

ARCHIVES CORNER

Children's gift to parish sets a remarkable example



This oddly shaped Communion plate (paten) was a gift to All Saints Church in the Parish of Prince William from Ecclesfield Regiment of the English Children's Mission Army in February 1869.



This chalice is also believed to be a gift of the Ecclesfield Regiment of the English Children's Mission Army, but it is not engraved.

A couple of years ago, the Archives received an unusual silver Communion plate (in the photo top left) for safe-keeping. Resembling a cake plate more than the regular paten, this item bears the intriguing inscription "Presented by the Ecclesfield Regiment of the English Children's Mission Army, February 1869." (1 Flagon, 2 Chalices, 1 Paten, 2 Plates)

Naturally, the arrival of the plate raised questions about the Ecclesfield Children's Army and why it sent a communion plate to a parish in the Diocese of Fredericton, New Brunswick. Research for a recent exhibit at the Provincial Archives on Juliana Horatia (Gatty) Ewing provided answers to these questions.

Juliana came to Fredericton in June 1867 with her husband, Alexander Ewing, who was attached to the Pay Department of the 22nd Regiment. Though they stayed in New Brunswick for only two years, the Ewings, particularly Juliana, are well remembered here.

Juliana, daughter of children's author, Margaret Gatty and the Rev. Alfred Gatty, Vicar of Ecclesfield, also wrote children's stories and painted. Determined to maintain strong ties with her family, Juliana's many letters home contained detailed accounts and often water colour sketches of her life in colonial New Brunswick. Many of these letters have been published and indicate that the Medleys (Bishop John and his wife, Margaret) befriended Juliana and Alexander, who sang in the Cathedral choir and often played the Cathedral organ.

Juliana's letters home often told of drives in the country with the Medleys to visit or consecrate churches, trips on which she always sketched. Through the Medley connection, Juliana's circle of friends included other clergy families. One of these friends, the Rev. Theodore Dowling (Parish of Douglas) told her that Anglicans in nearby Magaguadavic, in the Parish of Prince William where the Rev. E. A. W. Hannington was rector, were building a church (All Saints) and that they needed assistance, including communion vessels. When Juliana relayed this to her mother, the Ecclesfield Regiment of the Children's Mission Army sent out the communion plate.

Modelled on the mission armies in the United States, the first Regiment of the English Children's Mission Army was established in Ecclesfield circa June 1868 by Mrs. Margaret Gatty – immediately following sermons encouraging its formation.

On March 1, 1869, the Mission Life printed this report: From Ecclesfield we hear that the sum of £5 12s, out of monies subscribed by the Young Crusaders, has been expended in the purchase of a set of Communion plate (electro-plate) for the use of a small Mission Church in a wild part of New Brunswick, North America. The church has been raised by the manual labour of those who are to form its congregation; but although they could hew wood and join them to stone, a decent Communion service was not obtainable except by purchase. This want, therefore, the Ecclesfield Young Crusaders are supplying, their interest in the case having been called for by letter from the married daughter of their Vicar, now resident at Fredericton. A meeting, at which tea and cake will be provided for the children by the liberality of friends and neighbours, is to take place, and herself [Mrs. Gatty] and the little soldiers are to have the pleasure of looking at their beautiful gift before it is packed up for its far off destination.

Juliana later reported to her mother [March 1, 1869 letter] how pleased the rector was because Bishop Medley gave an altar (butternut wood), Mrs. Medley the coloured cloth, Mr. Pearson (assistant at the Cathedral), the font, Ecclesfield the communion plate and the military may give linen cloth. Juliana concludes "It seems odd but I believe that interest you and yours have taken will do more to rouse their neighbours to help them than if the Bishop had pounded away for a year."

On August 24, Juliana happily told her mother of the arrival of the Communion plate.

"It is splendidly solid and fine and the gilding of the chalices is beautiful. How charmed the people will be! And we are all so glad it has arrived in time for the Consecration. The alms dish is called a Paten! And two plates are also enumerated. Paten is the old word for the plate or plates on which the bread is put. And as there are two cups or chalices — I suppose the two small dishes are the plates or patens. The other — like all the big dishes in communion sets — is to receive the alms when they are brought by collection to the minister."

Juliana described the new church as a "very pretty church built of wood, rather than logs. It is roofed and is to be consecrated in September." It was consecrated as All Saints Church on September 8, 1869 by Bishop John Medley.

Sources:

- Leaves from Juliana Horatia Ewings's "Canada Home" (Gathered by Elizabeth S. Tucker)(1896)
- Canada Home, Juliana Horatia Ewing's Fredericton Letters, 1867-1869 (Edited by Margaret Howard Blom and Howard Blom) (1980)
- Mission Life, 1868-1869 (copies found online).

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