

# Bexley Methodist Church (398 County Road 41)

## Heritage Designation Evaluation

Bexley Township

CON 4 PT LOT 9 BEXLEY

PIN 6311-50101

May 2021



## Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest

The subject property has been researched and evaluated in order to determine its cultural heritage significance under Ontario Regulation 9/06 of the Ontario Heritage Act R.S.O. 1990. A property is eligible for designation if it has physical, historical, associative or contextual value and meets any one of the nine criteria set out under Regulation 9/06 of the Act. A heritage evaluation of the property has determined that 398 County Road 41 has cultural heritage value or interest and merits designation under the Ontario Heritage Act.

### 1. The property has design value or physical value because it:

i. is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material, or construction method:

The subject property is a representative example of a rural Methodist church constructed in the late nineteenth century. The church, which is believed to have been constructed in 1884, reflects the simplified use of the Gothic Revival style by many Methodist congregations at this time, particularly in rural areas with limited resources. The design which includes large lancet windows on a basic rectangular plan with a front entrance porch demonstrates the type of churches constructed on rural Methodist circuits during this period.

ii. displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit:

The subject property displays a typical degree of craftsmanship and artistic merit of a rural church of this type from the late nineteenth century.

iii. demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement:

There are no specific technical or scientific achievements associated with this property.

### 2. The property has historical or associative value because it:

i. has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization, or institution that is significant to the community:

The property has direct association with the Methodist Church in Bexley Township and northern Victoria County as a whole during the late nineteenth century. The Methodist Church was the largest religious group in the area during this time period and the subject property reflects its large circuits in northern Victoria County. The church was an important community building in the hamlet from its construction in 1884 and direct links to the theme of religion in early settlement.

ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture:

The property yields information regarding the role of Methodism, and religion in general, in both the hamlet of Bexley and Bexley Township in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. As the only church in the community, it was the primarily religious space in the hamlet until its closure in 1965. It also yields information about religion as a key part of the life of early settlers in northern Victoria County.

iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to the community:

The designer of this church is not known. It was likely constructed by local community members.

### 3. The property has contextual value because it:

i. is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area:

The subject property supports the character of the local area as a small nineteenth century hamlet and rural post office. The former hamlet is comprised of a collection of historic properties around the intersection of County Road 41 and North Mountain Road. The historic church, as one of the two surviving institutional structures in the community, contributes to the hamlet character of the area and reinforces its history as a small, rural community from the nineteenth century.

ii. is physically, functionally, visually, or historically linked to its surroundings:

The subject property is historically and visually linked to its surrounding as part of the former hamlet of Bexley. The church was constructed during the development of Bexley in the second half of the nineteenth century and has a historical relationship with the surrounding properties which were primarily constructed during this period. The church reflects the nineteenth century architectural character of the surrounding community.

iii. is a landmark.

The subject property is a well-known local landmark as the former Methodist church in the community. It is highly visible in its location at the intersection of County Road 41 and North Mountain Road and is known locally.

## Design and Physical Value

398 County Road 41 has design and physical value as a representative example of a rural Methodist church constructed in late nineteenth-century Ontario. Constructed in the hamlet of Bexley around 1884, the church demonstrates the primary characteristics of Methodist architecture as constructed in rural locations during this period. The church, which was originally known as Bexley Methodist Church and then Bexley United Church after the creation of the United Church of Canada in 1925, retains its original massing, siding and windows although it was converted to residential use in the 1970s after the closure of the church in 1965.

The architecture of the Methodist Church in Canada evolved throughout the nineteenth century to reflect the changing views within the church on architecture and its relationship to the liturgy, worship and theology of Methodism. Early Methodist churches in Canada were, in general, non-descript. Meeting houses, as they were known, were highly utilitarian buildings with limited ornamentation. Generally constructed on a rectangular plan, they featured a gable roof, sash windows and an central entrance on either the front or side of the building. On the inside, they were meant explicitly to facilitate preaching and the internal layout reflected that, without aisles as might be found in other Protestant churches from this time. These buildings, constructed between about 1790 and 1840, were extremely plain and basic and reflected a general iconoclastic attitude prevalent in the Methodist Church in the early nineteenth century.

