starting to enter the first phase of the industrial revolution. The replacement of the cottage system of linen production by a factory system, in which wage rates became hopelessly depressed, created social dislocations which the Churches did their best to alleviate. Secondly the Union Church belonged to the Burgher Synod8 in a town where the Churches were divided into a variety of sects. It was undoubtedly during these years that Bain developed two principles which were to guide him through his ministry – great effort in the relief of social distress and de-emphasis of sectarian argument on questions of doctrine. These were principles likely to have positive results in his work.

Union Church was a large but poor congregation. Attendance averaged 600 persons of whom 7/8 were of "the poor and working classes." Yet it devoted a large part of its income to the Church's missions. Had it devoted all its revenue to discharging the construction debt, Bain concluded in 1836, this would have been entirely paid off. As it was, almost half of its original debt of £1500 remained outstanding.3

This picture emerges of a young minister vigorously at work in a charge where much needed to be done. Its relative poverty may be gauged from the fact that, of its 750 sittings, only 389 were let, yielding a revenue of only £108 a year.4 The undoubtedly working class nature of the congregation led its minister to devote much attention to two groups – the whalers and flax workers.

The former group suffered enormous hardships. Unstable prices, constant danger and low wages combined to create a precarious existence. Having used congregational funds to relieve retired and injured whalers, Bain decided to write a book about their plight. The Perils of the Ice-Bound Whalers5 is a classic study of a particularly hazardous early-Victorian activity whose existence was soon to be threatened by technological advances. As coal-gas became readily available in the late-1840's, replacing whale-oil lamps, there was no further need for the whalers' services. Many became destitute as their livelihood disappeared, and the Union Church played an important role in their relief.

The other group occupying much of Bain's attention was the flax workers. Of all the groups and classes whose life was changed by the industrial revolution, none suffered more acutely than the textile dressers, spinners and weavers. In Lancashire, the old cottage-based spinning industry was destroyed by the technological advances of the 1780's. Thereafter cotton spinning became a factory based

The Scots have greatly influenced most of the major institutions which have been the foundation of Canadian life. Medicine, law, business and the Church are callings to which they aspired in greater proportions than their numbers would suggest. Since it provided representatives in all these fields, the Bain family of Kirkcaldy in Fife – and subsequently Scarborough, Ontario – acted as a microcosm of the well-off Scottish immigrants to Upper Canada. Indeed without such families the Canadian professions would have developed less rapidly than they did.

In those days of unashamed male dominance, the family head was undoubtedly the father. James Bain was born in the village of Madderty in Perthshire, mid-way between Crieff and Perth, in 1802. The eldest son of an artificer, he was from an early age encouraged to seek his own living. Having shown promise in school he enrolled at Edinburgh University while only 14. Apparently a gifted student, he attended lectures in anatomy, astronomy and other sciences, in addition to the regular course load of a theology student.1 On completing his degree, he spent a year teaching school in Strathmiglo in Fife, being regarded as too young for appointment to a charge. In April 1826, still only 24, he was ordained to the Union Church in Kirkcaldy.

This charge was a particularly interesting and challenging one. First it was a new Church – Bain was its first minister – in a town just.
occupation, paying subsistence wages. More troublesome to spin mechanically then cotton, linen – on which Kirkcaldy’s wealth was based – was not amenable to factory-based technology until the 1839’s. Wage rates tumbled thereafter, creating widespread hardship in the town.

Bain threw his weight into the relief of the linen workers. But the resources of his working class congregation were limited in the face of so huge a problem. As Scotland’s textile industries entered a long period of depression in the 1830’s, sufficient to inspire creation of a number of Royal Commissions of Enquiry into the subject, the problem became acute. Bain concluded that local relief alone could never solve the problem and that emigration should be encouraged to alleviate it. In 1825 at Strathmiglo, he formed a friendship with Rev. Dr. Barrie of Eramosa, Ontario, near Guelph, The latter was interested in encouraging Scottish emigration to Upper Canada, and was touring Scotland to investigate its possibilities. Though interested in the scheme, Bain was not immediately in a position to assist, but he maintained a correspondence with Barrie over the years. As the linen workers’ condition deteriorated in the 1840’s, Bain organized a public campaign to raise funds to assist their emigration. The pages of the local newspaper, the Fifeshire Advertiser, regularly contained details of groups leaving for Canada. In 1852, for example, over £100 was raised, which resulted in a group of 24 going to Eramosa that year (Although Dr. Barrie had died in 1850). Eramosa and Kirkcaldy thereafter retained close links as one of the group corresponded regularly with the Advertiser on topical Canadian political matters such as the Clergy Reserves dispute and the “rep by pop” issue.

