

—— WANGARATTA BAPTIST CHURCH ——

An Inquiry
into
Historical Themes and Patterns

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FOREWORD

This study of the history of Wangaratta Baptist Church was part of a special project conducted in March and April 1984. Rev. Herbert Swanson was invited by the church to examine the church's history in order to help it make decisions about its future. The project involved over sixty interviews with people associated with the church, group discussions with deacons, Bible study groups, youth groups, and a special task force formed for the purpose of working through the project with Rev. Swanson, as well as the analysis of the church's written records. Rev. Swanson reported his findings in several ways. He spoke to the whole church on Saturday 7th April 1984. He later reported in detail to the task force and to the diaconate. This book is the final part of that report.

The book was written not to record the past but in order to understand the present. Thus it does not seek to record the names of all who have so faithfully and generously contributed to the life of the church, nor the ways in which they have contributed. That has been done in the "Memorial Book" prepared by Mr. Frank Garth. Nor is this book a collection of facts of the history of the church as is Brenda Leitch's monograph, "Wangaratta Baptist Church History 1902-1977".

This book is an attempt to discern themes and patterns in the history of Wangaratta Baptist Church which may help us to understand the church today. Every object, organization, and individual is, at least partially, the product of its history and can only truly be understood through its history. This book was written for the church because it was believed that through understanding itself it could better make decisions about its future.

While the emphasis has been placed on the analysis and interpretation of the past, attention to facts has not been lacking. Considerable effort has been expended to ensure the accuracy of what is reported here. We are most grateful to Rev. Swanson for his analytical skills and for the thoroughness with which he used them.

Since April 1984 the book has been read by the members of the special task force, the deacons, and five of the pastors of Wangaratta Baptist whose names appear in the book. We are grateful to them for their comments, and revisions have been made accordingly - a process of editing for which I must take responsibility.

Within this book, the challenge to the Wangaratta Baptist Church and to all churches is stated again: How can we best organize our life and our activities in order that we might truly be the body of Christ, living in order to serve, reaching out beyond ourselves? My hope is that through this book, God, in His grace, will help us to understand that challenge more clearly and to discover more of God's will in response.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Where are we and where are we going? When I came to Wangaratta on the last day of February 1984 to undertake with the Baptist Church its "Church Anniversary Project", this question was on the minds of many of its members. For some it was an immediate and pressing concern. For others it was little more than a dark speck of a cloud hovering in the recesses of their church life. Where are we? Where are we going? I found that for many of its members the life of this small Baptist church in North East Victoria was an important part of their personal lives. The church was alive. Unlike most churches in Australia and in Wangaratta, it included a significant number of younger couples and of youth. Its youth programme was envied by some of the other churches of the community. On the surface, it was a caring and happy Christian community significantly different from many other Christian congregations in its town and region.

Yet, underneath there were tensions. It is a human community, and like any such community its daily functioning included human problems as well as joy. In my research, I increasingly found that the congregation was facing some serious problems that arose directly from its historical experience. Indeed, much of its tension came from a fundamental conflict between its life time experience since 1902 and more recent experiences dating back to 1967. I found two paths out of the past rather than one, two paths that still seem to me to lack unity. It is these two paths that cause a strong sense of ambivalence in the hearts of many members of the church. The task of this inquiry is to explore the two paths flowing out of the past into the current life of Wangaratta Baptist Church.

The reader should understand the limits of this inquiry. Because of the limited duration of the Church Anniversary Project there has not been time to conduct the intensive oral and documentary research necessary to write a full history of the church. A great deal of research was conducted, and this brief history does present the main themes and patterns of that history. But more research needs to be done before a more complete history will be written. The purpose of my research has been to discover the main courses of the congregation's history and to see how those major themes and patterns influence the present life of the church. My central concern was to involve the congregation in an exploration of its own past as the vital first step towards finding its way confidently and faithfully into the future. This paper is one of several means by which I am presenting my findings to the congregation so that they may begin to take further steps towards that future.

All historical writing necessarily distorts the past because the past cannot be fully known or completely written up. The best we can do is to point with as much clarity and honesty as possible to some of the most important things that happened in the past with sufficient detail to give the reader a fair idea of the events described and discussed. At the same time, we can discover enough of the truth about the past to understand something of it and how it

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influenced us. Thus, this study has certain strengths: it is written by a person who is neither Australian, nor Baptist, someone who is distant enough from the church to have more neutral attitudes and who may be spoken to as one with whom people in the church will not have to live with for years to come. There is safety in distance, and I brought some distance to the project. Another strength of this project is that as its researcher I have experience in researching local church history in situations where little previous research has been done. I have pastoral experience and rural church experience. And, I have experience in wrestling with issues of faith in a culture that is not my own. However, the real strength of this project is to be found elsewhere: in the deep concern that many of its members have for this congregation and in their willingness to share their hopes and fears for this congregation and with an outsider. This is very much their history not only because it is about them but also because it is from them. Well over fifty percent of the church directly participated in the project in one way or another, and nearly that number were "informants" who gave of their own memories for inclusion in the historical records.

Therefore, in spite of the obvious limitations of this inquiry it does have something pertinent to the life of Wangaratta Baptist Church to say to the church, not least of all because it reflects the voice of the church itself. Wangaratta Baptist Church has a past. In that past, certain actions were taken for certain reasons. An identity developed that is absolutely unique to Wangaratta Baptist. That identity arose out of the experiences of individuals within the church. Their personalities, their triumphs and failures, their quarrels and times of deep sharing - all of these things went into the creation of the present church. The bad times and the unhappy events have had as much influence on the church today as have the good times and the joyous occasions. If the church is to know itself then it must know its past. It must know what actually happened rather than what it thinks happened.

I would like to end with a personal word: Although I have tried to be as impartial as possible in this study, I must confess that I have grown quite partial to the Wangaratta church. They welcomed me into their homes and their lives with a warm hometown graciousness that transcends cultural and national distinctions. We have prayed together. We have traded ideas. We have shared concerns. My "bias" is most certainly in their favour. A particular note of appreciation must go to Rev. Doug Cosson and Rev. Philip Hughes, co-pastors of the church, for the insights they shared, the time they invested, and the support they gave for the Church Anniversary Project and the preparation of this history.

2 FALSE STARTS

Baptist history in Wangaratta began in late 1848 when Mr. William Peacock and his family moved to Wangaratta to open a school for aboriginal children. The Peacocks were English immigrants and

members of the Collins Street Baptist Church in Melbourne. Failing to establish an aboriginal school, Peacock did start a school for local children in the recently established settlement of Wangaratta. He also began leading worship services and erected a building for worship and educational purposes. In actual fact, Peacock's relatively brief stay in Wangaratta (the family left in 1853) has much more to do with the history of the Collins Street Church than it does with that of the Wangaratta church. Peacock approached the Collins Street church asking it to seek a land grant for the little congregation in Wangaratta. The matter of land grants was controversial in Baptist circles at that time, and other means had to be found to secure the land the church/school building was built on. With the foundation of a national school in Wangaratta, Peacock closed his school and went into business. After leaving Wangaratta in 1854, the family eventually found their way back to England. Although interesting from a more general perspective, this brief episode left no permanent Baptist community in Wangaratta and is not a direct part of the past of the modern church.

In the 1860s, there was a new and more lively spirit abroad in Baptist circles in Victoria. In 1862 the Baptist Association was established and there grew up a new air of confidence that manifested itself in a desire to expand and establish Baptist "causes" in new areas of the colony. More financial aid for the churches and for expansion was available. The Ovens Valley district was one of several new areas to which the Association attempted to expand.

As early as late 1863, there was already a small group of Baptists worshipping together under lay leadership. They were English immigrants from Northamptonshire living in the area of North Wangaratta. The secretary of the Association visited them in February 1864, at which time they were reported to be the only Baptists worshipping in their own chapel between Brunswick and Beechworth. The little church (not officially constituted) had a capable preacher, a Sunday School, a day school, and sold religious periodicals.

In order to serve the growing number of Baptists in the Ovens Valley district, the Association had sent Mr. William Brightwell to Beechworth to establish a church there. He arrived in 1864. Brightwell established a small church of about 14 members in Beechworth, but within a year he abandoned that work and moved over to the North Wangaratta group. That congregation opened a chapel (presumably its second) with much fanfare on 11 November 1865, and under Brightwell's leadership the congregation was an effective little church. Brightwell also carried out evangelism in other areas of the district. Little is known of the life of this congregation although some of its member families became members of the church established in Oxley twenty years later. Brightwell remained in North Wangaratta as a teacher and pastor until 1874 when he returned to England. The Baptist Association in general was having trouble sustaining work in the more distant rural areas particularly for lack of home missionary personnel and lack of leadership generally. We must assume, therefore, that when Brightwell left North Wangaratta the small congregation either lapsed or might have been looked after by other denominations.

In any event, there is no evidence that suggests that later events which eventually led to the re-establishment of Baptist work

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in the city of Wangaratta were in any way related to this little congregation at North Wangaratta. When the Oxley church was constituted some twenty years later, older adult members of families that had belonged to the older North Wangaratta church had to be baptised suggesting that the Baptist tradition had not been sustained at North Wangaratta. We must consign that congregation to the general ferment of the rise and fall of little Baptist congregations that could not be kept going in those earlier years of the Association.

3 MOTHER CHURCH: THE NEW BEGINNING AT OXLEY

The actual establishment of the Wangaratta church is rooted in events that began with the founding of the Baptist Home Missionary Society in Victoria in 1871. It was through the efforts of the society that the first steps were taken to solve the problem of leadership for new churches that had hampered church expansion previously. Within the next decade a pattern of church expansion in northern Victoria began to emerge: moving northward from Bendigo (Sandhurst) new Baptist causes were established in Echuca in 1876 and in Kerang the following year. From Echuca work started in Shepparton in 1880. Church expansion proceeded northward, westward, and then eastward towards the Ovens Valley.

In 1883 Mr. James Pollock was sent by the Home Mission Society to assist in the work in Shepparton where he then helped establish the Goulburn Baptist Church in 1885. It was at about that time that Benjamin and John Jones, Welsh Baptist immigrants who had settled in the Ovens Valley at Meadow Creek in the late 1860s, contacted the Home Mission Society with a request that someone be sent to begin a cause in the Ovens Valley. Pollock was appointed to that work in May 1885.

Pollock began his work in May 1885 with about 13 people, and although his work centred on Oxley where the chapel was built he covered a large territory that included monthly services at the following places: Bobinawarrah, Hurdle Creek East, Carbor (or Upper Meadow Creek), Meadow Creek, Hedi, Moyhu, Red Camp, Boggy Creek, and Tarrowingee. Within the first six months of the work six people were baptised, and a bark hut chapel erected. Pollock reported in the Baptist Handbook for 1886 that both the spiritual and financial condition of the cause had improved.

In attempting to link the Oxley work of Pollock to the earlier North Wangaratta congregation, it is worth noting that Pollock write in the 1886 Handbook that his work in Oxley "... borders on an old district that was held by the Baptists many years ago, but through some cause fell through, and it has now gone into the hands of the Wesleyans, who are working it under the circuit system from Wangaratta." (p.62). It is probable that this refers to the North Wangaratta group particularly since the church had Methodist connections. For example, the Wangaratta Chronicle for 22 January 1896 in its obituary for Thomas Dunkley, a foundation member of the

Oxley church living in East (that is, North) Wangaratta, was also "a devout Wesleyan" and frequently preached in the Wesleyan church even though he was "from a youth a BAPTIST". Later members of this and other North Wangaratta families were to be found among both Methodists and Baptists. And, in later years this chapel was again used by the Methodists for their services. Although the North Wangaratta church is not listed among the original Oxley preaching points, it soon became one, thus returning to the Baptist field.

