

David Aitken

August 20, 2015

It may have been around Christmas 1924 when I first heard the music at First Methodist Church before its name changed to Metropolitan United. I was born in March 1925 and began a life-long association with the church on being christened on June 19 that year. I attended the church's Sunday school and joined the Cubs in 1934. After my mother died the next year, we moved to live with our grandparents in Goderich. Father continued to work for a London company as a travelling salesman throughout Western Ontario. We enjoyed much commuting to London but we missed the excitement of the great flood of 1937. However, father married a lady he met in North Street Church Choir and we returned to London and Metropolitan later that year.

When it was announced that Metropolitan's new senior minister would be the Rev. Dr. W.E. MacNiven, father was delighted because they had camped together by the river at Edmonton as young men in the summer of 1916. Father soon invited the MacNivens to dinner at our home. While father was an outgoing gregarious successful salesman, he was slightly nervous at hosting dinner with his new bride who was also our new step-mother. The first thing he did as we gathered in the dining room was to tip over his glass of tomato juice. He always appreciated that special moment when he "broke the ice" and everyone relaxed.

We continued at Metropolitan with father singing in the choir to the 1950s and my brother and I in Sunday school and Young Peoples Union through the thirties and forties (with some of the members of Metropolitan who attended the June 25, 2014 gathering at Metropolitan).

I joined the Church's scouts in 1937 and enjoyed many years of activities under the leadership of Frank Dickinson who told us his purpose as our Scoutmaster was to help us become Christian gentlemen. When he urged us to take part in some community event, he would remind us, "Do not let your inclinations overrule your obligations." We had a lot of fun, enjoyed competitions, industrial tours, hikes and camping events in many places in southern Ontario.

In 1939 our community was plunged into World War II. An early service project had the Scout troop loading equipment on trucks at Wolseley Barracks on a Saturday morning. For several years, some Scouts spent Saturdays helping to load household salvage on trucks operated city wide by the Red Cross Corps.

In the 1940s, London was headquarters of Military District Number One, so there was a lot of recruiting and training in and around the city. There were many parades, including church parades on Sunday morning. There would be Army one week, next month perhaps the Navy or the Air Force. The woodwork on the ceiling of the church sanctuary was dark and so were all the pews. Sometimes the high humidity in summer softened the dark finish on the pews. On more than one occasion, when the service ended and the closing hymn was announced, as everyone stood up, there was a loud sound heard ... slurrpppppppppp ... as the sailors' uniforms were released from the somewhat sticky surface of the pews. A war story!

Over two hundred members of Metropolitan served in Canada's military forces and in February 1946, over three hundred former service personnel, friends, family members and guests attended a homecoming banquet at Metropolitan United Church.

We were privileged to grow up and grow old in this Church.

Judie McDonald

May 3, 2015

When I was in my fifth year in high school, my friend Sue Peever and I would take the bus to Metropolitan and arrive here at 9 a.m. each morning. (Sue's Grandfather, Rev. Dr. R. G. Peever, had been a Minister at Metropolitan during the First World War.) We asked for permission from Mae Radford, Church Secretary, to study at the church. We'd go into the Sunday School rooms at that time in Met Hall. We would work in different rooms and do our school studies until 10:30 a.m. when we would take a break to play "Hide 'n' Go Seek" in the church. Mr. Bean, the Custodian, never said anything to us. Yet, he and others in the church had to know we were running around on the upper floors. After our break we'd go back to our rooms and study. At noon we'd break again, go down to Moskie's for lunch, then come back to the church. In the afternoon, we'd have the same break. Sue passed her high school subjects very well. I more than passed ... I got into Western. I believe this was attributable mostly to my time spent here at Metropolitan. To my knowledge this practice was something never done by others at Metropolitan. This story is a credit to Metropolitan for getting me out of high school.

Numerous other great things happened here at Metropolitan ... my baptism, our marriage and our children's baptisms. All five children joined Metropolitan. Funerals for my husband and parents were also held here.

