

St. Matthew's Historical Vignette
George Monro Grant
Minister 1863-1877

I would like to tell you about one of St. Matthew's ministers who became well-known throughout Canada during his lifetime: George Monro Grant, who served from 1863-1877.

He was born in Pictou County in 1835, the son of a respected, but not very successful Scottish immigrant farmer and teacher. When he was eight years old, he suffered a farm accident in which his right hand was mangled, and resulted in his losing all but the thumb of his right hand. Since the injury left him unfit for farm work, his parents decided he should get an education that would prepare him for the Presbyterian ministry. He attended the Pictou Academy, then the West River Seminary, and then the University of Glasgow which he attended on a scholarship designed to provide education in Scotland for promising colonial youth. He was ordained in 1860, and declined a comfortable parish in Scotland to return to Canada. He had a particular interest in helping people in need, and performed home missionary work for the Church of Scotland in NS and PEI before accepting the call to St. Matthew's Church in 1863 while still in his twenties. Grant was a visionary, and encouraged his parishioners to support higher education, theological training and missions.

Grant was associated with the Presbyterian campaign to place Dalhousie College (later Dalhousie University) on a firm foundation. Although Dalhousie was founded in 1818, it did not function consistently until it was revived in 1863 by fundraising Presbyterians; the chair of the Dalhousie Board of Governors, William Young, and 2 of the remaining 4 members of the Board being members of St. Matthews. The local Church of Scotland Synod funded a chair in Mathematics which gave the Church the right to name the professor, and to have a seat on the new Board of Governors. George Grant was the first to fill the Board position created by the Kirk endowment. His experience on the Dalhousie Board probably contributed a great deal to his understanding of the running of a University, as he left St. Matthew's to accept the position of Principal of Queen's College (later University) in 1877. Queen's was then a small struggling Presbyterian school which he rescued from near-financial ruin, and developed into a nationally respected university. He was known as 'Mr. Principal' until his death in 1902..

There are many stories of George Grant which will bear telling another Sunday.

A plaque was placed in the sanctuary at St. Matthew's in his honour by members of the congregation: George Monro Grant DD, 1863-77, Much beloved as Philanthropist, Orator and Statesman much admired.