

*“It is a look from the other side of the pulpit.”*

That is the very accurate description given to this memoir submitted to the HWTProject by Miram Berry on behalf of her friend Key Wray, both of Deep River, Ontario. Rev. Veals spent his whole working life as a missionary in China, was married and had two daughters born there. Rev. Veals wrote his life story for his daughter Kay Wray and family before his death.

### **Rev. Howard J. Veals Story**

Rev. Howard Veals wrote his life story after his retirement. This section covers the years he was the minister for St Andrews United church in Beachburg and Trinity United church in Forester's Falls, 1952 to 1960.

February 28, 1952 Rev. Veals and his wife Edna arrived back in Toronto finishing his years of service on the mission in China. He was 58 years old and was available for ministry work in Canada. In late September he received a phone call from Pembroke asking him to visit Beachburg. His daughter Kay had married Len Wray and now lived in Deep River while Len worked for Atomic Energy of Canada. On the third weekend of October Rev Veals travelled to Deep River on the Saturday to stay with his daughter. Sunday morning. Kay and her husband took Rev Veals went to Beachburg to preach in the morning service at St Andrews United church\_ then on to Forester's Fall for the afternoon service at Trinity United church. After the afternoon service the members gave Rev Veals the signed call to be their minister and he committed to come by the end of November.

He had a busy time as one of the difficulties he faced was that Rev. Veals had never learned to drive a car. It would be necessary to have one in a rural charge. He bought a 1951 Meteor and with a beginner's licence and the help of friends in Toronto, he practiced driving around the streets. The first test was a failure but he passed on the second try. Their home in Toronto would be rented out and furniture to be moved to Beachburg.

November 17 1952 Rev. Veals and his wife arrived by car in Beachburg in the afternoon. The ladies and some of the men of the church were getting the manse ready for occupation and putting on storm windows. The furniture van arrived before dark and everything was placed in the house, beds set up and Rev Veals and his wife slept in the manse on their first night in their new charge.

Beachburg had about 500 residents. About 80% of the families in the area adhered to the United Church, or about 200 families in the village and countryside. About six miles to the east Forester's Falls had about 150 people in the village. Perhaps 50% of the people here were United church with about 80 families. The Beachburg minister served these families too.

Rev. Veals commented that people in this whole block of countryside were closely related to each other. Certainly one would need to be very careful about saying anything about anyone, if he did not wish to discover that he was a relative of the one you had been talking to. I never wanted to criticize any of them for I found them all grand people. Almost every time I had a funeral for several years after we arrived there, I would discover some new relationship that I had not known of before. Mr Reynolds, the undertaker in Beachburg, and one of the finest in the country, always knew these relationships and could tell me why this one or that had been sitting with the mourners on that particular occasion. Sometime the whole central section of the church would be filled with relatives of the deceased.

Their former minister had left the first of July and they had not found one until I came in November. I wanted a couple of weeks to get oriented so said that I would preach my first sermon on November 29th. Before that time I had my first two funerals. I wanted to get to know where everyone was as quickly as possible, especially with winter coming on. So I enquired around and found some sort of maps that showed the roads and sidelines of the whole area. From these I made a map of my own on a large piece of paper and got Mr Reynolds and others who knew the families, to tell me where each one was. I marked little squares

for houses and wrote in the name correspondingly. Some of the elders went with me, one at a time. So by the time I preached my first sermon, I knew pretty well where everyone lived, and had visited perhaps half of those living in the country. Before Christmas I had been to almost every country family, and then continued with those in the two villages when winter came on apace. It was, however, a winter almost without snow that year but there was ice and I had more than one spin around in my high powered eight cylinder Meteor. I was still quite a novice as a driver, but by Spring I had learned a lot.

The people of Beachburg were extremely proud of their village and with reason. During the first year I was there I must have been asked dozens and dozens of times – ‘How do you like Beachburg?’. I never had any trouble right from the first in truthfully saying that I did like it, but I knew it would have been very unwise of me to say anything else. We were welcomed with open arms and real friendliness. They seemed to be our kind of people.