Pollock was a busy, hardworking pastor very much involved in moving about the countryside. In 1887, the church had become sufficiently strong to purchase land in Oxley, and in the following year Pollock reported a number of conversions in the district. In September 1888, the Home Mission Committee moved that Oxley, Beechworth, and North Wangaratta each be formed into church fellowships and that the Secretary visit the district. Although there were problems in grasping the opportunities at Beechworth, there was enough of a congregation assembled at the old North Wangaratta site so that the owner of the land, a Mr. Ward of Eldorado, was willing to transfer ownership of the property to the Home Mission Committee.

Slow and steady growth continued in the Oxley district. In about July 1890, the Oxley church building was opened. And, in the following year, Pollock was urging the Home Mission to send a man to work at East Wangaratta. (Although there has been much confusion over the matter, records and property records show that the so-called "North" Wangaratta church of earlier years and the so-called "East" Wangaratta church of the 1890s are, in fact, the same church.) Things were also picking up in Beechworth.

It is difficult to make much of the history of the Oxley Church after 1894 when Pollock left the church. Wilkin, in his history of Baptists in Victoria, Our First Century 1838-1938 (Melbourne, 1939) wrote of Oxley, "The promise of the early days has not been fully realized, most of the preaching stations have been abandoned, and the frequent changes in the pastorate have militated against the work." (p.96). An examination of Home Mission and Oxley Church minutes confirms his statement. The life of the congregation revolved around building and grounds, financial, and social concerns with members in the distant preaching points being only minimally involved in congregational life. The church was too scattered to have a strong, centralized programme of activities, and some of the strongest families, such as the Joneses at Meadow Creek or the Cousins at Bobinawarra, had little effective contact with those who gathered for worship at Oxley.

It is interesting to note that of all of the pastors and home missionaries that have served the Oxley and Wangaratta churches, Mr. James Pollock still holds the record for longest term of service. Both of these churches owe much to his ability and dedication, and it may be said that the Oxley church never quite recovered from his leaving the district. In any event, later pastors of the church continued to look for places to expand in the district, and one of those places was the larger community of Wang. As early as 1901, Mr. Ottaway of the Oxley church visited the people of "South" Wangaratta but found no encouragement for starting services. More successful in the matter of expansion to Wangaratta was a later successor, Mr. H.

MOTHER CHURCH: THE NEW BEGINNING AT OXLEY

Stewart.

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By the year 1900, Christianity in Australia was moving into a new phase in national life. In the early colonial period, the extension of the Christian faith had been partially neglected especially by the English church which was much more interested in missionary work among the "heathen" than in working with the convict population of Australia. J.D. Bollen in his lectures at Leigh College in 1973, entitled Religion in Australian Society: An Historian's View (Enfield, NSW, 1973), has noted that this early neglect meant that the organized denominations were always trying to "catch up" with the society after that. The society was expanding and religion was generally rushing after it, not always with great success. In the years around 1900, Australia entered a period of national growth, and the churches also entered into a period of extensive building programmes and of expansion that brought the church into new areas, particular in the cities. Bollen argues that the church in this period was more successful in moving into the mainstream of Australian life. It provided more of a centre for the social and spiritual life of the rural towns and the urban neighbourhoods of the era before World War I.

It was into this social and spiritual situation that the Wangaratta Baptist Church was born, a society to which it adapted and to which it adapted itself. It is also worth noting here, however, that Bollen also argues that in the decades between World War I and the present the churches of Australia have failed to remain close to the heart of Australian society. The churches pursued their own dreams - ones most Australians did not see as being relevant to their lives. The result has been a general decline in church life and a wide gulf between the churches and the larger society.

Basil Brown in his history of the Baptist Union of Victoria, Members One of Another (Melbourne, 1962), has described the period in which the Wangaratta Baptist Church was founded as a period of transition for the Home Mission work of the Union. Home Missions faced financial limitations and continued to be plagued by poorly trained and equipped home missionaries. Each year large numbers of them resigned, and there was a continual transfer of these men between the churches that was a serious limitation and a source of "continual anxiety" to the Home Mission Committee. (p.98).

Thus, the Baptist cause in Wangaratta was founded at a time that generally favoured the extension of churches, and that was the high tide in the church's influence in society. Yet, at the same time, that cause began at a point of transition when the period of rapid home mission expansion in the Baptist Union had passed and when financial and leadership problems became an increasing burden.

In April 1901, the Home Mission Society appointed Mr. H. Stewart

as the pastor of the Oxley church. Stewart proved to be a more capable man than several of his predecessors particularly in the matter of expanding the geographical extent of his work. For example, he soon involved the Oxley church in a very successful mission in North Whitfield. It was during his time that the Bobinawarra group built their chapel. And, it was Mr. Stewart who began to show serious interest in establishing a cause in Wangaratta.

He reported to the January quarterly meeting at Oxley that when he had been in Melbourne on his holiday he had met with the Superintendent of the Home Mission Society, Mr. F. J. Wilkin, about Wangaratta. An unknown correspondent, presumably from the Wangaratta area, had written to the Home Mission Committee in late 1901 requesting a cause be opened in Wangaratta. At about the same time Stewart had been approached by the people in Wangaratta seeking his help to begin a cause there. He had called upon several families and corresponded with the Home Mission. Stewart was then authorized to do so and planned to rent a hall and begin in March. (The 4 January 1902 minutes of the Home Mission Society in the Baptist Union Archives confirms Stewart's report.)

In actual fact, those opening services did not take place until 11 May 1902 (the same day that the Bobinawarra church was opened) with Mr. Wilkin preaching. Stewart reported back to Oxley that these initial meetings were "fairly well attended" and the Wangaratta group was able to pay its own rent. Stewart felt that the situation was promising enough so that someone would have to be stationed at Wangaratta permanently within the next three months. However, there seems to have been little real enthusiasm in the first months of Baptist efforts in Wangaratta even though about 30 had attended that first service (which was held in the Masonic Hall on Ovens Street).

The foundation of the Wangaratta cause received great impetus from a revival movement which swept Victoria in August 1902, by a two week mission conducted by the Rev. E. Isaac, and by the arrival of Mr. E. L. Watson (sent by the Home Mission Committee) in Wangaratta. Watson had been a student studying under Wilkin, who, upon completing his course of study, was sent to Wangaratta. He began his work there in October as a temporary appointment, but he soon became the permanent home missionary at Wangaratta. He was a capable preacher and a man naturally liked by others, and the result of his work was an immediate increase in the numbers attending Baptist services. The congregation had to move from its original premises to the Theatre Royal. On 23 November 1902, Watson conducted the first baptismal service, baptizing five people in the King River.

The Home Mission minutes for 3 February 1903 record the following: "Letters were received from Mr. Chalmers, Treasurer, Wangaratta and Mr. E. L. Watson relating to the retention of Mr. Watson at Wangaratta; Resolved that they be congratulated on the progress of the work, and that Mr. Watson will be retained there for the remainder of his two year's engagement." From this point things began to move rapidly in Wangaratta. At the April meeting of the Home Mission Society, Mr. Wilkin reported that he had visited Wangaratta and constituted a church there with 21 members. Unfortunately, we do not have a record of the exact date that the church was officially constituted, the date being either late March or early April. (An article in The Southern Baptist suggests that the church might have

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been formed earlier than March and states there were only 19 original members - see Volume IX, no.18, 15 Sept 1908, page 215.) From that time, the work in Wangaratta prospered until 60 were attending morning worship and 156 evening worship. A Sunday School was begun on 10 August 1902 and within a year grew from 2 to 60 students.

There were problems. For one, the Theatre Royal was located next to a rather noisy hall that distracted the worshippers. More seriously, a Methodist journal, The Spectator, charged the Baptists with stirring sectarian discord and with "sheep stealing" in Wangaratta. (See The Southern Baptist, vol.IX, no.12, 16 June 1903, page 133.) We have already seen that the "boundaries" between Baptists and Methodists were indistinct in East Wangaratta. Obviously, the enthusiastic Baptist cause and its appealing young leader were attractive to some Methodists in the community.

The first concern of the newly founded church was to build a suitable building. J. D. Bollen's lectures mentioned at the beginning of this section make an interesting observation about Australian Baptists that may help us to understand why this and other organizational matters were so important to the Baptists in Wangaratta. He argues that in England the Baptists had characteristics of both a denomination and a sect. It had aspects both of the more organizationally established denominations such as Presbyterians or the Church of England and also aspects of the more enthusiastic radical sects. However, Australia has never been very willing to accept such sect groups (English or American), thus the Australian Baptists became more like the other mainline denominations and accordingly were very concerned with gaining "denominational prosperity". (p.23). One of the themes of this Baptist congregation was its desire to be as socially acceptable and accepted as the Presbyterians and Anglicans. And one its latter frustrations was that prosperous Baptist families in the church or moving into Wangaratta seemed to join the Presbyterians or other churches rather than remain Baptist.

There is no record that any members of the church questioned the need for a church building. We may assume that those early members quite naturally accepted the "fact" that any church needed to have a building in order to be a "proper" church. Another theme that we will find consistently in the life of the church is considerable concern for building, property, and finances. As Bollen suggested, the Wangaratta Baptist church from its birth has been very concerned with "denominational prosperity".

The acquisition of a good site, the accumulation of funds and loans, and the actual building of the church building absorbed nearly all of the energies of the young congregation for some two or more years. Although the congregation acquired a large piece of property where the bowling club on Docker Street is now located, the Home Mission Society felt that that piece of property was not suitable for the type of building the church wanted to build. So, that property had to be sold and the present location on the corner of Docker and Baker Streets was purchased. The congregation wanted to build a two-storey brick structure, but that proved to be too expensive. Minutes of the Home Mission Society show that the Society and the congregation gave very considerable amounts of time just to the matter of buying property.

Even more energy and controversy went into the actual building of the church building. By October 1904, the congregation was ready to let bids for construction, and a Mr. J. Earwaker won the bid with Mr. G. Adams, the architect, supervising construction. By this time, Mr. Watson had been forced to resign as pastor because he was suffering from typhoid, and Mr. Horsfall, a student, was appointed as supply. There were problems almost from the outset. First of all, the congregation invited several men to lay the cornerstone, but none of them could come, so that Mr. Chalmers of the church had to do it himself. More seriously, there arose a dispute between Mr. Earwaker and Mr. Adams. Adams claimed that Earwaker had not met the specifications set out for the building. Earwaker then stopped all work. This was in early 1905. Earwaker submitted a claim against the Home Mission Society because Adams had refused payment for work done, and it was not until May that the dispute was settled. Mr. A. Parker then took up the unfinished work, and the church building was occupied and opened in July 1905. The total cost of the building to the Home Mission was £816. The cost of the property had been £165.

