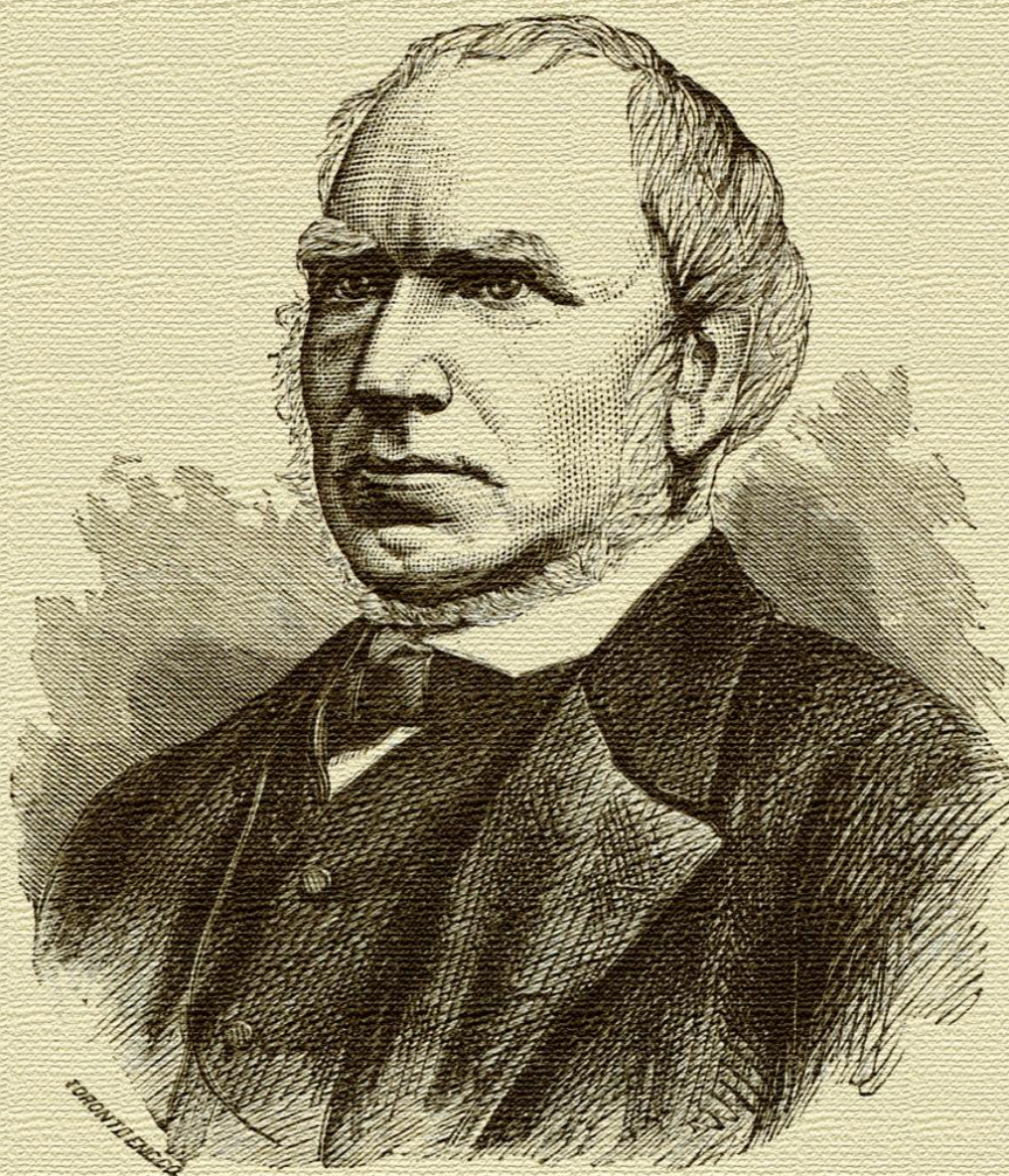


Revised Edition

Joseph Russell Little: Saddlebag Preacher



by Mary Janes

JOSEPH RUSSELL LITTLE:

Saddlebag Preacher

by
Mary Janes

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PREFACE

When my husband Paul and I first heard about Joseph Russell “Uncle Joe” Little, we presumed that he was just a local legend in Warwick Township who had been remembered over the years because of his eccentricities. Stories were told about him giving away his boots, or food, or whatever he happened to have. His name and stories about his generosity kept recurring—not just in Warwick, but throughout Lambton County. It was soon clear that he was known far beyond Warwick. Neither of us realized then just how much influence this man had among the pioneers, first in Lambton County, and later in other parts of eastern Canada.

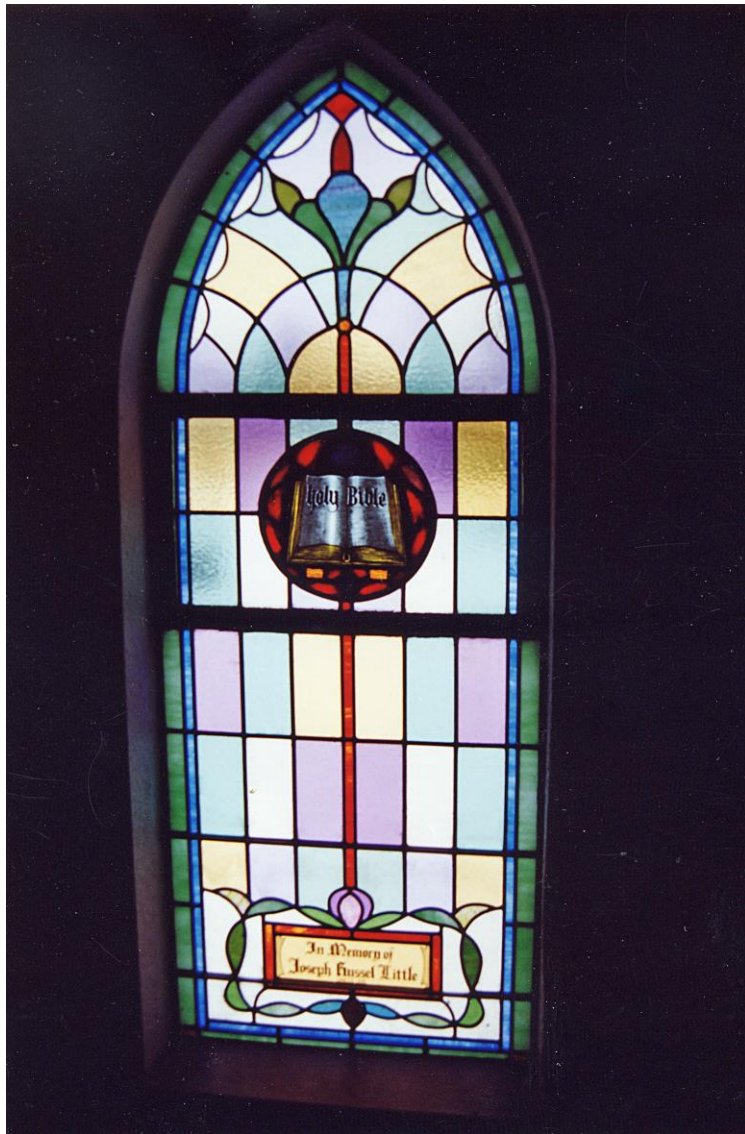
We both started to do actual research into the life and work of “Uncle Joe” Little in 1985, as the result of a Warwick United Church Cemetery Board meeting. When repairs were being made at the cemetery, the tombstone of “Uncle Joe” needed some attention. It was suggested that something be done to commemorate this man because he had done so much for other people. Members of Warwick United Church, the Warwick Women’s Institute and the community at large encouraged the idea of erecting a provincial historical plaque. The following year Paul submitted a proposal to the Ontario Heritage Foundation on behalf of Warwick United Church.

Although the initial request for a plaque was turned down, the research into the life and work of Joseph Little continued. As is true in research generally, one fact led to another source, which led to another fact, and so on. Soon a large body of information about “Uncle Joe” had accumulated and, while work was being done on the Warwick United Church records in 1992, the question of a plaque was again raised. By October of that year a second application for a provincial historical plaque for Joseph Russell Little was approved by the Ontario Heritage Foundation. Consequently, a committee of representatives of local community groups was set up to plan for the unveiling in 1993.

Although the name of “Uncle Joe” Little was familiar to many in the community, the details of his life in Lambton, in other parts of Upper Canada (later Ontario) and on Anticosti Island, were not known. A few people knew of or had copies of the 1903 book *Uncle Joe Little: Life and Memoirs of Joseph Russell Little* by Rev. Leonard Bartlett. An excellent record of the life of “Uncle Joe”, this book is written in a style typical of its era. Bartlett’s book is used as one source of information in *Joseph Russell Little: Saddlebag Preacher*.

I felt there needed to be some kind of up-to-date information about this devoted, kind-hearted missionary pioneer and his work, set in the historical background of Upper Canada. It seemed appropriate to put all the research that had been collected about Joe Little together in book form, in more modern language, with maps indicating the places he visited in his travels, and with pictures of some of the memorials to him that now exist in Lambton County. That is what *Joseph Russell Little: Saddlebag Preacher* has attempted to do.

Mary Janes
Warwick, Ontario
April, 1993



Stained glass memorial window in Watford, United Church

BEGINNINGS OF WARWICK TOWNSHIP

In the early 1800s, what is now known as Lambton County was part of the Western District¹ of Upper Canada. A wilderness of forests and swamps, this territory had been acquired by the Crown from the Chippewa Indians in several land deals between 1796 and 1827. The first non-natives to settle in Lambton were a few French-speaking people who settled along the St. Clair River after the British surrendered Detroit to the Americans in 1796. But there were no major settlements until the 1830s, at which time the ten townships which eventually became Lambton County were surveyed.

Warwick Township was surveyed by Peter Carroll in 1832. Using the Egremont Road, also called the Government Road, as a dividing line, he set out six concessions on the south side, and eight concessions on the north side, all running east and west. There were eight sideroads running north and south. When the first settlers arrived in Warwick, the trails blazed by the surveyors and the native trails were the only indicators of locations in the bush.

The terrain was gently undulating for the most part, with some rolling areas near the creeks, while the soil was a reasonably good quality mixture of clay loam and heavy clay. Hickory Creek drained the soil in the north-westerly direction and the Sydenham River, which has two sources in Warwick, drained to the south and southwest. A tributary of the Aux Sables River flowed to the northeast. Wildlife such as deer, wild turkeys and wolves was plentiful.

The first pioneers to arrive in Warwick Township were British military men and their families. Many had retired with small pensions and were entitled to free land in Canada for service in the British army. However, most of these settlers from the towns and cities of England had little knowledge of farming. Many had been brought up in a life of ease and were not prepared to be labourers. Nor did they expect to live in the backwoods conditions of Upper Canada. Life in Canada was very difficult for them, even more so because there were no previous settlers to whom they could turn for help and advice.

Among the few settlers in Warwick Township were the Hume brothers—James on lot 25 and Robert on lot 23, concession 2 south of the Egremont Road. The Donnelly family chose lot 27, concession 4 south of the Egremont. Lieutenant Colonel Freer, a half pay officer of the regular army, had settled in Warwick Village along with the Scottish pioneer and first Warwick blacksmith, Thomas Hay. William Burwell was on lot 10, concession 1 north of the Egremont. The McKenna and Hamilton families had also settled in Warwick Township in 1832, along with Sergeant Fair.

Some of these were poor Irish civilians, tenant farmers looking for a fresh start. They arrived along with a few pioneers from Scotland. All of them were eager to start a new life in a new land.

¹ This area, with its seat of government at London, generally represented what is today Southwestern Ontario.

The early settlers of Warwick Township were totally ignorant of the requirements and difficulties of life in the backwoods. There are many stories of the hardships they endured. Some people nearly starved before they were in a position to grow their own grain. They subsisted on “browse,” a boiled mixture of wild plants and young shoots, or on a wild vegetable called “cow-cabbage.” In 1835, the wheat crop was ruined by overabundant rainfall. Although the wheat could be used to feed the animals, it was not suitable for human consumption. Bread made from it was waxy and unpalatable. There was one way for humans to make use of the wheat; it could be taken to the distillery in Kilworth, Middlesex County, to be made into whiskey!

