

A Great Man is Honored

By Rev. Tom Saunders

It is exactly 100 years since the Presbyterian church arrived in western Canada. It came to the "Forks," the present site of Winnipeg, in the person of Rev. John Black on Friday, September 19, 1851. On September 28 he conducted his first service at Old Kildonan.

Much has been written and many old stories handed down by word of mouth about the struggles of the Red river settlers in those days and the importance to them of their religious faith. Now, in the centenary of John Black's arrival, their story and the vital part played in their spiritual development by this pioneer minister will be told again, in narrative and pageantry, at the meeting of the United Church Conference on Thursday evening at Westminster church.

The script for the pageant and its accompanying tableaux has been prepared by Rev. Allen Huband; and Mr. Huband and Dr. W. G. Martin of Grace church will act as narrators, with the choirs of Westminster and St. Pauls churches assisting.

The settlers to whom John Black ministered had arrived in the Red River valley some 40 years before. In the early days, when they had no minister, James Sutherland, a catechist, was given power to marry and baptize, and in 1820, Rev. John West, a minister of the Anglican church, arrived. To please the settlers, who were mostly Presbyterian, Mr. West simplified the Anglican service, and many a good Gaelic Scot attended the Anglican church. Their children were baptized by Anglican ministers, and many of the original settlers were buried in the Anglican cemetery. With the arrival of John Black, however, they had, for the first time, a minister and church of their own.

Today he is claimed both by the Presbyterian church and the United church. In 1925, at the time of Church Union, the congregation at Old Kildonan elected to remain Presbyterian; but the congregation at Little Britain, which John Black also served, came into the Union. In 1862, at the request of the governor of the colony, he had begun preaching in Fort Garry, where the city of Winnipeg now stands. This was, in effect, the beginnings of the Presbyterian cause in Winnipeg. Out of it came the parent Presbyterian church of the city, now Knox United church, which is the United Church Conference church for this year.

Besides his work as a pastor and preacher, John Black was intensely interested in education. This academic interest culminated in the founding of Manitoba college which, with old Wesley college, forms the present United college in downtown Winnipeg.

The United church celebration this week is a prelude to John Black centenary services to be held in congregations on the Sunday nearest September 28—the actual date of his first service at Old Kildonan.

The pageant at Westminster church on Thursday evening will tell the graphic and

colorful story of the first settlers leaving their Highland homes and sailing from Stornoway for the shores of Hudson bay. It will include their hazardous trek from York Factory, "poling, sailing and rowing the heavy York boats through all kinds of weather to Fort Douglas on the Red." It will tell of their early struggles in their new Canadian homes, of their desire to keep their faith alive through family worship, of Lord Selkirk who founded the colony, and of John Black, the apostle of Red river. The United church honors a great man at its Conference this week.

