

Program for the Grand Bend United Church Centennial Pageant

Mary (Blewett) Alderson found this Grand Bend United Church Centennial Pageant Program in November 2014, as she was sorting and packing to move from Strathroy back to Grand Bend. Mary is in possession of her parents', the late Bill & Hazel Blewett's diaries, and this program was in a drawer with them. The Blewetts lived on highway 21 south of Grand Bend and were members of the United Church from 1955 to about 1983. The history of the church was presented as a play, organized by the UCW as a project for Canada's Centennial in May, 1967.

"I remember my mother having meetings with some playwrights from Sarnia, and working with several of the UCW ladies collecting the histories of the Grand Bend churches. I also recall rehearsals in the church basement, but the actual pageant was performed at the Grand Bend Public School in the new gym.

I remember my Mom asking my Dad for his mortar board (not the graduation cap, but a real wooden board with a handle in the middle of the bottom for masonry) and a trowel to be used by the actors, and since she didn't have any wet cement handy, my mother made a mixture of porridge and coloured it grey with a melted black crayon, to put on the mortar board. When it was applied to the cardboard corner stone during the play, it caused the cardboard to become wet and collapse.

I was 12 years old and taking piano lessons at the time, so Mom coerced me into playing the piano before the show, as the audience was coming in and taking their seats. I think I was first. I remember being terribly nervous and racing through my one song, so that older, more talented young people could take their turn. It may have been my first and last time performing in public.

I believe the gym was jam-packed with every seat taken and people were standing along the back and side walls. Or maybe it just seemed like a huge audience to a scared 12 year old. In any case, the evening was deemed a success.

Mom typed this program on her very old, black Underwood manual typewriter -- cutting a stencil on the tissue-like paper. She had to be careful not to hit the letter "o" too hard, or the centre would fall out. Then that stencil was applied to the barrel of the old Gestetner copier and thick black ink was squeezed out of a big tube (like a giant tube of toothpaste) and smeared over the stencil. The Gestetner was in the church basement, and it was my job to crank the handle and turn out the copies. She also did the church bulletins, so there was lots of cranking to be done each week. Could be the reason my right arm is stronger than my left. But bulletins had to be printed, before I could cross the street to go roller-skating Saturday night.

An afterthought -- she also cut the stencil for the program for our wedding in June 1979. But by then the Gestetner was electric and didn't have to be cranked."