

## THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT VAN VLACK

Early records indicate that the Van Vlack Presbyterian church was built in 1894. Some records date it in 1896, on part of the northern half of Lot 25, Concession 8, Flos Township.

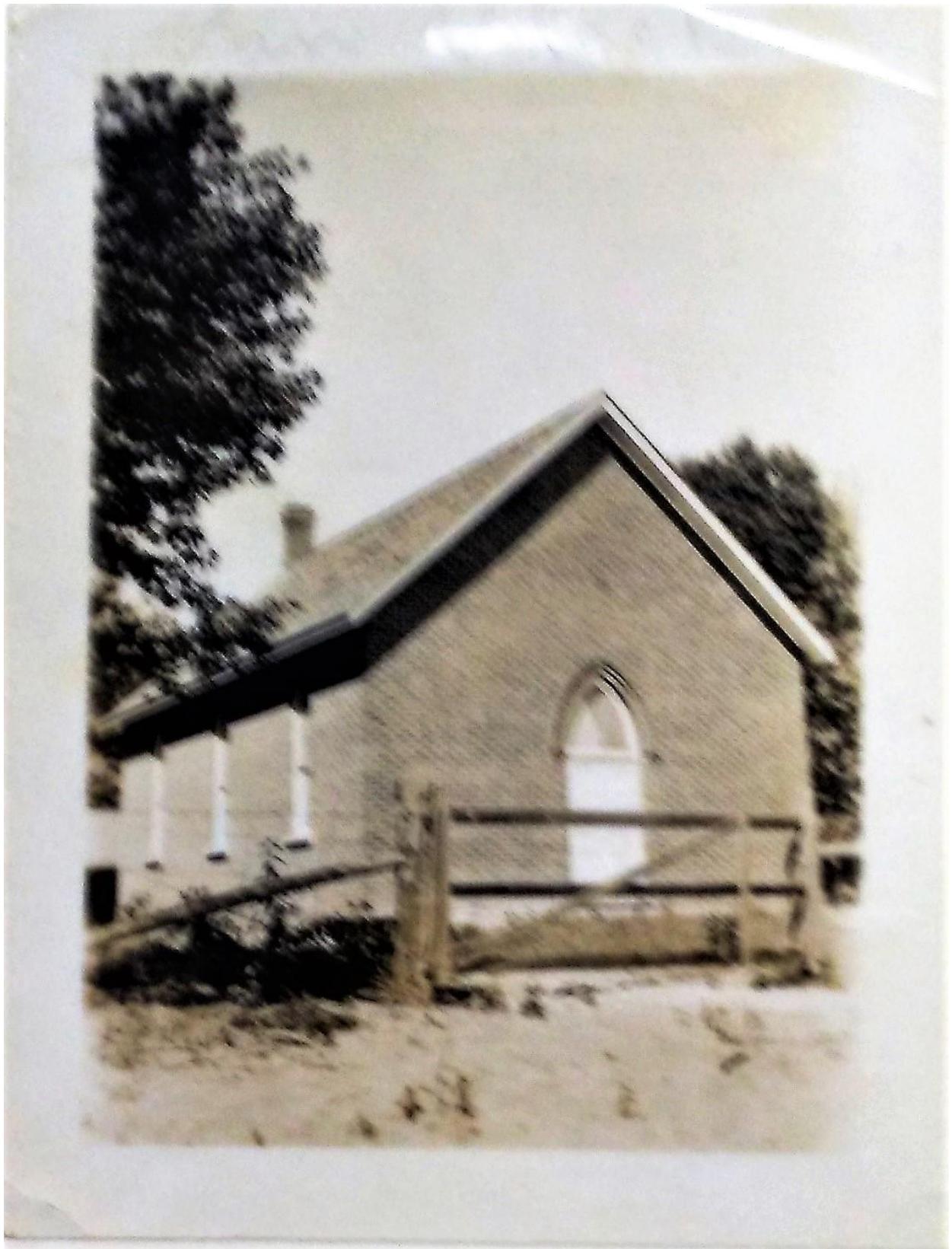
Prior to this date, the north half of lot 25 was owned, under a lease agreement since 1871, by the Georgian Bay Lumber Company of Mr. Anson Dodge. On December 14, 1883, the Company sold 50 acres of the eastern half of the N ½ of the lot for \$350 to Mr. Walter Little of Flos Township. No deed for the land the church was built on was registered at that time so we might presume that it was hand-shake agreement between the Little Family and the founders of the Presbyterian congregation.

A bill of sale for the property of the Church was registered at the Simcoe County Registry Office on May 12, 1903. The children of Mr. Little, James, Alexander and Mary, sold the parcel of land and premises for \$1.00 to the Trustees listed: James Wallace, James Little and William Kerr Jr., of Flos Township. The church was known locally as the “Van Vlack Church”, however the official name registered by the Trustee’s was “Marl Lake Presbyterian Church”.

Details within the registry instrument show the property had a 90 foot frontage on the 9<sup>th</sup> Line. It was 175 feet deep down the boundary line between the lot #25 and lot #24 of Concession 8. This places it at the extreme eastern side of Lot #25. In 2023 this parcel of land is occupied by Carruthers & Davidson Funeral home and a building occupied by Caithkin Foster Care at #499 River Road West.

As previously noted, the Van Vlack Presbyterian church was built on part of Lot #25. An excerpt from a document titled “A Trip to Van Vlack, October 26, 1893”, in the Van Vlack, Women’s Institute History, at the Simcoe County Archives, describes the building of the church;

“The brick church is at present under construction and is in the able hands of Messrs. Kirkpatrick, the framer, W. Patterson, the carpenter, W. Little, an old country joiner by trade and others. The church will be both handsome and commodious by nature.”



The Reverend John MacDonald was the first minister for the Van Vlack Church.

The ladies of Van Vlack formed the Ladies Aid Group when the Church opened and this group was active until the church closed in 1930. At this point in time the Van Vlack Ladies Aid group became the Van Vlack Women's Institute. This group was active, as noted in the Women's Institute History of Ontario, until 1990.



The Van Vlack church closed in 1930 and it sat vacant for a period of three years. On July 25, 1933 the building and the property was sold to James Sydney Bell, by the authorized Trustees of the congregation - Burtis Graham, James Workman and Lamont Livingston - for the sum of \$225. A note in the (-Tweedsmuir ) Van Vlack Women's Institute History describes what happened to the Van Vlack church;

“In the fall of 1933 Sidney Bell bought the church from across the road, Lot 25. He removed the bricks and had a carpenter, G. Dickie, remove one end and rebuild it to make into a house 28x30ft. It was then moved across the road to present location, bricked up again and remodeled to make a home. Mrs. J. Bell, Phyllis and Sydney moved into the new house around Christmas time.”

Part of the Bell property.



The present day (1978) homestead  
of the Bell family.

After the closing of the Van Vlack church it is assumed that members of the congregation joined one of two churches in Elmvale, or the Knox Presbyterian Church of Flos on Vigo Road. According to the Bicentennial Pictorial History of Flos Township (1985) the Van Vlack Choir gave Knox Presbyterian Church a gift of the Van Vlack Church collection box.

One final note regarding the Van Vlack Church happened in 1925 when a major development occurred. While the Anglican Church and the Presbyterian Church of Canada remained separate, a number of Presbyterian congregations split away and joined the Methodist Church, to form the United Church of Canada. In this year, the local community decided to become the "Van Vlack United Church."