It was a little bit grim in the manse that first winter. It was one of those large high ceilinged houses, with two full stories and an attic, such as they were building around the end of the last century. There was an entrance hall with stairs going up as you came into the house, and on the left was the study and then at the other end of the hall the living room and behind the study the dining room, and at the back of the dining room the kitchen that was one step down, and had a room over it too, and behind that the woodshed. In the kitchen was the wood and coal range with a reservoir. We decided at once to abandon the kitchen and move into the dining room for cooking. We had brought our own electric stove and we ordered from Eatons a sink that they set up for us and connected up with the septic tank. The water system obtained its water from two good cisterns in the cellar. Drinking water we carried from the common well at the back of the manse property but on the road allowance. Often the pump froze up, especially if you forgot and left the handle in the wrong position. The house was heated by a wood furnace, a very good one in its day but deteriorating somewhat. We burned large blocks of good hard maple in it. By filling it up well at night, there were always enough coals left in the morning, so that I could get it going again. The maple blocks were much too heavy for Edna to handle, so I always had to be very careful to get it well stoked up before I went away for a while during the day, which, of course I had to do. Even then we could not get the heat in the house much beyond 60 or 65 degrees. Edna put plastic over all the windows in the room we slept in which helped. But our good people were watching and the next summer they took the old furnace out and put in an oil furnace, putting in a lot more heat pipes and outlets. The following winters we were much cosier. They also repapered the hall, living room, and our dining room–kitchen, and did other needed things around the manse. Also in another year or two the village put in a water system, and we no longer needed to use the cisterns or carry water from the well. There was a good deal of opposition in the village to putting in the water system, but it was put through, and now of course they wouldn’t be without it. They told me the same thing had happened when they got the Hydro in some years previously.

I should mention here that the smaller church at Forester’s Falls had completely remade their church a couple of years before our arrival. It had been a little, almost square small brick edifice without a basement. They raised it some three or four feet, dug out another five or six feet, and put in a concrete wall under the old structure, and made a very nice basement. They also tore out the front of the building and built an extension of some seven or eight feet that became a choir room and a classroom, and all the space below it is used for a kitchen and a Sunday School room. They also made it into a chancel church and memorial windows were out in by various families. The total result is one of the loveliest little churches that I have ever seen anywhere.

I suppose that my one Canadian pastorate of eight years was not much different in experience from that of thousands of others in rural charges across the land. I can only recount these experiences as they appealed to me. I loved these country people from the very beginning. They were so genuine, so friendly. It may be true that they did not accept people from outside quickly. One man who had been there ten or more years already told me he was not really accepted. But then, of necessity, the minister was in a special category. What I say now I say for both churches, for I loved them equally. It is not always easy to be minister of two churches, especially when, as usually happens, one is considerably larger than the other, and when one must, of necessity, live in the centre of one of the communities. I will not say that I always succeeded, but I did my very best to serve them equally.

As in all churches there were the very faithful ones who were always there, and could be counted upon. From these came largely the Sunday School staff, the Elders and perhaps to a lesser degree, the Stewards. Then there were a much larger number who were often and sometimes there, and again there were those whom I seldom saw in church except at funerals. Again I tried to love all of them equally, but one soon knew those who could be depended upon to carry on the life and work of the Church. I always felt that somehow I was failing the others in some way, but such it was. In all churches too, there are those who have their religious experiences through different mediums, and in different ways of expression. Some have their emotions easily stirred, and receive help through that medium. Others again are fed in their souls by a more intellectual presentation of the Lord; while still others find an expression of their faith more easily in working and serving. I am glad that there is room for all these within the United Church, for I believe that while all should be gathered together in the experience of each of us and usually to a certain extent are, yet very rarely are they expressed in equal proportions. I found all these types in the two churches I was serving and I was very glad. I do not believe that any one of these types should live off into a little group by itself just to enjoy what seems to be to them the way to express their religious faith. We are not in the church just to enjoy but to serve. I always think it is a doubtful commitment to a minister to have some one say to him at the door –‘O, I did enjoy that sermon to-day’. I try to make my ministry a challenge to all these types. How far I succeeded, of course, I do not know.

