

THUMBNAIL HISTORY OF FIRST BAPTIST

During the summer of 1836, Charlottetown druggist Thomas DesBrisay, led eight other baptized residents, all committed to membership, in bringing the Baptist denomination to Charlottetown with the formation of its first Baptist Church. Rev. George MacDonald, a Sessions preacher visiting from Nova Scotia, conducted the inauguration service with all nine members in attendance. Thomas DesBrisay, the motivator of the founding, was inducted as the first deacon.

Nine years later, a Charlottetown Baptist "Mission House" was constructed on the north west corner of Euston and Prince Streets, and was officially opened in August of 1845. In 1853 the small chapel was moved to a new location on lower Great George Street, near the waterfront, in an attempt to "be more central and reach more wayward souls". In this location, a decade later and under the leadership of the church's longest serving pastor, Rev. John Davis, Baptist membership in the city had grown by almost 400%.

By the mid 1870s Charlottetown Baptists had outgrown their small chapel and Rev. D.G. McDonald stirred the membership to build one of the finest church structures in the city on the southeast corner of Prince and Fitzroy Streets. The large octagonal church became a notable feature on the city skyline, was opened in 1879, and served Baptists for nine years until it was destroyed in a spectacular fire in 1888. A new church was opened on the same site in 1891 and provided the membership with a sanctuary and meeting rooms for sixty eight years until the current church building was opened on the opposite corner in 1959.

A great example of the dedicated membership in the early years of the church was James DesBrisay, a son of the founding deacon, Thomas DesBrisay. Until he passed away in 1898 James had been Church Treasurer for 38 years, Church Clerk for 30 years, Deacon for 24 years and Sunday School Superintendent for 22 years. It is documented, when there was no choir he would sing and lead singsongs, and when there was no preacher he would read library sermons to the congregation. He was an esteemed Charlottetown businessman and at the opening of the current church in 1959 Dr. J.A. Clark, speaking about him said, "...He abounded in every good word and work. The Charlottetown Baptist Church must never forget the name of James DesBrisay."

The Charlottetown United Baptist Church, now called First Baptist, has a history of welcoming thousands of members, visitors and guests with capable leadership and a comfortable pew to worship God. Through this era in time, local Baptists have maintained the faith through periods of both great enthusiasm and memorable challenge. Members today benefit from this legacy as this historic Charlottetown church continues to seek divine direction into the future, buoyed by the examples and inspiration of members long past, who built, with unquestioned faith, the respected church that has now served Christ in this city for 175 years.