrance (Nichols 70).

Later buildings, also show the influence of the Romanesque. The 1896 Gower Street United Church, designed by British architect Elijah Hoole and designated as a Registered Heritage Structure by the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador in 1995, is an excellent example of the Romanesque Revival style of architecture, featuring rounded arches in the windows and doors, arched corbels under the eaves, and the rounded towers with conical roofs.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, Newfoundland Methodists were also experimenting with Gothic Revival style buildings. George Street United Church (built in 1873, designated by the Heritage Foundation of NL in 2000) was also designed by Elijah Hoole, and is a good example of a modified Gothic Revival church. Many typical Gothic elements remain intact, including its pointed arch lancet windows and the exposed timber nave hammerbeam roof, a typical Gothic element.

This shift towards Gothic Revival buildings by the end of the Victorian period was not unusual for Methodist congregations across North America. Originally a dissenter's church, Methodism had been established by John Wesley as an evangelical movement within the Church of England, from which it eventually separated in 1795. Originally occupying an "outsider" position, by the Victorian era the church had moved to be more of an established, mainstream faith. Roger Robins (185) argues that "the process of embourgeoisement was common to Methodism throughout America and that the denomination's leadership was guiding it toward a position of cultural dominance and an 'insider' role. Furthermore, upwardly mobile Methodists in all regions expressed their new social location in surprisingly similar ways, such as Gothic architecture and rigorous academic higher education." Nathan Hatch (188-189) notes that while some Methodists continued the plain-style worship of early Wesleyans, by the 1850s "others were building gothic churches and folding gentility and refinement into the very definition of being religious."

The building of the Pilley's Island church in the Gothic Revival style in 1896 is very clearly part of this trend. The church was the "establishment" church of Pilley's Island, associated as it was with an emerging local merchant class and the nearby mining operations. That the later United Church school would be built adjacent to it links back to the Methodist ideal of religious instruction and educational advancement.

Other Architectural Features

As a wooden edifice, the building needed constant maintenance and repair. The "Trustee Board Minute Book For Pilley's Island Mission" in the collections of the United Church Archive in St. John's provides a good record of this work. The Minute Book's first entry is for November 1st 1917, and entries continue until 1966. The short, handwritten entries often mention ongoing repairs, including notes on the procurement of nails and paint, window and door repairs, and one very specific entry about the exact timing of bell ringings on the Sabbath. The 29 November 1927 entry, for example, notes:

Repairs. Bro. Anthony acquainted the meeting with the need of either repairing or replacing the door in the porch of the church. Bro. Warr proposed and Bro. Harris seconded that the door be repaired - the meeting agreed. It was also agreed that Bro. Anthony arrange for these repairs.

The Minute Book noted for 14 September 1937 that the committee "...promised to inspect the windows in the Choir and secure faulty sashes until new ones can be procured." It also noted that the church was painted in 1939 and again in 1941.

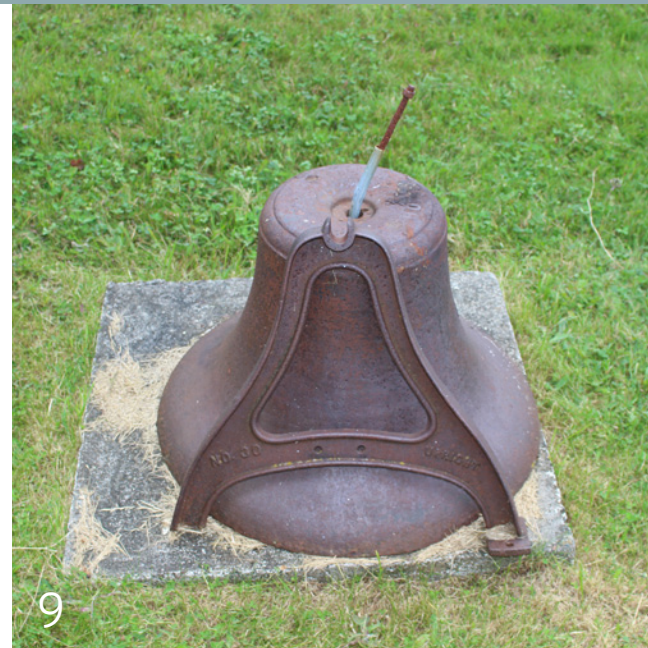
The Minute Book also offers clues to one of the property's interesting historical features. Outside the church's main western entrance was a small, free-standing bell tower. The bell in the outside belfry was connected by a rope to the inside of the church, a feature of the building which goes back close to a hundred years. The Trustee Board Minute Book notes, for February 4th, 1918: "Moved & carried that J. Roberts Look after Bell Rope & get it inside of Porch so that Sexton will not be exposed to Rain and Storm when at work on bell." As Ern Sims remembers, "we'd drill a hole into the porch, put the rope into there, when the weather was bad you didn't have to go outside to ring the bells."