The church's problems did not end with the building of the church building. In March 1905 Mr. W. J. Coulson became pastor of the church. E.L. Watson had remained in the community, and he and Coulson now became embroiled in a controversy (the details of which are very obscure) that seems to have split the church and certainly caused great unrest in it. The controversy had to do with financial matters. It came to the point that the congregation could not decide even who was to preach the opening service in the new building. One faction opposed Watson and another opposed Coulson.

Over the next months the tension deepened, and much correspondence reached the Home Mission Society over the matter. By January 1906 a petition had been sent to the society demanding the resignation of Coulson. At the same time, Coulson did resign. An investigation was conducted by the Home Mission Society, and Coulson was urged to withdraw his resignation. At the same time a faction in the church was told to drop their opposition to Coulson and stop focusing on petty matters and differences. Both sides were urged to work harmoniously. The church and Coulson accepted the recommendations of the society, but it is doubtful if the tension fully disappeared, and in December 1906 Coulson was transferred to Shepparton and the Rev. Frank Harris was transferred from Shepparton to Wangaratta.

5 THE HARRIS - BROOKS ERA 1907 - 1929

An examination of church membership statistics shows a striking correlation between the coming and going of pastors and the rise and fall of membership. In the entire history of the congregation since 1902, four pastors may be marked as being those who actually built the church, taking the congregation in each case to a new height in membership and in the general strength of the church. The first of

THE HARRIS - BROOKS ERA 1907 - 1929

these four men was the Rev. Frank Harris. The congregation had only 20 members when he came in 1907, reached a peak of 42 members, and had 36 members when he left the church in 1912. Another one of the themes and patterns that we see throughout the history of the Wangaratta Baptist Church is its heavy reliance on pastoral leadership for growth and directions.

Although Harris himself was only in Wangaratta until 1912, his ministry carried the church through the following fourteen years, a period of numerous pastors and little development.

Harris was deeply concerned about congregational life and sought to bring about a healing of previous hurts and a deeper sense of trust within the membership. It is clear, however, that organizational and property concerns as well as finances remained uppermost among the problems the church had to deal with. In this period, the congregation grew not only in numbers but also in financial giving so that in 1909 the church was able to send £2 more than required for its allotment for the Home Missions Society. There was real optimism in Harris' day, and the church began to look forward to the time when it could cut loose from the Home Mission Society and go its own way. In the bright days of 1909 it looked as though that time was not far off.

It was at this time that the East Wangaratta chapel came to an end. It was already being used by the Methodists, but when the Baptist Home Mission Society offered to sell it to the Methodists that offer was turned down. The Home Mission then decided to turn the property and the building over to the Wangaratta church. This was in 1910, but it took nearly two years before the church was able to move the East Wangaratta building, also known as the "Dove" School, into Wangaratta to be used as a Sunday School building. The first steps towards moving it were taken in January 1912.

Unfortunately, by this time the Home Mission Society had transferred Harris to Colac. In February 1912, the Rev. A. A. Medley was appointed to Wangaratta. It appears that he and the church did not get along too well together. The state of the church deteriorated and became a concern for the Home Mission society. In February 1915, Medley was transferred out of Wangaratta. Throughout his short ministry, Medley had been particularly concerned with the low level of church giving and had advocated various methods for raising the giving. It is worth noting that it was during this period that one of the Miss Diffeys (there were three in those days) served as acting church secretary (from February 1912 to January 1913).

Medley's successor was the Rev. H.G. Dwyer. He lasted in Wangaratta only from June 1915 until March 1917. Because of his "irregular" relationship with one of the women in the choir, Dwyer caused a scandal within the church which came to a head in March 1917 and resulted in his resignation from both the church and the Home Mission Society. The Rev. H. H. Childs followed Dwyer and lasted even a shorter time: May 1917 until October 1918. He is remembered as a fellow who never did get along very well, and he too resigned from both the Home Mission and the church.

The Home Mission Society now moved to try to solve some of its

problems regarding lack of competent home missionaries by trying to convince the Wangaratta and Oxley churches that they should work together. At this time the Oxley pastor, Nichols, was a competent man, and the society wanted to move him into Wangaratta and assign an assistant under him for Oxley. The Oxley church refused to go along with this proposition, and the society was stuck without anyone for Wangaratta. The Rev. H. S. Bunn, a popular young man, filled in for three months, but it was not until July 1919 that the Rev. Samuel Harrison accepted the Wangaratta pulpit.

The years from 1912 until 1919 were seven very hard years for the Wangaratta Baptist Church. The church had suffered through three pastors none of whom were well suited to the role of pastor. The church was very dependent upon its pastor and hesitated to undertake any major activity without pastoral leadership. At the same time, the lay leadership of the congregation seemed to be in a constant state of flux as office holders in positions like church secretary and church treasurer were constantly changing.

The pastoral leadership situation changed for the better in the latter part of 1919 when Harrison became pastor. Harrison was a man who took charge and did not hesitate to take actions he felt needed to be taken without waiting for formal permission. Just as was the case with Harris, he was also a man concerned with the spiritual life of the congregation. The Wangaratta Baptist Church minutes for 30 December 1919 are worth quoting: "The meeting was addressed by the pastor who was thankful that so much had been done in the last 6 months but he felt sure more could be done if we only sought a deep spiritual life which would bring in its train a helpful quietness of life, unity of purpose and loyalty to each other." Several members voiced their appreciation for his efforts.

Throughout this period and for many years afterwards, Mr. Percy Dodsworth loomed large as the most important lay leader of the congregation. It was his voice that was heard at key moments, and he was often the one to take on important tasks and to represent the church in meetings. Just as Mr. Chalmers had been the key lay leader in the early years of the church so Mr. Dodsworth would be in these years. Another interesting pattern of congregational life in the Wangaratta church that distinguished it from other Baptist churches in Victoria was that for the most part the strongest lay voice in the church was not the church secretary. Although it is difficult to tell from the written record, it is reasonable to assume that in the difficult years between Harris and Harrison it was the lay leadership that held the congregation together and gave it some sense of continuity.

Pastoral housing was a major concern during the time of the next pastor, the Rev. W. P. Cairns. Cairns was able to convince the church and the Home Mission Society to purchase two houses near the church and build one good house out of the two. By early August 1922, the work and renovation had been completed (with the assistance of a £850 loan from the Victorian Baptist Fund). The church had its first manse.

Just as in the case of the building of the church building so in the case of the manse there were problems, this time with the Home Mission Society. There was a misunderstanding over whether the pastor

THE HARRIS - BROOKS ERA 1907 - 1929

of the church would have to pay rent on the manse to the society. There were also problems related to whether the church would have to pay interest in its loans for the manse. There was confusion and resentment in these matters on the part of the church, and it took some time before they were cleared up - generally to the satisfaction of the congregation.

One other physical improvement that was made at this time was the installation of electric lights in the church and the manse in 1924. It is amusing to note that not long after the installation of electricity the congregation began to have trouble paying its electric light bills!

A change in the life of the church, one that became a central activity of the church for years to come, was the first Flower Show in 1923. Mr. A. Garth, elected Church Secretary in 1918, was generally a quiet man who did not seek to be a predominate voice in the church. However, the Flower Show was "his baby". He organized the first one, and it was a great success (netting £44-7-10). In a manner typical of him, Garth disclaimed any special credit and said that this success was possible only because of the great support he had received from the membership. The church elected Garth secretary of the Flower Show every year after that and kept the show very much "in the family", appointing his daughter, Lottie, treasurer each year.

The picture we have of the church in those years before the Great Depression is of a small congregation that paid little attention to and knew relatively little about the outside world. Many Baptists led strict lives that included a heavy dose of church activities. This was particularly true for the leading families in the church. The church provided their social life and their entertainment. We might suppose that it was also something of a political organization and helped meet the need of its members to be involved in such a body. There was a heavy emphasis on behaving properly. There were many good times in the life of the church: church socials and picnics. The church cooperated with the Methodists and Church of Christ in Christian Endeavour. Some older members now still remember "Nana" (Grandma) Hedges with fondness, a person who had a good influence on their lives when they were children. Thus, the Baptist life of those days was a mixture of adherence to certain standards that could be very hard on the children but which also included many good times.

One final change in Cairns' time that did not last was the changing of the name of the church to "St. Andrews Baptist Church". No official action appears in the minutes of the church, and it is likely that Cairns took it upon himself to change the name of the church, but the change was neither popular nor permanent. Cairns left the church in July 1925, and he was succeeded by Rev. F. Townend who did not last very long, coming in December 1925 and leaving about one year later. A notable achievement in his short stay was that for the first time the church was able to send in its full assessment to the Home Mission Committee for a quarter.

This era in the history of the church came to an end with the ministry of one of the truly outstanding pastors in the history of the church. The influence of his ministry is all the more remarkable

for its brevity. The Rev. A. H. Brooks, appointed to Wangaratta in November 1926, took up his work early in 1927, and left three years later. He came to Wangaratta as a young man, and quickly became greatly admired by the people. He came to a church that had had seven pastors in fourteen years and that had actually dropped in membership from the period of Harris. In 1926 the church had just 30 members. When Brooks left in 1929, the church had 58 members, a church growth record that nearly equalled that of the period of Frank Harris' ministry. One high point for the church during Brooks' ministry was a mission held in late 1928 that resulted in a number of applications for baptism as well as greater youth attendance at worship.

During the ministry of Brooks, the church liquidated its entire indebtedness, one that had been quite heavy before his coming, and more than met its Home Mission assessments. This achievement so impressed the Home Mission Society that it recorded a "Minute of Appreciation" for the fine work of Brooks and the Wangaratta church. The culmination of Brooks' efforts at Wangaratta came on 16 November 1929 when the church dedicated its new brick and wooden fence. It is remarkable how closely the church linked its own self-esteem and sense of worth to additions, even minor ones, to the church plant. From its foundation, the church sought to achieve its spiritual aims partly through the accumulation and material improvement of buildings and property.

Brooks was a man of ambition and drive. He showed his concern for his congregation in many ways, and he would always pay a visit to any members who had not been in church the previous Sunday. One measure of his drive and fire was his deep involvement in the founding of a Baptist cause at Albury. From the beginning of his ministry Brooks was fired with a zeal to expand the Baptist presence in North East Victoria, and he felt it a shame that no new work had even been attempted since Wangaratta was started in 1902. In 1928 he became interested in Albury and soon had the Baptist Home Mission society involved as well. He began services in Albury in February 1929 and continued them until the Home Mission Society could find someone to appoint permanently to Albury. Brooks had a particular appeal to the young people of the church, and it was during his years that the Tennis Club was founded after a Mr. Chambers, who had two daughters among the youth of the church, offered the church use of some land he owned for a tennis court.

On the whole Brooks brought the congregation to the verge of economic self-sufficiency. In the 1929-30 estimates of the Home Mission Society, the Wangaratta church was transferred from the category of a "subsidized cause" to that of a "self-supporting cause". Evidently the Home Mission Society felt that the congregation had achieved a certain measure of maturity under Brooks since it for the first time (recorded) involved the congregation in the decision as to who to call for its next pastor. When Brooks left in December 1929, the Rev. H. R. Stewart, who was living in retirement in Wangaratta (the man who had initiated the Baptist cause in Wangaratta 27 years earlier), spoke on behalf of the whole congregation to express their appreciation for his ministry.

