



*Celebrating*  
**100**  
*years of music at Knox*



**History of Music  
at Knox Presbyterian Church,  
Listowel, Ontario**



# Introduction

In the earliest days of Knox Church there was no instrument, no choir, and a precenter alone led the responsive singing of psalms or paraphrases. At some point during the 1880's a hymnal was introduced which added to the *"interest of the praise service"*. The first selection sung from this hymnal was "Onward Christian Soldiers". It is unknown when a choir was actually first formed; however, in a very brief order of service from the mid 1890s, it lists "Anthem – Selected". The early use of the word "anthem" was to describe a type of responsive singing between soloist and choir with instrumental accompaniment, so it is unclear if this was a special selection by just the choir or if it might refer to the selection of hymns or psalms for the service as there is no mention of those in the order of service.

In 1888, Miss Margaret Sutherland, who was a young teenager at the time, began as organist when Knox's first pipe organ was installed in the newly-built sanctuary. The position of choir leader was also introduced at this time, but the earliest records pertaining to choir leaders (also referred to as precenters) date back only as far as 1899: Miss Hay (1899); W.R. Dunn (1900-1902); Walter Hardwick (1903 – 1908); C.M. Scott (1909-1910); Lila M. Thompson (1911 – 1915); Blanche Stevens (1917). According to the 1914 historical book, Margaret worked "in harmony with every choir leader" and was described as a *"tower of strength to the congregation in the service of praise and has few equals as an organist"*.



Lila M. Thompson, Choir Leader 1911 - 1915

In 1912, the session expressed their thankfulness to the current choir leader, Lila M. Thompson for her *"arduous labours in helping to make the hours of public praise and worship helpful and pleasant, and would recommend all who have the gift of song to take an active interest in the praise service of the congregation."* The 1914 historical report describes the choir as being *"large and efficient"*. In 1915, Lila Thompson expressed

her appreciation for the congregation's support in raising funds through donations and various events to purchase choir gowns.

It was in 1919 when the choir was formally organized:

***"The choir was organized February 12th, 1919, with 29 members and three honorary members. During the year we have gained 15 members and lost 10, leaving a membership of 34.***

***Under the leadership of Miss Sutherland the Choir has made steady progress and the attendance at practice as well as church services has been good.***

***Special music has been rendered at different times during the year and a concert was held in the church on the evening of Good Friday and was well patronized by the congregation."***

At this time the separate positions of organist and choir leader were combined into one. Margaret took on this new position, receiving the added salary of choir leader (\$300) in addition to the organist salary of \$250. Under the sole direction of Margaret Sutherland, the choir provided the vocal leadership for the singing of hymns and as a group they began raising funds to purchase music to sing. Their aim was *"to assist in every way to make the music a real help to the Minister and Congregation"*. To raise funds, the choir presented a concert once or twice a year, usually in April or December. Often there was a soloist or group hired to perform in the concerts, and at one time they paid \$4.00 to have a piano moved in for a concert. Some of the choir funds were used for the choir's social events and/or presentations for choir members moving away or retiring from the choir.

The organ at Knox had also undergone a recent change. The original pipe organ required air to be pumped into the pipes in order to generate sound. An individual was employed to manually pump the organ bellows by continually pushing down on a pair of levers. In 1900 this job paid \$12.00 per year and by 1917 the salary had increased to \$25.00. In 1918 a new mechanical organ blower was installed for \$285.00, and it was no longer necessary to pump the organ manually. With a continuous supply of air flowing through the pipes, the organ would have a reliable, constant sound.



Organ bellows with lever.