This style of building was highly suited to Methodist theology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The key planks of Methodism were, and remained, the personal conversion experience, personal salvation and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. The early Methodist Church in Canada was heavily focussed on conversion as a central aspect of its mandate and it evolved into a highly emotional denomination. The arrival of Methodists in Canada corresponded with the Second Great Awakening with which the Methodist Church in the United States was intimately connected and Methodist practice during this period was consistent with the theological concerns of this revival. In particular, Methodism was characterised at that time by the camp meetings which took place outdoors and aimed to convert people through experience, emotion, and a connection with the Holy Spirit.

The impact, architecturally, from their theology and practice was that the physical form of the church building was effectively irrelevant to early nineteenth century Methodist congregations. The belief that the Holy Spirit could inhabit any space, both indoors and out, and that conversion did not require a specific physical environment meant that church buildings were utilitarian spaces, not symbolic ones. Because of this, congregations built structures that did not necessarily adhere to the popular styles of the day and could facilitate their liturgical and theological needs. Simplicity was seen as

more conducive for receiving the Holy Spirit and was, therefore, the architectural order of the day for Methodists. These basic churches also conformed to the writings of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who advocated for simplicity in worship space design. Functionality was the driving force in their design and the idea of creating beautiful architecture for its own sake was highly discouraged.

Liturgically, Methodism was a preaching-based form of Christianity where the spoken word took precedence over ritual, form, and ceremony. As a result, buildings used for worship was constructed to facilitate this and the need for a form that could accommodate ceremonial worship, such as in the Catholic and Anglican Churches, was not necessary. Effectively any building with good acoustics and sight lines to the preacher was suitable for Methodist worship and that can be seen in the diversity of spaces that early congregations used. Although few of these early Methodist churches in Canada have survived, there are several notable examples in Ontario which demonstrate this type of architecture, including the Hay Bay Church, constructed in 1792 near Adolphustown, and the White Chapel, constructed in 1809 in Picton.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the tendency of Methodist congregations to eschew ornamentation in their church buildings was lessening, particularly with the rise of the Gothic Revival style in church architecture. The Gothic Revival style had arisen in the 1840s in the Anglican Church and, throughout the mid-nineteenth century, spread to other denominations. By the second half of the century, it was the dominant architectural style in church architecture in Canada and could be seen in nearly every denomination in both urban and rural communities.

The Gothic Revival was characterised by its use of architectural forms and details taken from medieval architecture, particularly medieval ecclesiastical architecture. The style was first used by the Anglican Church as part of a shift towards more romantic and formalized forms of worship in the mid-nineteenth century. The Gothic style, because of its roots in medieval ecclesiastical buildings, was seen as a fundamentally Christian form of architecture and an embodiment of the moral and beliefs of the Church and was, therefore, viewed as the most appropriate style for church architecture.

The style developed a number of key principles which defined the ecclesiastical architecture that came out of the movement. The main feature of the Gothic style was the pointed arch, manifested primarily in doors, windows, and vaults. Other features that became popular included steeply pitched roofs, medieval motifs and ornaments such as the trefoil, buttressing, bell towers, and an internal arrangement focussed on the altar. More abstractly, the style emphasized the notion of verticality as a key element of the Gothic style, meaning the upward visual movement within the architecture. These principles formed the basis of the Gothic Revival style in ecclesiastical architecture and came together to inform how churches were built throughout Canada and across

denominations throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, including Methodism.

One of the key publications that shows the transition of Methodist architectural practices is F.J. Jobson's *Chapel and School Architecture*, published in 1850 and explicitly focussed on the architecture of Methodist churches and schools. Jobson was clear in his discussion that the Gothic Revival style, despite its connections to the Anglican and Catholic churches at this time, was suited to Methodist worship because of its origins as a Christian style of architecture; this was in contrast to the Classically-inspired styles of the Georgian period which were seen as having historical connections to Classical, pagan culture, despite their widespread use in ecclesiastical buildings. The Gothic style was, in his words, "the natural embodiment" of Christianity and therefore suitable for use in Christian worship spaces.

