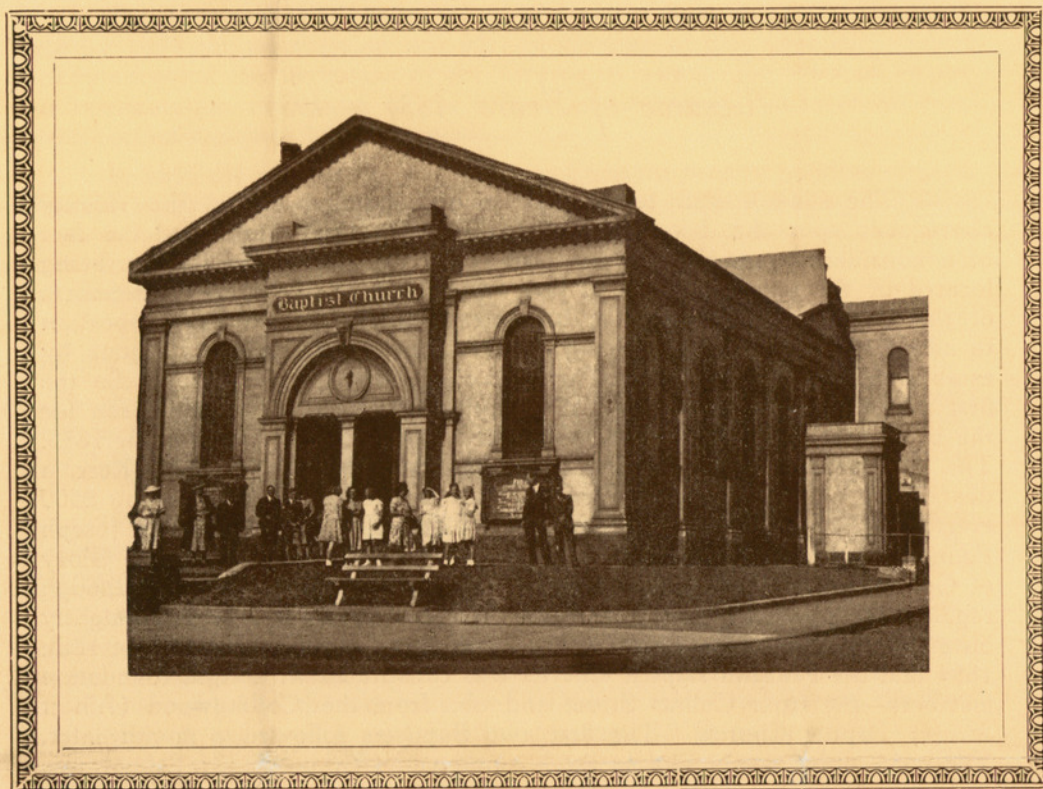


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The Centenary
of the
South Yarra Baptist Church

1854 - 1954

Rev. S. Watson, Pastor

Mr. A. Harvey,
Hon. Treasurer

Mr. D. H. Coleman,
Hon. Secretary

SOUTH YARRA BAPTIST CHURCH

Resume of Years 1854 - 1954

"The sudden and rapid increase of the population in the vicinity consequent upon the discovery of the Goldfields of Victoria, and the fact of a considerable number of members of the Baptist Denomination being located in the neighbourhood, it was considered by some of the members of the first Baptist Church in Melbourne both desirable and important to afford the means of advancing the cause of our Lord and Saviour by establishing the worship of God in that connection in this place." So the first minute book of the South Yarra Baptist Church records the reason for the beginning of a Baptist Witness in the Prahran district in the Year 1853. The idea seems to have originated in the mind of a Mr. Robert Kerr, a deacon of the Collins Street Church, who donated a building costing £500 erected in Brewer (now Charles) Street—the land a donation of Mr. Joseph Pound. The furnishings were donated by various people, and to the Glory of God it was opened for worship on Sunday, June 19th, 1853. Although regular services were held, with mid-week prayer meetings and fortnightly business meetings of the newly formed committee, it was not until June 18th, 1854 that the Prahran Baptist Church was constituted with eight foundation members—six from Collins Street and two from the Collingwood (Albert Street) Baptist Church. The first two Baptisms followed a month later. The work grew slowly and in the beginning of 1855 a Sunday School was commenced.

The Church faced the first of its difficulties in that year when a difference arose with Mr. Pound concerning the Trust Deeds of the property. In August of 1855 Mr. J. Wilson, the Secretary of the Church, offered a block of land in Chapel Street, and upon the offer being accepted, the work of the present South Yarra Baptist Church commenced. The services were well attended—51 being present at Communion—and the offerings amounted to ten shillings a service. In May the following year the first Trust was formed, consisting of all the male members who were of age. In the same month the Secretary, Mr. Wilson proposed the following resolution which was adopted.—"That in the Opinion of this Church there exists in this colony a great necessity for more intimate union, fellowship, mutual co-operation and assistance among the various churches holding, substantially, the same faith and order as ourselves, and we think it desirable that the First Baptist Church Melbourne, should take the lead in initiating a movement for the accomplishment of so desirable an object." The South Yarra Church seems to hold the honour of initiating the movement which resulted ultimately in the present Baptist Union of Victoria.