Sydney & Dorothy Read

May 3, 2015

When we moved to London from St. Catharines in 1952, we went to different churches and narrowed our search to two. We found the marble floor in the vestibule at First St. Andrews to be too cold. So was the reception we received. "Let's go to the church on the corner (Metropolitan United Church)," we said. We did, and we signed the guest book there. We were both impressed with the minister who was the Rev. Dr. George Goth. On the following Monday, we answered our doorbell to Rev. Goth. After this visit, we joined Metropolitan and both of us joined the choir. We had sung in the choir at our church in St. Catharines and were thrilled to sing in a larger choir such as the one at Metropolitan. Tom Chattoe was the Organist and Choir Director at that time.

Over the years we have been involved in many groups, one being the Couples' Club. When we were perhaps 40 years old, we found that there was nothing for our age group at Metropolitan. So, we approached Dr. Goth who said, "How about coming to the manse where Marjorie will have a bean supper." (Marjorie was famous for her bean suppers.) About 40 people came. As a result of this, the Metropolitan Supper Club was formed. We met once a month on a Monday with great food and entertainment, as well as many wonderful speakers. Eventually this group faded away, but the Supper Club was one of the happiest groups that we ever attended at Metropolitan.

Once you volunteer your services at Metropolitan, you are always a volunteer forever. We followed Marjorie Gardiner as head of The Old Treasures, part of the yearly Yuletide Fair. We are both still active in this group.

Now we have a wonderful minister in Dr. Jeff Crittenden and we both still enjoy our affiliation with the life of this great church. Many of our friends belong here as well, and I (Syd) still enjoy singing in the choir after 63 years.

Gail Schnarr

April 23, 2015

The young people were involved in many activities at Metropolitan. The High-Cs, a group of young people in their late high school years, met every Sunday night with Bill Heine. After that, all sorts of university students became involved in the 8:30 Club. A Young Peoples group was very active also. Metropolitan had a Young People's baseball team that never won, but had a wonderful time playing the game. After the games, there were parties and all the teams we played against came to the parties.

The offshoot of all these activities involving our Young People, was that I—a Presbytery representative—could go to any place in Ontario and know somebody! Conference representatives were there from London, Hamilton, Toronto, etc. We knew everybody province-wide. It was an amazing time for youth at that time. We lost an awful lot when Kairos replaced Young Peoples groups.

When Ted Blake was head of Scouting at Metropolitan, both Lois Allison and I were approached to help with the Scouts. Ted just about fainted when he learned that he was going to have two female leaders in Scouting. Lois and I joined and progressed. Kent McNeill became Akela after Ted left. Following Kent, I took over the Pack. My husband Lorne was head of the Scouts. My two sons were also involved with Scouting and helped their Dad. Scouting was so much a part of our family. Lorne would take the Scouts to Camp Sylvan and a lot of private parks. My sons and daughter learned so much about life through Scouting. One young Scout had been in a car accident and had a disability. His father helped Lorne in Scouting. When the Scouts were outdoors hiking or camping, the physically challenged boy would help us with the Cubs. Our kids learned so much from him because they realized that a person with a disability can really play a part in helping others. Those were some of the most memorable activities during our Scouting years.

Marion (Halcrow) Raycraft

April 2, 2015

This wedding story took place at Metropolitan. My husband Owen and I, and my sister Heather and her husband Dan Colfax, were married 48 years ago today (June 25, 1966) in a double wedding ceremony at Metropolitan by Dr. George Goth. Since Dr. Goth was scheduled to attend a convocation in New York City that day also, he had said to us, "I insist on conducting the wedding but you must be married by 12 noon at the latest so that I can fly to New York." So we were married by noon. At that time, I coached cheerleaders at Westminster Secondary School. Many of them attended and were sitting along the rail of the balcony in the church with their elbows up on the rail, watching the wedding, and excited to see the marriages of their teachers from school.

This church is a very mysterious and wonderful building. The custodian from the 1980s would take me, my daughter Heather, and Wynsome Walker (Gordon & Harriet Walker's daughter) up into the tower to see the view around the area. While in the tower, we went through a door that led to a ramp that circled the dome above the Sanctuary. Because our dome is not exterior, you could look down into the Sanctuary from the very top of the dome. That was very special.