Music was also an important part of the Sunday School opening and closing exercises. In 1906 Sunday School was held in the sanctuary at 2:30 p.m. There was an organist or pianist hired to play who was paid \$15.00 per year; and the organ pumper was paid extra when needed. A youth orchestra was also organized by Mr. F.M. Kay *"providing the Sabbath School with excellent music in our service of praise."*

1920

*Sunday School has Youth Orchestra which plays during the opening and closing exercises, directed by Mr. Hall (who taught violin lessons).*

*The orchestra was originally started by Mr. F.M. Kay in 1906.*

*The choir already had gowns (purchased in 1915); collars added in 1920 (made by the Ladies' Aid Group).*

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC**  
**Margaret A. Sutherland**

- Good Friday Concert in 1919 raised \$108.50
- Choir rehearsals were Friday nights at 8:00 p.m.
- Began singing special music during worship services
- Choir continued presenting concerts once or twice a year
- Mrs. A. J. (Hazel) Hamilton was a paid soloist in the choir



Margaret A. Sutherland 1914

1924

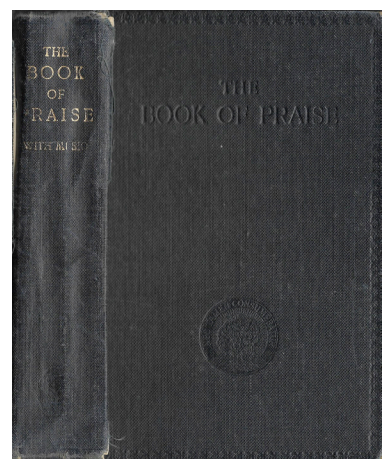
- In 1924 they started a choir fund with each member paying into the fund "to help defray expenses"

1929

- In 1929 "the Concert of the year was *The Gypsy Rover*" (a musical written in 1919). The concert was put on for 2 nights in Listowel and then repeated in Harriston, Palmerston and Arthur. They raised over \$435.00, which is the equivalent of approx. \$6,500.00 today.
- Hymnbooks with music were purchased in 1929 for \$36.77



Gypsy Rover music cover



Presbyterian Hymnbook 1918



1930

- In the annual report of 1930 the choir made a request for the choir loft to be renovated as the *“seating capacity is taxed to the utmost many times and not conducive to comfort”*. The choir then transferred \$100.00 into the building fund.



Knox Choir 1931

1931

- In 1931 after another successful concert was presented twice in Listowel and repeated in Harrison, the choir purchased new collars and caps for the choir (which only the ladies wore), and a rack to store the caps.
- An afternoon “tea” was held for Margaret Sutherland in 1933.
- A “presentation” was made to Margaret Sutherland when she retired in 1935 to show their *“appreciation of her loyal and efficient services for so many years.”*

1933 – Piano donated to the Sunday School



George Hannahson 1935

1935

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC**  
**George Hannahson**

1936

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC**  
**R.H. Dougherty**

1937

- New organ (plus new lighting and decorating of church)
- Mrs. Hazel Hamilton continued as a paid soloist until 1937. She was described as an *“outstanding soloist in the community”*.
- Concerts were presented in 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940; choir made donation to organ fund in 1940

Ladies Aid paid for the new organ over the next 5 years



Knox Choir 1935



1941

*DIRECTOR OF MUSIC*  
**Mrs. H. H. Howald**

1942

*DIRECTOR OF MUSIC*  
**Bessie Jobb**

*Miss Edna Roulston faithfully plays piano for the Sunday School.*

1943

- Choir practices moved to Thursday evenings
- Presented the play "Princess O'Toole"; raised over \$655.00 and paid \$2.50 in royalties

1945

- A choir banquet was held
- New choir gowns, collars and hats
- Bessie Jobb had a rule that every person who sang in the choir would sing a solo at some point.
- Since 1920 it had been the custom of the choir to make presentations to members who move away or retire from the choir. The last time this is mentioned in the choir reports was in 1946.

*1946 – Members of Youth Orchestra were: Elmore Hill, Lorne West, Douglas Hamilton, Donald Cockwell*

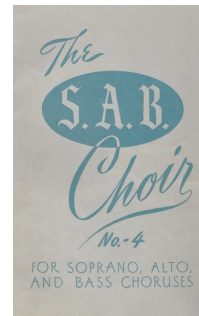
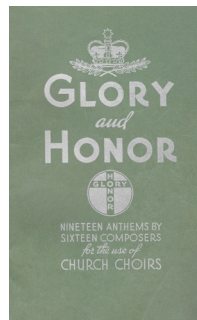
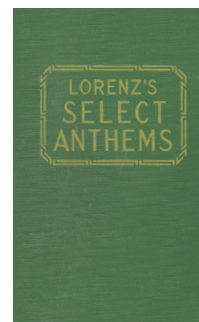
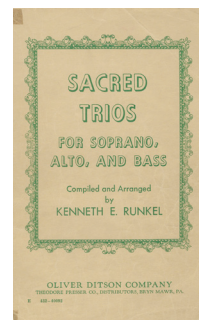
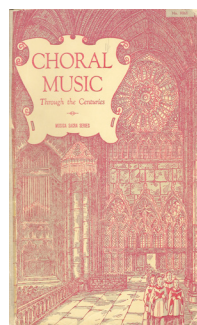
1947

