

An Historical Look at Worship

For early settlers in this area, places of worship were few and widely scattered. Groups gathered in family homes, or wherever space could be found, to listen to itinerant preachers. William Proudfoot's first address was delivered in a schoolhouse near the forks of the Thames. Worshipers needed a place to sit and listen; speakers required somewhere to be heard.

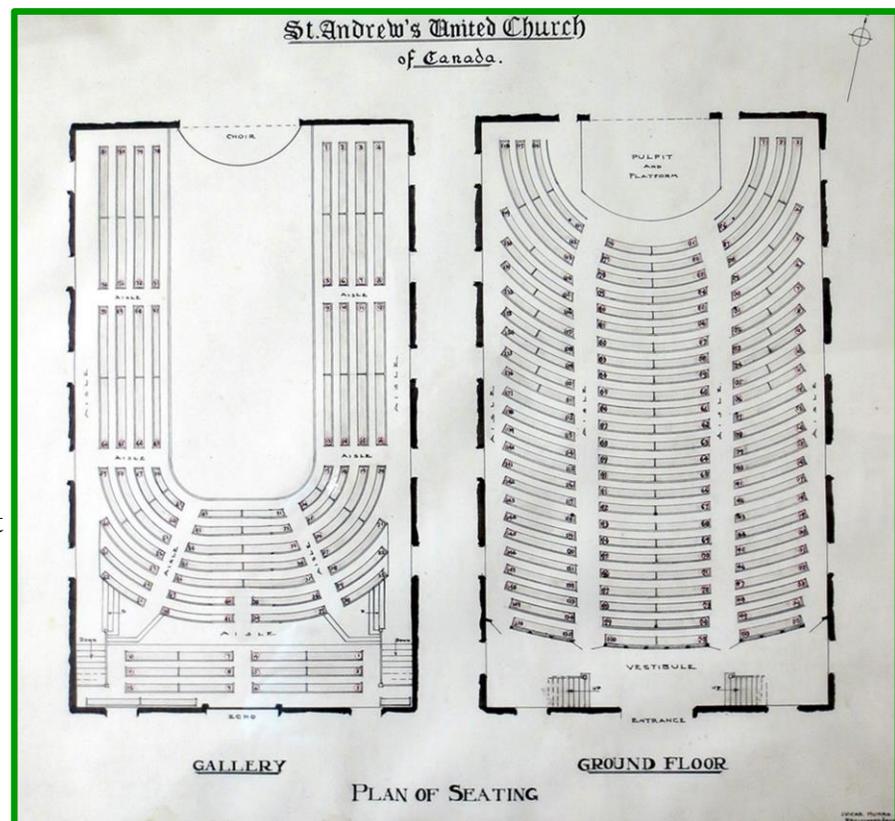
When Proudfoot was in the process of building the United Presbyterian Church on York St., the congregation met in a nearby Methodist meeting house where they were seated on rough benches. On at least one occasion, when the crowd was too large for the space, the benches were simply moved outside, augmented with makeshift seats fashioned from available boards, and the service conducted in the open air. Better quality benches were used in the United Presbyterian Church when it opened in 1836 in a space about the size of our present chapel. One constant was a lectern or pulpit as a focal point—ministers spoke; people listened!

[The United Presbyterian Church stood until January 1859 when it burned down. Its replacement, opened in 1862 at the corner of Clarence and Dufferin streets, was given the new name, First Presbyterian Church.]

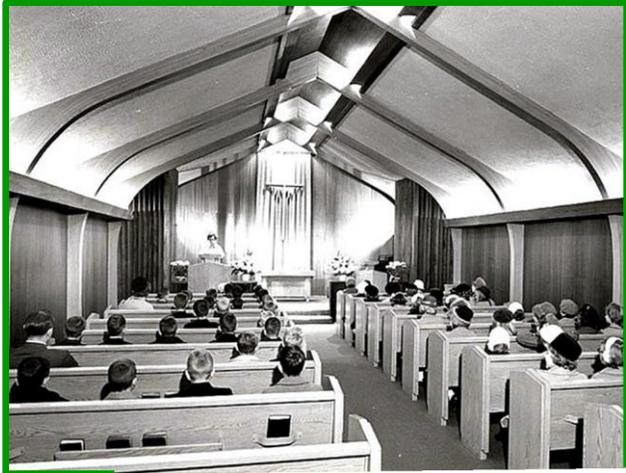
The singing of psalms and later hymns (paraphrases of psalms) was a *cappella*—musical instruments were not permitted. This practice continued into the 1850s when Proudfoot's son, John, much to the horror of the Presbytery, allowed a small melodeon to be used. No instruments were permitted at St. Andrew's until much later.

When larger buildings were erected in the 1860s, pews were installed for the worshippers. At St. Andrew's in 1869 the pews were curved around a central pulpit.

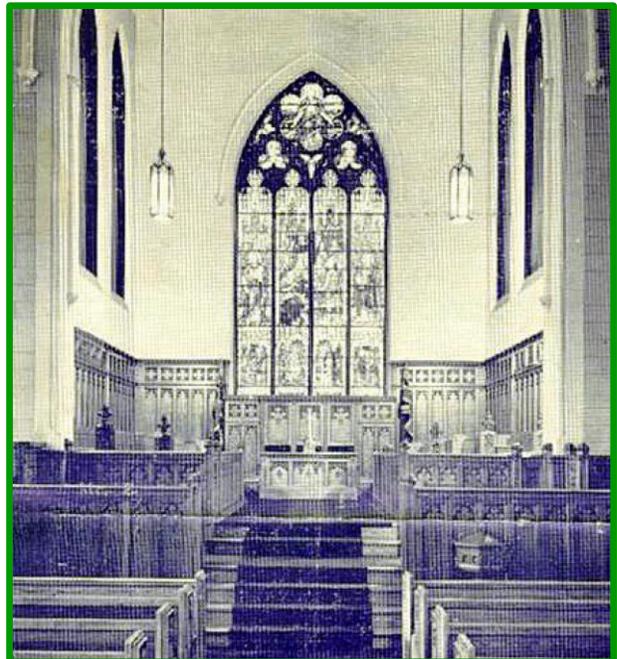
After the installation of the first pipe organ in 1888, the choir moved from the gallery to a platform at the front of the church, behind the pulpit. In 1910, Durrant designed the brass-embellished choir loft behind the pulpit. A communion table sat in front of the pulpit at floor level, less lofty than the minister's perch.



In St. Andrew's Hall, we had a raised platform surrounded by a semi-circle of Sunday school rooms, abutting a large multi-purpose open space in the middle. Chairs, tables, etc., could be arranged as needed. Ironically the reconstruction of 1954–55 created the chapel with fixed pews until these were recently removed.



In 1938, First-St. Andrew's was created with a new look. A central aisle, so loved by brides, invites procession to the chancel. The pulpit was moved to one side, balanced by a lectern on the other. The communion table became central, though placed far back under the new chancel window.



In 1968, when the choir returned to the gallery, the table was moved closer to the congregation for better visibility, particularly in the front corners of the church. Removal of the organ console and most of the choir stalls created an open space which encouraged greater use of drama, further enhanced by a portable stage purchased at a later date.

Services of the past tended to be quite formal. At one time, ushers (all men) were expected to wear formal morning suits; no female was without a hat and probably gloves as well. Rituals included prescribed prayers and sung responses. Today we tend to be more informal. Worship in the chapel is flexible: arrange chairs in a circle if desired, use the pulpit, lectern etc., or not, as you wish. In the sanctuary we strive for greater participation, particularly by children and young adults. We are a people of tradition but our future will be the choice of future members.



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