The situation of the congregation as of 1 January 1930 was better than it had ever been except possibly at the end of Harris'

ministry. The church had grown in size. It was debt free. It had a strong leader in its treasurer, Dodsworth, and a widely respected leader in its secretary, Garth.

Even though the church had attained a pinnacle in the years of A.H. Brooks, we must note that in actual fact very little had changed in the life of the congregation since the days of Watson and Coulson. One cannot help but be deeply impressed with the fact that nearly all of the activities the church was engaged in were activities directed inwards towards the lives of the members and the needs of the organization. The church remained very much a "turn-of-the-century" church born in the era of church expansion and building. Its major activities centred on building and property, on fund raising, on church social and organizational activities. It spent a great amount of energy ordering its own life in the electing of many church officers to innumerable offices. Even its premier pastors, Harris and Brooks, focused almost entirely upon building up the internal life of the church.

Spiritual matters were not ignored, but these spiritual matters seem to have been viewed by the membership as largely a matter of behaving in correct/moral ways and being active in the internal activities of the church. Besides occasional "missions" (evangelistic services) that seldom resulted in very many conversions, there was almost no outreach into the community. The amounts of money given to causes outside of the church itself were very small compared to the amounts being paid out to maintain the church plant and the pastor.

Thus, the picture we have is of a small church somewhat distant from and, perhaps, alienated from the life of its community. It was a church with quite solid walls, and those who lived within the walls very much took being Baptist as a key part of their identity.

6 DEPRESSION AND WAR: Hard Times (1930-1947)

Following Brooks would have been difficult for almost anyone because of the fine record Brooks had at Wangaratta. It must have been especially difficult for the man who actually did follow him, the Rev. E. T. Laxton, another "exit student" from theological college. Laxton arrived in February 1930 when the future of the church was still bright. It was at this time that the church began to make serious plans for building a Sunday School hall, and the profits from the Flower Show were now assigned to the building fund.

The future, however, could not be sustained. The Great Depression sweeping the world soon made its force felt on Wangaratta and on the church as well. It was not a time for vision but for tightening the belt and holding on to what had already been achieved. From 1930 onward for well over a decade finding enough money just to keep things going became the central concern of the congregation. In 1932, Laxton agreed to take a cut in his stipend,

and there was at least one month during these years when he had to forgo his stipend entirely. There came a day in June 1932 when Laxton had to sit in the church vestry from 7.00 pm to 8.30 pm of a Saturday evening to receive a "free-will offering" which was obviously intended to make up for the church's inability to pay his salary.

Money was short everywhere. The Home Mission Society had its own problems finding funds, thus one of the usual sources of help for the local Baptist churches in Victoria became less reliable. Money was not the only problem, however. Laxton, himself, was a man with whom people did not feel very comfortable. He did not mix well, and some remember him as being better suited for a city church. Attendance at worship and other church activities was also down considerably from Brooks' time.

One of the most important organizations involved in community outreach in these years was the Christian Endeavour Society. The C.E. visited the hospital and took up special offerings as well as holding a variety of social and sporting events. There was also a definite ecumenical flavour to the C.E. as the Methodist and Church of Christ congregations co-operated with the Baptist church in C.E. activities. It should be noted that the pastors usually served as president of the C.E., once again emphasizing the importance of the pastor as the key leader of the church.

Laxton resigned from the church in November 1933, and the Rev. C.A. Jamieson followed him in January 1934. Until the ministry of Peter Jenkin (1972-81), Jamieson had the record for the longest ministry of any pastor of the Wangaratta Baptist Church (1934-1940). He is remembered as a very strict man, a former missionary in China. Those years were not prosperous ones for the church, and there were continual problems and tensions over finances during his period. At one time, the position of church treasurer had to be left vacant and the duties rotated among the deacons (late 1934 and early 1935). The financial situation of the church became serious enough that the church had to assign part and then all of the proceeds from the Flower Show to the general fund of the church. The dream of a Sunday School Hall had to be postponed.

During these years, as the influence of some of the older members began to wane, the name of Mr. E. ("Ted") Gowling begins to appear more and more frequently in the records of the church. The minutes for the congregational meeting of 28 March 1936 record that, "Mr. Garth moved that Mr. E. Gowling be elected a deacon Miss L. Westneat sec. The motion was carried with applause." Gowling became treasurer that same year, and as the years passed his voice increasingly became the strongest in the life of the congregation. He continued the tradition of Mr. Dodsworth: the most influential member of the church did not hold the position of church secretary. One of Gowling's deepest concerns was for the young people of the church. In this same year, 1936, he first took a small group of Sunday School boys, ages 13-14, on a camping outing to Henley's Gap on the snow road to Myrtleford. The following year a second camp included about twenty young people as well as the pastor and Mrs. Jamieson. The camp was held in King Valley. In the years after 1937, the Easter camp grew and included guests from other churches as well. It soon became another of the high points in the church year.

DEPRESSION AND WAR: Hard Times (1930-1947)

The constant concern of the church during these years was money. The church formed committees to deal with the problem. It made numerous appeals to the congregation to increase giving. The church sent letters to the Home Mission Committee asking for assistance. Nearly all outside appeals to the church for mission or other giving were passed over. Jamieson also had to go at times without his stipend.

With strong pastoral leadership, the church might have come out of the Depression years in better condition, but Mr. Jamieson seemed to have little rapport with his congregation. They did not feel close to him, and between this fact and the hard times of the Depression the church drifted along.

Church membership is an almost infallible guide to the relationship between pastor and church and a generally reliable measure of the organizational condition of the church. The membership of the Wangaratta Baptist church had begun to drop in Laxton's era and, after a brief upswing, continued to drop in the Jamieson era until membership in 1939 was almost as low as it had been in 1926 when Brooks first arrived.

Under the leadership of the Rev. M. A. Thompson, (1940-43), the church began to recover somewhat. Thompson came to the church as a young man, and he seems to have worked particularly well with the youth of the church. He did not have a very strong pastoral ministry, however, and people do not remember him as a man of sympathy. Thompson served during the war years, and there were very few young men in the church. One important change during Thompson's time was the retirement of Mr. A. Garth as church secretary. In February 1942, Mr. Hardcastle was elected to take the place of the man who had served in that position for 24 years (1918-42) faithfully, quietly, and to the good of the church. However, the fundamental problem of church finances continued to be a serious limitation on the life and work of the church. In 1942, the church refused a loan for manse renovation proposed by the Home Mission Committee because the church felt that it could not take on any more financial burdens.

By 1943 the financial situation of the church was improving to the extent that the church voted to send a "gift" of £10 to Mr. Jamieson "for services rendered to the church during a difficult financial period". (Church Minutes, 2 February 1943). It was at about this same time that another important and very fundamental change in the organization of the church began to take place: the Diaconate, as an organized body with its own meetings, began to have more influence in the running of the church. It began to make recommendations to the church meetings and to have items of business referred to it for its own action by the church meeting. It also began nominating some officers such as church secretary and treasurer.

In late 1943, Mr. Thompson informed the congregation that he was about to be called up for active military service in the chaplaincy. The congregation voted to request that after he finished his military service that the Home Mission Society reassign him to Wangaratta. This action suggests that even though there were problems with his

ministry that on the whole the church appreciated his work. Certainly, he initiated a period of growth and of financial restoration. Mr. Thompson thanked the congregation and said that he would consider their offer to have him return.

As it turned out, the Home Mission Committee did not agree to the request from Wangaratta that Thompson be allowed to return to the church after the War. The society felt that it would not be wise for Wangaratta to be supplied by "single men" in the interim, and nominated the Rev. Mackwood Tudball Smith to the pulpit. The congregation reluctantly gave in to the society, and Tudball Smith began his ministry in Wangaratta as of 16 December 1943. They need not have been reluctant because Tudball Smith turned out to be a very good young pastor, the best since Brooks. He was a hard working young man and generally well liked. During his ministry the Oxley Baptist Church came under his care although it was not "yoked" to Wangaratta. Thus, Tudball Smith had to make many calls out in the country side and to hold services at various points in the King River Valley such as at Bobinawarra, Whitfield, and Meadow Creek.

It was only during the ministry of Tudball Smith (1943-46) that this situation continued. The Wangaratta pastor was responsible for Oxley from about February 1944 until May 1946 when the Home Mission Society decided to "rehabilitate" Oxley. During 1945 Tudball Smith also explored the possibility of starting a new Baptist cause at Benalla, but nothing seems to have come of the matter.

Although Tudball Smith was well liked by many, there were some problems about the manse and other minor but irritating issues during his relatively short ministry. Even so, the congregation continued on its path of recovery from the Depression and the years of poor pastoral leadership. Plans to build the church hall revived and received more discussion than they had had for some time. The Flower Show made a greater profit than ever (£85.4.10 in 1946). This was in spite of the fact that Tudball Smith worked with the congregation in the latter years of the War and the early post War era when things were unsettled and many young people gone.

Partly due to the problems he had faced in Wangaratta and partly due to another call, Tudball Smith resigned from the church as of September 1946. The minutes of that meeting record that, "The secretary referred to the happy fellowship which had existed during his [Tudball Smith's] two and a half years of ministry and expressed regret that the church was losing Mr. & Mrs. Smith from the oversight of the work."

A continuing problem in the life of the church was that most of the pastors that the Home Mission Society sent out to Wangaratta were young men just out of theological college. They had limited experience. There are always difficulties in adjustment for young pastors with little background in running a church, and this meant that the pastoral leadership lacked the maturity and direction that it might otherwise have had. As one member of the church has remarked, the Wangaratta church was always preparing pastors for other churches. Capable young men such as Brooks and Tudball Smith "cut their teeth" on Wangaratta before moving on to larger and more challenging ministries. In no small measure, these young men put a lot of weight on the lay leadership for continuing the life of the

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church. That lay leadership would have been experienced in holding the church together, but there is little evidence that it had a vision of service and outreach. The lay leadership was, quite naturally, concerned with just keeping things going.

Although Tudball Smith had given the church and the Home Mission Society several months warning before he left in the latter part of 1946, there was no one immediately available to replace him. The Home Mission Society, therefore, sent a student, Mr. Shannon, to carry on the work. Finally, in January 1947, the society informed the church that the Rev. J. H. Baker, an older man who was married to one of the Diffey girls of East Wangaratta, was available. Seeing no alternative the church accepted Baker as pastor.

Meanwhile, the now small and quiet church at Oxley experienced a brief rebirth of life and enthusiasm. For a short time around New Year 1947, the Rev. A. H. Marshall conducted a mobile unit ministry in the Oxley circuit that put life back into the congregation particularly at Meadow Creek. Even 18 months later, reports from Oxley were positive and hopeful.

7 POST-WAR PASTORATES (1947-1956)

Rev. Baker began his brief ministry in Wangaratta in March 1947 and remained until May 1948 when he resigned to go to Shepparton. He was a very good preacher, but being an older man, he was conservative and did not relate very closely with the youth. He is particularly remembered for his radio ministry, taking his turn with other ministers on the daily devotional programme on 3SR. This ministry continued after he moved to Shepparton. One event worth noting in his short stay was that Hardcastle moved away and had to resign as church secretary and Mr. J. R. Patterson was elected in his place. In February 1947, Mr. Percy Dodsworth, now failing in health, was elected as a Life Deacon in recognition of his more than forty years of service to the church.