**Social Events**

- In 1947 the choir was entertained to a dinner at the Royal Hotel, followed by a social evening by Mr. D.P. Savage (Sunday School Superintendent)
- In August the choir had a picnic in Port Elgin



*Bessie Jobb 1950*



*Choral Books*

1950

*The current minister, Rev. Max Putnam, sang tenor in the choir and he also played hockey and baseball. The choir were some of his biggest fans cheering him on to score a goal for his hockey team, or when he played for the Listowel Legionnaires baseball team.*

- Triple trio group called “*Cupidores*” formed under direction of Bessie Jobb

### **The Cupidores**

This singing group of young women from Knox Choir was formed in 1950 and led by Bessie Jobb. Their first performance was with a male trio named “*The Commodores*” who put on a concert at Knox, and thus the name “*Cupidores*” was chosen by the girls. Practices were held at Bessie’s apartment at 7:30 a.m. so that everyone could get to school or work.

The group performed at church socials, services and local concerts. Their repertoire was varied with songs like “*I Passed by Your Window*”; “*Come to the Fair*”, spirituals, and lighter songs such as “*Never Been Kissed*”.

Most of the girls made their own gowns with the stipulation that they be any colour as long as they were pastel shades. When singing for a strawberry social at Cromarty Presbyterian Church the only place for the girls to change into their gowns was the coal cellar. The group certainly had a lot of fun while managing to change without getting their dresses dirty!

The group reluctantly disbanded in 1952 when three members left to train as nurses; three went to Teacher’s College; and the other girls resumed their various jobs.



*Cupidores 1950s*



## 1950's continued

1954

1955 – Junior Choir formed; leaders Sandra Nickel (Arlein) and Joyce Willis; 70 members (ages 8 – 15), sang for a number of organizations, appeared twice on television and led the praise at the Christmas Eve service; also sang at the wedding of their pianist, Joyce Willis to Bob Nickel  
75 white gowns made for junior choir

- For 2 years (1953 & 1954) “scotch tape” is listed as an expenditure at \$20 (needed to repair anthem books)
- Following the renovation of the choir loft, the choir now processed in through the front doors on either side of the loft.
- The annual choir Christmas party held in Sunday School room (gifts exchanged; games played and lunch served)
- In 1955, Carillonic Bells were installed in the church tower



Knox Choir 1954

1957

1957 – Mrs. Jobb (assisted by Mrs. Estelle Fritz) took over the leadership of the Junior Choir

- From the 1958 Session Report:  
*“The Ministry of Music is an important part of our worship. Mrs. Jobb and the choir are to be commended for carrying out their responsibilities so skillfully and inspiringly.”*



Joyce Willis

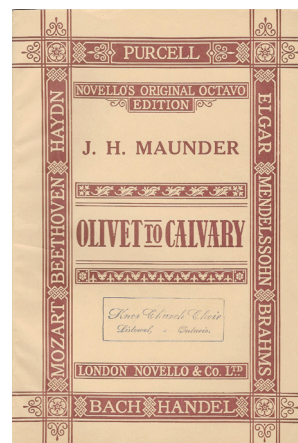


Sandra Nickel

1958

1958 – Junior choir sang the 3rd Sunday of every month and Christmas evening service.