Doug Stevens

April 1, 2015

Metropolitan's High-Cs and the Eight-Thirty Club were the predecessors of our Couples' Club. There were a lot of marriages that came out of the two groups, including our marriage (Doug and Shirley Stevens).

On a light note, one Sunday morning during the worship service, my mother started coughing. She proceeded to unwrap that "evil little mint" which started a stream of sounds. "Rattle, rattle ... crunch, crunch, crunch ..." could easily be heard by everyone in the pews surrounding my mother. Once the mint was in her mouth, she proceeded to fold up the wrapper and again, it was "rattle, rattle, rattle, rattle ..." Meanwhile, the nearby pews were shaking with subdued laughter. This, I'm sure, was the forerunner for all the theatres requesting people to open their mints before the show begins.

Tom Browne

(who passed away at University Hospital on Tuesday, January 20, 2015, in his 84th year. The following story was shared by Tom on June 25, 2014 at a special gathering of senior Metropolitan United Church members.)

I've been a member of Metropolitan almost as far back as Dorinda (Dinnie) Greenway ... the 1930s. Today is the first time I've been at Metropolitan when my brother (Ted Browne) hasn't been here.

My story goes back to the years when Rev. Dr. W. E. MacNiven was our minister. As a young boy about 10 or 12 years of age, I became a very close friend of David Reeve, who passed away in 2013. David and the Reeve family were members of Metropolitan. David and I would play together and come to church together. In those days I was a full-time "attender" and earned a Bible which I still have at home. My father was very active in the church because his father had been a member of this church also. His name is up on the wall. He helped install the bell in the church tower. When my father put more time into serious golf and stopped attending church services, I came ... sometimes with my brother, and most often with the Reeves. David and I were such good friends that Mr. & Mrs. Reeve didn't trust us together, and tried to keep us from acting up in church. I sat on one side of Mr. Reeve, and David sat on the other side. David and I had a favourite name for Rev. Dr. MacNiven ... Wild Bill. One day, when Dr. MacNiven came to the door to see Mrs. Reeve about something, David went around the corner and yelled up the stairs to his mother, "Mom, Wild Bill's here!" Then, one Sunday around Easter, when Dr. MacNiven was preaching about Jesus coming into town, Dr. MacNiven said, "Jesus came into town on his ass as most people did in those days." David and I chuckled somewhat. Mr. Reeve laughed so much that he could hardly stop!

All three of my children were baptized and married at Metropolitan. My wife Joanne, a former Anglican, may have felt that she had to join Metropolitan after we married. I have many fond memories as a member of Metropolitan.

Joanne Browne

(April 21, 2015)

During Tom's tenure at Metropolitan, he collected the Sunday offering, counted the money, packed it into pouches, and drove down to the bank where he made the deposits into the bank slot. Tom took his duties at Metropolitan very seriously and played different roles in his quiet way. We attended Church quite regularly until Tom retired. Then, winters were spent in a warmer climate. For the remainder of each year, we were at our cottage. Little time was spent in London until the dreadful post polio took over his body. Tom was the most honest, compassionate and humble man that one could ever meet.

Anna Rowcliffe

(who passed away at University Hospital on Thursday, January 15, 2015, in her 88th year. The following stories were shared by Anna on June 25, 2014, at a special gathering of Metropolitan's senior members.)

When we (Anna and husband Jim Rowcliffe) first came to Metropolitan United Church in 1952, Dr. George Goth was our minister. You may recall that, in March 1965, Dr. Goth decided that he had to be a part of Martin Luther King's march to Selma, Alabama. Not all the congregation were in favour of this; there were those who were opposed. Dr. Goth strongly believed that it was his calling to participate. That was an historical mission in the life of Metropolitan. I well remember the Sunday he returned home. We had two worship services at Metropolitan ... one at 11 a.m., one at 7 p.m. The Church was packed with people for both services. At the Sunday morning service, a choir member, Bob McMyrtle, fainted in the back row of the choir. Bob was a very tall, well built man. I remember other choir members taking him out through one of the two side doors at the back of the choir loft.