After Rev. Baker resigned, Mr. J. G. Manning, Home Mission Superintendent, visited the church and spoke "at length" with the congregation about the difficulties of securing a new pastor immediately. In the interim, the congregation had to make do with theological students as pulpit supply. Finally, the Rev. Norman Stait arrived in November 1948. Although an older man and already married, Mr. Stait, like a number of his predecessors at Wangaratta, was newly graduated from theological college. Stait was generally well liked, and the congregation immediately began to recover from a down swing during the time of Mr. Baker.

During Stait's ministry, the quiet trend toward greater organization in the church began to be clearly noticable. More and more business of the church passed through the hands of the diaconate just as more and more items were referred to it by the congregation for their decision. There were more committees than previously and

suggestions for change were being made. The deacons tended to handle more of the decisions about membership, property, and finances. The congregation's financial situation continued to be good, after a brief "dip" in Baker's time. In 1949, the church purchased the property on Baker Street where the manse now stands and turned it into a tennis court for the Tennis Club. The church also started to follow a set budgetary process with the first church budget being submitted to the congregation in February 1951. The church approved a budget of £580 that year. The next year the budget went up to £700. Previous to the purchase of more land on Baker Street, the Home Mission Committee voted to purchase two blocks of land in Wangaratta for "extension work". By November 1950, the financial situation of the church was good enough so that it again achieved self-supporting status within the framework of the Home Mission. It was also during this ministry that the Easter Camp under the guidance of Ted Gowling acquired a "permanent home" with the purchase of the Cheshunt Camp along the King River.

Stait showed himself to be something of a leader in larger circles as well serving as secretary for both the Ministers' Fraternal in Wangaratta and the North East District Baptist Association. Thus, even though Stait is remembered as a man with a quite refined sense of what was "proper", both he and his wife fitted in fairly well and worked well for the church. Thus, Stait performed the role in relationship to Tudball Smith that Reeves would later play for Griffiths: he consolidated and maintained the gains made in an earlier ministry.

When one reviews the ministries of the four men who followed the poor years of the 1930s, one must conclude that by-and-large the Wangaratta Baptist Church had reasonably good pastoral leadership that brought the church back to and held it near the level of the exciting Brooks years. In these years the budget grew and the general financial situation improved enormously. Church membership revived, and the organizational structure of the church became more complex and well-ordered. We should also note, however, that even though the structure of the church became more complex, the things the church did still did not change appreciably. In fact, if anything, the church seemed to be more money-oriented and money-conscious than in previous years. There was an increase in the number of different funds with nearly all of them having to do with property - funds such as the Renovation Fund, the Sunday School Hall Fund, and the Land Fund. This emphasis on money in the church reflected the general social situation of post-war Australia in which the economy was booming and everyone seemed to be more interested in having more and spending more (see Conway, Land of the Long Weekend, Melbourne, 1978).

Stait left the Wangaratta Baptist Church at mid-year 1952, and the Rev. Ian ("Duff") Forbes came as his replacement very shortly thereafter, by August. Forbes is not remembered unkindly, but there is widespread agreement among those who knew him that he was not really fitted to the role of a country church pastor. He was an Intellectual with a capital "I" who could and did make people feel inferior. The church did not prosper under his guidance particularly because there was an underlying tension between Forbes and some of the lay leadership. Unlike some previous pastors, Forbes "had a mind of his own" that caused this tension.

POST-WAR PASTORATES (1947-1956)

Something of a landmark was reached in March 1953 when a special meeting of the congregation decided that for "this year" there would be no Flower Show. There was never to be another one again. This signified an end of an era, one that was born well before the Depression. At the same time, the congregation continued to discuss plans for a Sunday School hall, the long held dream to which most of the proceeds of the Flower Show had gone over the years.

1953 was a difficult year for Forbes. It all came to a head at the end of the year when the church secretary, Mr. Patterson, resigned all of his positions in the church including that of member. Patterson had gained for himself a poor reputation as church secretary. He had trouble compromising and made life difficult for many. The Home Mission Superintendent had to come up to Wangaratta to chair the meeting at which his resignation was acted on, so disturbed over the tension between Patterson and others including Forbes was the church. Mr. A. Raison was elected to fill the office of church secretary, thus returning to the tradition of the church that the strongest voice(s) in the congregation did not occupy the position of church secretary.

During the eventful year of 1953, relations with the Oxley church again became an issue. In September, the Oxley church voted to approach the Wangaratta church about the possibility of uniting the two congregations into one circuit sharing a common pastor. After negotiations between the two churches about financial arrangements and how much time the pastor would spend at each church, the two churches agreed to a circuit relationship which began in December 1953.

Forbes left the Wangaratta church in July 1956. The congregation again faced the problem of finding a new pastor. It was fortunate in finding a very capable interim pastor in Mr. Alex Oliver. He and May Oliver formed something of a team ministry in Wangaratta with May occasionally taking a morning service including the sermon. They worked for the Evangelisation Society of Australia, and they were very helpful in beginning to heal some of the underlying hurt that had resulted from Forbes' ministry in Wangaratta. During the Olivers' brief time with Wangaratta as pastor, the church began to formulate its plans for building both a new manse and a Sunday School hall.

The congregation still faced the problem of finding a new pastor, and at the suggestion of Manning, the Home Mission Superintendent, the church gave serious consideration to calling Tudball Smith, then working as a businessman in Bendigo, out of "retirement" and back into the ministry. Nothing came of this, and the church finally after some months of hesitation agreed to accept the Home Mission Society's nominee, ex student David Griffiths, into the pastorate. Griffiths took up his work in Wangaratta early in 1957.

8 THE ROLLER COASTER YEARS (1957-1972)

The church that David Griffiths found on his arrival in early 1957 was small and dispirited with a low self-image and little sense of purpose or future. There were a number of minor complaints and just general unhappiness in the congregation. In fact, the Wangaratta church was very much different from the larger community. While it had drifted along with a membership that was lower than the hey-day of A.H. Brooks thirty years previously, the community of Wangaratta had gone into a boom time and was just about to become a city (1959). There was growth and optimism in the community, but the Baptist church did not share in that at all.

The question facing young Griffiths when he arrived in Wangaratta was a simple one: what to do? The church was dispirited and the physical plant was in poor shape. It was a church just maintaining itself. Griffiths took his initial direction from the still lingering dream of the people themselves for a Sunday School hall. Plans for a new manse were well under way when Griffiths arrived, and the old manse was soon sold to Mr. McQuade for removal for £500. Griffiths saw renovation of the old plant and the achievement of the old dream as a solution to the question of what to do.

Thus, the central themes of the "Griffiths Years" were building and finance. Even as plans for the manse and for the church hall proceeded during 1957, Griffiths and the diaconate planned for a massive, comprehensive stewardship campaign to fund the building and renovation programme. This stewardship campaign presented the church with a challenge to build for the future and to find new life through greater giving to the church. Members were encouraged to tithe and to build upon the past accomplishments of the congregation. "Griffo", as many in the church affectionately called him, signed his message in the stewardship brochure "Your Friend and Pastor". Youth, drive, optimism: these were the marks of the new young pastor communicated to the congregation.

The results were spectacular. In the six month period ending in January 1957, the church gave £1688 to the work of the church as compared with a mere £400 in the previous six months. In May 1958, church giving was averaging £78.8.0 per week considerably above the original target set by the stewardship campaign of £60 per week. This pace of giving could not be maintained, and it was not intended that it be maintained, but even in later years church giving was high.

1958 was a big year for the church. By February the manse was nearing completion, and just three months later the new Sunday School hall was dedicated. In the building of both of these buildings, Mr. Frank Garth played a very important role giving of himself in many ways to see that the manse and the hall were well built at a minimum cost to the church. Much of the work was done by working bees and a great sense of fellowship was built as the men worked together.

Property and building matters dominated in that period, and as the church plant grew so grew the complexity of the church's business life. In the years since 1940, the diaconate had become more and more an important voice in the life of the church. With the growth in church property and business, the church's organization became

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more complex and the diaconate became a predominant voice. It handled much more business than previously and made more decisions on the basis of its own authority. Griffiths was an active, restless, creative pastor, and this meant that there was even more business for the diaconate to consider. The shift in the focus of authority from the pastor and congregation to the pastor and diaconate matured in the Griffiths era.

The emphasis was on "new". New groups were started up including a bowls club, a documentary film club, and a new youth club. There were many new members as well, some of whom were to be important leaders in the church for decades to come. However, everything was not sweetness and light during those years. There was a strong undercurrent of tension between some of the newcomers and the "old-timers" that at times caused fall-outs. The long-time members of the church worried that the newcomers would commit the church to all sorts of changes without staying around to follow them through. The newer members felt sometimes as though they had not been welcomed into the life of the church and that the "old-timers" resented them and would not give them their rightful say in running the church. There were pains of growth.

There were limits to change as well. For example, in February 1957 the suggestion had been put forward that one of the women of the church be elected to the diaconate. After a long debate, the deacons concluded that "... the time wasn't opportune for a woman on the deacones (sic)." (see Deacons' Minutes for 15 February 1957). And many things of the past continued on including what is remembered as one of the high points of the church's life, the Easter Camps.

Griffiths was extremely popular both inside and outside of the congregation. He had numerous speaking engagements and was well known and respected in the community. All of this helped the church improve its own self-image. After the hall was completed, it was used by outside groups, and this too made the Baptist church more a part of the community and more appreciated by the community than at any time for many years past. Wangaratta Baptist Church was finally beginning to catch up with boom times of Wangaratta.

There is some indication that Griffiths understood one of the truly fundamental problems facing the church more than most of his predecessors: the problem of pastoral-dependence. The church's heavy reliance on its pastors for leadership has historically been one of the most important characteristics and problems of the church. Griffiths saw something of this problem as well and sought to do something about it by instituting a committee system that would give the church greater stability. In 1959, Mr. Garth Hodge, chairman of the "Committee System Sub Committee", presented a report on the possible use of a system of organized committees for the congregation. There does not seem to have been great results.

Otherwise, it is clear that Griffiths was a man with a lot of ideas. He was also a person who sought to involve the congregation in his ideas - to share them and get others interested in them. At various times, he involved the diaconate in discussions on the life and ministry of the church, the best ways to use its new plant, and new styles of Christian education.

One of the most important changes during Griffiths' ministry, however, was initiated by the Home Mission Committee and not Griffiths himself. In 1958, the Home Mission Committee began to initiate a new policy whereby the stronger of those churches under its care would be freed from it. (See J.G. Manning, Builders for God, Melbourne, 1971). In May 1959, the diaconate began discussing a letter received from Manning, the Home Mission Superintendent, regarding independence for Wangaratta. In August, Manning visited the church and discussed the steps to be taken towards independence. Although it took some time to complete the full process, by 1961 the Wangaratta Baptist Church ceased to be a Home Mission church.

The Griffiths years were exciting ones and left the church much stronger organizationally than it had been for many, many years. The roller coaster hit its peak. But the church could not expect to keep such a capable pastor, one who could "really get next to people", and in 1962, Griffiths resigned to accept a call in Melbourne.