In his text, which was widely circulated and well-known, Jobson discussed the idea that the function of a building should be known by its appearance; in his view, a church should look like a church, as opposed to many of the plain box-like structures favoured by many Methodist congregations. The church, in his view, was a visible representation of Christianity and should be reflective of its position as God's house, through the use of suitable forms, good proportions and tasteful ornament. He did not, however, advocate for highly ornamented buildings, emphasizing instead that ornament should be incorporated into churches through its vital elements, including windows, doors, and exterior cladding. For Jobson, the simplicity of form that had characterized Methodist buildings could be enhanced and made more church-like through limited ornamentation integrated into the construction of the building. Specifically, he emphasized the pointed arch as the key feature of the Gothic style which could be used in Methodist buildings.

Jobson also noted that the adaption of the Gothic style to Methodist churches did not have to be inconsistent with Methodist theology and worship. He encouraged congregations and church builders to take only those forms from the style which supported Methodist practices and makes changes as necessary to accommodate their needs. Most notably and emphasized by Jobson several times within the text, this involved the removal of the central aisle on the interior of the church as this was not needed for processions in the Methodist liturgy because it was preaching-based. He also deemed chancels, rood screens, and towers unnecessary because of their lack of suitability for Methodist theology and worship needs.

Jobson's text accurately reflects the shift in Methodist architecture in the second half of the nineteenth century when the Gothic Revival became the default style for churches. The Church pivoted its architectural practice, in line with other Christian denominations at this time, to use Gothic Revival stylistic details in a variety of ways, from the construction of large urban churches that were unmistakable Gothic in their design to

smaller rural churches, such as the Bexley Methodist Church, that integrated Gothic details into basic rectangular plans.

The shift that occurred in architecture is related, in a large part, to the changing theology and pastoral practices of the Methodist Church in the middle of the nineteenth century. By the 1850s, the Methodist Church was institutionalizing and moving away from its revivalist roots, in a large part because of its growth throughout the first half of the century and its newfound centrality in the lives of communities across Canada. The emotive practices of the early nineteenth century and the heavy focus on conversion shifted to a focus on pastoral care, the provision of everyday spiritual guidance, and addressing the moral and social issues in nineteenth century society. This did not mean that the Methodist emphasis on personal experience went away, but was rather tempered by other concerns related to their pastoral ministry and the role of the church in Canadian society.

With newfound institutional station, the Methodist Church felt that they were required to be a recognizable presence in Canadian communities which contributed to the spiritual and moral guidance of their members and to the community at large. The idea that worship space only needed to respond to practical needs was being replaced with an emphasis on church buildings as communicative tools that could demonstrate the beliefs and ideals of the Church. Architecturally, this meant providing a worship space that was distinct from the surrounding secular environment. Gothic Revival structures provided a venue for this shift because, by the mid-nineteenth century, they were the default option for ecclesiastical architecture and had distinctive, and clear, connections with Christianity. By the late nineteenth century, virtually every new Methodist church constructed in Canada was built in the Gothic Revival style.

398 County Road 41 was constructed in a stripped down version of the Gothic Revival style, reflective of the general trends in Methodist architecture in the late nineteenth century. Given its rural location, the church was necessarily small but the builders nevertheless made a clear effort to use elements of the Gothic style in the building. The church is constructed on a rectangular plan with an entrance porch on the front elevation. Its Gothic Revival elements are limited: these are the front entrance porch, the gable roof, and the lancet windows with tracery along the 3-bay nave of the building. Nevertheless, they still reflect the general principles of the style that had made their way into the Methodist church by this time.