While the exact construction date of the belfry is unknown, it is possible to date it to circa 1939, based on entries from the Trustee Board Minute Book. By the late 1930s, it seems that the old bell and belfry needed some work. On Nov 25, 1936 it was noted:

The Heads Hr. people have asked for the old Bell, it was moved by Mr. Blackmore and seconded by Mr. Payne that we ask them \$5.00 and if they can't pay that we make a present of it. Carried.... Repairs are needed for the roof of the belfry & 2 windows are needed which the sexton agreed to look after and was asked to present his bill, it was decided that the roof of the belfry be left over until spring.

At a meeting the following year, March 23, 1937, it was noted: "Broth. Rideout Suggested that we have a roof put over the Bell and the frame Clapboarded and newly spanned [?] provided that funds can be raised to pay for these repairs."

FIG. 8: BEN CALLAHAN, LEFT, AND JEANETTE MARIE WHALEN, RIGHT.
FIG. 9: REMAINS OF THE OLD CHURCH BELL. (PHOTOS BY DALE JARVIS)



Whether or not the repairs were ever carried out is uncertain, but the belfry clearly needed replacement two years later, possibly due to it being unable to any longer support the weight of the bell. A new structure was needed, and on October 20th, 1939, the minutes read,

A discussion was then held re the building of a new belfrey [sic] as the bell is down. The secty. stated he had on hand some sticks he would be satisfied to sell. It was moved and seconded & carried that we buy these sticks from Messrs. Warr. Mr Kelly said he would procure the cement from Roberts Arm. Moved by Mr. Locke and seconded by Mr. Blackmore that Mr. Roland Gind take charge of this work (carried).

The work was carried out, and duly reported upon December 11th of the same year:

Bills were presented for bringing in sand by Stanley Vineham and [a blank space in the text] for \$2.60 and \$2.85 and were paid.

The cement was secured from Mr Wm Budgell & is to be returned in the spring.

The belfrey [sic] being completed Mr. Locke and Mr. Gind presented their bill

10 days each \$25.00

10 days each \$25.00

Cash on hand \$32.35

Recd from hot supper \$21.50

The minutes from April 18 of the following year note: "Moved by Br. Rideout and seconded by Bro. Locke that we ask for volunteers for painting the belfry."

In her book "Tapestry of yesteryear: growing up on Pilley's Island," author Gwendolyn Poole Molnar reminisces about the belfry and its call to service:

The United Church stood on a knoll to the right of the Courthouse, quite imposing to our childish eyes. It had a bell tower, and the bell tolled faithfully on Sundays at 11 am and again at 7 pm. The services were always well-attended. Ivy Curtis was the organist and Margaret Blackmore the star soloist.

The belfry was an attraction for local children, but they did not dare ring the bell itself. Ern Simms recalls:

That was one of our things we would do because it was cross-membered. It was up five or six feet, to keep the small youngsters off. But we always found a way to get up onto the first bar, didn't we? We were like the monkeys, and be up around the bell. But don't ever ring it. You know, because, jeez, you'd be dead. Because to ring a bell, that's for emergencies. So, we didn't dare do that. You'd get up and have a small rock or something and just tap, but the big BONG, no, no!