By 1853, at the age of 51 and having held the Kirkcaldy charge for 27 years, Bain decided to make a major change in his life, following his sponsored emigrants to Eramosa. The reasons for this decision are obscure, but were certainly not financial. His stipend was a good one, £160 a year plus manse and other allowances. In addition, he had in 1828 married Catherine Rutherford, daughter of Ebenezer Rutherford, a prominent Kirkcaldy mill-owner and merchant who doubtless brought a suitable dowry with her. Nor was there ill-feeling among the congregation to force him to leave. The Presbytery Minutes suggest that the congregation was pleased with his work and wished him well in Eramosa. The Advertiser felt that he regarded his work in Kirkcaldy as complete and now looked for new challenges.

Having announced to the Presbytery in July 1853 his decision to go, Bain and his family soon left for Canada. They sailed to New York from where they travelled to Upper Canada, as Bain preached in churches along the way. On arrival in Eramosa, they were welcomed by many of those whose emigration he had sponsored through his public subscriptions, although Dr. Barrie had died in 1850. During the autumn of 1853, Bain must have had mixed feelings about his situation. No matter how warm the welcome or idyllic the life in Eramosa, it was an established community with its own minister. He could clearly not stay there as an honoured guest forever. When a vacancy occurred in St. Andrew’s Church in Scarborough, therefore, he readily accepted an offer to fill the charge until a permanent appointment was made. Having filled this position for ten months, he was inducted into the charge in October 1854, opening what was to be the final chapter in his working life.

Situated to the east of Toronto, Scarborough was an established and expanding town. Its active Scottish community furnished a vigorous Presbyterian congregation for St. Andrew’s. In addition, in the farming areas of southern Markham Township, to Scarborough’s north, a sizeable Scottish population journeyed down each Sunday to church. The congregation was a mixture of rural folk and townspeople, not particularly wealthy but earnest and devoted in their worship.

The annual report to the Presbytery in 1856 provides an impression of the congregation at that time. Some 266 of its 326 sittings were let at 10/ annually. Total revenue amounted to just over £225, total expenditure to just £219. Of the latter figure, by far the largest single item was the £120 annually paid to the minister. In good years, revenues were sufficient to ensure a comfortable surplus in church funds, although the members of the congregation were not individually wealthy. Bain was initially paid £20 annually by voluntary subscription of the congregation for the committee work he did on its behalf. In 1862, a terse note in the Congregational Records states that while the congregation were happy with his work.

It was moved by Mr. Alexander Muir that from this date, in view of the present circumstances, no donation be given to Revd. James Bain for the ensuing year. Carried.

Congregation resources were clearly limited.

At the time that the donation was discontinued; however, Bain’s work load was starting to increase. As previously mentioned, the Scots of southern Markham Township – between what are now Highway 7
and Steeles Avenue - attended St. Andrew's. But in those pioneer
days, it was a long journey for them every Sunday. Consequently,
when their numbers were sufficient to warrant it, they sought
construction of their own Presbyterian Church. In 1864, they built St.
John’s Church on what is to-day known as Warden Avenue. With true
Scottish frugality, they rejected the idea of a separate appointment,
approaching St. Andrew's to see if a joint appointment were possible.
This was merely a formality since all concerned had for many years
belonged to the same congregation, so there was little difficulty in
reaching agreement. The St. Andrew’s Congregational Records note

Resolved that under the present circumstances, it would be in the
interests of this congregation to unite with St. John’s Church,
Markham, providing Mr. Bain is willing to discharge the duties of
both charges.17

In fact, this procedure merely gave official approval to matters which
had been agreed on for some time. Bain had played an active role in
the foundation of St. John’s from the first, continuing to fill both
charges for the remainder of his ministry.9

Sundays were now even more arduous than before. Bain would
conduct a 3 hour service at St. Andrew’s in the morning, before
travelling the 8 miles or so to St. John’s. An afternoon service there
was followed by the return journey. He continued this regimen for
almost a decade, despite the snow and wind of winter, and the heat
and dust of summer. For a man in his 60’s, it was a considerable task.

It is difficult to gain a precise, personal picture of Bain. Many of the
records of St. Andrew’s for that period have been lost, while St.
John’s and its records were burned to the ground in August 1929. The
clearest description of him emerges in David Boyle’s History of
Scarborough Township, 1796-1896. Dead for just over ten years when
the book was published, Bain must have been known to the author
who wrote

Mr. Bain was in many respects a remarkable man. Possessed of a
clear intellect, he was a vigorous thinker, had a wide range of
knowledge, debating power of a high order, great fluency of
speech and a magnificent voice. Few were his superiors on the
platform. He was a man of good business ability, genial and
kindly in disposition and ever ready to help, so that when he
resigned his charge, he had many firm friends.18

Certainly his vigour cannot be disputed for he was able to continue his
work in this demanding double charge until December 1874. Then,
nearly 73 years old, he retired to the village of Markham, where his
daughter lived.