There are differences in this church, however, from the Gothic Revival principles of the Anglican church and from many of the more ornate Methodist churches constructed during this time. The church is constructed in wood, which was not uncommon in rural churches in Canada, but it uses horizontal siding, as opposed to board and batten which was the preferred exterior treatment by proponents of the style. Horizontal siding

was not uncommon as an exterior treatment, but it does reflect the less strict interpretation of the style prevalent in the Methodist Church. In this case, the church is clad in Dutch or German lap siding, a popular style in the 1880s. The other change was in the interior arrangement, which is no longer in place because of the conversion of the building to residential use in the 1970s. The interior, which was comprised of a single rectangular space, was oriented towards a pulpit and had three lines of pews with two aisles between them, as opposed to the single aisle favoured in the Gothic style. This, however, was completely consistent with the direction taken by the Methodist Church in the late nineteenth century in its use of the Gothic style without the formal, processional-based internal arrangements required in the Anglican Church.

To provide an analysis of its consistency with rural Methodist churches in Victoria County at this time, the Bexley Methodist Church can be compared with other Methodist churches in the local area. At various times, the church was part of the Coboconk Methodist Circuit and the Victoria Road Methodist Circuit, which covered a geographic area stretching from Lake Dalrymple to Kinmount and included a range of worship spaces, both purpose built and improvised.

The best surviving comparison from these circuits is the Methodist church in Norland, now Hope United Church. Constructed in 1885, just a year after the church in Bexley, it replaced an older log church on the same location. Although it has been extensively modified, the church as it was constructed in 1885 was extremely similar to its counterpart in Bexley, save for the fact that it did not have an entrance porch, and that it was larger, with four bays, instead of three, consistent with the fact that Norland was a much larger community. However, the church in Norland was constructed on the same basic plan, with lancet windows, a gable roof, and limited ornamentation on the front façade.

The closest Methodist church, geographically, to Bexley on this circuit was in Victoria Road. Constructed in 1875, it is a more ornate version of its counterpart in Bexley. The four-bay church is built in polychromatic brick with ornate window hoods and a rose window on the front elevation. However, it is built on the same plan as the Bexley church and contains the same entrance porch and massing. A comparison of these two churches reflects the differences between these two communities in the last quarter of the nineteenth century: in at the end of the century, Victoria Road was a prosperous railway hub with a population of over 300 hundred people, while Bexley was a small hamlet with 35 residents. Despite these demographic and economic differences, however, the same basic church form was used by both Methodist congregations, speaking to the prevalence of this design in rural Methodist churches at this time.

This design was also found in other dissenting churches in rural areas at this time. The simple rectangular form with an entrance porch and lancet windows was an easy to

replicate design and very serviceable for rural dissenting congregations for whom the visual and ceremonial forms required in the Anglican and Catholic Churches was not necessary. Two good comparators can be found in the Kinmount United (formerly Presbyterian) Church, constructed in 1867, and the Baddow Baptist Church, constructed in 1874, which are virtually identical to their Methodist counterpart in Bexley. These two churches were constructed on the same plan as the Bexley Methodist church, using a with a three-bay nave and central entrance with no ornamentation on the front elevation, although the Kinmount Church does have a cross on the front of the building. The belfry on the Kinmount Church is a later addition, from 1907. All three churches employ horizontal siding with the Baddow Church also making use of the Dutch lap type.

The church has had limited modifications from when it was constructed. In 1923, the wooden siding was covered in chicken wire and cement, in an effort to modernize the look of the building; the wooden siding, however, was not removed. After the closure of the church in 1965, the cement was removed to reveal the wooden siding underneath. The church has also been more recently converted to residential use and an addition added to the rear of the building. The addition has not changed the massing of the original structure which remains intact. A rear attached shed, which was used to house horses and later cars, was removed. The interior of the church has also been changed to accommodate a residential use and the interior fittings removed. In general, however, the exterior of the church looks much as it did when the building was constructed and retains its key exterior elements which provide its architectural significance.

### Historical and Associative Value

398 County Road 41 has historical and associative value as the Methodist and later United church in the hamlet of Bexley in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The church, which remained in operation until 1965, formed part of the Coboconk and Victoria Road Methodist circuits and later the Victoria Road Pastoral Charge after the creation of the United Church of Canada. It is directly related to the theme of religion within pioneer life and in rural Ontario hamlets in the late nineteenth century. The church yields information regarding the role of religion, and Methodism specifically, in Bexley Township in the late nineteenth century and the demographic settlement patterns of this area of the county.