On July 20, 1969, we were at home watching TV that Sunday afternoon in anticipation of Neil Armstrong stepping out onto the moon. It was Jim's Sunday to count the collection after the evening worship service, so Jim and I went to church while the children stayed at home because it was going to be history in the making. Just as we arrived at church at 7 o'clock, in the park at that time were what we referred to as "hippies." They marched into the church and sat down in the two rows of pews at the front of the Sanctuary. I have to be careful how I say this because perhaps we now wear black leather coats down to the floor with chains over them. It was quite a sight to arrive at church and have all these people coming in as well. Dr. Goth came out of his study not knowing that they had arrived and led the service through to his sermon. He then came out of the pulpit and said, "I am not going to preach what has been announced. We have people here who I know want to say something. But I wish to say something to them first. I want them to try to understand my generation. We, from seeing the first plane fly, tonight are probably going to see a man step out onto the moon. Can you appreciate what we have had to adjust to?" What a way to emphasize such an historical event! Dr. Goth continued, saying to them, "If we wanted to go anywhere, we could not expect other people to look after us. We had to pick potatoes – do anything to make enough money to go from one town to the next. So, we've had to adjust to something that's very very different." And, of course, then the group of people in the front pews, with their Bibles in their hands, spoke. "If you are your brother's keeper, you are going to allow us into the Church to sleep and eat." Metropolitan's insurance policy disallowed such accommodations. Tom Browne would be very much aware of all this too. The next day Neil Armstrong stepped out onto the moon. I will always remember both this event and the impact Dr. Goth had in explaining this event to everyone in the congregation on the evening of July 20, 1969. It was an historic time.

In 1996, Al Boyd and I were Co-Chairs for the planning of Metropolitan's Centennial. It was a great event. When we began our search for the Church archived papers and photos, there were boxes all over the church. It was truly an effort to try to gather all the archived materials. A lot of our archives were at Western University. An outcome of all our planning was the need to bring all Metropolitan's archived resources together. Walker Schofield has done so much to carry out this project. He has organized all Metropolitan's archives into a separate room off Met Hall. Metropolitan's next planned celebration will be much easier to bring together, I can assure you.

Thank you.

Dorinda (Dinnie) Greenway

June 25, 2014

There were so many interesting reminiscences today.

My first memory is about trying to stifle giggles – by watching the organ pipes high up at the front of the church. They were exposed then (1930s), and trying to figure out which notes on our magnificent organ, played by Mr. T. C. Chattoe, came out of which pipes. I had been watching my younger brother switch gentlemen's hats from under the pews where they had been stowed away in metal slots during the worship service. Every now and then he would try one on and, of course, they all came down over his ears. The junior congregation was wont to retire to Sunday School during the last verse of the hymn just before the sermon given by our great family friend Rev. Bruce Hunter. As my brother and I departed, I heard my Mother say to my Dad, "This hymn suits the occasion – yes?" The hymn was called "The Battle is o'er, the strife is done" and so we went (to Sunday School).

However, my ancient history precedes my attack of the giggles. Mother and Dad met at Metropolitan United Church and fell madly in love when they were just 16. Mother was a contralto and sang alto. Dad was a baritone and/or tenor, whichever Mr. Chattoe needed. This love affair lasted all their lives, but at 16! The maternal grandparents panicked. So Keziah (Kizzie) McCormick was shipped off to University in Boston. Kizzie became a successful playwright. Arthur Brickenden became an international lawyer and judge. They saw each other at church at Christmas and Easter – still madly in love. On Saturday, October 26, 1918, they married at the age of 21 at Metropolitan.

Like many places of worship throughout the centuries, the places of worship had facilities for community gatherings and drama. Kizzie took advantage of her training as a playwright and produced skits and entertainment for the church. There are copies and pictures of these skits in our church archives. They have been on display in the past. Mother went on to become Founding Director of the London Little Theatre which has established an award for amateur theatricals called the Brickenden Awards which are presented annually. It all began at Metropolitan.

My brother and I were duly christened here and later married here. In any case, I was happily married here 3 times!

