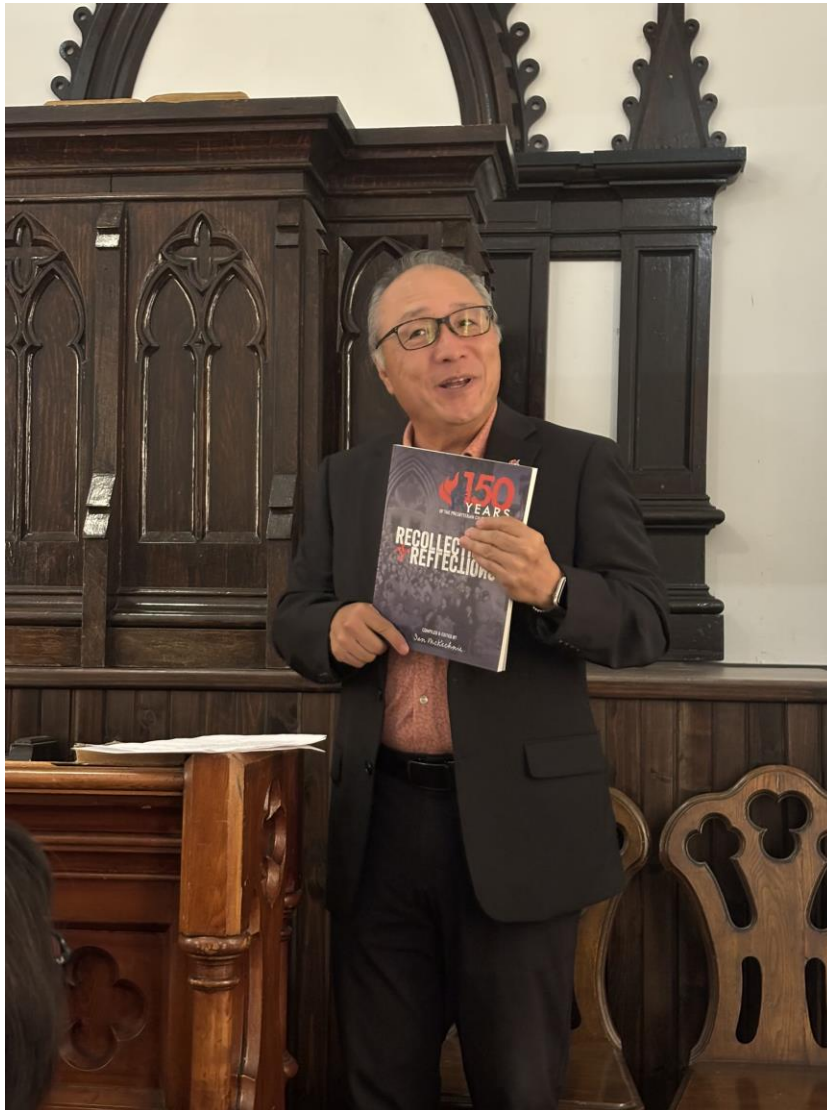


The Opening of The Presbyterian Church Heritage Centre

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By Ian Mason



The Rev. Victor Kim, Principal Clerk of The General Assembly, presents a copy of *Recollections + Reflections: 150 Years of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* to the PCHC on the occasion of its opening.

Photo: Nicole D'Angela

It felt as if we had slid into home base and captured the world series!

At the 11th hour, the Presbyterian Church Heritage Centre held its dedicatory worship service and official opening of our new facility on Saturday, September 20, 2025 at 3:00 p.m. We opened our “new” facility on the main floor of Carlisle United Church, the Carlisle located in the Municipality of North Middlesex, Ontario.

Curator Ian Mason, along with his wife, Laurie, herself a retired museum curator with 37 years of experience, completed the arrangement of the last display case at 2:45 a.m. on September 20, only 12 hours before the dedication service!

The opening occurred 10 years after St. John's Presbyterian Church in Riverdale, Toronto, first informed us that redevelopment plans were underway for their church, our host church since 2002. The National Presbyterian Museum (NPM) was dedicated and officially opened on Sunday, September 29, 2002. The NPM remained at St. John's Church until the museum closed to the public in September, 2018. The collection remained at St. John's until it was removed to temporary storage in July, 2021, during the COVID pandemic.

The Heritage Centre Advisory Committee under its chair, Marilyn Repchuck, was delighted to open our new site this past September. At 59 people, the church was filled to capacity. The dedicatory worship service was led by and the sermon preached by the Rev. Angus Sutherland, past chair of the advisory committee. Assisting Angus was the Rev. Duncan Jeffrey, member of the advisory committee, and the Rev. Henry Bartsch of Faith Presbyterian Church, Tillsonburg, Ontario. (When Henry was serving as the minister of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Chatham, Ontario, he organized a work party of youth and adults from the congregation. They undertook the moving of most of the collection into temporary storage.)

Curator Ian Mason served as the beadle, delivering the Bible into the pulpit at the beginning of the service and removing it at its conclusion. The Bible was the one used at the opening worship of the United Presbyterian Church of Carlisle, Canada West on January, 11, 1858. The Rev. Angus Sutherland used Exodus 3:6 as the text for the sermon. The sermon was entitled "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob", and looked to investigate what lay behind this three-part acknowledgement of God for the people of Israel. In part, the identifier reminds the people of their past, of how God, in faithfulness, worked with these patriarchs and thus created the foundation for the people's identity and the faith they espoused. The Heritage Centre also seeks to remind our church of our past, both positive and negative, displaying the foundation of our people and our faith.