I had met Gardner Ward, the minister of the large United Church in Renfrew, and when I arrived he assured me that he would do anything he could to help me. I think he sensed that my experience in, and knowledge of, the home church was limited. I had heard him tell of a series of meetings that he held in his own church the previous year shortly after he had come to Renfrew, so I made bold to ask him to come and have a week of meetings with us. He accepted the challenge and the meetings were held in the last week of March, the first Spring we were there. Led by some who were especially pleased that we were to have such meetings, our people really prepared for the meetings in an adequate way of publicity and prayer. Gardner gave us wonderfully sane and inspiring talks, calling for life decisions and for rededication. We really got a great uplift from that week, though I have felt that somehow I did not do the follow-up as well as I might have. We had a very good midweek meeting for quite some time, but it dwindled as time went on. We had another set of meetings of a similar character some four years later, when Hugh MacDonald, just about to be ordained, and another young theological student from Montreal, gave us a real rousing week in the Forester’s Falls church, and Carl Zurbrigg of Hamilton gave us a few days, especially stressing Stewardship, in the Beachburg church. The two men were entirely different in their approach, but each appealed to a different type that I spoke of above.

However we did not depend only on special meetings. The first summer we were there we asked for, and received, a team of Young Peoples Caravaners. They were three fine young people, and their leader, who conducted Daily Vacation Bible Schools for us in both churches, and also in one of the country schools, Also on two or three occasions, groups of four or five of our elders received wonderful inspiration by attending with me the meetings sponsored by the Board of Evangelism and Social Service at Whitby each year in late August. When Sunday evening services became no longer profitable because of lack of attendance, we arranged for occasional inspirational and prayer groups in different homes. In these and other ways, including Presbytery sponsored gatherings, we tried to keep up the spiritual tone of the churches.

A good deal is said these days of funerals and their lack of Christian content. Somehow I never felt that on my charge. We had a great many funerals in our churches for the size of the charge. It is true that I felt it was a little incongruous sometimes to have a person brought into the church for a funeral, who very rarely had attended it while in the flesh. However, I always felt that it was a challenge and an opportunity. We had one of the very best Undertakers to be found anywhere in Canada. I always received perfect cooperation from him and I felt that this presence greatly added to the dignity of the occasion, comfort to the families and a real Christian witness.

We had two hospitals in Pembroke that I visited whenever we had any of our people hospitalized there, and occasionally there would be someone in the Renfrew hospital. Like all ministers I sometimes had very difficult tasks to perform. After being there only a few months I got a call from a doctor in Cobden saying

that the husband of one of our women had dropped dead in his office, and would I go out and break the news to her and her sixteen year old son. Women soon gathered to help the widow, while I gave my attention to the boy, who had been very close to his father. Some years later our good neighbour across the street from us was killed by a falling tree as he was working in the woods. It fell to Edna and me together that day to go over and inform our very good and close friend the widow, and then I went to inform their one daughter who was living just outside the village. A little girl of eight was swept into an old culvert by a freshet, as she played in the water in the ditch by the side of the road. That was the only time I ever broke down, as I attempted to conduct a little funeral service at home. All these things, and many others, along with visiting and sermon making and Presbytery duties keep any minister more than busy. But I got time somehow, to have a fairly large garden planted each summer.

I could not finish without mentioning the good lady in the manse and all her various work. She was accepted and loved by the women of both congregations. She did not accept leadership in any of the groups but she made her presence felt in every one. I think our charge was unique in that it had seven different W.M.S. groups. Three of these seven were entirely in the country areas of Beachburg church; two were in the village – one afternoon and one evening; and two in Forester's Falls – one for older woman and one for younger, again meeting in the afternoon and evening. They each met once a month and were real centres for Christian fellowship. Edna did not always get out to every one every month, but she attended a great many of them. I enjoyed taking her to the ones in the country and in Forester's Falls. Then she opened the manse in a real way to the women for their meetings as her turn came up, and for so many other small meetings. We could do that more easily than many since our children were grown up and gone. Edna also attended a small prayer group in the village – just a few women but I know it was a power for the church.

So the years slipped by, almost eight busy happy years, and we realized that it was almost forty years since we began work in China, and so it was time for us to retire. We made our intentions known at the end of 1959, and actually retired from the charge on July 1, 1960.

Now I must say a few words about our send-off from Beachburg. Both congregations gathered and read us a parting message and presented us with a good rocking chair and more than three hundred dollars, which we heard they would like us to use to buy a T.V. We did that later, a very clear one, still working well. Many things were said and we could not question their genuine character. I felt the greatest compliment came in these words from one of the men – 'You were one of us'.