But even these memories are preceded by my grandparents and Dr. & Mrs. Harry Abbott, Grandmother McCormick's brother and wife. There is an Abbott stained glass window in the northwest corner of the balcony at Metropolitan.



My Grandfather McCormick lived across the road from Metropolitan where City Hall now stands. He was President of the choir and sang bass and baritone or tenor as required by Mr. Chattoe. One winter's Sunday, Grandfather had spent the morning in church. That afternoon he took a few friends on a sleigh ride along Dufferin Avenue. Now Grandfather loved good horses and his horses had speed. He was reported to police for speeding ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON! He attended court on Tuesday and the magistrate said, "Mr. McCormick, how fast do you reckon you were going?" Grandfather replied, "Your Honour, just as fast as that mare could trot." He was let off. In fact, the magistrate bought one of that mare's colts a few years later.

There were Sunday School picnics at Springbank Park to ride on the toy train. The trip down was in an open trolley and the boys were later chastised for hanging on by one arm and one leg as we roared along. The races were supervised by Dad, who for many years was Superintendent of the Sunday School. All the prizes were boxes of cookies from McCormick's Biscuit factory. Baseball, games, singsongs – epic adventures and great memories. Hurrah for Metropolitan!

*Cheers,
Dinnie*

Marieon Mara

June 25, 2014

My twin sister and I were born in 1924. I grew up in London and lived at 435 Ridout Street North, where the old Bank of Upper Canada stood. My mother was a World War I Army Nurse. Before the Cenotaph was built in Victoria Park in 1934, my twin sister and I, plus my parents, would stand on the corner of Dufferin and Wellington where our Church stands, to watch the Armistice Day parade every year (1920s), without fail. Sometimes we would sit on the church steps to watch the parade. I have so many memories of all the old churches, cathedrals and houses that surrounded Victoria Park. They reflect our British heritage.

After my father came from Ireland during the 1st World War years, he bought a house and ran a "printing" store which still stands on the corner of Albert Street. Someone in the family ran a pub in the same neighbourhood. The Sansone Fruit Company was part of the community in those days. My family was buried in St. Paul's Cemetery until St. Paul's Cathedral moved the family to Woodland Cemetery because they wanted the land.

My father was concerned about us as kids when we would cross Richmond Street because it was a big street with buggies. So, my sister and I attended a Baptist Church nearby (Talbot Street) and didn't have to cross Richmond Street. We sang in the choirs. The Baptists love to sing, and the music was amazing. I was married in the Baptist Church on Talbot Street.

I first entered Metropolitan United Church to attend a Sunday night gathering known as the Fireside Hour. We would meet in Metropolitan's lovely parlour complete with a large fireplace. Rev. MacNiven was the pastor. He wanted to attract more young people to the church, and started our Youth ministry. T.C. Chattoe was the organist and choir director. During my high school years, I sang in the Choir. Then World War II came along. The younger generation was scouted and went off to war.

I was involved in and enjoyed a lot of activities at Metropolitan and have had many good times here over the years. Thanks for "letting us in."

Pauline Hansford

June 25, 2014

After my late husband and I were married in 1946, we moved from British Columbia to London and lived in the present-day Granite House on Central Avenue. Because it was very close to Metropolitan we came to this very welcoming church and later joined Metropolitan. An Usher gave my husband, Chuck, and me a very formal and wonderful reception on our first Sunday at Metropolitan.

In 1949, we were expecting Dr. George Goth to visit us at a pre-arranged time one afternoon. However, he came early and I was in the midst of fall house cleaning! Even so, we had a wonderful visit. In spite of the fact that we were living on the corner of Huron and Talbot streets at the time, we decided that we would attend services at Metropolitan no matter where we lived in the city. Some of the other London churches wanted us to join when we lived closer to their particular sanctuaries.