Before the dedicatory worship service began, Angus played Scottish psalm tunes on his concert bagpipes (not the popular Highland version of the bagpipes, which would be too loud for the chapel!). Two of these psalm tunes were later sung a cappella during the service in deference to the way Presbyterians sang at worship prior to 1875. (In 1875, the first General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada allowed individual congregations to decide whether or not it was appropriate to sing hymns and use instruments such as organs.)

The reed organ donated from St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Beeton, Ontario, was superbly played by Nancy Tapley, President of the Chatham Centre of the Royal Canadian College of Organists. Nancy was courageous in the face of danger – our reed organ has not been tuned in at least 20 years.

Two sacred classics of the 19th century – The Holy City, with text by Frederic Weatherly and music by Stephen Adams (alias Michael Maybrick), and How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings, a solo setting of Psalm 84

by Samuel Liddle – were sung by operatic tenor Andrew Derynck of Jeannette’s Creek, Ontario (Municipality of Chatham-Kent).



**Organist Nancy Tapley sits at the PCHC's historic reed organ while visitors mingle in the background.
Photo: Nicole D'Angela**

We were delighted that the Rev. Victor Kim, Principal Clerk of The Presbyterian Church in Canada was able to attend, along with his wife Sophie. Victor led in the prayer of dedication. He also presented the Heritage Centre’s Study Collection with a copy of the PCC’s 150th anniversary book, donated by Don Burnard, a member of St. Giles Presbyterian Church in Sarnia, Ontario, and member of the General Assembly Committee on History. The richly illustrated Recollections + Reflections: 150 Years of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, has been superbly compiled and organized by Ian McKechnie of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Lindsay, Ontario, with design and layout undertaken by Ekaterine Alexakis, of nearby Cannington, Ontario. (Copies of this book are still available for purchase via The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s website: <https://form.jotform.com/Presby/pcc-order>.)

Greetings were read from the Moderator of the 2025 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Rev. Jeffrey M. Murray, who sent his regrets:

The Heritage Centre's commitment to collect and exhibit artifacts of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its antecedent denominations is deeply appreciated. As you help to preserve the history of our church as it ministered in different times and through many challenges, that story helps inspire us to confront the challenges that are before us today with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I regret that I cannot be with you in person as I am currently visiting Palestine to meet with various organizations and partners working to confront the challenges of an enduring conflict, where we hope and pray that reconciliation, which the Gospel of Christ has inspired for many generations, may take root and offer a lasting peace.

We were blessed with the presence of our Presbyterian heritage colleagues, Nicole D'Angela, managing archivist, and Alex Kay, archivist of the Presbyterian Church Archives.

Those who travelled the farthest to join the celebration were Garry and Jane Marnoch of Ballyduff Presbyterian Church in Ballyduff, Ontario, and Ian MacCready of Oshawa, Ontario, and David Linderman, of Brooklin, Ontario.

After the worship service, there was a brief amount of time for informal tours, fellowship and conversation. Most of those who attended were able to enjoy dinner served promptly at 5:00 p.m. Marguerite Gilbert, sister of Marilyn Repchuck, cooked the pork barbecue. Frank Teahen of Carlisle United Church barbecued the sausages. Several of the members of Carlisle United Church helped serve the meal. Homemade pies provided by members of the curator's home church (Trinity Presbyterian, Chatham, Ontario) were the "icing on the cake."



This pipe organ will engage Presbyterian Church Heritage Centre visitors through the medium of sound.

Below (l to r): Organ installers - Tim Marshman, London, ON; and organbuilder, Ron Dossenbach, Windsor, ON

Photo: Ian Mason



As I write this, it is the eve before the arrival of the Heritage Centre's largest artefact – a 95 year-old pipe organ. This instrument was used by Dorchester Presbyterian Church, Dorchester, Ontario, from 1930 until the congregation dissolved in January, 2024. It is a two-manual, eight rank organ manufactured by Edward Lye and Sons, Toronto. It is one of the last eight instruments produced by this company before Lye's grandsons re-organized and re-named it simply Lye Organ Co. When it is installed, it will be the only pipe organ in the Municipality of North Middlesex. We have already been contacted by a local pianist who has begun organ studies and is interested in using it for practice.

We are very grateful to retired organbuilder Donald Pole of Chatham, Ontario, and Ron Dossenbach of Windsor, Ontario, who championed the restoration of this historic Canadian instrument. Our gratitude is acknowledged to the pipe organ disassembly crew: Gordon Varney and Brett, Stephen and Jay of Paris Presbyterian Church; and Marcus Ross of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Chatham, who spent several days disassembling and carefully packing all the pipes, components and bits and pieces of the organ.

Our inaugural pipe organ concert is scheduled for November, 2026 after the organ has had ample time to get adjusted to its new environment and has undergone a full regimen of minor tuning adjustments.

Marilyn Repchuck, Chair, Advisory Committee members and Curator Ian Mason look forward to continuing to serve the PCC by following our mandate:

The Presbyterian Church Heritage Centre shall collect and exhibit artefacts relating to the history of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its antecedent denominations. The significance of the artefacts will be described by interpreting the lives of the men, women and children in association with Canadian Presbyterian denominations and how they confronted, challenged and changed both Canadian and global culture with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.