Today there are two bells, one housed with the steeple, and the second, an older, cracked bell, on the ground outside close to where the original belfry stood [Figure 009]. When the church steeple was rebuilt in the late 1990s, the bell was brought into the church and placed in the steeple.

The interior of the church is simple, and relatively unadorned [Figure 010]. The walls have dark wainscoting rising to the height of the window sills, a band of dark wood trim at ceiling height, and then a white-painted curved arched roof rising to a centre dark ridge trim board. The original stovepipe opening is visible in the centre of the ceiling, and the roof is supported by six square wooden pillars, which match the paint scheme of the nave, and which are chamfered from the top of the wainscot trim to the height of the ceiling trim. The interior is reported much as it has always been, though there have been two smaller interior rooms added to the east end of the nave for storage and to house the furnace.

Also constructed in the mine forges were the internal iron tie rods used to prevent the spreading apart of the lower ends of the rafters. There are two sets of rods, visible in the nave of the church [Figure 011].

The choir loft above the altar houses the church's organ, which dates from 1905 [Figure 012]. "The organ was restored during the summer of 1979 by Sergeant A.D. Kirbyson of the RCMP detachment, Springdale. "It looks beautiful and sounds even better," it was noted in a Nor'Wester newspaper article in 1980.

Today's church pews follow the layout of earlier fixed pews, though Ern Simms suggests the original pews might have been shorter in length, as there had to be room in the aisles for the caskets during funerals. The two side rows of pews are original; the centre pews are more modern. Seating was arranged by family, and families would pay or donate money for pew seating. Jeanette Whelan remembers:

Well you paid for you pew, you call them pews ... I guess they still do. And I think mom paid maybe a couple of dollars a year, but our seat was 26 and she made sure I'd go to church and we'd sat in that seat and she'd poke me



FIG. 6: EXTERIOR OF PILLEY'S ISLAND UNITED CHURCH, 2017.

FIG. 7: ORIGINAL WROUGHT-IRON FINIAL AND STAR. (PHOTOS BY DALE JARVIS)

inside. I remember all my life, behind me was a family called Vineham ... Stanley Vineham and Macy ... Actually Macy worked with me after at Blackmore store, but I wanted turn around to talk to Macy. Now in those days my mother turned me around and you didn't talk in church or nothing like that. If she ever came to the church in Sudbury now she'd fall over! They're drinking pop and eating chips and you know! You sat in your own seat, and like I said behind me Mrs Blackmore ... Mrs Vineham sat. Now over in the middle pew, Mr Blackmore sat. Now Mrs Blackmore she was the organist then, that's the lady I took the lessons from, and then over on the far side there was a pillar and that's where Harold Warr -- that's Ray Warr's father and Bruce Warr's father -- they sat over there and believe you me they were in church every Sunday morning!

Heat was originally provided by stoves, a "Little Giant" at the front of the nave, and another woodstove at the rear. Stovepipes ran straight up, then turned 90 degrees to meet each other at the centre of the church, tied to the tie rods for support, then up through a T-junction flue to the exterior. The pipes were cleaned annually to prevent fires. Ern Simms recalls,

When we were kids, two or three kids were running around one Sunday just before Sunday School and someone tripped, hooked into the Little Giant, and knocked all the pipes down! No Sunday School that day!

Outside the church is a very well-maintained churchyard, with 42 grave stones visible, the majority of them facing north [Figure 013]. There may have been other burials which were unmarked, marked with stones or memorials now removed, or with wooden markers. Several tombstones show signs of repair, or have been elevated on inclined wood or concrete pads to assist with preservation and drainage.

The earliest recorded tombstone death date is 1896 (John ROBERTS), which is consistent with the building of the church. The churchyard holds three tombstones with a death date of 1924, and then a gap with the latest recorded tombstone death date of 1936 (John SHEARING, who was listed in the 1912 Year Book and Almanac of Newfoundland as being a member of the Outport Roads Board for Pilley's Island).

