

## **From our history: Remembering George Cluett, Sexton at St. Matthew's United Church**

George Cluett came to St. Matthew's as sexton in 1950. He arrived after a career upon the water, sailing in vessels as a fisherman and crew member. He was married with four children, and eventually had 11 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Family was important to him, but he also devoted many hours to the family of St. Matthew's.

George seemed to be always here. Whenever, one came to the church, whether it was Sunday, during the week, morning, noon, or night, he was here. If there was something happening at St. Matthew's, he was here to open the doors and make sure the place was warm long before anyone else would arrive. As people arrived for a meeting, he would be at the door to open it for you and to greet you. He made you feel that you were important and coming to a warm and friendly place.

His job was to keep St. Matthew's clean, and he did this with loving and tender care with regard to every detail. He kept this place ship-shape.

Other aspects of his life at sea were brought to his work at St. Matthew's. The lessons he learned as a sailor and the experiences he had gave him a strong character and he loved to share his stories and talk of those days. George could be seen at a Boy Scout gathering, teaching the boys how to tie knots.

George's work at St. Matthew's went well beyond his duties as sexton. He was a true minister to the people of St. Matthew's. He attended weddings and funerals to make sure everything was in order, but he also contributed with his kind words and gentle ways. One lady remembers George cradling a rose and placing it gently on the piano for a service. One Anniversary Sunday, he was asked to carry the Bible and he walked up the aisle very proudly carrying the Scriptures.

The youth of St. Matthew's greatly benefited from his being here. He would notice the teenage boys of the congregation who were perhaps not sure they wanted to be here any more and take them under his wing. He would ask them to help him with tasks that were impossible for him to do by himself. For example, he had a series of boys help replace the lights in the sanctuary and the gym. Bill Gibson, who is now a minister, was one of these boys. He spoke at George's funeral on March 29, 1986 and two of his stories will illustrate this.

"He had a sense of humour. He would always greet me with the words: 'Now, Bill'. One day in particular, I had searched every corner of this facility for him. I knew he was here but I couldn't find him. Finally, I came here to this sanctuary and sat down in the front seat. Then a booming sound echoed through the whole church: 'Now, Bill', and again – I traced the voice to one of the lights in the ceiling and there was the cherubic face of George, and although I was too far

away, I know there was a twinkle in his eye as he said: ‘Bill, pass me the screwdriver’.”

Another time, Bill was helping George fix a light in the gym ceiling when a leg of the ladder broke.

“The ladder came away and it was held by one leg at the top and George at the bottom. I was paralyzed with fear. ‘Now, Bill’, he said, ‘come down’. He saved many of us from falling.”

George provided outreach. He shared with those who were down and out and needed money and he always had a job for those who needed a few dollars. He worked with alcoholics in Dartmouth, speaking with them, and helping them to believe in themselves.

As mentioned above, George seemed to be always here. In fact, he practically died here. He took a heart attack on the Tuesday before Easter 1986, while washing the floor at the entrance to the hall. He was taken to hospital but lasted only a few days and his funeral was held here at St. Matthew’s on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Molly Austen believes that George has never left. She claims that his ghost presides in the gallery of the sanctuary, and that when you hear those creaks it is only George cleaning for the Sunday service or perhaps preparing to fix the lights.

The congregation commemorated George’s life and his gifts to this church with the installation of the George Cluett Ramp and the plaque which you can see on the South wall near the door that goes out to the hall.

Margaret Fay, Summer 2005

*With the help of the funeral eulogy for Mr. George Cluett presented by Rev. William J. Gibson on Saturday, March 29, 1986*