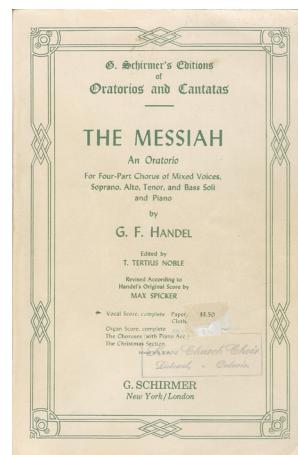
- According to the 1958 Choir Report, the combined performance with the United Church Choir for the Easter Cantata, Olivet to Calvary was “well attended but not financially successful.”



Olivet to Calvary (Easter Cantata 1958)

1959

- Went carolling at Ontario Hospital in London
- Under the direction of Bessie Jobb, the choir was kept very busy presenting concerts throughout the decade, including “St. Luke Passion” by Bach, Handel’s “Messiah”; radio and TV broadcasts; won top awards in music festivals



Handel's Messiah

1963

- Major work done on the organ

1964

*Supply organists during Bessie Jobb's illness were Joan Park & Marjorie Crawford*

- Annual Christmas Eve services began in 1964
- New Junior Choir gowns purchased (Yellow-gold)
- A new piano purchased in 1965 by Ladies' Aid group "made it possible for organ and piano duets to be played at services"

1967

- To mark Canada's Centennial a community service was held on July 2, 1967 at the Listowel arena, led by Knox's minister Rev. David Crawford and Knox Choir; Marjorie Crawford played the organ (which was brought in for the event).
- Bessie Jobb retired in 1967. She was honoured by Session for her faithful service, gifts were presented by the Music Committee, and the choir gathered at a local restaurant to pay tribute to Bessie's 25+ years as organist and choir leader at Knox.

*Bessie Jobb continued to sing in the choir while Marlene was Director*

1968

*1968 – Regular evening services discontinued  
1969 – Children's Choir went carolling at Christmas*

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC**  
**Edward Johnstone**

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC**  
**Marlene Fagan**

- Children's choir was divided into Junior & Intermediate choirs; more gowns purchased



*Bessie Jobb & Quartet 1960s*



*Marlene Fagan 1968*

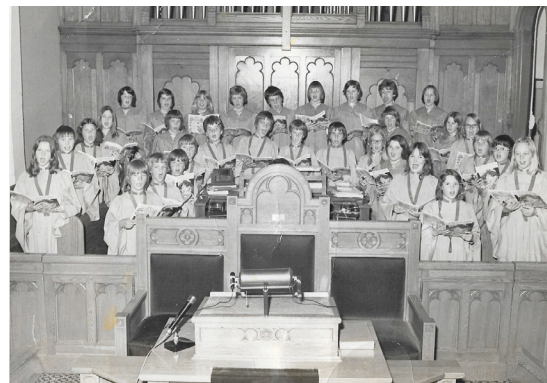


# 1970's

1972

Total membership of all choirs (Junior, Intermediate and Senior) is over 100  
New hymnbooks purchased

- Adult choir membership built back up, although there is this note from the 1972 choir report: "We still need more men to sing in the back row"
- \$1,200.00 was raised to purchase new choir gowns (Blue)
- From the 1972 Session report "We are grateful to Mrs. Fagan for the excellent leadership and training she is giving the Junior, Intermediate and Senior Choirs. We also commend the choir members for their faithful attendance and hard work."

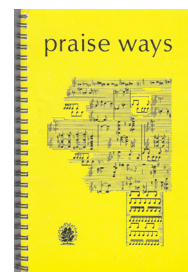
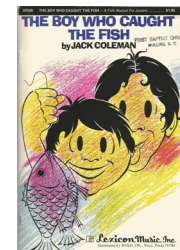
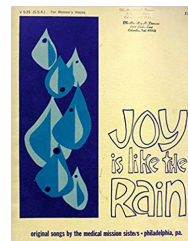
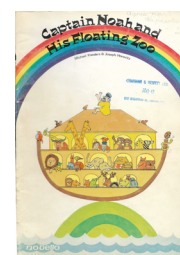
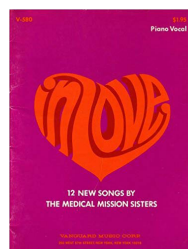