Game was plentiful for the first few years, but the deer quickly disappeared as settlers moved in. Other hardships were a very severe winter that killed the wild turkeys, and wolves that menaced the livestock. As a result, settlers ate what was available. James Major wrote in a letter about one particular meal: “In August 1834, I ate dinner in the parsonage with Rev. James Evans. We had bear meat for dinner.”²

In this early period, men cut down the trees and burned them to clear enough land for planting crops. On this newly cleared land not only rocks and stumps, but also ploughing with oxen, produced a myriad of problems. For Sergeant Luckham, an old British soldier, such an instance happened when his ox got sick and died. The sergeant and his wife made a harness of basswood bark, then hitched themselves to the home-made harrow and finished planting their first crop of wheat.³

If the settler had no oxen, he would work the land with a wooden spade and sow the seed by hand. The harvest was done using cradles and flails. Then the grain would be taken to the closest mill, probably at Westminster, Middlesex County, to be made into flour.

Archibald Gardner related in his memoirs that:

Life in Warwick, Canada, was one of pioneering. With settlements so far away we had no stores to go to. The clothes which we wore came from the backs of the sheep in our own pastures. After being clipped, the wool was cleaned and carded by the women.... The carded wool was spun into yarn on the old spinning wheel and then woven into cloth on hand looms.

This cloth the wives and mothers made into clothes for men, women and children....

In 1835 the homes in our locality were built of logs; the better ones were of hewn wood, the humbler ones of rough logs. Floors were of split logs, flat side up. Glass windows were unknown. A little slide was thrown back admitting light when it was not too cold. Doors were made of split and hewn logs.⁴

These homes were almost a luxury because other houses were simply lean-tos or shacks.

² Jean Turnbull Elford, *Canada West's Last Frontier* (Sarnia: Lambton County Historical Society, 1982), p.4.

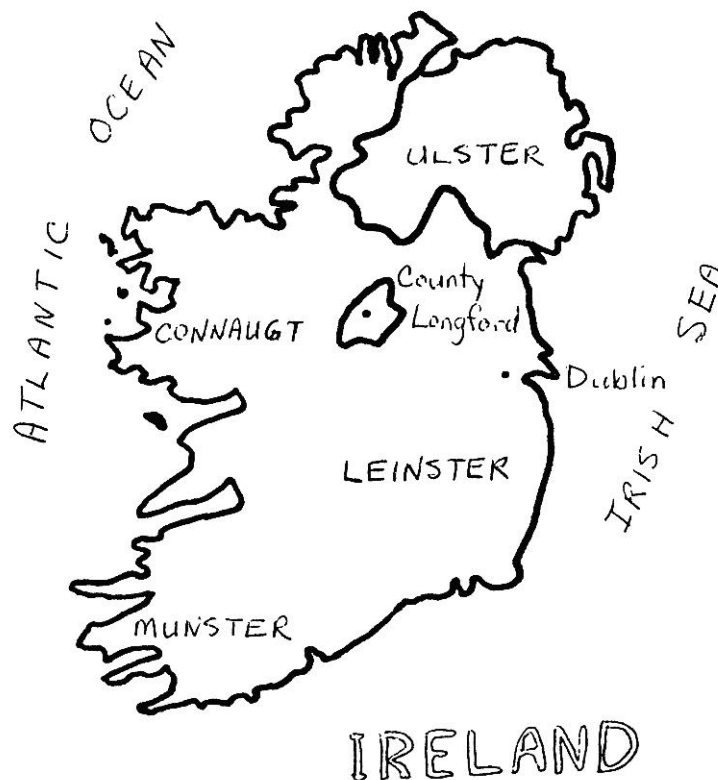
³ *Illustrated Atlas of the Dominion of Canada* (Toronto: H. Belden & Co., 1880), p. xvi

⁴ Elford, *Canada West's Last Frontier*, p. 4.

Lack of roads, shortage of food, unavailability of materials for clothing and rough wood for homes were only some of the difficulties faced by the pioneers. Warwick lacked the waterpower necessary to build gristmills. Sawmills ran only when the water level was high enough. Yet, in spite of all the difficulties, the pioneers persevered.

The first municipal government in the township was formed in 1835. The assessment roll from that year shows that there were 61 taxpayers in Warwick who paid a total of nine pounds, nineteen shillings and ten pence in taxes. Of the total 69,876 acres in the township, 250 were cultivated and 9,550 were occupied but uncultivated. Four horses, twenty-four oxen and thirty-four cows were included in the assessment.⁵

It was in this primitive but vibrant new society, isolated in the clearings of Warwick Township, that Joseph Little would first experience the western frontier of Upper Canada.



⁵ *Illustrated Atlas of the*

GROWING UP IN IRELAND

Joseph Russell Little was born on October 28, 1812, at Coolnahinch Farm, near Kenagh, in County Longford, Ireland. This inland county of Leinster Province had rolling hills and prosperous farmlands full of small towns and hamlets. Both his father, Thomas Little, a comparatively well-to-do tenant farmer and a respected member of the community, and his mother, Jane Russell Little (who died at the age of 35 or 36, when Joe was only three years old), were devout Methodists. Of his one sister and three brothers, Joe was especially close to William, his elder by four years.⁶ After the death of his wife, Thomas Little conscientiously devoted himself to looking after his five children. For Mr. Little, an important aspect of this concern was education.

In the early 1800's, the rural schools in Ireland were independent of municipal or government control. Some were poorly managed and inefficient. Fortunately, in the Coolnahinch area, there was an excellent teacher by the name of Jack Evans who taught school in his home. Like the Littles, he was a Methodist who used the Bible as the source of truth in his teaching. Developing his own curriculum, he combined both temporal and religious training, and, as a result, the Little children received a better than average education. Although there was unlimited freedom and a great deal of independence in the school, Mr. Evans took an interest in his students and encouraged them in their studies, especially in their love of reading.

School was only part of Joe's well-rounded childhood. Very little is known about his early years, but it would seem that growing up in Ireland was a pleasant experience. Joseph was surrounded by a close-knit circle of family and friends. He enjoyed swimming and skating on the lake next to his farm. Brought up a Methodist, he attended services in the Church of England as well. To many people, his early life would have seemed idyllic.

When Joseph Little was 19 years old, the first major religious event of his life occurred. With some friends, he went to Kenagh to hear an eccentric Methodist evangelist by the name of Gideon Ouseley. As a result of this meeting he saw himself as a hell-deserving sinner and became very miserable. Shortly afterwards, he converted publicly. After giving himself to God, he became associated with the work of the Methodist Church, and patterned his life after that of his role model, Gideon Ouseley.⁷

Not long after this experience, Joe's neighbour, Arthur Kingstone, asked him to embark upon another major experience which would take him across the Atlantic Ocean to an entirely different environment from that in which he had been brought up.

⁶ At the time of Joe's death, his brother William, William's three children—Rev. Joseph Russell Little, Mrs. Kane and Mrs. Hazen—Joseph's sister, Mrs. Rev. Wm Craig, and her daughter were still living.

⁷ Rev. Leonard Bartlett, *Uncle Joe Little: Life and Memoirs of Joseph Russell Little* (Toronto, William Briggs, 1903), p. 27

LEAVING IRELAND

In 1833, 21 year old Joseph Russell Little emigrated to the Western District of Upper Canada from Ireland. He accompanied Arthur J. Kingstone, a rich landowner who lived with his family at Mosstown, near Kenagh, County Longford, in the central part of Ireland. Kingstone had decided by this time to settle in Canada with his family because he was very critical of Irish society. To Kingstone, his countrymen were vain, indolent and self-indulgent. The young men especially were being drawn into “vice and folly.”

In one of his diary entries, Kingstone states:

I have to say that my family (now five sons, besides daughters) are rising fast about me—for them, in this country [Ireland]—the learned professions are filled to overflowing—mercantile and manufacturing employments are subjects of such competition that few only, and those of ability and enterprise, can rise by them into independence, and that slowly, and as to agricultural pursuits, they are very uncertain and often not profitable.⁸

In Canada he saw many opportunities. His diary continues:

An investment can be made with great advantage, with which industry and forethought becomes at once an independence, affording a facility for the settlement of young men not to be met in this country. Moreover, things are in a more wholesome state on that side of the Atlantic than on this. There industry pervades every class of society. Wealth flows freely, but only through the channels opened up and kept in operation by activity.⁹

On April 10, Kingstone and Little left Kenagh to travel to Liverpool, England. They boarded the 600-ton sailing ship *Brittania* [sic] on April 17, and arrived in New York City 42 days later, after a passage of almost constant sickness. In those days, ocean travel was very uncomfortable. Passengers had to bring their own bedding and food aboard these roughly built ships which were often overcrowded. The water that existed was stale and not very plentiful. As a result of these conditions diseases could be spread quickly.

In the years 1832 and 1834 there were cholera¹⁰ epidemics in Britain. Some of the passengers would contract the disease on board ship and not live to see their destination.

Once in New York City, the two men travelled up the Hudson River to Albany, New York, where they took a train to Schenectady. Then they sailed along the Mohawk River to Tonawanda in the Niagara Falls area. From Niagara Falls, they went via Queenstown, Upper Canada to Fort George, then by steamer to Toronto.

Upon arrival in Toronto, Arthur Kingstone immediately went in search of land to purchase. He knew exactly what he wanted. In his diary he states:

⁸ “Kingstone Was Early Lambton County Settler,” *London Free Press*, 13 March 1993

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Cholera is an infectious disease of the intestines, resulting from the use of contaminated water. It was a feared disease in those days because no one knew its cause or how to prevent it.

The requisites I considered necessary for a good settlement were, as indispensable:

First, good air or healthy district and location; second, good water and abundant; third, good land. As desirable, fourth, favorable water privileges; fifth, favorable climate for crops; sixth, favorable locality.¹¹

The best area to look would be in the southwestern townships, because they would have less snow and less spring frost. He considered that Lake Huron would probably moderate winter cold and summer heat. The proximity of the United States for commercial operations was another consideration.

Kingstone then proceeded to call on Colonel Mount, the agent of the Western District, and chose from a map lots 6, 7, 8 and 9 on the second concession and lots 5, 6, 7 and 8 on the third concession south of the Egremont Road in Warwick Township. There was a creek running through this block of 1 600 bush acres. A mill seal on the map indicated that a saw mill had to be built on the property in order to get a patented deed.

On July 2, 1833 Arthur Kingstone purchased the land for 10 shillings Halifax currency (\$2.00) per acre, with the condition that there be someone in continuous residence on the property for three years. The Crown grants were registered in the name of Arthur Johnston(e) Kingstone on August 26 and 27, 1836.¹²

Since Kingstone intended to spend his summers in Canada but his winters in Ireland, he needed a manager. For this reason he had brought his neighbour Joseph Russell Little with him. Joe Little would be his managing agent in Canada.

On July 16, 1833 the first trees were cut to construct a log house on Lot 8. Then Kingstone left for Ireland. He and Joe Little travelled together to Toronto, where an account was opened at the Bank of Upper Canada, so that Joe Little could finish his house, furnish it and make improvements on the newly purchased property. Kingstone then continued on his route via Kingston, while Little went to Buffalo to pick up his baggage and purchase what he needed for his new home. A log cabin surrounded by trees, with no immediate neighbours, was going to be so different from the green fields and country lanes of County Longford that had been home to Joseph Russell Little until now.

¹¹ *London Free Press*, 13 March 1993.

¹² Kingstone continued to purchase land. By 1867 he owned 4,890 acres, assessed value being \$33,540.00.

MANAGING AGENT

To say that Joe Little's upbringing and education did not prepare him for life in Upper Canada would be a gross understatement. In his homeland, people were able to travel with relative ease from one community to another. When Little arrived in Canada in 1833, there were no railroads and few roads. Overland from London to Lake Huron and the St. Clair River was unbroken wilderness. However, the Egremont Road, which now (1993) runs from Adelaide through Warwick Village as far as Errol on Lake Huron, was being suggested as a work project by Sir John Colborne in 1833.