The Rev. B. R. Reeves was inducted as the next pastor of the Wangaratta church in July 1962. The church deliberately sought an older and more mature man as the first pastor ever called by the church itself. It was almost as if by choosing the older Mr. Reeves the church was rejecting one of the themes of its past in which it had been made a Home Mission training ground. Reeves' ministry was a quiet one marked primarily by conserving the gains made during the exciting days of Griffiths. Some older members of the church have remarked of him that "he was the perfect man to follow David" and that "he was never a man for changing things". During his years, the Tennis Club opened a new court in West Wangaratta, and an old school at King Valley was purchased and re-erected at the Cheshunt camp in 1963. Youth work was maintained at an active level. The Particular Baptist Trust gave a gift of £350 to the church for putting on a new roof, which was done by March 1965. There seems to have been more than the usual amount of cooperation with St. Paul's Presbyterian church including some shared services. The congregation also purchased a new electronic organ in 1966.

One milestone was reached when the church honoured Ted Gowling for thirty years service as treasurer of the church in 1966.

Not only were the Reeves years quiet ones but also they continued the now well-established and widely honoured pattern of giving a central place of emphasis to maintaining and upgrading the physical plant of the church. The church also continued to depend upon its pastor for day-to-day leading and the establishment of goals. The Reeves period makes one more keenly aware of the fact that basic patterns of church behaviour had become "traditional" and that the church actually depended upon its pastor for maintaining a strong church life within those traditions. Thus, Griffiths found that it was easier to "move" the church by fulfilling the expectations and desires created by those traditions (such as a church hall) than to challenge them. While I have argued that the Wangaratta Baptist Church is very strongly pastor-oriented, I would also acknowledge that there are very definite limits to what a pastor can accomplish. Those limits have been set by the continuing traditions and expectations of its members, and these have been an important part of the church since its foundation in 1902-03.

THE ROLLER COASTER YEARS (1957-1972)

Mr. Reeves left the Wangaratta church in March 1967, and at that time, "He referred to the many happy hours of fellowship spent in the Wangaratta church". It must have seemed to the members that the church had entered a new era of stability, and it looked forward to the ministry of its next pastor, the Rev. E. Hosie, who was inducted on 16 April 1967.

The first order of business in the first year of the ministry of Hosie was the dissolution of the Oxley Baptist church. For some years now, it had been obvious that Oxley could not sustain an independent life especially with the advent of the automobile which made a drive into Wangaratta just a matter of a few minutes. The relationship between Oxley and Wangaratta had grown closer over the last few years because they shared a pastor and the expenses of maintaining a pastor and a vehicle for him. Discussions about the transfer of the Oxley membership to Wangaratta continued throughout the year, and in December J. G. Manning of the Church Extension Department of the Baptist Union visited both churches to assist in final arrangements, particularly financial arrangements, towards the merger of Oxley into Wangaratta. Finally, on 9 June 1968 all but one of the members of the Oxley church were officially received into the fellowship of the Wangaratta church. Oxley became an outstation of Wangaratta, and certain financial arrangements were made to insure the upkeep of the Oxley property and to be ready in case the Oxley church could be re-established. Thus, the mother church of Baptist churches in North East Victoria came to an official end. Within another 18 months, the average attendance at Oxley dropped to only four or five per Sunday.

Another important piece of business in the earlier years of Hosie's ministry was the Appin Street property. Although the property had been purchased years before by the Home Mission and still belonged to it, the church had been using it as the site for its tennis court. A misunderstanding with the City Council about the use of the land now arose, and the church saw an opportunity to buy the property at a very low price from the Home Mission and sell it at a profit. Although the Home Mission was quite willing, there arose further problems with the City Council about what the land could be sold as, and it took several years to negotiate the sale of the land.

Records of the church suggest that Mr. Hosie was a man who was concerned with a well-ordered church structure. A number of organizations in the church worked on constitutions or guidelines, the most important of which was the constitution of the church itself. Under Hosie a constitution was prepared which then received considerable attention both by the diaconate and at meetings of the congregation. The revised constitution was adopted in April 1970, but when the constitution was submitted to the Baptist Union it was objected to by the Union on various points.

Superficially, the life of the church carried on as it had under Griffiths and Reeves, but underneath there was a growing tension between the members and Mr. and Mrs. Hosie. One person has described him as man who preached the Gospel with strength but without love. He was seen as someone who was certain about what was right and wrong, and who zealously tried to protect the purity of the church. Deviations from the standards he expected of the church were called

out quickly. A key issue was the proper observance of the Lord's Day, and individuals and groups were confronted with violations of the sacredness of that day. At one point there was a serious misunderstanding between the pastor and the youth over a bus trip the youth took on a Sunday. Another issue that caused division was that of earning money for the church through sales rather than personal giving, and again hard feelings resulted. Mrs. Hosie found herself in serious tension with the women of the church over giving versus sales and other issues, some of which seemed very petty in retrospect.

Not all of the members felt negatively about Mr. Hosie. Some remember acts of kindness on his part that showed that he did care about the church. In other situations away from the church, such as in conducting afternoon services for a small group of Baptists in Whitfield, he was well appreciated. Most importantly, respect for the minister was a deep ideal in the Wangaratta church, and it caused serious spiritual dislocation for the members who found themselves in conflict and disagreement with the man who was supposed to be their spiritual leader. While most of the congregation felt disaffected a small group supporting Mr. Hosie gathered.

The church secretary's annual report for 1968-69 already betrayed Mr. Raison's own concern and unrest as he posed a number of questions about falling attendance and the style of worship. Amidst growing tension, Raison held on until May 1970 when he requested an immediate "leave-of-absence" from the position of church secretary and made it clear he would not seek renomination to the office. Thus, came to an end his seventeen years of service to the church in this position. The Raison family and others began leaving the congregation. Mr. Stan Goeby became acting secretary, but he also refused permanent nomination, and position finally fell to a relatively new member, Mr. Harry Wilkinson, who was elected church secretary in August 1970.

Matters moved towards resolution even before this. In July 1970, four members of the congregation addressed a letter which was considered by the deacons stating that they felt that they as members and the pastor were incompatible and urging the pastor's resignation, if possible, before the end of the year. The Baptist Union also became involved as the church membership sought to resolve the tension between itself and the pastor.

In September 1970 Hosie submitted his resignation effective 31 January 1971. In the meantime, attendance at worship and church activities had dropped. Church giving had begun to drop off. Quite a number of people left the church entirely so that membership dropped from 106 in 1968 after the Oxley people joined to 78 in 1971.

Yet, on reflection, many of those members who lived through the time of Mr. Hosie years feel differently about them now than they did in the chaos of emotions of the time. They sense that in a way that is difficult to define the hand of God was at work moving the church in a new direction. Mr. Hosie represented one flank in the Baptist tradition: a very firm emphasis on what Christians should believe and how they should act. In fact, he represented one aspect of the heritage of the Wangaratta Baptist Church itself, that heritage that demanded that Baptists take Sunday very seriously centred around church activities, that they refrain from all manner of "sinful"

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actions, and that they must "believe certain things" in order to be "good" Baptists. During the time of Mr. Hosie, many of the people in the church came to feel that when this side of Baptist tradition was taken to its extreme it could be both hurtful and deadening. Some members, who now look back across the time of Mr. Hosie to earlier times, see that even as Hosie typified that aspect of Baptist traditions, so they themselves and some of their brothers and sisters in the church had expressed similar attitudes.

It has been important to dwell on the events of the Hosie period, because they mark the beginning of a transformation in the spiritual life of the church. The congregation was convinced of the inadequacy of a legalistic preaching of the Word. While Mr. Hosie was forceful and dogmatically correct, many felt that something of Christ had been lost. Now the church began the search for its spiritual life, and it could not be the same as before. The dogmatic, uncompromising side of its Baptist heritage had been given a major jolt, and now another aspect of the Baptist heritage which emphasized a more positive piety, a more loving community relationship had a chance to emerge. The tension of this period also led to a new experience of the meaningfulness of prayer. One member has commented that at this time the church learnt that when one prayed God worked. The origin of the cell group movement in Wangaratta might be said to date from this time. One small lay-led prayer group continued for many years.

At the strong recommendation of the Baptist Union, the Rev. Arthur Ritchie was called to the pastorate of the Wangaratta Baptist Church, and he was inducted on 2 May 1971. Invariably, older members remember him fondly as "the perfect man" to follow the hard times of the previous ministry. He did what needed to be done: he injected love into its life. The Ritchies were particularly concerned with family life and tried to emphasize family participation in church activities including Sunday School and worship. During his brief stay, he also tried to emphasize fellowship and to arrange events, such as Easter evening service at Cheshunt in 1972, that would give the church a chance to rebuild its fellowship.

Arthur Ritchie began the difficult work of putting the church back together again. One significant event during his short stay was that the church agreed to take over the full responsibility for Cheshunt, making it a church camp. In August, Mr. J. R. ("Rex") Moon was elected to fill the position of church secretary which had been vacated by Wilkinson as a consequence of the deep tension he experienced in the hard period. Moon was the fourth person to hold the position in little over a year. One indication of the success of Ritchie's work with the church was that church giving increased significantly from just \$100/week when he arrived to over \$140/week when he left. One member of the congregation still sees the call and the ministry of Arthur Ritchie as being one of the most significant spiritual moments in the life of the Wangaratta Baptist Church.

Unfortunately, the influence of earlier years still lingered in the church, and the Ritchies experienced tensions and some inter-personal problems that were of a piece with former years. Thus, the Ritchies felt that it was best not to stay very long in Wangaratta, and on 24 September 1972 the Ritchies were farewelled as Mr. Ritchie accepted a position in social work at Maryborough. Another member of the church concluded that they had stayed just

about the right length of time and that had they stayed for a longer period the church might have drifted back into its old patterns and not learned the spiritual lessons it had to learn from its hard years.

When the Rev. Peter Jenkin was inducted on 19 November 1972 as pastor of the Wangaratta Church, he found a church that had few children or young people in it, a church that had lost most of its best leadership except for a few of the "real loyalists", and a church that was still very desperate for fellowship. The goal and the mark of Jenkin's early years was healing.

9 RENEWAL (1973-1981)

It was slow going at first for Jenkin, and his situation was made all the more difficult when he broke his leg at the Easter Camp in April 1973. People needed to be cared for, and the Jenkin family set about trying to be a model and an example for the church in helping them to care for each other. Jenkin emphasized calling. The family welcomed church members into their home. And things did begin to improve. Church giving rose immediately. The drop in membership was reversed with a modest gain for the first time since 1968. An attempt was made to improve the attendance at worship out in Oxley, and a canvas of the Oxley area in February resulted in a modest increase in attendance there. An addition to the manse, a study, was completed. The reports in the annual report for the year ending 1973 showed modest but not discouraging results.

The healing process continued during 1974. In late February, the Institute for Church Renewal conducted a lay witness mission in the church. Also in the early part of 1974 small groups were formed and met in the homes of the congregation to follow a plan entitled "Christ for Others" instituted by the President of Baptist Union at that time, Rev. J.D. Williams. The bonds of mutual trust and sharing continued to be mended and strengthened. Throughout this period there was a continuing emphasis on giving better care for the physical plant. Another way in which the church grew was through its response to heavy flooding in the Wangaratta area in 1974 and 1975. The church gave assistance to its members who were affected by the floods as well as responding in practical and financial ways to the need of the community at large.