The end of the churchyard as an active burial ground in the late 1920s coincided with the establishment of a newer United Church cemetery in another location. This new cemetery was in place by 1927, as noted in the minutes for a meeting November 29th: "Cemetery. The need for immediate efforts in providing the new cemetery with suitable decent fence was next suggested by Bro. Warr."

Of interest is the use of wrought iron grave surrounds/fences in the churchyard. Each piece is different, with a variety of finial designs. The work is entirely of wrought iron, differentiating it from the use of cast iron cemetery fencing in many other contemporaneous cemeteries in the province. Oral tradition maintains that the churchyard's iron fencing (like the tie rod in the church) was fabricated in one of the mine smithies. Ern Simms remembers:

The reason why they put those wrought iron fences around because there was no fence around it, and lots of cattle, lots of horses. See when we were kids there was at times a couple of hundred horses on the island, and six or seven hundred sheep. So, they could do damage.

The fence around the churchyard proper was there intermittently over the history of the property. Photos show a wooden paling fence similar to what is there currently, but there were times when the fence fell down, was gone for five or ten years, before being reconstructed.

Of particular note is the wrought iron grave surround found on the grave of Nathan Oliver Lawton Wakefield, son of Thomas and Amelia Wakefield, who died August 27th, 1904 aged 8 months and 10 days [Figure 014]. The surround is in two pieces: the rectangular fence itself, which is then topped with a birdcage-like wrought iron cover. It is visually similar in some ways to the mortsafes of Victorian Scotland, but seems to be purely decorative. It is a very rare style of mortuary art, and one the author of this report has not seen in any other Newfoundland and Labrador burial sites.

Later History and Conversion to a Museum

From 1972-1979, Pilley's Island Pastoral Charge had a stationed minister, Rev. Raymond O.C. Kraglund, who was instrumental in fostering interest in the church. During 1978, stewardship of the pastoral charge increased by 34% over

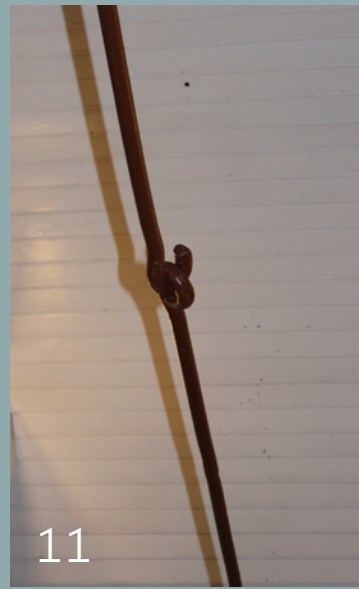


FIG. 10: INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH, LOOKING TOWARDS THE ENTRANCE. • **FIG. 11:** WROUGHT IRON TIE RODS. • **FIG. 12:** ORGAN, WITH JEANETTE MARIE WHALEN. • **FIG. 13:** CHURCHYARD. • **FIG. 14:** 1904 MORTSAFE-STYLE ENCLOSURE AT THE GRAVE OF NATHAN OLIVER LAWTON WAKEFIELD. • **FIG. 15:** CHURCH EXTERIOR, 2017. (PHOTOS BY DALE JARVIS)

1977 and considerable donations were made to the building fund at Pilley's Island and South Brook. Kraglund was recognized as being the minister responsible for getting the church re-organization initiated.

As the Minute Book attests, the Pilley's Island church, like all wooden churches, needed constant maintenance, and an active congregation to assist in that work. In a letter dated July 24, 1978, now in the collections of the Newfoundland and Labrador Conference Archives, Kraglund wrote (emphasis his):

Pilley's Island is hoping to receive a Canada Works Project to help restore their historic building. Their W.C.W. has raised \$1,000 since Christmas which will be added to the already existing building fund of \$2,000. This means they now have around \$3,000 to help renovate their church. However, it should be remembered that church is NOT a building --- CHURCH IS PEOPLE!