In a letter to Lord Goderich, the colonial secretary, dated January 10 1833, Colborne states:

In Adelaide and Warwick about 3 500 persons have been established, a population that will much advance the interests of the Western District. I have authorized the employment of the destitute immigrants in opening up a road to Lake Huron. Some of them will, I hope, find work on the location of the officers and other settlers who have lately purchased land in that part of the province.

I regret to state that many of the pensioners, who arrived last season, having commuted their pensions are in great distress and cannot without assistance, remain on their land.¹³

In Ireland, villages were close together; people lived in groups. In Upper Canada, the year in which Joe Little arrived to manage the Kingstone Estate was the year that the first house was built in Watford. Perhaps a dozen families were scattered throughout the rest of Warwick Township. A few more families came in 1833 before Little arrived, but still the residences were scarce.

Immediately upon his arrival, Joseph Russell Little involved himself in the life of the surrounding community. That first year he helped build Irwin Church on the fourth line in Sarnia Township. 1834 found Joe serving as clerk for the fledgling St. Mary's Episcopalian Church in Warwick Village. By 1838 he was a captain in the Warwick Volunteer Regiment.¹⁴

Stories abounded of "Uncle Joe's" generosity to people he met during his travels. He seemed to have a knack of finding the poor and helping them out, if not financially, then with clothing or food. To resist the appeals of poverty was impossible for him.

The most common story is that of giving away his boots. One frosty cold winter's day, as he was travelling in a wagon pulled by a team of horses, Little passed a poorly dressed man walking along the road in the snow. Joe noticed the holes in his boots, so he knew they were of little protection against the weather. Within moments he removed his own warm boots and gave them to the man, then wrapped his feet in a horse blanket and drove off.

¹³ Elford, p. 92.

¹⁴ Warwick Volunteer Regiment Payroll (1838), p. 1. For twenty days in February that year he was paid eighteen pounds, thirteen shillings, four pence, as a member of the local militia.

On another occasion when a similar situation occurred, he showed up at a friend's home in the extremely worn boots of the man to whom he had given his own, which had been in better shape. When his friend wondered why, he simply stated that he knew that his friend had a better pair to give him! If it was not his boots, then it might be his coat or his socks; his generosity knew no limits.

Whether he gave away his own belongings or those of others seemed not to matter. One time Little was hired by a local farmer to take 20 bushels of wheat to the gristmill in London to have it ground into flour. Because of poor road conditions, this trip took several days. On the way back from London, Joe Little kept giving away bags of flour to the hungry people he met. By the time he arrived back in Warwick, he only had two bags of flour left for the farmer who hired him!

Within a short period of time Arthur Kingstone noticed that his estate in the Western District was not showing a profit. Since Kingstone agreed that the needy and the hungry had to be provided for, he was sympathetic to his manager's charitable work. But, after 11 years of overdrafts, Kingstone finally fired Joseph Russell Little as the steward of his property.

Kingstone was aware that upon dismissal Little would no longer have a home or an income. Because he both admired and pitied Little, Kingstone decided to give him 200 acres of good land—lot 5, concession 6, north of the Egremont (known as Hickory Creek Line in 2009), with conditions attached that Little could neither sell nor give away the property. Little was very fortunate to have such a sympathetic employer, but at the same time Joseph was determined to be free of worldly goods so that he could do the Lord's work. It did not take him long to regain his freedom from the land.

TAX COLLECTOR

It was 1844. Joseph Little was 32 years old. He had just been given a 200 acre farm from which he could clear the trees and sell the timber. With his experience farming the Kingstone estate, he could have made his farm a valuable property and made a good living for himself. But Little, it turned out, had different plans. To be free to serve God and His people was more important to him than to make a good living for himself. From his first days in Upper Canada, Little was totally preoccupied with the spiritual well-being of the community and with helping others. The people in the community were equally concerned that he should have his basic needs met and they tried to make sure that he had an income in order to provide these basics.

Perhaps his charm made Warwick Township Councillors overlook his record as manager for Arthur Kingstone; perhaps they sympathized with this likeable man. Possibly there was no-one else willing to take on the challenge of collecting taxes from the desperately poor settlers. Whatever the reason, Warwick Township Council appointed Joseph Russell Little tax collector for a two year term, probably 1845 and 1846. But Council soon learned that, if they wanted tax revenue to pay for township improvements, Joe Little was not the person they needed in this position.

As Joe Little went around collecting taxes, he heard many tales of poverty and hunger. Being the good-hearted man that he was, he found it impossible to force many of the poor pioneers to pay what they owed. Instead, he would issue them a receipt marked “paid” and continue on his way. Sometimes he would take the money he had received at one farm, and use it to pay the taxes at another. By the end of the first year he had an obvious deficit, which even the withholding of his salary could not cover. Little promised Council that in the second year he would be sure to collect back taxes as well, so he continued in this position.

During his second year as tax collector, economic conditions had not improved noticeably. People still had hard-luck stories to tell; they still had no money for taxes. After two years of deficits in tax payments, Warwick Council was forced to sue Joseph Little. When he appeared in court at Sandwich (now Windsor, Ontario), the judge, upon hearing of the destitution and poverty of the people of Warwick and of Joseph’s sympathy for them, granted Little a year in which to pay off the debt of back taxes. The very same thing happened the following year, at the second court appearance.

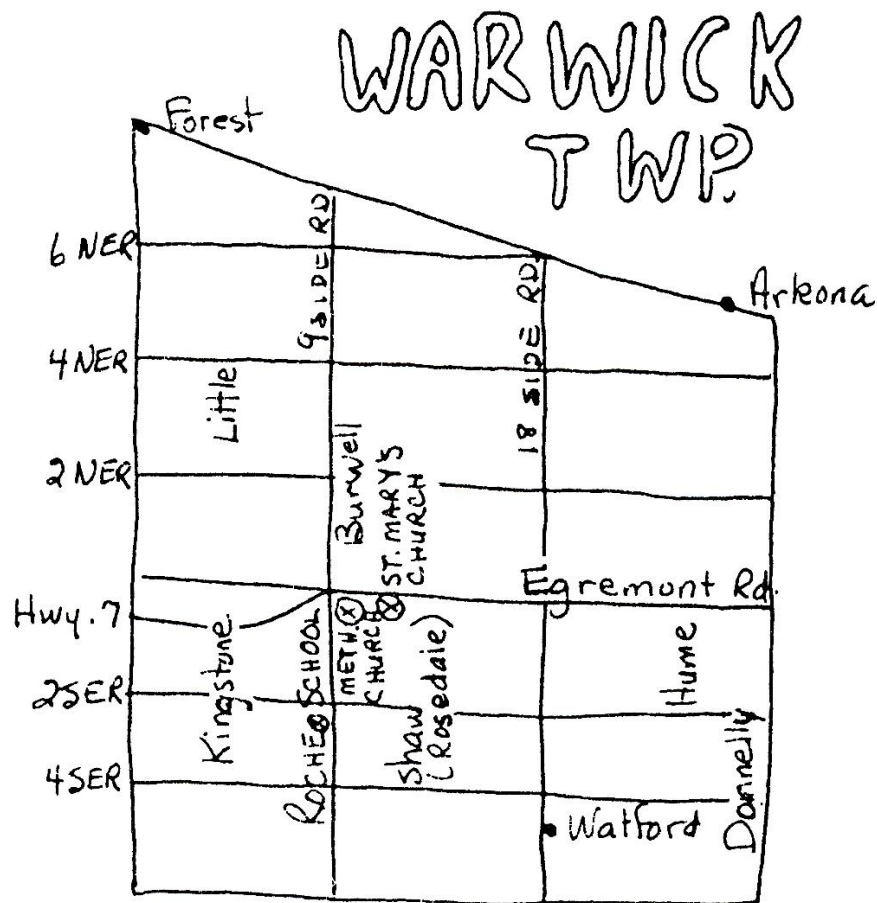
This was the year in which Joseph Little put his earlier plan into action. He knew that, although he could not sell his farm, the township could sell it for back taxes. He talked a particular friend into bidding \$800 (the amount needed to cover the debt owing Council) for the property; then he talked the sheriff into not accepting any other bids for the property. Both of them were sworn to secrecy. So it was that on the day of the sale, Little’s farm was sold for exactly the amount he owed to Warwick Township and Little was again without property or income. But now he was completely free to do the work of the Lord! Little’s comment about this experience: “The very idea of sending me out to collect taxes! Indeed, they might better have given me a bag of money and told me to go out and distribute it among the poor people.”¹⁵

¹⁵

Bartlett, *Uncle Joe Little: Life and Memoirs of Joseph Russell Little*, pp. 40-41.

Farming and tax-collecting did not seem to be suitable endeavours for a philanthropist such as Joseph Russell Little. Perhaps a position teaching school would be a more appropriate occupation whereby he could use his own ability and interests to help others.

The sketch below of Warwick Township shows the approximate locations of Kingstone property, St. Mary's Anglican Church, Warwick Methodist Church and the school where Uncle Joe taught. Little's 200 acre farm should be shown as being on the next concession (concession 6) north.



TEACHING CAREER

For a long time education in the British colonies had been ignored by the Home government. The government was content to leave education in the hands of the family or private tutors in Upper Canada.

In Lower Canada, the government considered that education was the responsibility of the Roman Catholic Church. Jesuits, Recollets, Ursulines and other religious orders provided elementary instruction in catechism, reading, writing and arithmetic. More advanced education was available to those young men who wished to join the priesthood or become professionals. In areas where families relied on their children for economic assistance, apprenticeships were a common way of passing skills from one generation to the next.

The majority of the population in both parts of Canada could neither read nor write. But changes in attitudes, not only in the colonies, but throughout the world, were being made by the nineteenth century.

During the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) the French abandoned most of their settlements in Upper Canada. After the surrender of Montreal in 1760, the British gained complete control of Lower Canada. In the years after the Conquest, the British government, concerned about the strong French Canadian presence in the now British colony, made various attempts to counteract that presence. Its initial efforts were not well organized and generally unsuccessful.

By the early nineteenth century, the concept of schooling as a method of cultural change was more widespread. The educators of that time saw common schooling as an opportunity for general social improvement and stability, promoting shared values and customs. Taxation was considered a small price to pay for all those benefits.

Thus, once the British government began to look at education as a way of promoting the English language, British customs, cultural and religious identification (especially Protestantism), changes took place quickly. The need for change became even more apparent when the cultural complexion of Upper Canada was altered due to an influx of immigrants (United Empire Loyalists) from the United States.

The offspring of an earlier migration of United Empire Loyalists, Reverend Egerton Ryerson, a Methodist minister in Upper Canada, took up the cause of non-denominational schooling as early as the 1820's. He promoted formal education as a public responsibility and encouraged attendance by all children. It was the intention of the School Act of 1841, an act Ryerson helped formulate, to provide a uniform school system in Upper Canada, under the headship of the Superintendent.

The government of Upper Canada set aside a certain amount of money each year strictly for the maintenance of schools. As a result, in 1843, Warwick Township was divided into school sections, with each section having its own board of trustees whose duty it was to hire teachers and manage the schools. Within six years Warwick Township had nine common schools.

Until 1840, most of the training of Warwick's children had been done informally in the home by the family. In 1840 the first common school in Warwick Township opened, with Joseph Tanner, a retired soldier, as the first teacher. The government provided the lot on which to build the school in Warwick Village, which at that time was expected to grow into a large town and had been surveyed with this in mind. Two hundred acres had been set apart on which to build the village. The lot for the school was located about three and a half kilometres south of the Egremont Road.

Ryerson himself became Superintendent of Schools for Upper Canada in 1844. He was instrumental in developing the Common Schools Acts of 1846 and 1850 which made sweeping recommendations concerning teaching methods, textbooks and administration.