Bexley Township was first surveyed in 1831 and limited settlement followed soon after, primarily near the north shore of Balsam Lake. Settlement was slow, however, likely due to the poor quality of the soil and the difficulty in accessing the township throughout the mid-nineteenth century; by the 1871 census, there were fewer than 500 people living in the township. The northern part of the township away from the major waterbodies was

particularly inaccessible. The area around the hamlet of Bexley itself was first settled in the 1860s by several families from Cavan Township and a rural post office was established to serve the area, known locally as “Peel’s Settlement”, Bexley Post Office, or Bexley Corners. The hamlet was centred, as it is now, at corner of Lots 3 and 4 in both Concession 9 and 10. The new settlers established farms in the area, although the poor soil made farming difficult.

More substantial settlement did not take off in the area until the early 1870s and the arrival of the Toronto and Nipissing Railway in 1872. The railway began construction in Toronto in 1871 with the intention of eventually creating a railway link to Lake Nipissing; the line made it as far as Coboconk, running roughly east-west across Bexley Township, north of Balsam Lake, with stops at Victoria Road, Corson’s Siding and in Coboconk. Although it never reached its final destination, the railway had significant implications for Bexley Township: it allowed for settlers to more easily and quickly enter into the township and it heralded a period of economic and population growth throughout the 1870s and 1880s. During this time, new settlements were formed and consolidated and the infrastructure and services available in the township increased to respond to new demand. This includes the establishment of new churches, as religion was at the heart of pioneer life and one of the primary institutions in the villages and hamlets throughout northern Victoria County.

Many of the settlers in the township were English, Irish and Scottish Protestants and the growth of religion and the construction of new churches in the township in the late nineteenth century mirrored this demographic pattern. By the turn of the century, Methodism was the largest religious group in Bexley Township. The 1911 census demonstrates the religious affiliations of the population with 317 local residents identifying as Methodists, compared to 195 Anglicans, 121 Presbyterians, and 110 Catholics. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were four Methodist churches in the township, at Coboconk, Corson’s Siding, Victoria Road, and Bexley. Two of these churches, at Bexley and Victoria Road, are still extant.

There were two Methodist circuits in Bexley in the mid- to late-nineteenth century: the Coboconk circuit and the Victoria Road circuit. These circuits shifted and changed throughout the second half of the century with population, demographics, and congregation needs and included congregations in the neighbouring townships of Laxton, Eldon, Carden, and Somerville and sometimes stretched much further afield. Between 1862 and 1880, the circuits ranged in size from about 40 to 180 members with up to 11 different appointments, or worship sites, on each circuit, although not all of these had dedicated churches, and extending as far, at some points, as Lake Dalrymple in the west and Kinmount in the east. The Victoria Road circuit, which was the first circuit in Bexley Township, was formed in 1861, and was eventually absorbed into the larger Coboconk circuit in 1864, before becoming its own circuit again in 1875. Bexley

was part of the Victoria Road circuit, because of its close proximity to the larger community. The statistics of the circuit are demonstrative of the demographic changes in the township in the second half of the nineteenth century, namely the significant population growth beginning in the early 1870s and the large numbers of Methodists who settled there. The exact number of Methodists attending services in Bexley is not known, but the population in the hamlet itself was small; by 1898, only 35 people lived there, although it is likely that families from the surrounding farms travelled to the church there. There is also evidence that families from Corson's Siding also travelled to the church in Bexley to worship, rumoured to be due to the perceived lack of morality in the Corson's Siding settlement which was operated as a lumbering community by Gooderham and Worts until the early 1890s.