Intermediate Choir 1977

1975

A rehearsal party and choir reunion was held on June 28th, 1975.  
Jr & Int. Choirs sang 3 cantatas during the 1970's and at times they would take a turn leading the singing from the choir loft  
Choral clinics held on vocal and rehearsal techniques  
Choir sponsored a sold-out concert by The Canadian Brass  
1978 – Shirley Martin directs the Junior Choir

- To mark the Centennial of the Town of Listowel in 1975, a community service was held at Knox on June 29th with a large reunion choir of former and current members formed for the occasion. Anthems for the service were: "God So Loved the World" (Stainer), "Old One-Hundredth" (Vaughan Williams), "Praise Ye the Lord" (Rutter) "Sussex Mummer's Carol" (Vaughan Williams)
- From 1975 to 1977 the choir presented "A Gift of Music" program on Christmas Eve which was very popular with large attendances. A favourite Christmas song was "Mary's Little Boy Chile".



Children's Choir Books

1979

Children's choir sang the first verse of a children's hymn each Sunday

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC**  
**Catherine Haire**

- Marion Bristowe was hired as Director of Children's Choirs in 1979.



Marion Bristowe  
1979



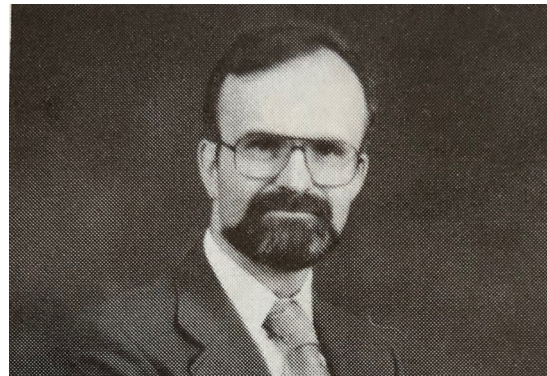
Catherine Haire  
1979

1980

1980 – New Junior Choir gowns (red)

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC  
Lynne Orme**

- Lynne Orme & her husband Peter played an organ recital in December



Brian Emery 1985

1981

Choir membership ranges from 31 to 37

Chimes added to organ via donation

Male chorus sings periodically

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC  
Brian Emery**

- Choir exchanges with other churches
- Several Christmas choral service broadcasts on CKNX Wingham
- The choir sang at 3 weddings and competed at Kiwanis music festival in Stratford, Ontario
- Combined with Trinity Choir for "Passion According to St. Mark"
- In 1986 the choir sang an Easter cantata "Behold the Empty Tomb"



Junior Choir 1982



Knox Choir 1982

1987

1987 – Worship service is now video-recorded for local cable TV

1988 – Grand piano donated

1989 – 2 services held each Sunday (9:00 & 11:00 a.m.)

- To commemorate 100 years since the sanctuary was built an old-fashioned service was held in 1987. The congregation remained seated during the singing of hymns as they were led by Brian Emery in the role of precenter.
- In 1989 two Hand Bell groups were formed. The adult group was directed by Brian Emery and the children's group was directed by Kelly Henderson.



Junior Choir 1985



Knox Choir 1985



1990

*Choir room is officially named "Bessie Jobb Choir Room"*

*Hand Bell groups directed by volunteers Marcie Johnston & Gordon Galbraith*

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC  
Nancy Martin**

- Choir exchanges with Trinity and Palmerston United Churches
- Pat Sharpless regularly stepped in as organist and choir director while Nancy Martin was off due to maternity leave and sickness



*Hand Bell Childrens Group 1991*

1993

*When moving a piano back to Knox after being in storage, the piano slipped off a pickup truck at the corner of Wallace and Inkerman. The piano was later taken to the dump!*

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC  
Agnes-Marie Henderson**

- The choir sang Easter cantatas in 1995 and 1997
- Presented concerts in 1995 and 1998



*Agnes-Marie Henderson 2014*

1996

*Children's Choir has a membership of 35  
1996 – Organ is rebuilt with a new console, solid state workings and stops added.*

- Children's Hand Bell groups divided into Beginner and Advanced
- Adult choir membership increased to 32 and more gowns were ordered



*Knox Choir 1997*

1999

*A new electronic keyboard donated for the choir room*

- Began introducing contemporary hymns to the congregation



*Hand Bell Group 1999*

2000

- Crosstones singing group formed, perform at various local events each year.