It was in this political and social atmosphere that Joseph Little was asked to teach school in the log school building¹⁶ on the south-west corner of 9 sideroad and concession 2/3 south of the Egremont.

Little was one of the more educated residents of the township. As a child, he had been eager to learn and had made good use of his opportunities. His love of children made him a "natural" for the job. For a short while he seemed to have found his place in life. However, Joe Little's students found him too kind-hearted and lenient. In time these two attributes worked against him.

Some mornings his students would be waiting for him, but he would fail to arrive at school, having been delayed along the way. On one occasion he had been preaching in Sarnia and started for his school (about 40 kilometres away) after the Sunday evening service. He was found Monday morning sitting on his horse fast asleep, the horse quietly feeding in Warwick Village. Little remembered nothing of the ride back! When this sort of incident became more prevalent, it became obvious that preaching was interfering with his preparation and teaching time.

As the years went by, there were more and more settlers in Warwick Township but there were few ordained ministers to attend to the spiritual needs of the community. Joe Little felt the need to fill that void more than the educational one. On Sundays and in the evenings he spent as much time as possible riding about the countryside on his Indian¹⁷ pony, preaching or speaking wherever he went, either at tea meetings or church services.

Little soon came to realize that following the path that Christ had set out for him was leaving minimal time for other endeavours. He decided to give up teaching. One more occupation, more closely related to preaching, would be tried before he gave himself over completely to the work of God.

¹⁶ At the time, it was known as the Roche School.

¹⁷ A small, hardy, stocky horse, excellent for riding, native of western North America

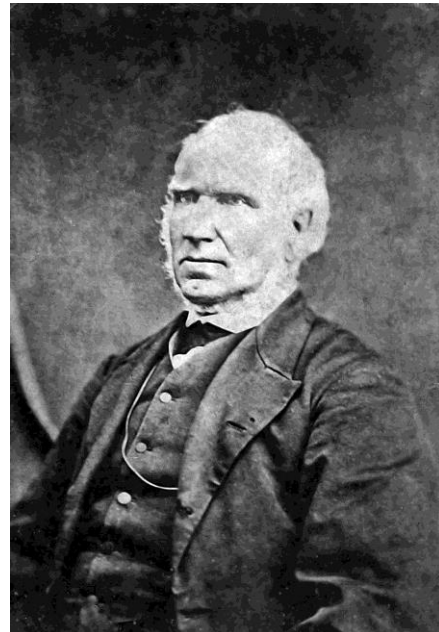
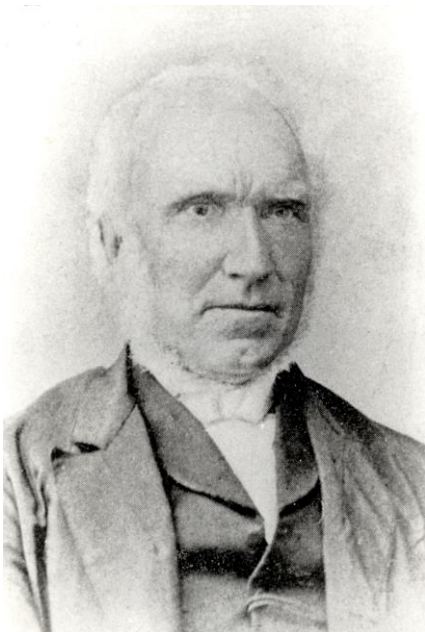
BOOK SALESMAN

Joseph Little attempted one other type of position before he gave himself entirely to itinerant preaching. He accepted an agency for the Religious Tract Society. In this line of work, he could put good books into people's homes and, at the same time, discuss their spiritual welfare.

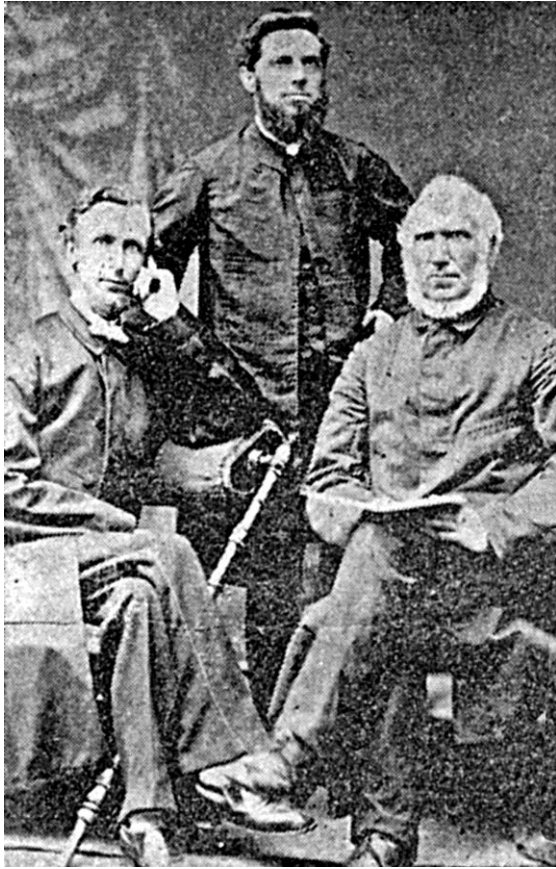
Books had always been important in the life of Joseph Russell Little, as they were to his friend and former employer, Arthur J. Kingstone. When Little and Kingstone arrived in Warwick, they quickly became aware that the new settlers had few opportunities to increase their knowledge or improve their intellectual life; there were few books or newspapers to be obtained. Kingstone purchased a large number of books in Ireland and deposited them with the rector in Warwick, who was asked to serve as librarian in the community.

One of the books that Kingstone had purchased, and Joe Little especially liked, was about the life of John Wesley, the 18th century evangelist and founder of Methodism. Joe recommended the book to several patrons of the library, but it was always reported "out" when requested, then "lost." Joe Little decided to find this book. It turned up on top of a bookshelf, covered in dust, where the minister had "mislaid" it because he did not consider Wesley's life story suitable reading! Joe Little made the point that Mr. Kingstone must have considered it worth reading or he would not have placed it in the library. It was always available after that incident.

Little achieved some success as a book distributor. But, eventually, he lent the proceeds of his sales to an acquaintance before he had the opportunity to obtain more books. The acquaintance failed to repay the loan, which meant that Joe Little could not afford to replenish his stock and his career as book salesman ended abruptly.



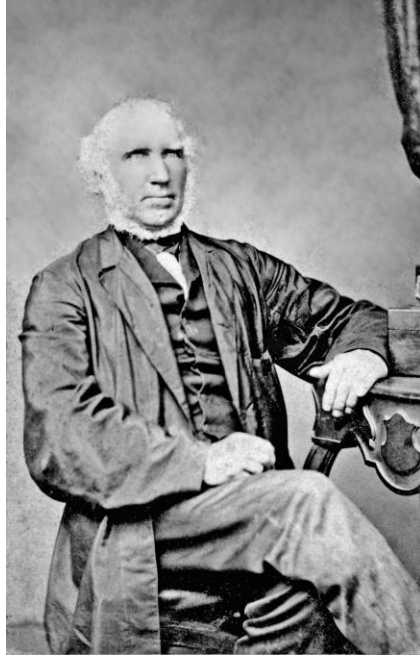
On the left is the first photograph taken of Joseph R. Little. The photo on the right was reproduced at the time of his burial in Warwick United Church "Old Warwick" Cemetery.



A newspaper photograph of Joe Little on the right with two of his clerical friends, Reverend James Kennedy (left) and Reverend James Whiting (centre) taken in London



Joseph Russell Little (courtesy Lambton Heritage Museum)



Joseph R. Little (courtesy Frances O'Neil)

“UNCLE JOE” LITTLE: THE PERSON

Estate manager, teacher, tax collector, book salesman—just who was this transplanted Irishman who rode horseback preaching the Gospel wherever he went? What did he look like?

There are few known photographs of Joseph Russell Little. (All of them are on the preceding pages.) In the Bible the fourth commandment states: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under earth.” To Joe Little this meant exactly what it said.

The photographs that do exist show a very stern, straight-laced gentleman, nothing like the written description of his appearance. This is probably due to the fact that, in his day, a person needed to hold a pose for about a minute for a photographer to take a proper picture. It was easier to pose with a sober look on one’s face than with a smile. Few pictures taken at that time show people smiling.

It was said that “Uncle Joe” Little had a “beaming countenance” and that he was “very striking” in appearance. Rev. Bartlett stated:

His face wore a peculiarly happy, peaceful, contented expression; always lit up with a joyous smile “which thinketh no evil.” His body and limbs were solid and compact, as if made to endure toil and hardship. He was a big-hearted Irishman.¹⁸

Very athletic, Joe Little would often illustrate the point he was making by running or jumping. The very fact that he travelled on horseback all over the countryside for over 40 years indicates how agile and healthy he must have been.

At one meeting he used this agility to illustrate to the congregation that he had been completely cured of rheumatism, by claiming that he could jump higher than the church. He jumped about eighteen inches off the ground, then said, “Now, let’s see your church jump that high!”¹⁹

In his attire, Joseph Little chose comfort over fashion and custom. He seldom wore the black suit and white tie that ministers were expected to wear in those days. Black was symbolic of the dreariness of Christianity that he criticized so much; he preferred people to be hopeful and see the good side of life. His loose-fitting, light-coloured clothing and white linen coats symbolized that goodness and hope.

The cheerful, happy side of life was reflected in “Uncle Joe’s” voice. In those days when organs were scarce, he led congregations in song, using his strong, rich, musical voice. It was also customary for Joseph Little to sing a hymn after preaching a service, while the congregation was dispersing.

Among his favourite hymns was one called *And Can It Be That I Should Gain*, especially the lines:

My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

¹⁸ Bartlett, p. 32-33.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 106.

Another one that Joe Little especially enjoyed is Martin Luther's hymn *Lo! God is Here! Let Us Adore!* This hymn includes the words:

A pilgrim and a stranger here: Happy, happy, happy;
I serve the Lord with filial fear; Happy in the Lord.

These hymns seem to exemplify his philosophy of life and his attitude to worldly goods. His favourite hymn, *Shall We Gather at the River*, speaks of other-worldly concerns.

Soon we'll reach the shining river,
Soon our pilgrimage will cease:
Soon our happy hearts will quiver
With the melody of peace.

In daily life Joe Little was very punctual. Even though he did not always succeed, he always tried to be on time. Once when Joseph was getting ready for a service, his dull razor was slowing him down. Realizing that he was going to be late if he finished shaving, he went to that particular service half-shaven. Of others he expected the same; if they did show up late, he would make a point of indicating his displeasure.

On one occasion when he did arrive late, it was because he had taken the time to chase some hogs out of a grain field before he continued on his way. At another event, he apologized for being late, but said it was not his fault, nor was it his pony Toby's, nor was it the fault of the lady who had served him dinner. It was the fault of her clock: it was too slow!

Regardless of the eccentricities in his services, Joseph Little was an excellent speaker. He spoke clearly and distinctly, so that he could be understood by everyone. It was as a speaker at tea meetings, missionary meetings and anniversaries that "Uncle Joe" shone. By some he was known as the "Professor of tea meetings." Such gatherings provided a natural milieu for his sense of humour.

It was probably this sense of humour and dry Irish wit that made him the favourite of so many. Concerning matrimony, Little had several different explanations for not being married. Sometimes he would say that he was too fond of the ladies to inflict his personality upon them; at other times he would say that he could not be a bigamist—he had married Miss Fortune, the daughter of Dame Fortune, and he had not obtained a divorce. Another reason was that he could not marry one woman when he loved all of them.

"Uncle Joe" tended to exaggerate. One day when speaking at Bethel, near Camlachie, he seemed to be exaggerating beyond all reason. One member of the congregation was disgusted when "Uncle Joe" stated:

I have travelled far today. Early this morning I went down to Jericho....
Then I took a ride up to Mount Zion.... Now I have come back to rest at
Bethel.²⁰

In reality, all these were settlements nearby.

²⁰

Ibid., p.161.