The new building seating 150 and occupying the site of the Forrester's Hall was opened for worship on October 18th, 1857. The first diaconate was elected in March 1858 following a "Special Prayer Meeting for Divine Guidance in this important matter." At this meeting "the duties and qualifications of deacons, as recorded in Scripture, were read and commented on, much earnestness and unanimity prevailing." On May 6th the Church joined the newly formed Baptist Association.

Following the completion of the Baptistry two men were baptized, and by 1859 the membership was 35. In October of that year Mr. Wilson finally accepted the invitation of the Church to assume the office of Pastor, his remuneration consisting of the balance remaining in the General Fund after current expenses had been paid.

In 1866 the present site was purchased and the present building erected. The old building and the land with the exception of ten feet was sold. Three years later two other Baptist Churches meeting in the district amalgamated with the Church, bringing the membership to 51 and the Sunday School enrolment to 120.

The first gift made by the Church to the Home Mission was in 1872, and the sum was £3.

In 1880, South Yarra Baptist Church took over control of services held in the Boundary Hall of which unfortunately no details are available. The following year a revision of the Church Roll took place as a result of which 35 names were removed. This seemed to mark the beginning of a new era. In 1882 the Church treasurer, Mr. Turner was elected Mayor of Prahran. The Sunday School growing rapidly, was forced to meet in the Forrester's Hall.

A new Missionary Spirit was evidenced in the commencement of a fellowship in the Malvern Court Room which continued until 1896 when it became a Church. Also, in 1892 a new lobby which is now the present vestry was added to the side exit door. During this latter period the Rev. L. J. Malyon exercised a very fruitful ministry, 26 being baptized and 61 new members being added to the Roll. As a prelude to the Jubilee of 1904 some of the foundation members in 1901 presented a Bible.

During the year 1913, which also saw the death of Mrs. Drew, the last foundation member, an Inner Suburban Scheme was developed consisting of South Yarra, Crimea Street, St. Kilda, and Cecil Street, Prahran, but unfortunately lapsed in 1917.

Further alterations and additions occurred in 1926 when the present Manse was purchased for the sum of £905. The Church was altered to provide for the addition of two halls and the stained glass memorial windows were added. Also, in 1940 the steel railing and stone fence were removed from around the Church.

Since pioneering the Home Mission Inner Suburban Scheme in 1947, South Yarra has been privileged to have as minister, the Inner Suburban Director, the Rev. Samuel Watson. Under his guidance the Church has taken fresh heart and is now approaching the peculiar difficulties of witnessing in an inner suburban area with renewed faith in the ultimate success of the task laid upon it. Evidences of this are seen in the elimination of the £1150 General Fund Debt, the increased giving to all Denominational causes and the increase in the assessment paid to the Home Mission.

The witness of the Church has increased also. The congregations have more than doubled, the Sunday School attendance has increased, and the Christian Endeavour work has been re-vitalized. The Church has reached out into the local community under the inspiration of the Pastor. Factory and open-air evangelism has been undertaken, while juvenile court work and social services are also regular ministries of the Church.

While the consistent witness of all the members of the Church is responsible for much of the progress in the Church, special tribute must be paid to the unflagging work of the officers—the treasurer, Mr. A. Harvey, who has held that position since 1929, and the immediate past secretary, Mr. V. Nathan who held office since 1949 until his removal from the district in the last few months.

As the Church faces the second hundred years of service for the Lord in this district, it gains courage and inspiration from the faith and foresight of that vast multitude of saintly men and women who witnessed well for their Lord in their own generation in this place, and bequeathed to the present members a noble building, a fragrant memory and a challenge which must be accepted.

Under God this Church shall not be unworthy of those who pioneered the South Yarra Baptist Church.

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.”



Present Pastor:
Rev. Samuel Watson

Past Ministers

1859	Mr. J. Drewe	1896-1901	Rev. J. H. Pryce
1859-1860	Mr. J. Wilson.	1902-1905	Rev. P. W. Cairns
1860-1868	Rev. D. Rees	1907-1911	Rev. W. J. Eddy
1868-1869	Rev. W. A. Claxton	1912-1914	Rev. L. E. Tranter
1869	Rev. W. J. Cother.	1915-1917	Rev. E. A. Kirwood.
1869-1873	Rev. T. C. Davis	1918	Rev. H. G. Scholefield
1874-1875	Rev. G. Brockway	1919-1921	Rev. L. E. Tranter
1875-1881	Rev. J. Wolfenden	1921-1925	Rev. H. G. Hackworthy
1881	Rev. W. J. Mathams (Supply)	1925-1932	Rev. R. W. Dobbins
1882-1885	Rev. F. Page	1932-1943	Rev. H. MacDonald.
1886-1891	Rev. R. Williamson	1944-1946	Rev. McIntosh Brown
1892-1894	Rev. F. J. Malyon	1946-	Rev. S. Watson.