One major task remained, which he had anticipated for many years.
This was to return to Scotland for a visit to renew family ties. Accordingly, in the spring of 1875, he and his wife set out for their
birthplace. In the whirl of family reunions, he still found time to do
public work, preaching once more in Kirkcaldy’s Union Church and
speaking at the Mechanics’ Institute about Canada. He continued to
encourage emigration for the flax workers who were entering yet
another disastrous period, offering his services and assistance in this
matter.19

On his return to Markham, Bain lived out his retirement years
quietly. In 1883, his health began to deteriorate, and he died
peacefully at home on December 9, 1885.

By any measure of his chosen profession, the achievements of Rev.
James Bain must be considered significant. He had played a role, as
many like him had done, in establishing and spreading
Presbyterianism in the new land. It was in this way that men of
medicine, the bench and the cloth established in Canada institutions
which were essentially British in character. Canada retained its loyalty
to and affection for the Crown, Empire and British way of life until
well into the twentieth century through the efforts of such people.
This was no mean achievement in a land which became increasingly
culturally complex as immigrants began to reach Canada in increasing
numbers from countries other than Britain. By this time, though, the
British character of Canadian institutions had been established.

At the individual level, Bain had established a new congregation in
Scotland and assisted in the development of another in the
Scarborough-Markham area. His encouragement of and assistance to
the Kirkcaldy flax workers in a small way contributed to the
alleviation of misery and the development of a new and vigorous
colony.

Bain’s family development is a case study in the energy and
acquisitiveness of the Scots. The eldest son of a skilled craftsman in
Scotland, whose society was being changed by the growth of industry
and urbanism, he clearly had to strike out in his own direction. His
marriage to the daughter of a prominent merchant indicates how he
had climbed the social scale by his mid 20’s, a progression continued
by his children. His eldest son, James, became a doctor and professor
of medicine at University of Missouri. His son, William, became a
Q.C. with a lucrative practice in Toronto. His daughter, Catherine, married Frederick A. Reesor, a descendant of the first family to settle in Markham, and manager of the Standard Bank. In two generations, therefore, the Bain family had risen from skilled craftsmanship to prestigious levels of medicine, law and finance. Such families were the stuff of which the Canadian dream of a new life in the new land was made.

The life of Rev. James Bain is significant in that it typified the achievements of a certain type of Scot, both in his native land and in Canada. Possessing intelligence, energy and compassion such people alleviated human suffering and helped to develop a new society. It is easily forgotten, in the more complex times in which we live, that the basic humanity and respect for hard work of Canadian society today were largely laid down by men of his ilk.

NOTES

1 Markham Economist, December 17, 1885.
2 Royal Commission on Religious Instructions, Scotland, Scottish Record Office HH 37/116.
3 Ibid., HH 37/39.
4 Ibid., HH 37/116.
6 Markham Economist, December 17, 1885.
7 Fifeshire Advertiser, September 11, 1852.
8 For example, Fifeshire Advertiser, April 30, 1853.
10 Ibid., December 13, 1853.
11 Fifeshire Advertiser, August 20, 1853.
12 Minutes of Kirkcaldy United Presbyterian Presbytery, July 26, 1853.
13 Markham Economist, December 17, 1885.
15 St. Andrew's Church, Annual Report to Presbytery, 1856. St. Andrew's Church Records.
16 St. Andrew's Church, Congregational Records, January 13, 1862.
17 Ibid., September 11, 1865.
18 Boyle, op. cit., p. 142.
19 Fifeshire Advertiser, July 14, 1875.

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---, Congregational Records.

a Following the first Jacobite rebellion, an Act of parliament was passed requiring all Burgesses to reject Catholicism and to swear allegiance to "the true religion as presently professed in this realm." Such an oath was subject to varying interpretation - those who felt able to accept it were known as the Burghers while those unable to do so called themselves the anti-Burghers. With the abolition of the Burgess Oath in 1820, hopes were high in Kirkcaldy and elsewhere for reunion. Quite the reverse was the case. The majority of its anti-Burgher congregation opposed reunion, and the minority withdrew to form a new Church, aptly titled the Union Church.

b His financial security is further suggested by his decision to seek the uncertainty of Eramosa, where he would hold no paid position, rejecting offers to accept calls at Philadelphia, Cincinnati and New York with large emoluments, as he travelled from New York, where his ship docked, to Canada West. - Markham Economist, December 17, 1885.

c In 1859, glebe lands were for the first time fully let, contributing over £264 to revenues that year. - St. Andrew's Church, Annual Report to Presbytery, 1859.

d In 1859, for example, he did valuable work in having St. Andrew's claim to disputed lands recognized by law. (Congregational Records, January 10, 1859 and December 12, 1859).

e St. John's remained part of the Scarborough charge until 1887, when it became part of the Union ville charge. - W.H. McCowan, The History of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Scarborough, Ontario, 1818-1975. (Scarborough: 1976), p. 9.