Little's speech on June 29, 1867 at a picnic in Bosanquet is often quoted.

You have heard very much to-day about our country and the blessings of Confederation, but there is one thing which has not been told. I have been among you for many years now, but I shall never be seen again in Upper Canada after 12 o'clock the day after to-morrow.²¹

The people were surprised and sorrowful until he added, "You know this will not be Upper Canada any more, but Ontario."²²

In spite of his strong voice and dry wit, Joseph Russell Little was not considered a great preacher. His sermons tended to be long, digressing from the main point, so that they lost their effectiveness. The strength of his preaching was the feeling that his sermons were accompanied by the Holy Spirit of God. He quoted the Scriptures accurately and used them well to illustrate his point.

It was not in the pulpit, but in the homes of the people, that he felt he could do the most good. He paid special attention to the sick and those in need, often staying at a bedside until the patient either recovered or passed away.

In the homes he loved to spend much of his time with children. While children sat on his knee, often with their arms around his neck, he taught them songs and told them stories.

On those rare occasions when he was not preaching in the evening, Little lived at Rosedale Farm, the home of John B. Shaw, a distant Irish relative. Little was considered a member of the family circle there, helping with daily chores and assisting family members in any way possible. It was probably during this time that he came to be known as "Uncle Joe." The children in the Shaw family considered him as much a member of the family as their own parents; they had familiar titles for their mother and father and wanted something equally familiar for Joseph Little. They called him "Uncle Joe." The Warwick settlers had become his family in place of the family he had left behind.

Several times during his first ten years in Upper Canada he considered going back to Ireland to visit his family and friends, but he always felt there was too much work to do. After his father's death in 1843, Little stopped corresponding with his family. Even writing letters to his family made him homesick.

While he was in Warwick he received word that one of his brothers in Ireland had converted to Christianity. Uncle Joe said that this was the best news that he had ever received in his life.

As his family relationships changed over time, so too did Joe Little's personality and beliefs. During his childhood he was loving and dutiful towards his family, devoted and warm towards his friends, but restless in spirit. Growing up, he helped others and started to show his natural ability to lead people. He was a God-fearing teenager with a thirst for mission work.

²¹ Ibid., p.167.

²² Ibid.

After he came to Upper Canada, Little showed that he lacked managerial ability and that he found regular work rather confining. He much preferred his freedom. Throughout his life, his generosity, his goodness, his wit, his happy spirit and his willingness to help won people over to him. For Rev. Leonard Bartlett: “He was a very Oliver Goldsmith of quaint good-heartedness, combined with prodigality when he had anything to be prodigal with, and a habit of letting the future, as to food and raiment, take care of itself.”²³

A free spirit, Joseph Little held liberal views on some topics. In an era of fierce sectarian disputes, religious denominations were meaningless to him. Even though he did work for the Wesleyan Methodism Church, he made it clear to everyone that they were the Lord’s sheep and that the shepherd should look after all of them. Whether the person was Roman Catholic or Protestant did not matter, because Joe was sure that he had a soul to save.

At one Baptist home, as he was using the family Bible to pray, he noticed that some of the pages seemed stuck together. He knew that the Baptists believed in immersion, so, in his dry manner he remarked: “I wonder if there is anything here against baptism, and if sister S— has glued these leaves together to hide it.”²⁴

Unorthodox though he may have been, Joe Little firmly believed that the Sabbath Day was the Lord’s Day. It was not simply a day of rest, but a day of Christian living and service. Uncle Joe felt that Sunday School (class meetings, as it was then called) had a very important role in the upbringing of children.

He also did not believe in taking up collections at services. Sometimes this put him in awkward circumstances, as is shown in the accompanying letter to his friend Hugh Johnston in Bosanquet. He thought the Gospel should be free. (The letter, in Joseph Little’s handwriting, is transcribed at the end of it.)

Under other circumstances, free will offerings were acceptable. As a fund-raiser, his services were very much in demand, especially if money was needed to build a new church. One example of this was at Irwin Church in Sarnia Township, where he raised enough money in one day to pay for the entire building.

While money was used to build churches, humour was used to rebuild lives. Uncle Joe did not hesitate to use his sense of humour to brighten up the lives of the people with whom he came in contact. His religion was happy—full of music, fun, innocent tricks and simple, homespun tales.

²³ Ibid., p. 33. Oliver Goldsmith, born in County Longford, Ireland, was the author of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, 1766.

²⁴ Ibid., p.149.

My dear Brother

Warwick
6th April 1850

I was not aware
of you having engaged the Baptist
Minister until Brother Shaw told
me after his return - had I known it
I should not have told him to speak
about the collection however as I hope
you shall have the services of our
Ministers occasionally perhaps the
people may wish to contribute some
thing towards their support I shall
then God willing be at your settle-
ment on Sabbath the 14th Instant at
ten o'clock and as announced
by Brother Shaw take up a collec-
tion - that is if the people wish to
have our Ministers to continue to
visit them for my own part I always
feel it a pleasure to visit you

when my other appointments admit
I can truly say I always found it
profitable to my own soul when
joined in the worship of God with
you on the Lake Shore - and my
prayer for you is that the great
head of the Church may raise up
a Church among you that the
gates of Hell shall not prevail
against I intend by the blessing
of God to get up to your place
on Saturday evening - may the Lord
bless ^{and keep you} you by his mighty power
through Faith unto Salvation
in haste
to?
Yours sincerely
Hugh Johnston } Joe Little
Lake Shore }
Bosanquet }

This letter is written by Joe Little to Hugh Johnston of Bosanquet, Lambton County. It is ironic that, although "Uncle Joe" did not approve of collections at services, that is the topic of this letter. A transcription follows.

courtesy Lambton Heritage Museum

Warwick
6th April 1850

My Dear Brother

I was not aware of you having engaged the Baptist Minister until Brother Shaw told me after his return – had I known it I should not have told him to speak about the collection, however as I hope you shall have the services of our Ministers occasionally perhaps the people may wish to contribute something towards their support I shall then God willing be at your settlement on Sabbath the 14th Instant at ten o'clock and as announced by Brother Shaw take up a collection – that is if the people wish to have our Ministers to continue to visit them for my own part I always feel it a pleasure to visit you when my other appointments admit I can truly say I always found it profitable to my own Soul when joined in the worship of God with you on the Lake Shore – and my prayer for you is that the great head of the Church may raise up a church among you that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against I intend by the blessings of God to get up to your place on Saturday evening – may the Lord bless you and keep you by his mighty power through Faith unto Salvation .

In Haste

Yours sincerely
Joe Little

Hugh Johnston
Lake Shore
Bosanquet

During a visit in Oxford County, Joe Little requested a meal and accommodation at a farm house. Although he was a stranger, he was well received. As they were eating dinner, the family seemed to be anxiously looking out the window, as if expecting someone. Finally, the family told him that they were expecting a clergyman by the name of Rev. Mr. Little to preach at their church that night and they invited Joe to join them, even though it looked like the clergyman would not be there. A crowd was gathered at the church, anxiously waiting. At the time at which the service was to start, Uncle Joe got up and said, "Friends, you were expediting to hear the Rev. Mr. Little tonight. He will not be able to come, but if you will take your seats Uncle Joe Little will talk to you for a little while."²⁵

If people were being thoughtless or inconsiderate to each other, Uncle Joe would be quick to correct them, without offending them. At one time, Joe was canvassing for money. He spoke to the man of the house, who agreed to contribute \$3. When Joe asked if this was on his own behalf or on his wife's behalf, the man thought for a moment, then said that his wife was donating \$1 and he was giving \$2. Joe's reply was:

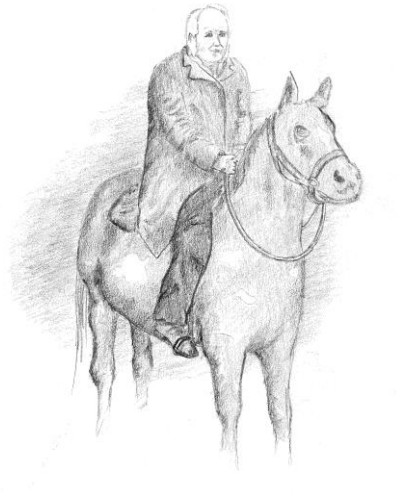
²⁵ Ibid., p.151.

And you count yourself twice as good as your wife. Well, I don't. I'll put you down for one dollar and a half each, for I think your wife is as good as you are any day.²⁶

For Joe, humour did not extend to vices such as tobacco and liquor. Uncle Joe believed that a man should worship God with clean lips. Those people who chewed tobacco were embarrassed to meet up with him; they knew in no uncertain terms what he thought of their habit!

Liquor was no more tolerated than tobacco. Uncle Joe, himself a rigid abstainer, preached temperance to young and old alike. He organized temperance lodges²⁷ wherever he went. During his preaching days, he convinced hundreds of people to sign the pledge of abstinence. This was an era when whiskey was commonly found at any kind of gathering, whether a barn building or a wedding. Liquor was blamed for much of the poverty that existed in Canada at the time.

Uncle Joe used Toby, his horse, to illustrate the evils of whiskey. Even a beast like Toby did not consider the stuff fit to drink, according to Joe. To make his point even clearer, he would then roll around on the ground to show how a common drunkard acted. By the time Joe had gone, no-one would doubt his position regarding alcoholic drinks.



Sketch by Rob Turnbull

²⁶ Ibid., p.169.

²⁷ An organization opposed to the use of alcoholic beverages

TOBY

Integral to the Uncle Joe Little story is his black Indian pony, Toby. Toby was his constant and sole companion as he travelled throughout the countryside. There appeared to be a perfect understanding between pony and preacher.

Just as this intelligent pony could find his way back to Warwick from Sarnia, with his master asleep in the sheepskin saddle, Uncle Joe would say that because Toby knew every sinner he met, he would stop to let Uncle Joe show the sinner the error of his ways. In actual fact, Joe Little liked to stop and chat with everyone he met on the road, and Toby was so used to this that he would stop of his own accord whenever anyone approached!

Uncle Joe was a lover of animals and understood the nature of horses. His patient perseverance accomplished much in keeping a horse firmly under control. Showing others how to break and handle a horse properly was a favourite pastime.

Certain that Toby would not desert him, whenever Uncle Joe preached, he would let Toby go off to feed by the roadside. As expected, Toby would always be waiting nearby at the end of the service.

It was at these services that Toby figured prominently in the speeches or sermons of Uncle Joe Little. Joe referred to Toby as a teetotaler, the same as himself. On other occasions, he would say that Toby was like many other Christians. They could be influenced by bad companions in the same way as Toby was when he refused to leave the company of some other horses in a field.