The congregation began to regain a sense of self-confidence as it found that with the aid of its pastor it could deal with some of its problems and make changes. One example of this renewed self-confidence was the church's ability to find means to deal with dwindling attendance at evening worship services. It was decided to include some special youth services and also to involve the "Christ for Others" groups in the evening services. By June 1975, an improvement was seen in evening service attendance.

1975 opened with Mr. Philip J. Hughes, a theological student, helping out in Wangaratta for a few weeks. This was the church's first introduction to Mr. Hughes, a man who was to become a pastor of

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the church eight years later, and the report was that he had performed quite satisfactorily. A second lay witness mission was conducted by a team from Blackburn North Baptist Church. The biggest issue of the year was an emerging concern with church business meetings. The church asked the diaconate to explore questions of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the church meetings, the relationship of worship to business in the meetings, and the general need to improve the meetings. There were no immediate results from this concern, but in the light of later events and concerns it is significant to note that even now the church was beginning to take notice of its decision-making processes.

Rex Moon resigned as church secretary in 1975, and there was a brief period during which the congregation had trouble finding a replacement. Finally, Jenkin himself had to take over the task for a few months until Mr. Vic Lowen was appointed to the position in February 1976.

1976 was the year when many things began to come together and when one could feel the church begin to really move. The healing process was well along. In 1976 membership took a jump reminiscent of the great old days of Brooks and even Harris: it went from 82 in 1975 to 95 in 1976 (16%). Concern had been expressed at the dropping attendances at Sunday School. An investigating committee was set up, and made a number of recommendations. It proposed that Christian Endeavour and Sunday School should combine to form a "Junior Church". After considerable deliberation and prayer over these matters, the church agreed to establish a "Junior Church" to meet at the same time as Sunday morning worship.

At the same time, the church moved out into a truly innovative venture by experimenting with the "cluster group" concept in which groups of families came together regularly each week for study and fellowship as a family. This was another recommendation of the investigating committee. Two groups met under the leadership of the Jenkins with between ten and fifteen families involved. It looked as though the cluster groups might become the solid core of fellowship and Christian education for the church.

With the introduction of Junior Church, the time of the worship service was changed from 11.00 a.m. to 10.30 a.m., and it was decided to have a "cup of tea" after the morning service. The programme worked well and became a permanent part of the church's life. It is also worth noting that whereas there had been very few youth in the church when Jenkin arrived in 1972 by 1976 the church had an active youth programme.

1976 was also the year that Jenkin first prepared the prayer calendar with the names of all of the member families and adherents on it. Each family was to be remembered in prayer on the appropriate days by the rest of the members of the church. A milestone was reached in September 1976 when Rex Moon was elected treasurer in place of Ted Gowling. For 40 years Gowling had exercised considerable influence in the church representing the traditions of the church and the congregation's concern for continuity.

From the beginning of 1976, the church's financial structure was re-organized. Budgets were to be prepared on an annual basis, and

the church decided that from the beginning of February 1976 it would tithe all general offerings. This tithe was generally sent to the Baptist Union for its co-operative programme. Larger commitments were made to the work of the Australian Baptist Missionary Society. This has been seen as a turning point in the church's financial health.

Thus, when the Jenkin family went on long-service leave in October 1976 they had much to be proud of and thankful for. A great deal of healing had taken place and mutual trust had been fostered. Jenkin had not simply gone back to doing things the way the former pastors had done them but had creatively sought new programmes and directions that would strengthen the spiritual life of the congregation. The church was much more inclusive in wrestling with problems, and Jenkin certainly did not fear trying to expose and solve the problems the church was facing. Much had been achieved in four years.

While Jenkin was on long-service leave, Rev. Clive Smith ministered in the church. During his short ministry, he made a significant contribution to the life of the church, particularly through his visiting.

However, the minutes of the Deacons' meeting on 10 February 1977 show that Jenkin was not willing to sit on his accomplishments nor be satisfied with the condition of the church. Upon his return, he brought to the diaconate a typewritten report that included seven suggestions for improving the fellowship of the church. Some of these suggestions were fairly simple ones, such as purchasing name tags, but others suggested more long range thinking and planning. He again raised the issue of church meetings and what they ought to discuss. During his presentation, he first mentioned the possibility of having an American team visit the church in 1978. Jenkin was a man restless with ideas and with a need to get things "right" in the life of the church.

One of the most important issues of 1977 and one that would come up again in later years was that of church meetings. In February, a sub-committee was formed by the diaconate to investigate church meetings. This sub-committee reported to the congregation in May 1977 with various recommendations which included appointing a special body to oversee the spiritual life/growth of the congregation and appointing a business administrator to handle the business of the church. These and the other suggestions made were not acted upon. In September, a survey was conducted that showed that there was uneasiness about church meetings among those (46) who responded. There was particular frustration with the meetings as being too long, too wandering, and not dealing with significant matters. Some changes in church meetings were later adopted in February 1978.

The office of church secretary again changed hands with Vic Lowen resigning in May 1977 and Mr. Stan Goebby, a man who had become very active in the church, becoming church secretary in August. A new set of cluster groups were also begun in August 1977, and although they seemed to be going well at that stage the cluster groups eventually died away. Part of the idea behind the cluster group concept was later to be "resurrected" when a number of cell groups were established for Bible study and fellowship in later years.

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The year 1978 was pivotal in that it marked the emergence of a new phase in the ministry of Wangaratta Baptist Church. Jenkin spent several weeks in Los Angeles in January and February engaged on special ministry and preaching assignments, and he returned from Los Angeles with renewed enthusiasm and many new ideas. He called on the congregation to expect miracles and gave the members meeting of 28 February 1978 quite a pep talk. From this time onward, he began to emphasize the need for the church to reach out beyond itself asking whether the church was "a holy club or a mission". This meeting in February 1978 gave evidence of a definite upturn in the level and pace of activity in the church as well. Plans for distributing large numbers of evangelistic leaflets were reported. The congregation voted to sponsor a work party of men to be sent to Papua New Guinea. The Social Service Committee was formed, thus completing the development of a strong committee system for directing church programme. And, as mentioned, some changes in the church meeting structure were adopted.

Both the diaconate and the congregation began to discuss planning and church goals, and it is clear that the church was thinking more about the outside world than it ever had before. It was just at this moment of increasing activity and search for new direction that the "Marysville Accident" occurred. On 24 March 1978 a utility carrying ten of the youth of the church who were at a youth camp accidentally overturned injuring all of the young people, some seriously, including Heather Jenkin and killing two of the young people, David Crawley and Jennifer Walker, outright. The congregation was stunned, and there was a groundswell of prayer and support for the families of all of the children, especially the Crawleys and the Walkers. Members of the church remember that time as being a special time unlike anything else in the history of the church. Fellowship deepened. Unity grew. The accident propelled the congregation further along the line of spiritual healing and growth that had begun when Arthur Ritchie came in 1971.

The youth of the church were particularly touched by the accident. They felt a deeper sense of comradeship with their friends, and for some the accident brought them to Christ. The accident introduced a deeper spiritual quality into many lives and into the life of the church. As the years passed, the accident continued to be a back-drop to the daily life of the congregation, something that would be mentioned at odd times and was never quite forgotten.

In May, the congregation again met deeply under the influence of the Marysville accident. The congregation adopted fifteen goals for growth in three major categories: growth by evangelism, growth in Christ, and growth in service. A brief analysis of these goals is important. Given the increased concern for reaching outward, it is interesting to note that of the 15 goals only three have anything to do with reaching out while the other 12 refer entirely to the inner life of the congregation. The congregation still had primarily a self-oriented approach.

Four months after the Marysville accident, a week's evangelistic mission was held, conducted by a team from Los Angeles. The team was headed by the Rev. Lee Lenzing. They were warmly received by the

church. It was during this period that the church began to use the local press regularly for evangelistic and advertising purposes. They ran advertisements related to human problems, rather than advertising the church as such, and there was some response to these.

The congregational concern for goals continued throughout the year, and at the end of the year the church was still discussing its goals. There was also some awareness of a need for congregational leadership training. An important decision reached at the end of 1978 was to discontinue services at Oxley as of the new year. There was a hope that a home group could be formed at Oxley so that the church's ministry there did not come to a complete end. It is clear that the church came to this decision only reluctantly and that the decision itself had been put off for several years. The congregation had continued to hope that somehow new life could be pumped into the old Mother church.

The pace of congregational life picked up in 1979 reaching a level even higher than in 1978. The year began with five representatives of the congregation going on a month-long mission to work with the Bennetts, the missionary family in New Guinea sponsored by the congregation. They reported back that they had saved the mission there considerable amounts of time and money in construction work and had gained considerable personal spiritual benefit as well.

In the following months Jenkin and Mr. Doug Crawley of the diaconate began to explore the possibilities of setting up a community counselling programme. Crawley chaired the committee responsible for studying the idea. While this new departure was still under consideration, Jenkin along with Stan Gooby, started visiting people in the Myrtleford area with an eye to starting a Baptist fellowship there. In August, Jenkin reported at a congregational meeting that there was a need for a Baptist fellowship in Myrtleford. That meeting voted to begin holding services in Myrtleford in September on a trial basis. The first service in Myrtleford was held at the local high school on 30 September 1979.

Jenkin presented a very upbeat report to the congregation in November that indicated a certain level of interest in the community in having a Baptist fellowship. Services soon moved over to the vacant St. Andrews Church, a former Presbyterian congregation closed as a result of the Uniting Church merger in Myrtleford. As it turned out, most of those who began to regularly attend the Baptist Fellowship were former Presbyterians who were unhappy over some aspects of the Uniting Church merger. Nevertheless, Jenkin had great hopes for the future of the Myrtleford mission work.

The evangelism committee continued to be active. It was reported that two hundred homes had been visited in the Yarrunga area during 1978. In 1979, a "Reachout" week-end was held with a dinner in Wendouree Hall. This was the first of several such dinners, involving guest speakers and music groups from outside Wangaratta.

Wangaratta Baptist Church had changed substantially since Jenkin arrived, and office changes at the church further symbolized the growth of the church. Jenkin moved his study into a room in the church hall. And when Mrs. Olga Walker became secretary for Jenkin

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renovations were made to accommodate her. The congregation continued to wrestle with new ideas that came in both from the pastor and from lay people. Church giving continued to increase rapidly reaching \$645/week by November. All in all, the church showed considerable willingness to experiment and there were lots of new ideas with which to experiment.

There were, however, problems. In August 1979, the issue of women door stewards came up in the congregational meeting. There was considerable discussion after which a vote was taken. The motion was lost because of an unusual procedure whereby it was agreed in advance that the motion had to be unanimous in order to pass. The actual vote was about half-and-half. Superficially, this vote might have meant little except that it indicated that while the place of women was changing very rapidly in Australian society the place of women within the church was still restricted and less than equal to that of the men. Where women did exercise an influence in the church it had been a "hidden" influence from behind the scenes for the most part. Women had only rarely exercised any authority outside of the confines of the women's groups.

Another problem that might not have been understood in 1979 but that is striking in retrospect is that while many changes were taking place they seemed to lack focus or have any central theme to them. In May yet another sub-committee was appointed to look into the structure of the church's organization. Nothing seems to have happened, and the result was a haphazard and almost frantic piling of activity upon change upon activity. It is little wonder, then, that serious discussions about the need for someone to help Jenkin began at the end of the year. Jill Hollingsworth's name was mentioned although no immediate decision was made because of the hope to appoint a counsellor to be available to work in the church as well as in the community.