The religious makeup of Bexley Township mirrors that of Ontario in the late nineteenth century, notably the prominence of the Methodist Church. By the 1870s, the Methodist Church was the largest and most influential denomination in Canada, particularly in Ontario, and had firmly moved into the cultural mainstream from its roots on the fringes in the early part of the century. This was a significant change from a century previous when the church was small and operated outside of the established denominations. There were a number of reasons for this rapid growth. On one hand, the Methodists were very aggressive evangelists and actively worked to gain converts, more so than other denominations in Canada at this time. On the other was the flexibility of Methodism in its structure and its heavy emphasis on the use of itinerate lay preachers. Early nineteenth century Methodism was extremely mobile in the huge circuits its preachers were expected to cover and very flexible in terms of its need, or lack thereof, for dedicated worship space, making it ideal for newly settled communities. Although it became highly influential in all sizes of communities across Ontario by the mid-nineteenth century, Methodism was particularly popular in rural areas where its itinerate flexible model was suitable for smaller communities with limited resources for church building and which may not have been served by ministers or priests from other denominations. By 1881, just over 30% of Ontarians were affiliated with the Methodist Church, compared to only 17% forty years earlier in 1842.

As the church grew and became more entrenched within Canadian life, it underwent a number of changes, particularly regarding its pastoral model and role within secular life of local communities. Theologically, the Church had moved away from the religious fervour of the early nineteenth camp meeting and the focus on sudden conversion towards a model that favoured the pastoral care of its members and a focus on social and moral issues in the wider community. The Church still emphasizing the importance of a personal relationship with God through experience and the conversion of its members, but the newly converted had become large congregations who required ministry and regularized worship. The emphasis within the church had shifted away

from a focus purely on spiritual matters to one that was more concerned with the role of religion in the secular world and both the spiritual and every day lives of its members. In rural communities, the Church aimed to both provide spiritual guidance and to improve rural life through the promotion of religious, social, recreational and educational activities. The church was no longer a small denomination on the edge of Canadian life, but rather an entrenched institutional presence throughout Ontario and its growing communities.

The most visible indication of the growth and institutionalization of Methodism in the mid-nineteenth century was the proliferation of churches in communities across Ontario. The second half of the century saw a massive number of new churches constructed for Methodist congregations across Ontario, in both urban and rural settings. The growth in congregants required spaces for them to worship, but the shift in focus for the church with regard to its pastoral programming did as well. While still holding revivals and camp meetings, the new focus on pastoral and community care changed how Methodists worshiped and brought them indoors for more regularized services. The Church now required dedicated church buildings. At the same time, the denomination's newfound prominence also required physical spaces for gathering separate from secular spaces and that were recognizable as Christian buildings. While Methodists did have churches in the first half of the century, the second half of the century brought with it a new importance to physical space.

In most English-speaking communities in Ontario with primarily Protestant populations, the Methodist church was a central aspect of community life and occupied a prominent physical location in the community. The church served as a worship space, but also often as a community hub around which the community could gather. This was particularly true in rural communities. The church and school were the generally the only public buildings in small hamlets such as Bexley and were the physical locations around which community life centred. The church in Bexley was known to have housed a library in the early decades of its life and was certainly used for other purposes as well. The Church's new focus on pastoral care and involvement in secular issues, namely those related to morality, also made it an important voice in Ontario communities and the church building an important representation of its work.

The Bexley Methodist Church also has a specific historic relationship with the first settlers in this area of Bexley Township, the area known as "Peel's Settlement" after one of the early families and the family which donated land for the church building. The land on which the church was constructed was donated by George Peel, who deeded the land to the Methodist Church in 1886, although the church is believed to have been constructed several years previously. Peel was born in 1836 and emigrated to Bexley from Cavan Township in Durham in the mid-1860s. He was one a number of individuals and their families who immigrated from Cavan to Bexley and settled around the site of

the Bexley post office, including his brothers William and Henry Peel, as well as Henry Southern, and Joseph and George Staples. These families were all Irish Methodists and would have been active in the Bexley Church in the nineteenth century. It is likely that they formed the core congregation for the church with newer members joining as they arrived in the community.

The current church, however, does not appear to be the first Methodist church located in the hamlet. The 1871 map of Victoria County shows a Methodist Church at the northwest corner of County Road 41 and North Mountain Road, as they are known today, as opposed to the southeast corner where the current building is located. This property, Lot 10, Concession 4, was owned by William Peel, believed to be the brother of George Peel, who settled on this property in the 1860s. The older church is believed to have been constructed around 1864, at about the same time as the Peels arrived in Bexley Township. Although there are no records confirming this, it was certainly constructed prior to 1871. There are no descriptions of what this church looked like, but it was likely a very basic wooden, probably log structure, meant to serve the basic needs of worship in the community.