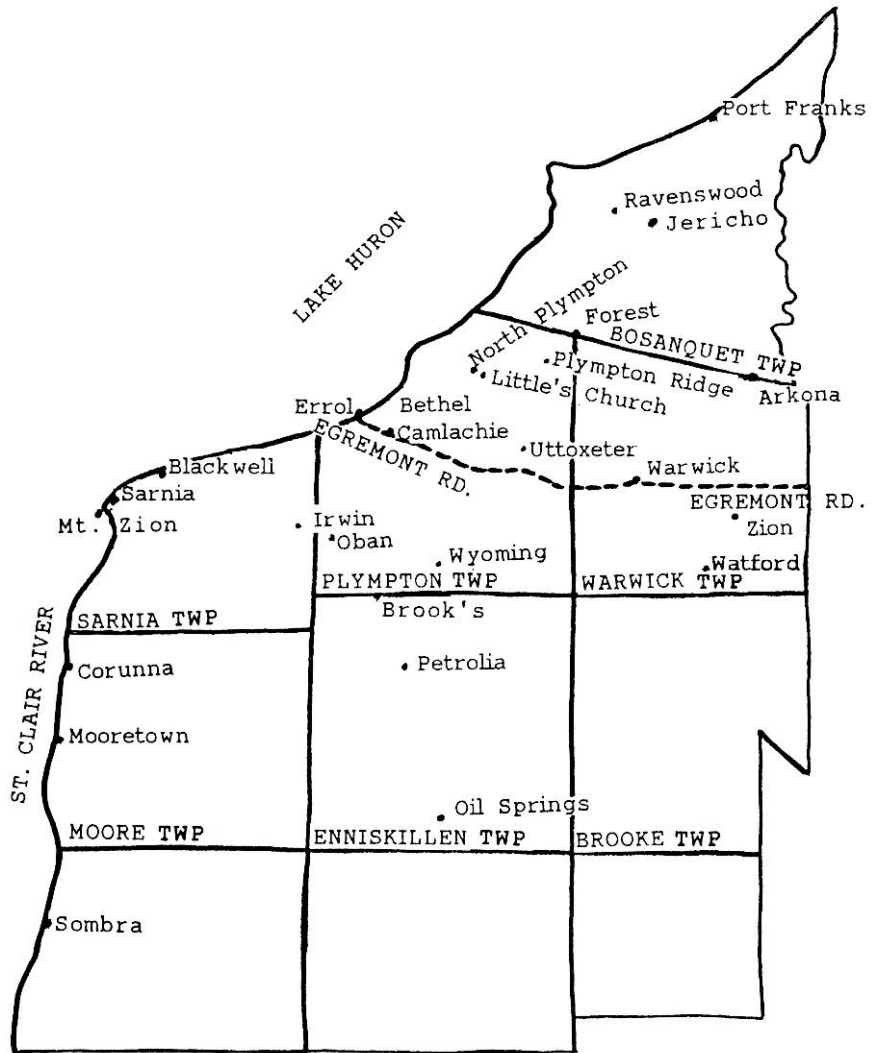
This chunky pony was as well cared for as Uncle Joe's when they came to visit. Blacksmiths were willing to shoe the horse for free. Some of the neighbourhood boys used to say that they would cut grass with a jack-knife to feed Toby. The people seemed to think that it was to their credit to keep the preacher's horse looking well.

When, in 1871, Joseph Russell Little decided that his work in Lambton was done, he moved on to Wellington and Dufferin Counties. While there, Uncle Joe became homesick for his Warwick friends and decided to pay them a visit, and to pick up his colt, Topsy²⁸ while he was there. This was an unbroken pony that had not been ridden before. Although Joe Little seemed to have a rapport with horses and was able to train them quite easily, this one gave him some trouble. Perhaps at the age of 59, he was not quite as agile as he had been in earlier days. On the trip back to Wellington County, Uncle Joe suffered a fall in which he broke several bones. He never completely recovered from this fall, and suffered considerably from rheumatism after that incident. By this time, Uncle Joe had been a saddlebag preacher for close to 40 years.

²⁸ No mention is ever made of the death of Toby, but it is suggested that there were two Tobys before Topsy. Whether Topsy was an offspring of Toby is not known.

TRAVELS IN LAMBTON

These are some of the places where Uncle Joe worked or visited in Lambton



LAMBTON COUNTY

PREACHING IN LAMBTON

Almost immediately after arriving in Upper Canada, Joe Little accepted the work of a local preacher in addition to his work on the Kingstone Estate. His axe turned out the first log for the Irwin Church on lot 7, concession 5 of Sarnia Township in 1833.

In 1834 Little found himself acting as clerk for the newly formed St. Mary's Episcopalian congregation in Warwick Village. Arthur Kingstone, his employer and a member of the Church of England, used his influence to organize the congregation and to finally build a church in 1843. Up to that time there had been no permanent church building anywhere in the township.

While Rev. John Radcliff had been conducting Episcopalian services in a variety of locations, including Burwell's tavern, the Warwick-Adelaide Methodist Circuit was being organized in 1839 under Rev. Charles B. Goodrich. Uncle Joe Little assisted him by preaching in homes and barns in Bosanquet, Brooke, Enniskillen, Plympton and Warwick Townships (Lambton County) and in Adelaide, Caradoc and William Townships (Middlesex County). He used to say that his ministry extended from Strathroy as far as Lake Huron. Even when there were two ministers assigned to the circuit, Uncle Joe continued to assist them both, until the Warwick-Adelaide Circuit was divided in 1851.

It is not exactly clear when Joseph Russell Little became a full-time itinerant preacher. He assisted in church matters while he was managing the Kingstone Estate. Wherever he collected taxes in the daytime, he preached at night. During his teaching period, he realized that his preaching was interfering with his teaching, so he gave up the school work in order to be able to devote more time to ministering to the people in their homes. The position of agent for the Religious Tract Society was partially taken to enhance his position of preacher, but this undertaking ended up in failure. No matter what Joe Little set out to do, he ended up devoting himself more and more to religion, in the broad Christian sense.

Although Joe Little was a Wesleyan Methodist, and his name is usually mentioned in connection with that denomination, he worked for all denominations. It came easily for him to quote equally accurately from *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England or from the Bible, without reference to either book. For him, people of all denominations could be found in Hell, and those people who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" would be found in Heaven, no matter what race or religion they were on earth.

By 1848, Uncle Joe was assisting ordained Methodist ministers by conducting two or three services on Sunday and three or four during the week. Probably by this time he was a full-time itinerant.

The *Quarterly Records* of the new Warwick Circuit, organized in 1851 to reduce the size of the Warwick-Adelaide Circuit, include Little's name on many occasions, assuming a variety of positions.

When the Warwick circuit was formed, there was no parsonage in Warwick for Rev. John Webster and his wife. The business of the first quarterly meeting, held on August 9, 1851 at Hume's meeting house, was to discuss accommodation for the minister. Uncle Joe, as a trustee on the Circuit, along with four others at the meeting, accepted the responsibility of finding them a place to stay.

Later in the same year, on November 22, Little was appointed trustee for the Plympton Ridge Chapel, located on lot 28, concession 12 of Plympton Township. At this meeting, it was recorded that he had made a bargain with the Hon. M. Cameron for lots 6 and 7 on Park Street in Warwick Village²⁹, probably for the parsonage for Rev. Webster. Little's salary was recorded as eight bushels of oats, as compared to the minister's salary of \$3.24, plus expenses.

Joe Little, by this time, was licensed to preach. On May 8, 1852 and every year after that, his licence was renewed. At one time, his superintendent threatened not to renew his licence because he had failed to conform to the rules of the Circuit. No licence meant that Joe would not be allowed to preach on the Circuit. Joe's reply was that he had a licence to preach that no-one could take away.

Frequently the non-conformist, Uncle Joe Little never wanted to become an ordained minister. He thought a college education was not an essential qualification for Gospel preaching. To illustrate his point, he used the lives of the apostles Peter, James and John. They had never attended college, but they were excellent preachers. His mission was, in his opinion, to act as forerunner to ordained ministers. In spite of never being ordained, he was often referred to as Rev. Little by people who did not know him well.

The day-to-day work of the churches on the Warwick Circuit was as varied as Uncle Joe's involvement in it. At the second quarterly meeting of 1853, held at Plympton Ridge, Little was appointed steward³⁰. The 1855 minutes record that Uncle Joe, along with Henry Shaw and Simpson Shepherd, dug the well for the Warwick parsonage. In 1857 he witnessed the deed for the Uttoxeter Church while serving as trustee for the Warwick parsonage and the Wyoming Chapel. On November 9, 1857 he became a steward at Plympton Ridge again.

When Rev. Thomas Howard came to the Warwick Mission, it was Joe Little who helped him move his belongings from Mount Brydges, then showed him around the townships on the circuit. Mr. Howard was very impressed that Uncle Joe knew every person and every place, and that he was always well received.

Warwick Village had a parsonage for the Wesleyan Methodist preacher on the Warwick Circuit, but no church building in 1854. Consequently, plans were made to construct a Methodist Church. The property was deeded on July 31, with the trustees including Joe Little, Robert Campbell, John Shaw and William Mitchell, all of Warwick. This property had been purchased as a memorial to Christina Campbell. Uncle Joe was on the building committee to construct the 30 by 40 foot church, with hand-hewn beams and pews, on the south-east corner of 9 sideroad and Highway 7.

Warwick Methodist Church was dedicated in late January or early February, 1863. The "lighting plant" for it was brought from London by Uncle Joe Little. An organ was not purchased until 22 years later when opinions concerning the need for an organ changed.

²⁹ Bartlett p. 172

³⁰ A steward is elected or appointed to look after the church building and property.

As Lambton County grew, so grew the demands of the people for more ministers and churches. By 1859 there were two married ministers assigned to the Warwick Circuit, Rev. William Chapman and Rev. Thomas Culbert. Another parsonage was needed and again, it was Uncle Joe who was on the building committee. This second parsonage was built close to the first.

Church buildings were only one responsibility taken on by Joe Little. It was important to have a place in which to pray, but it was equally important to keep the spirits of the congregation high by arranging social events. On September 7, 1860 Joe Little organized a large camp meeting³¹ in Lambton County which included a picnic.

It was said that he was the “Professor of Tea-meetings”³². He was often invited as a speaker for church openings, anniversaries, missionary meetings and similar events. People learned to be ready for anything from him at any time, and he made sure they were not disappointed.

Joseph Little served as delegate at the London Conference where plans to build Victoria College in Toronto were discussed. The Warwick Circuit was in favour of building the college.

In spite of a myriad of roles, Joseph Little continued to preach. In 1861, he preached to all three Arkona Methodist congregations---the Wesleyan³³, the Episcopal³⁴ and the Primitive³⁵. He preached at the first Methodist service held in Forest during the same year. It was in 1861 that the Warwick Circuit had become so large that it was divided and the Camlachie Methodist Church, called Bethel, became part of the Wyoming Circuit. The other churches in the Wyoming Circuit included the Little Church (lot 19, concession 12, Plympton Township), North Plympton or McKay’s (lot 19, concession 13), Maxwell, Irwin (Sarnia Township), Epworth, Blackwell and possibly Oban or Jackson’s (lot 3, concession 4, Plympton Township).

The Little Church in Plympton Township was named for Joseph Russell Little. It was located on the north-east corner of lot 19, concession 12, on the south side of the road. Today, all that remains is a small cairn which marks the site of the burial ground that was located in the churchyard.

The half acre property for Little Wesleyan Methodist Church was sold to the congregation by James and Isabella Campbell for five shillings on April 24, 1861. The trustees were Robert Benson,

³¹ A camp meeting was a highly emotional experience which often lasted several days. Individual conversions and evangelical preaching were common components.

³² Bartlett, p. 154

³³ Wesleyan Methodists were followers of John Wesley’s principles of personal holiness and of a disciplined or methodical Christian life.

³⁴ Episcopal Methodists were zealous United Empire Loyalist Methodists who came to Upper Canada before the War of 1812. They were accused of being pro-American.

³⁵ Primitive Methodists were more evangelical English immigrants who arrived in Upper Canada in the late 1820’s.



Cairn commemorating Little Methodist Church and Cemetery in Plympton Township, Lambton County

Adam Delmage, John Johnson, Arthur Ross, James Stewart, Thomas Sutcliffe and Samuel Switzer. In about 1890 this church closed and the building was removed from the site.³⁶

The gravestones that remain in the cairn are those of Robert Benson, Arthur and Eliza Colwell Ross and their son Arthur A., Thomas Albert and Joseph F. Switzer, the children of John Switzer, M. McAllister and D. Johnson. The Rosses were natives of County Longford, Ireland, as was Uncle Joe. It is possible that they were acquainted with Joe Little before they emigrated to Upper Canada.

From his teaching days on, Joe Little used the John Shaw residence as his headquarters, but if asked where his home was, he would reply, "... wherever night overtakes me. When my hat is on my house is thatched."³⁷

One night, when he went to stay at the house of a friend, the family had already retired for the night. He let himself in, moved quietly to the spare room and went to sleep. The next morning the family was hardly surprised to see him come into the kitchen from the bedroom. In fact, the lady of the house was more concerned about the goose eggs that she had left in the bed to keep warm before setting; Uncle Joe assured her that he had not disturbed them at all!

³⁶ Eleanor Nielsen, *Plympton Township's Rural Cemeteries* (1980), p. 65.