Below the surface there was yet another problem that Jenkin and others were not yet aware of. The members of the congregation gave their approval to some of the new ventures but not their whole-hearted support. Undertakings such as that at Myrtleford were perceived as being Peter's vision, and the people were willing for Jenkin and a few others to work for it. But few in the church were really very enthusiastic, and a few even were beginning to feel pressured about all of the change that was taking place.

And the church entered into 1980, the most amazingly active year in the entire history of the Wangaratta Baptist Church. The congregation remained committed, at least outwardly, to both developing a counselling service and the work in Myrtleford. It also began to consider establishing a home for the elderly that would cater for the church members and people in the community. The problem Jenkin now faced was that he could not possibly carry the burden for all of this work plus the continuing pastoral work by himself. By February, the church was committed to finding him an assistant. After initial contacts, the name of Mr. Doug Cosson, pastor of the Hamilton church, came up. The diaconate resolved that Cosson be called to be an associate pastor in a team ministry, and by August everything was arranged. The only problem was that Cosson could not move to Wangaratta until January 1981. Thus, Jill Hollingsworth was asked to become "pastoral assistant" for six

months. She agreed.

Hollingsworth's ministry posed some problems because of a small but vocal group of members who opposed having women in the pulpit. Although Hollingsworth was hardly the first woman to preach in the church and those in opposition were not well-established members, the situation was irritating and resulted in one family leaving the congregation. It also served as a reminder to all that the "issue of women" had yet to be solved. A happier note was struck when Frank Garth, a long-time adherent, received the Citizen-of-the-year award for 1980 at the nomination of the church.

Since a second pastor had been called, the church felt that it had to purchase a second manse. It also wanted to purchase property for the planned home for the elderly. The church purchased, as a result, a large piece of property on Swan Street for some \$80,000. The purchase of the Swan Street property forced the congregation into a decision to sell the church building and property out at Oxley, and the long drawn-out process of selling the Oxley church began. Suddenly, property and financial matters, items that had been less important in recent years, began to loom very large.

In a paper written a year later, Doug Cosson referred to 1980 as a key year because it exhausted the church with activity and change. Part of the reason it was so exhausting was that much of the change was not going as well as had been desired. Myrtleford required a great deal of time, and the church was finding itself uncomfortably closely associated with groups feuding about the Uniting Church merger in Myrtleford. The youth groups were going through a period of transition. Selling Oxley turned out to be a real headache while the purchase of Swan Street put a heavy financial burden on the church. Calling an associate pastor took time and energy. On top of all this the church was involved in sponsoring a Vietnamese refugee family, as well as an attempt at getting an Asian Fellowship started in Wangaratta. And, on top of that there emerged a problem when a man of Presbyterian background applied for membership without being baptized by immersion. That decision was deferred until the next year, but it added to the weight.

The new year, 1981, started off well enough. Cosson took up his new position and began to settle into his duties. The first member of the congregation for many years to become a missionary, Miss Robyn Fenton-Smith, left for work in Nigeria. There were problems as well as the Oxley sale had run into difficulties with the man who had brought the property in 1980, and giving seemed down a little in the early part of 1981. The members had to be reminded of the need to give.

Most of the issues of the year were ones carried over from 1980. Plans continued to be made for Swan Street. The Vietnamese family sponsored by the church moved to Sydney and the Asian Fellowship idea was not developed. The church wanted to find an active Baptist family to move to Myrtleford to get things moving down there. But things were going well enough so that the church had to start holding two Sunday morning services each week. Giving improved greatly by July, passing the \$900/week mark. Things seemed to be going well.

* Then came the bombshell. The Deacons' Minutes for 13 October

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1981 has the following entry about the pastor's report for that evening: "The information he presented came as a shock to us all, when he announced that he was resigning from the pastorate as the end of 1981." Jenkin told the deacons that he felt his work in Wangaratta was done. He formally announced his decision at the November 1981 meeting.

The person most immediately affected by this decision was Cosson, and it took some time to decide just what would be done about the pastorate until a new senior pastor could be found. It was finally decided that Cosson would serve as interim pastor and that the church would try to find an interim assistant for him. Jenkin's resignation was to take effect on 27 December 1981.

Jenkin left a church very different from the one he had found. The physical structure of the church had been much improved and added to. The old power structures of the church had lapsed and Jenkin ran "a very tight ship" as pastor. The church was much more involved with the world outside of itself especially with Myrtleford. It had a second pastor. Membership increased from 78 to 118 and giving from less than \$150/week to nearly \$1000/week (not including Myrtleford). Christian education was better organized, and the church ran a youth programme envied by other churches in town. The spiritual tone and condition of the congregation was much better than in 1971.

Yet, when Cosson asked his Lay Training Committee for feedback on the condition of the church he found the committee answering that the church was a bit stagnant, that it lacked unified direction, and that it was too concerned about financial matters. The church was going "slowly"(!). It was being dominated by its pastors, and there was still a concern about the unhealthy state of church meetings. (See Cosson, "Wangaratta Baptist Church", p.4). Cosson concluded that by September 1981 the church had lost much of its vision as problems arose with nearly every project it had tried including Myrtleford, establishing a home for the elderly, and starting a counselling service.

10 BEYOND RENEWAL?

The year after Peter Jenkin and his family left Wangaratta proved to be a very difficult one for the church and for Cosson. There was a very real sense of loss, and the church began to experience a number of personal crises in the life of individual members that was a tremendous drain on Cosson. A number of outstanding problems still had to be handled.

Stan Goeby, a capable church secretary, resigned in June 1982, and the church had some trouble finding a replacement for him. It was not until November 1982 that Mr. Graham Sinclair agreed to take on the position of church secretary. The problem of what to do with Myrtleford had to be given considerable attention, and, of course, there was the very important matter of finding another pastor to

share the load with Cosson. That issue was very much linked to Myrtleford since it was felt that one man could not handle both Wangaratta and Myrtleford. The decision on Myrtleford was to continue it.

The most pressing and immediate problem, that of finding a second pastor, was solved when the Rev. Philip Hughes was called to join the team ministry and inducted in December 1982. Yet, in a larger sense even in the following year the Wangaratta Baptist Church found itself still very much in the Jenkin Era of its history. Most of its problems, most of its issues were ones that first arose in the years after 1971: Myrtleford; Swan Street; the team ministry; the role of women; and the format and content of church meetings.

In fact, the entire ministry of Peter Jenkin, a creative and innovative ministry which brought healing to an ailing congregation, left that congregation facing one of the most difficult and exciting questions a church must ask itself: how do we reach out?

Jenkin did not find an answer to this question. Although the congregation did some very good things in outreach under his leadership, no pattern of meaningful ministry beyond the bounds of the congregation emerged. In fact, in his very attempts to re-orient the church in new directions Jenkin found himself more deeply involved than ever in the questions and the burdens of property and finances, burdens that seemed to blur the vision and taint the search for outreach.

By 1984, the church had still not found any serious answer to the question of outreach. It was a strong church with a good foundation upon which to build. Yet, somehow it had not yet translated its strength into a solid programme of ministry to the Wangaratta community. It appeared to be primarily concerned with maintaining its own internal fellowship and programmes. It continued to rely very heavily on its two pastors for leadership/direction/new ideas/administration. When its members were asked about the things they held important and the way in which the church should structure itself their answers had mostly to do with keeping up the worship, buildings, and programmes of the church itself. Service was an ideal that seemed hard to translate into action for the church.

What I found in March-April 1984 was a congregation, then, with a dual history: one strand of its past began in 1967 when the church began to face deep spiritual testing. That strand gained new direction in 1971 and then in the period 1972-76. The Marysville Accident gave it a deeper, wiser impetus, so that this strand of deepening spiritual life continued until 1984. Its result was a church that was friendly, and, at a deeper level, generally caring for its members, although its members themselves often admitted that there were limits to the caring. The church had learned that the Good News of Jesus Christ did not come alive when the "Gospel" was preached in a dogmatically correct but loveless manner. The Gospel came alive in the midst of human sorrow and suffering when doctrines meant little and human need was great. It is hard to be a rigid fundamentalist in Wangaratta Baptist Church because the congregation's spiritual pilgrimage has taught it a different lesson.

BEYOND RENEWAL?

The second strand was less obvious to the members of the congregation. For the old "turn of the century" church of 1902 and 1912 and 1922 lingered on in some quite amazing ways, ways that made it difficult for the church to reach out beyond itself. That old church of 1902 was centred on property and finances. It did little to reach out into the community, especially because most of the people in the community already belonged to other churches. It believed that the "mission" of the church was to spread the gospel, maintain proper worship, and protect the piety and purity of its membership. It was a horse-and-buggy faith for a horse-and-buggy community.

But while this turn-of-the-century church drifted along from pastor to pastor in a continual rise and fall the world moved along at an ever faster pace of change. The Wangaratta of 1952 was amazingly different from that of 1902 while the Wangaratta Baptist Church of 1952 was amazingly similar to the 1902 model.

Superficially, the church seemed to change somewhat after 1977 as it did try to find new directions and did become more self-conscious about some aspects of its own life, such as church meetings. Seldom before that had there even been an attempt to set up congregational goals. Certainly, the church had never been encouraged to think about the world around it as much as it was in the Jenkin years.

Yet, I found that actually it remained much as it had always been. The church still depended heavily on its pastors. It was still very much a male-oriented church which only elected its first woman deacon in 1983 and was still very uncertain about the actual role and place of women in the church. It was a church that had not found a workable vision for outreach and was, therefore, still thinking about itself mostly.

Two strands. What I also found was that these two strands were very much in conflict with each other. In early 1984, many members of the church were not at ease about the life of the congregation. As one of them put it to me, there was a "divine discontent". The spiritual life of the church was not harmonious with the organizational life which still largely based itself on older patterns of spirituality that are no longer effective in modern-day secular Wangaratta. Perhaps the only difference between February 1984 and May 1984 was that the church had, for the first time in its history, come to terms with its own historical experience. And, that may be all the difference it takes to answer that one little question: how do we reach out?

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LIST OF MINISTERS

1902-04 Mr. E. L. Watson
1904-05 Rev. H. A. Horsfall
1905-07 Rev. W. J. Coulson
1907-12 Rev. Frank Harris
1912-15 Rev. A. A. Medley
1915-17 Rev. H. G. Dwyer
1917-18 Rev. H. H. Childs
1919 Rev. H. S. Bunn
1919-22 Rev. S. Harrison
1922-25 Rev. P. W. Cairns
1925-26 Rev. F. Townend
1927-29 Rev. A. H. Brooks
1930-33 Rev. E. T. Laxton
1934-40 Rev. C. A. Jamieson
1940-43 Rev. M. A. Thompson
1943-46 Rev. M. Tudball-Smith
1947-48 Rev. J. H. Baker
1948-52 Rev. N. W. Stait
1952-56 Rev. I. L. D. Forbes
1957-62 Rev. D. J. Griffiths
1962-67 Rev. B. R. Reeves
1967-71 Rev. E. F. Hosie
1971-72 Rev. A. R. Ritchie
1972-81 Rev. P. G. Jenkin
1981- Rev. D. C. Cosson
1982- Rev. Dr. P. J. Hughes

MEMBERSHIP OF THE WANGARATTA BAPTIST CHURCH