Restoration work on the building meant that the building was closed for some time, and the building was reopened in 1980. The Nor'Wester newspaper reported:

A capacity crowd from diverse parts of Central Newfoundland turned out on Tuesday, May 13, 1980 at 8 p.m. to help celebrate the official reopening of the historic Pilley's Island United Church. The service began with the "Call to Worship" by Ms. Maureen Ashfield, minister of the Pilley's Island Pastoral Charge (Pilley's Island, Robert's Arm, South Brook and Sheppardsville). Ms. Ashfield, a student minister from Ajax, Ontario who will terminate her year of minister on this charge on June 30, also welcomed all the guests and thanked them for coming to share in the happy occasion.

Throughout the 1980s the size of the church congregation started to shrink, though the church continued to be part of the pastoral charge. In 1988, Rev. Ira Parsons was interviewed about his work in the region for the magazine Decks Awash:

"I have a big charge with five churches at Beaumont, Lushes Bight, Pilley's Island, Robert's Arm and South Brook," Ira reports. "The church at Pilley's Island is at least 93 years old, and the next oldest is a beautiful church at Beaumont which was built in 1925. I try to get to each congregation at least twice a month with a service every Sun-day at Beaumont, Robert's Arm and South Brook where we also have a lay reader. We've had joint services with the Salvation Army at Pilley's Island, Lushes Bight and Robert's Arm."

By the 1990s, there were Sundays when few people came to church services. Services continued until 1994, and then ceased altogether. By 1996, the United Church of Canada Newfoundland & Labrador Conference changed the name of the "Pilley's Island Pastoral Charge" to the "Green Bay South Pastoral Charge" to capture the full geography of the charge and to eliminate the reference to a congregation that no longer existed.

A few members of the former congregation kept the building open, and discussions started about turning the church into a museum. In 1996, the building became the property of the Pilley's Island Heritage Society. Ernest Simms was one of the original volunteers who got the museum project started. He remembers,

I was on the church, you know, I was the guy who'd light the fires, and shovel the snow, and try to get people in. I didn't wear it too well, I wasn't a very good evangelist, put it that way! When we were growing up there were 15 or 20 families, but people moved away and, you know, we had less, and less, and less, and when you get down to five or six families it's difficult.

So, after I moved back here in, what, '84 I came back here, '85 I guess it was, the church wasn't doing too well then. But they kept it going up until 1990, '91, '92. That's all I could tell you. But I'd go over, you know, keep the fire going, and shovelled the snow.

So, I said to the Minister one day, I said 'this is enough of this.' He said, 'if nobody comes next week, or the next church service you have, that's it, I'm finished.' I said 'I don't blame you.' I forget the guy's name now. Davis, I think it was. Reverend Davis. And I held to my word, I walked away, and when I walked away that was it.

Well myself and Gary went to St John's, Gary was the mayor at that time. We were going to get some money to finish water and sewer up on Pitman's Road. And going in, it was a miserable day in April, and by the time we got into the overpass at Donovan's the snow was that hard we had to pull off. We got on this talk, that we'd get the museum going. Talked about it, and all the way back that's what we talked about, this, that, something else, and a few words here and a few words there.

But while we were in St John's, [Brian] Peckford was our member at that time and also the Premier. And he gave us holy hell for not putting in enough applications to get things done in here. And I think we did get some money for the ball field at that time. I thought, 'I think we'll try for a museum.' And we were lucky that we got it. I think the only reason why we did get it was because of myself and Betty [Traverse], we were last to go to church here, and Alice Oake. So, I think we deserved to get it for a museum.

Today, the church is operated as part of the Pilley's Island Museum, as part of a site including the church, churchyard, WWI war memorial, school, and short walking trail. The building is in good condition, and stand as a testament to the importance of church life in late nineteenth and early twentieth century rural Newfoundland.

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