When we first joined Metropolitan in 1949, there was indeed a welcoming group of ladies. There were two women's groups that comprised several units. We joined a group literally called Metropolitan's "Welcome Group." I joined the Women's Association Welcome Unit. We then heard about the Couples' Club of which Jim and Gerry Guest were Presidents, so you know we received a wonderful welcome when we joined the Couples' Club. Later Chuck and I served as Presidents of the Couples' Club which continued for some years, but eventually folded. However, it was missed. Therefore, an initial meeting to discuss the formation of another group was hosted by Rev. George and Marjorie Goth at their Church Manse on Wellington Street between Dufferin and Central Avenue where Centennial Hall is currently located. A new group named the Metro Supper Club was established. It was to be in a potluck supper format and to include both single people and couples. What a wonderful welcoming fellowship we received at Metropolitan!

From that time on, we became friends with so many people within our church family, including choir members – Dorothy Bullock, Joan Rogers Shipman, Grace Miller, Anna Rowcliffe – to name a few. Our Choir Director, T.C. Chattoe, welcomed us with opened arms. I auditioned for the choir when I talked to him after a church service. He gave me a hymn to sing and said, "Okay. Here you go. Sing." It was wonderful. Singing in the Choir since 1952 has been a mainstay in my life. It's such a marvellous fellowship and superb way of worshipping – even at choir practice.

In 1987, along with Fred Gray and other Metropolitan members, I was part of the Kerygma Bible classes. Everybody was asked to bring a Bible and we compared the different types. I still have The Good News Bible from that year, and I'm still using it some of the time.

Time Out, of course, was another Metropolitan program which is still happening every year – incredible! Anna Rowcliffe started the ball rolling there in 1974. I don't think anybody else will say this—and Anna certainly won't—but she was absolutely amazing with whatever she took hold of, including organizing things from her bed when she had just come home from hospital. That didn't stop her! She carried on and has certainly been a wonder woman—really—with everything she has done for the rest of us here at Metropolitan and for others outside of Metropolitan.

Over the years, we have certainly enjoyed coming to the RCCO (Royal Canadian College of Organists) carol concerts at Metropolitan at Christmas time. Umpteen times I've certainly mentioned to other people, "You know, we had standing room only!" One year the London Fire Department decided that "standing room only" was a "No No!"

It's interesting that, when I would sing in the choir, my husband would usually sit in the Balcony for so many years. Whenever we came into Metropolitan together to the Narthex because I had a cold and couldn't sing in the choir, I would be welcomed like I was a new member of Metropolitan! Our Ushers didn't know I was a choir member, nor did they know that I belonged to Chuck (my husband) too!

Our New Year's Eve parties at Metropolitan were really special. If you look back in our history book *On This Corner*, you'll read about those wonderful New Year's Eve parties. We had an ice storm in London on New Year's Eve in 1958-1959. Chuck and I were in charge of Bridge tables and games for people to play that night. About one a.m. we headed home, but couldn't drive up Oxford Street. So we headed into a subdivision to get

to the bridge on Riverside Drive. Driving on this road was a challenge too. So we abandoned our vehicle. Luckily we walked up the hill and arrived home safely!

Metropolitan's Yuletide Fair continues to be very special! Many of our choir members will certainly remember when the Yuletide Fair was held on Thursdays. Regardless, we came to choir practice on those Thursday evenings! We simply did not even think of missing choir practice!

At one time, Metropolitan supported a welfare unit led by Vivian Heine. That was something else in which I was involved for quite awhile.

Metropolitan has always had a Cradle Nook. When Chuck and I were Presidents of the Couples' Club, we were also in charge of Metropolitan's Cradle Nook. More recently Agneta Dolman painted some gorgeous murals on the walls of two nursery rooms that were used for the Cradle Nook. Unfortunately, the murals are no longer there as the library now occupies the space where the Cradle Nook was located.

Chuck served Metropolitan in various capacities – as an Elder, as a member of the Men's Club, the Scouts Committee, the Metro Supper Club, and as President of the Couples' Club. I too served Metropolitan as an Elder, Choir President, Couples' Club President, and for many years as Music Librarian.

The annual MAMA event was organized in 2006 for Metropolitan Alumni Music Association members. We carried on each year through 2013.

Our former Organist and Choir Director Alex Clark used to give me only three minutes to talk when I wanted to make announcements as Choir President. So, the time has come to stop talking. Thank you so much to everybody at Metropolitan for many wonderful memories.