### The Crosstones

In the early 2000's four young singers from Knox formed a group and began singing occasionally during church services. The original members of the group were: Lauren Johns, Heather Johnston, Nicole Kaufman, and Alicia Lockie, accompanied and directed by Agnes Henderson. The girls felt they needed a name for their group and it was Nicole's mom who suggested "The Crosstones". After a few years Karli Purcell also joined the group adding another strong voice.

Their repertoire consists of contemporary Christian and mainstream songs. Over the years the girls sang during worship services at Knox and at various community events:

- 2006: Fundraising concert for Nicaragua Mission group  
Hospital Volunteer Appreciation Dinner  
Ladies' Night Out  
Relay for Life  
Goderich Presbyterian Church worship service
- 2007: Mennonite Church Listowel (part of a concert)  
Relay for Life
- 2008: Salvation Army Ladies' Night  
Livingstone Manor
- 2018: Relay for Life

In 2008, when three of the five were studying post-secondary education away from Listowel, it became more challenging to coordinate their schedules and they did not sing as a group very often; however, they did return each year to sing in the annual Christmas concert at Knox. In 2017 the group began performing regularly again.



*Crosstones 2006*



*Crosstones 2017*



*Crosstones 2018*



## 2000's continued

2001

Children's musicals  
"Operation Christmas  
Child" (2002); "Good News  
from the Grave" (2004)

2001 – CD Lending  
Library started

- Choir has social get-togethers twice a year (in December and June)
- Easter cantata in 2000, 2001 2003
- Christmas cantata in 2000, 2001, 2004
- Participated in evening concerts in 2001, 2003, a 2006 CD Release for Mary Smith, a 2007 Knox 150th Anniversary concert



Operation Christmas Child - 2002

2002

2002 – An extra octave  
of hand bells plus mallets  
purchased

Hand Bell group performed  
at a wedding, Livingstone  
Manor and Caressant Care

- Choir participated in Anthemfest (a gathering of area Presbyterian Church choirs for a concert), 2002 hosted in Exeter; 2003 hosted in Listowel; 2005 hosted in St. Mary's



Good News From A Grave - 2004



Anthemfest St. Mary's - 2005

2005

Choir membership ranges  
between 25 – 35

- First annual "Music of Christmas" Concert held in 2005
- Praise team formed to introduce new Praise & Worship songs
- New drum set donated by Crawford family
- Nancy Skinner assists as conductor on occasions when Agnes Henderson accompanies choir on piano



Hand Bells 2004

Nancy Skinner  
2010



Praise Team & New Drums - June 26, 2005

## 2010's

2010

*Hand Bell group perform occasionally at concerts*

*Average choir membership ranges between 22-25*

*2010 – Began using projection for worship services*

*2010 – Concert Band accompanied choir for special events at Easter and Christmas*

- Choir continues to sing a weekly anthem and lead the hymn-singing
- Knox Praise team leads the newer songs; team consists of piano, keyboard, drums and vocalists
- Choir presented 2 original Easter musicals (written by sisters Agnes & Kim Henderson) "A Week Like None Other" (2010) and "Who Do You Say I Am" (2014)
- Oct. 20th, 2013 was Music Appreciation Sunday



*Band - Easter 2010*



*Easter Musical 2010*

2015

- Singers from the community were invited to join the choir for the annual Christmas concert
- Directing of Children's choirs now assumed by Music Director; 12 children in the choir



*Music of Christmas 2016*

2016

*2016 – Children's musical "The Kingdom Connection"*

*Piano donated to choir room*

- Beginning in 2016 the annual "Music of Christmas" concert had an afternoon and evening performance
- Nicole Kaufman assists with Children's Choir



*Children's Choir 2017*



*Nicole Kaufman 2016*

2018

*2018 – Pipe organ rebuilt and upgraded with digital capabilities, and is now portable*

- A new open-concept platform was constructed with risers and chairs for choir
- Apr. 14th 2019: Sunday Service marking 100 Years of Knox Choir; choir dinner following the service at Listowel Golf Club



*New Platform 2018*