The construction of newer institutional buildings as rural communities consolidated and matured was not uncommon. Many early log churches were quickly replaced, as funds allowed, with frame or brick alternatives, and were occasionally moved to different locations as appears to be the case for the Bexley Church. Schools followed a similar pattern, including the school in Bexley which went through three different buildings from a log building in the 1860s to a brick one in the 1920s on property donated by settler John Black. The replacement of older buildings speaks to the growth and increasing prosperity of a small hamlet like Bexley in the late nineteenth century and a new sense of permanence as the initial hurdles of settlement were overcome.

The Methodist church, and later the United Church, was an important part of the community in Bexley in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. The church closed in 1965, likely due to declining attendance and the ability of local people to travel further afield for services at larger churches, something which would have been much more difficult when the church was constructed in 1884. Despite its conversion to residential purposes, the building still yields information regarding the early settlement of the area and the role of religion within it.

## Contextual Value

398 County Road 41 has contextual value as a character defining feature in the hamlet of Bexley. The church forms part of a collection of historic properties surrounding the intersection of County Road 41 and North Mountain Road which form the nucleus of the

community and is historically linked to the surrounding properties, including the school house which is still extant on North Mountain Road. The church is also a well-known local landmark as the former Methodist church in the community.

The church is contributing feature the character of the area as a rural hamlet, centred on the intersection of County Road 41 and North Mountain Road. The hamlet is comprised of a number of historic residential buildings, the church, and the former school. The hamlet extends along the two roads, primarily on County Road 41, and there are no other streets. A historic but undated image (see below) of the hamlet show the former cluster of properties near the church, including the original McKegue Store and later the post office (#1) built around 1870, a newer building for the McKegue Store built in 1902 (#2) and a freight shed (#3) which also served as a grist mill. This grouping show the core of the hamlet in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and demonstrates the place of the church within the context of the centre of the hamlet. The original store and freight shed, both located at 397 County Road 41, are still extant. Several other historic homes are extant, including 372 County Road 41 and 407 North Mountain Road, which are likely the George and William Peel farmhouses, respectively. Together, these structures form a rural hamlet surrounded by agricultural properties and the cluster of building, including the church, at the intersection of the two roads maintains the historic character of the settlement. Similarly, the former church is historically linked to its surroundings as part of the historic development of the hamlet of Bexley in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The church is one of two institutional buildings in the community; the other is the former school, Bexley School Section 3, located at 354 North Mountain Road and constructed in the 1920s to replace an older building from the 1870s. The school, which has also been converted to residential use, retains its historic massing and details from the 1920s and is itself architecturally representative of rural schoolhouses constructed during the early twentieth century. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these two structures were important community structures in the community and are historically linked as the institutions of education and religion within the hamlet.

More broadly, the church forms part of the wider landscape of rural Methodist churches in the northern part of the former Victoria County from the late nineteenth century. Specifically, it has a contextual relationship to the former Methodist churches in Victoria Road and Norland which formed part of the local Methodist circuit in the late nineteenth century and are contemporaries of the Bexley church. Others surviving nearby include Dalrymple and Seabright. These surviving churches show the growth of Methodist across this area in the late nineteenth century

The church is also a landmark building in the local community. Located at the intersection of County Road 41 and North Mountain Road, it is sited in a prominent

location at the heart of the hamlet and can be viewed from multiple vantage points. The church's historic role as the community's only church also means that it is a well-known structure in the local area.

## Summary of Reasons for Designation

The short statement of reasons for designation and the description of the heritage attributes of the property, along with all other components of the Heritage Designation Brief, constitute the Reasons for Designation required under the Ontario Heritage Act.