³⁷ Bartlett, p.174.

If night came when he was in a neighbourhood where he was a complete stranger, he would simply knock on a door and request accommodation for the night. On one such occasion the woman who answered the door told him that they never kept strangers. Joe's reply was simply, "Well, my dear woman, it is time you did. I am going to stay. Toby has made up his mind that he will not go any further."³⁸ He stayed, in spite of the cool initial reception by his host. The next morning he was invited to come back to stay any time he was passing through.

Continually on the move, Joe Little was one of the first preachers at the Methodist Church in Sylvan, Middlesex County in 1863. By 1864 he was a trustee for the Plympton Ridge Burial Ground and on Watford's building committee. The *1866 Arkona Mission Society Report* shows that Little donated \$4 to the South Branch Wesleyan Methodists. That year also found him preaching in Parkhill, where there was no church and services were held in Noble's Hall.

From 1867 to 1869, Joseph Russell Little was assistant preacher at Mooretown. He worked with his old friends, Rev. Thomas Culbert and Rev. William Hicks. From here he found time to travel to Brant County to preach at the Gore Church on the St. George Circuit.

Joe Little shared the regular work of the Warwick Circuit with Rev. Brolly in 1869. They alternated Sundays. Little's salary was \$10 at Plympton Ridge, \$15 at Sixth Line, \$10 at Warwick, \$15 at Fuller's, \$5 at Watford and \$5 at Evan's.³⁹

The following year, Uncle Joe was appointed assistant preacher to Rev. William Hicks on the Watford-Warwick Circuit. The churches on the circuit paid his \$140 salary as follows: Plympton Ridge, \$20; Warwick, \$20; G. Fuller's, \$15; Watford, \$15; Evan's, \$15; J. Smith, \$15; J. Mitchell, \$15; J. Fuller's, \$15; Brooke, \$10.⁴⁰

In 1871, Rev. Hicks, having noticed how hard Uncle Joe was working, decided that he should be rewarded with a trip to the Methodist Conference at Belleville. Joe could not afford to pay his way and, by this time, people had learned not to give him money directly. A subscription list was circulated and soon supporters had the money required to buy him clothes and a train ticket. Enough was left over to cover minor expenses and to purchase a new harness for his horse. They made all the necessary arrangements for him. Ironically, it was at this conference that Little decided not to return to Lambton County but to carry the Gospel to a more remote part of Canada.

³⁸ Ibid., p.55.

³⁹ *Record of Quarterly Meetings*, Wesleyan Methodists (1851–1872), p.6

⁴⁰ Ibid.

MOVING EAST

By 1871, Uncle Joe Little considered his work in Lambton County completed. Conditions in Lambton County had improved in many ways. When Uncle Joe arrived in 1833, there were few settlers and no churches or industries. Within the next 38 years changes came rapidly.

The census of 1851 reported 20 churches and 20 schools in Lambton County to serve approximately 11,000 people. By the time of the 1861 census, the population had grown to 25,000 people and there were still 20 churches, 19 Protestant and one Roman Catholic. An additional 14,000 people lived in Lambton by 1871. Whether the number of churches and schools remained the same is not recorded.⁴¹

By 1852, Lambton had separated from Essex to become a county with its own warden. Kent County had already withdrawn from the Western District in 1851, as a result of the Municipal Institutions Act which was passed by parliament in 1849.

It was in this era that railroads came to Lambton County, opening up transportation to the East coast and to the United States. In 1854, the Great Western Railroad branched off the main London-Windsor line at Komoka (Middlesex County), passing through Strathroy, Watford, Wanstead, Wyoming and Mandaumin on its way to Sarnia.

The Grand Trunk, constructed in 1859, passed from St. Mary's (Middlesex County) through the northern portion of the county, with stations at Thedford, Forest and Camlachie before it reached Point Edward.

The third railway, the Canada Southern, built in 1862, crossed the southern portion of the county to Courtright, with a branch line extending to Petrolia and Oil Springs. Telegraph services were being expanded at the same time to provide another means of faster communication during this era.

A good road system throughout the county was slow in developing. There was a belief at the time that there was no gravel available in Lambton County for building good roads. The heavy clay soil, when it got wet, became too slippery to provide a decent roadbed without gravel.

In 1864, the Plank Road, a corduroy road from Sarnia to Oil Springs, was built at a cost of \$40,000. Within a very few years it was worn out by the immense amount of traffic using it.

In spite of the poor road system, progress in this period was very rapid throughout Lambton. In Warwick Township, Kingston's saw mill had been built and grist mills no longer relied on water power because of the invention of the steam engine. Brine had been discovered while drilling for oil at the Elarton Salt Works location at the same time as oil had been discovered in Petrolia in 1857.

The 1871 census reported that 1991 people were involved in manufacturing in Lambton County. The industries included six bakeshops, one brewery, forty-six blacksmith shops, nineteen carriage shops, thirty-seven boot and shoe factories and twenty tailor shops, along with a variety of others.⁴²

⁴¹ *Illustrated Atlas of the Dominion of Canada* (Toronto: H. Belden and Co., 1880), p. v.

⁴² *Ibid.*

This was no longer the backwoods of Upper Canada. Lambton County was truly a prosperous and progressive community. The number of ministers had increased and they were capable of looking after the spiritual needs of the people, according to Uncle Joe.

While Uncle Joe was probably right in thinking that there was little need for an itinerant saddlebag preacher in this part of the country by 1871, the people of Lambton did not agree. They thought that since he had given so much of his life and energy to them during their struggle with poverty that they had the right to share their prosperity with him in his old age. But Uncle Joe Little was being called to go to other backwoods settlements and isolated areas that had not yet heard the voice of an ordained minister.

Following the Belleville Conference of 1871, Uncle Joe went to Howick and Owen Sound, Grey County, for some camp meetings. Shortly after, he attended one at Norval in Halton County. In fact, for a while, it looked as though he was about to devote himself to that type of work. It certainly was the kind of life that suited his personality and beliefs.

However, in the fall of 1871, Joe Little was asked to conduct the Sabbath services for one day on the Garafraxa Circuit, Wellington County. Having enjoyed the day, he promised to come back to visit. When Joe did go back, his energies were directed into pastoral visitation in the Douglas (Belwood) area, in Garafraxa and Luther Townships. Little worked so hard and impressed Dr. Harper, the chairman, so much, that Harper secured a small missionary grant to keep him in the field as a local preacher.

Because of Uncle Joe's eccentricity it was difficult to find a permanent boarding place for him for some time, but Joe was happy to stay wherever he happened to be, just as he had done in any other area in which he had travelled. Eventually a home was found for him and he was quickly accepted as a member of the family.

It was during his days on the Garafraxa Circuit that Uncle Joe gave in to his desire to see his old Warwick friends once more. He sold his horse in order to buy a train ticket to Lambton, where he had a young colt named Topsy. After visiting his friends, he saddled Topsy and left for Garafraxa on horseback. Topsy had never been saddled before. Whether it was the nervousness of the horse, or whether it was the age of the rider will never be known, but it was on this ride that Uncle Joe ended up on the ground, bruised and sore, with several broken bones. In this condition he travelled from Adelaide Village all the way back to Garafraxa. Uncle Joe suffered from the effects of this fall for the rest of his life.

Joseph Russell Little felt restricted by his work in the Garafraxa region; he did not like to follow someone else's agenda but he did stay on the circuit for two years. Always hard-working, he assisted with the building of the first Methodist Church in Grand Valley, Dufferin County, bringing parts of the framework for the building from Guelph with his horse and rig. He made friends wherever he travelled, but it seemed that this part of Ontario was not isolated or remote enough for him to feel needed.

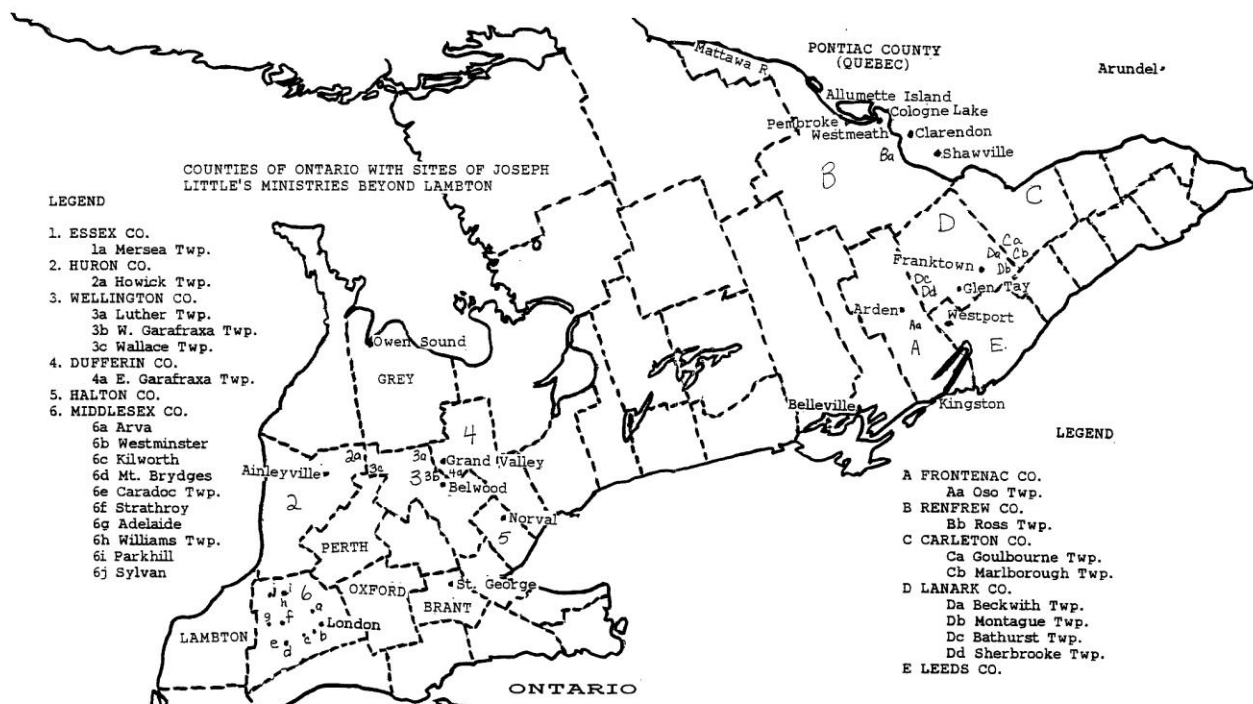
By the time of the Conference in London in 1873, Uncle Joe Little was ready to move on again.

EASTERN ONTARIO

In 1873 Joe Little was 61 years old. He felt his ministry in Lambton County was complete and he was unhappy with the restrictions of his work in Wellington and Dufferin counties. What would he do next?

At the Conference of 1873 held in London, it was made known that there was difficulty in procuring suitable preachers for the field in parts of Quebec and eastern Ontario. Chairman Rev. Richard Whiting of the Pembroke District was looking for a man not afraid of hard work to send to minister to the lumbermen of the Mattawa River region. The name of Uncle Joe Little was suggested. Soon he was heading for the Mattawa lumber camps.

By the time Joseph Little reached Pembroke on his way north, there had been a change of personnel on the Westmeath Circuit, Renfrew County, and he was sent there instead. The Westmeath Board welcomed him and arranged lodging and horse-keep for \$170. Some of the circuit was accessible only by water, so Uncle Joe learned to paddle a canoe in order to get to those homes he could not reach riding his colt.



He liked the climate. He felt healthier than he had for a long time; even his ague⁴³ did not bother him. He made friends easily and they were very generous to him. Joe Little was happy in Renfrew County.

From July 26, 1873 to May 7, 1874 Joe preached 166 times, attended 11 missionary meetings, seven temperance meetings and four protracted religious meetings. In addition he made over 800 pastoral visits.⁴⁴ His travels included Cologne Lake, Ross Township and Allumette Island. Uncle Joe's pace had not slowed down at all from his Warwick days!

