

Rev. John Semmens Fonds

Title: Rev. John Semmens Fonds

Dates: 1850 - 1921

Extent: 1 vol., 2 folders textual material

Repository: United Church of Canada Archives Winnipeg

Retrieval Numbers: Accession: 85-28 I.D.: 3460; location: PP37

Historical Note

Rev. John Semmens (1850-1921) served the Methodist Church of Canada for over fifty years. Semmens was born to John and Sarah Semmens of Perran Downs, Cornwall, England, on January 9, 1850. He moved to Canada with his family in 1860, settling in Bruce Mines, Ontario. He attended Victoria University (Toronto) and as a student he ministered in Walkerville, Chatham, and Dundas, Ontario. In 1872, he was ordained at the King Street Methodist Church in Hamilton, Ontario. Rev. Semmens then replaced Rev. Egerton Young in Norway House, and later took responsibility for the Methodist mission stations at Norway House, Berens River, Nelson House and Cross Lake, all in northern Manitoba. His experience within these communities made him a relative authority on the Cree language in Manitoba. In 1878, Rev. Semmens married Helen Kalista Behimer of Capetown, Ontario, and served Bruce Mines, Ontario for the year. In 1879, he ministered to Davenport Road Church in Toronto. Rev. Semmens moved west in 1880 and subsequently served Zion Methodist Church in Winnipeg. Between 1881 and 1888, he served Emerson, Norway House, and Carberry before returning to Winnipeg to serve Wesley and McDougall Churches from 1889 to 1893.

In both 1890 and 1894 Rev. Semmens was appointed delegate to the General Conference of the Methodist Church. Between 1889 and 1894, Semmens was Chairman of the Winnipeg district of the Manitoba and Northwest Conference of the Methodist Church, Assistant Secretary, Secretary, and President of Conference, and Chairman of the Lake Winnipeg District of Conference. In 1895, he became the Superintendent of the Brandon Residential School. He was acting head of the school until 1899, and then became Chairman of the Portage la Prairie district of Conference. In 1905, Rev. Semmens was superannuated.

During his career, Rev. Semmens also served as an inspector with the department of Indian Affairs, and he published a book entitled *Mission Life in the Northwest* documenting his life with the Cree Indians and his knowledge of their language. Rev. John Semmens passed away in Winnipeg on February 1, 1921, and was survived by several children: Mrs. G.A. Broadbent, Miss T. Semmens, Lieut. Col. J.N. Semmens, W.F. Semmens of Winnipeg, G.H. Semmens of Saskatoon, and F.A. Semmens of New York.

Scope and Content

The surviving records of Rev. John Semmens include: a Manuscript entitled 'Notes on Personal History', documenting his life and work, dating from 1850 to 1915; a

Duplicate of the Manuscript entitled 'Under Northern Lights: Notes on Personal History' (excerpt of), dating from 1850 to 1875; an Article entitled 'Methodist History-Winnipeg District', date unknown; a Tribute to Rev. Semmens (copy of), authored by John Maclean, dating from 1921; and Biographical clippings.

Related Material in this Repository

Biographical file; Rev. George H. Cornish, LL.D., *Cyclopaedia of Methodism in Canada, Volume II*. (Toronto: Methodist Book and Publishing House, 1903)

Custodial History

The records of Rev. John Semmens came to the Archives of the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario as part of a transfer of records in 1985.

Documentation Digitization

Relevant items in this fonds related to Indian Residential Schools are included in the United Church of Canada Archives Winnipeg 2014 Index of IRS Related Records and were digitized for submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Contact the Archivist for more information.

Language

The records are in English.

Restriction on Access

No restrictions apply.

Accruals

No further accruals are expected.

Amended September 2014