### Short Statement of Reasons for Designation

398 County Road 41, also known as Bexley Methodist Church, has cultural heritage value as a representative example of a late nineteenth century Methodist church in Bexley Township. Constructed in 1884, the church is built in a simplified version of the Gothic Revival style, which was typical for rural Methodist churches from the second half of the nineteenth century. The church is built on a rectangular plan with a front entrance porch, wooden siding, a gable roof, and lancet windows with tracery which is representative of churches of this type. The church has historical value in that it yields information regarding the role of religion, and Methodism specifically, in Bexley Township in the late nineteenth century and the demographic settlement patterns of this area of the former Victoria County where Methodism was the largest denomination in the nineteenth century. The church has contextual value as part of the hamlet of Bexley. It contributes to the historic character of the rural hamlet which is comprised primarily of a collection of nineteenth century buildings centred on the intersection of County Road 41 and North Mountain Road. The church is also a local landmark, due to its prominent location at the centre of the hamlet and the only church building in the community.

### Summary of Heritage Attributes to be Designated

The Reasons for Designation include the following heritage attributes and apply to all elevations, unless otherwise specified, and the roof including: all façades, entrances, windows, chimneys, and trim, together with construction materials of wood, brick, stone, stucco, concrete, plaster parging, metal, glazing, their related building techniques and landscape features.

#### Design and Physical Value

- Gable roof
- Wooden construction
- Rubble stone foundation
- Dutch lap siding
- Fenestration including:
  - Large lancet windows with tracery
  - Original glass
- Entrance porch including:
  - Doors
  - Gable roof

### **Historical and Associative Value**

- Relationship to Methodist church construction in the nineteenth century
- Relationship with early Bexley settlers

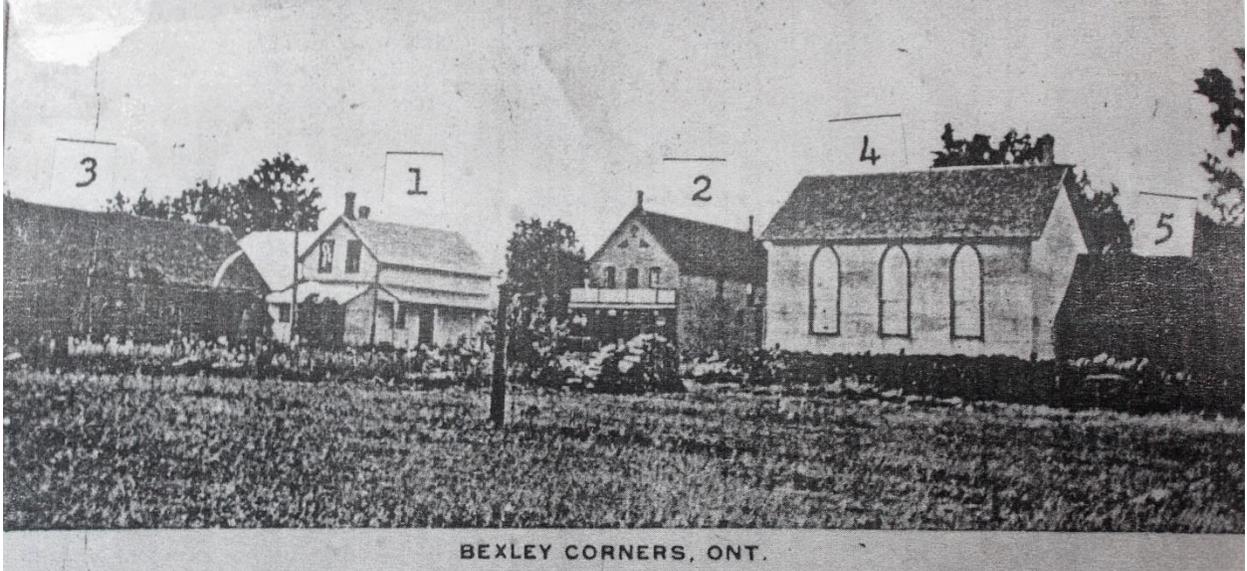
### **Contextual Value**

- Location in the hamlet of Bexley
- Views to and from the church along County Road 41 and North Mountain Road

Images







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