Methodists believed in moving their preachers from circuit to circuit, so the Conference of 1874 sent him as junior pastor to the Clarendon Circuit, which included Pontiac County, Quebec. The Clarendon area was a settlement of Irish people and he enjoyed being with his countrymen. He preached in places such as Shawville and Clarendon Centre. Camp meetings and pastoral visits kept him so busy that he did not even take time to recover from the three ribs that he had previously broken.

Uncle Joe continued to move around Eastern Ontario. At the Conference in 1875 he volunteered for Anticosti Island, but for some unknown reason another man was sent there. Joe was named superintendent of the Franktown Mission, at that time one of the poorest missions in Perth District. Beckwith, Montague and Marlborough Townships were included in this mission. Here Uncle Joe was much happier; he had "elbow room" to do as he saw fit. In the Franktown Mission he felt that he was the shepherd looking for his lost sheep.

By this time Joseph Little was old enough to be superannuated. In 1874, the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Conference of Eastern British American and the New Connexion Church had united to form the Methodist Church. This meant that more ministers were available to preach and itinerant preachers were not as necessary. Joe thought of going further west into Manitoba, which was luring so many settlers from Ontario, to preach. He even considered going back to Ireland. But he was posted again in 1876, this time to the Glen Tay Mission in Frontenac County. There were some settlements in Oso Township that had heard no preaching for two or three years. The only churches were located at Bathurst and Sherbrooke. Uncle Joe felt very needed on this mission because "religion was at a very low ebb."⁴⁵

Joseph Little continued as an itinerant preacher in charge of the Arundel Mission, Ottawa District, in 1877. Arundel was located in the province of Quebec, 140 kilometres from Montreal and the same from Ottawa. This mission field, much of it mountainous and difficult to cross on horseback, was about 50 kilometres long.

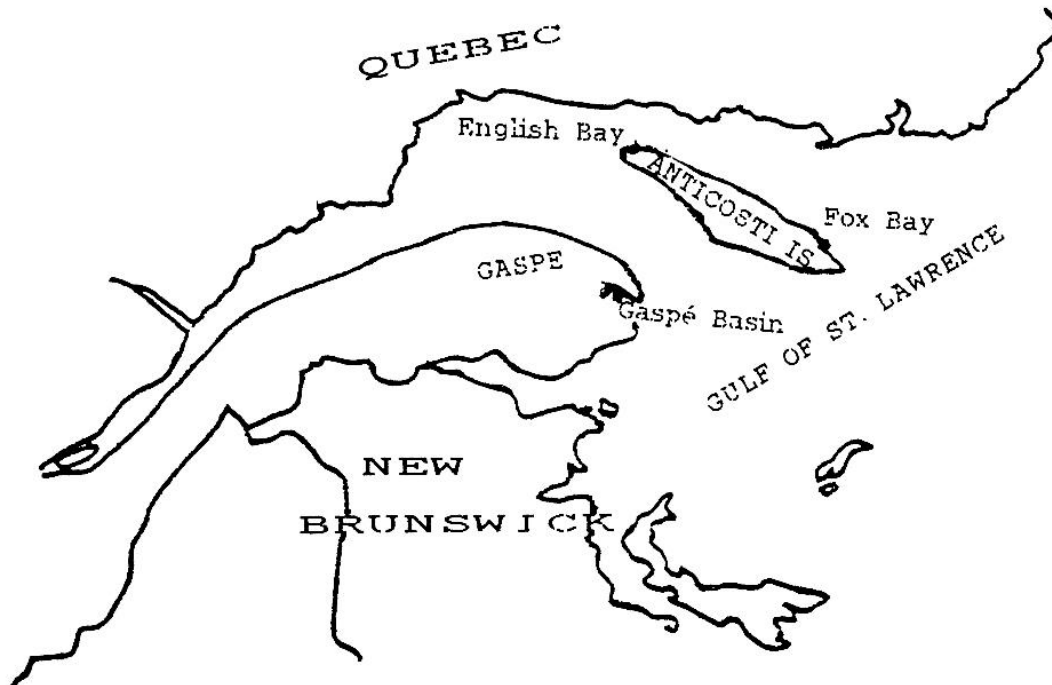
⁴³ Ague is a type of malarial fever, with cold, hot and sweating stages, along with shivering. Joe Little suffered from it periodically throughout his life in Canada.

⁴⁴ Bartlett, p. 199.

⁴⁵ Bartlett, p. 204. This expression is taken from a letter Little wrote from Glen Say (Tay) on August 23, 1876.

Leeds County was his next stop. In 1878, the saddlebag preacher had moved to the Arden Mission, Kingston District. Once again Uncle Joe was injured, this time being knocked off his horse by a tree branch. His ague and rheumatism also bothered him. He had broken bones in several falls over the years and had not taken the time to allow them to heal properly. Continually pushing himself to do the Lord's work without considering his own well-being in the process, Uncle Joe found it physically more difficult to continue his daily work. Yet, towards the time of the Montreal Conference in June of 1879, he was looking for a new position. The new position was to be on Anticosti Island.

ANTICOSTI ISLAND



ANTICOSTI ISLAND

In 1879 Uncle Joe Little travelled from Gaspé Basin by way of English Bay to his mission at Fox Bay on Anticosti Island..

Throughout his life, Joe Little was concerned with delivering the word of God to people who lived in areas that were not yet organized, either politically or religiously. In 1875, one such area was the Island of Anticosti in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. About 150 Protestants, many of whom had been brought up as Wesleyan Methodists, were living in isolation at Fox Bay and had no access to religious services. Uncle Joe volunteered to go there in 1875, but for some reason the arrangements were not made and he was sent to the Perth District instead. A man by the name of Healey had taken his place for that summer. Then, for three years, Joseph Pinel had served as missionary, until poor health forced him to leave the Anticosti mission in 1879.

At the 1879 Montreal Conference in Kingston, the case of the Anticosti Island settlers at Fox Bay was presented. Again Uncle Joe Little volunteered to go there. Many of those present questioned the wisdom of sending an elderly man with rheumatism to such a remote region, but in the end, he was appointed.

Joseph Russell Little arrived at Gaspé Basin on July 25, 1879. He spent a couple of months working on the Gaspé Peninsula, preaching 39 times in 14 places, before proceeding by mail packet⁴⁶ to English Bay, Anticosti Is. The voyage across the Gulf of St. Lawrence was unusually stormy, making Uncle Joe exceedingly sick. Still he kept the spirits of the crew up with his songs, hymns and prayers. From English Bay the boat continued from settlement to settlement until it finally reached Fox Bay, where a congregation of 30 families awaited him.

These families explained how they had come to such a desolate island several years before from Newfoundland. In 1873, the manager of the Labrador Company (also known as the Company of One Hundred Associates, which had claimed the island by virtue of a royal charter from the King of France, dating back to 1672⁴⁷) was a Mr. Forsyth. He encouraged a group of poor fishermen from Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, to settle at four different stations near Fox Bay, telling them that the fishing and hunting conditions were better and that he had good homes for them there. Several families sold their homes and moved to the Fox Bay region of Anticosti Island, only to find that there were no homes and that conditions were no better than those they had left behind. To make matters worse, a storm came up and destroyed their schooner, leaving them marooned on the island for the winter. In the spring, a few of them returned to Newfoundland; the rest of the survivors stayed on to establish new homes for themselves.

These were the families to whom Uncle Joe expected to deliver the word of God. Conditions were very difficult. Anticosti Island was cut off from the mainland for seven months of the year; the weather was severe; fishing conditions were poor and the settlers barely survived.

⁴⁶ a boat for carrying mail

⁴⁷ "The Island of Anticosti," *The New York Times*, November 10, 1898.

Uncle Joe was a sick, aging man when he arrived. Under the severe conditions on the island he failed to recover his health. Consequently, he was unable to hold many public services, but he preached whenever and wherever he could. The people loved him, affectionately referring to him as Uncle Joe. Even in the short period of time he was there, he left a deep impression on the people.

By the end of the year, only a few short months after he had arrived on the island, Uncle Joe realized that his health was not improving and that he might never leave Anticosti. He wondered if he would be well enough by summer to report to Conference about the work on the island.

In the first few days of 1880, his health continued to deteriorate. He spent his last days in extreme pain. Joseph Russell Little passed away on Tuesday, January 6, 1880.

Uncle Joe Little was buried in the small cemetery at Fox Bay, his grave marked with a flat stone picked up off the beach. The community that had known him for such a short time mourned his loss. After he was gone, they continued to talk about him in affectionate terms.

JOSEPH LITTLE MEMORIAL FUND

When Joseph Little wrote letters to friends in Lambton County after he had moved east, he often spoke of seeing his friends in Warwick once more. Lambton County was his “home.” Upon hearing of his death on Anticosti Island, these friends felt that he should be honoured in some way. They talked about erecting a monument in his memory; they suggested moving his remains to the mainland, burying him on the Gaspé Peninsula and erecting a tombstone with a proper epitaph; they also suggested moving his remains back home to Warwick.

With these ideas in mind, a meeting of his friends was held in Warwick on Tuesday, May 25, 1880 to consider the advisability of moving his remains. The executive committee set up to make arrangements was composed of Arthur and Charles Kingstone, John B. Shaw and Simpson Shepherd. A subcommittee of 25 men was organized to collect subscriptions in Warwick, Bosanquet and Plympton Townships, and in the villages of Watford, Arkona and Forest, in order to carry out the proposal. The treasurers of the Joseph Little Memorial Fund were Simpson Shepherd and J. D. Eccles.

It was at this meeting that the decision was made to not accept more than one dollar from anyone, in order to give everyone an opportunity to participate. Subscription lists were circulated among all denominations. The people were eager to take part, so the undertaking was an assured success from the start.

The first major hurdle to overcome was that of getting permission to remove the body from its site in Fox Bay, Anticosti Island. The people of Fox Bay felt that Uncle Joe had died among them and that his body should remain there. It took a great deal of persuasion by Rev. J. G. Brick, minister at Gaspé, who was also superintendent of the work on the island, to convince them that Warwick also had a claim to him. Finally permission was given to reopen the grave and remove the body.

The rest of the details were worked out in due course. A zinc container in which to ship the body was obtained. On November 1, this container was loaded onto a mail packet at Fox Bay and shipped by way of Quebec City to Montreal. From Montreal the casket was transported by rail to Watford, where it arrived on Monday, November 22. The remains were kept in the Canada Methodist Church in Watford until the day of the funeral.

THE "LITTLE" MEMORIAL FUND

taken from The Guide News, Watford, September 15, 1882

The following persons subscribed to the above fund the sum of one dollar:--

Acton William
Acton James
Adams Joshua
Alexander A.
Allingham Andrew
Anderson John
Anderson James
Anderson John
Anderson Robert
Anderson Peter
Archer E.
Armstrong James
Armstrong W. H.
Auld Mrs John
Auld Robert
Auld William
Baird G.H.
Baker Mrs H.O.
Barber Mrs J.W.
Bartley John
Bayley W. Z.
Beacom William
Bell G. Plympton
Bennett W.F.
Bentley Mrs B.
Bowes Mrs
Bowes C.
Brell Thomas
Brown Mrs
Bryce Robert
Burr Reuben N.
Buttery William J.
Campbell Robert
Campbell R. P.
Campbell T. M.
Campbell Duncan
Campbell Bros.
Campbell John
Campbell Edward
Caughlin William
Caughlin James
Clark John

Clark W.B.
Clark F.
Clark Daniel
Collier William
Coom Benjamin
Cornell William M.
Cox Andy
Cox Mrs Mary A.
Dewar Alex
Dewar Archibald
Dill M.R., Petrolia
Dolan Thomas
Donald Archibald
Duncan Allan
Eccles John D.
Eccles J.D. Jr.
Edwards Susan
Edwards Thomas
Edwards Rev. W.W.
Elliot J.F., Sarnia
Ellison Joseph
Evans Maurice
Everest G. M.
Fleck R.
Fleming William
Flintoft J.
Ford William H.H.
Forker James
Fraser Rev C.M.
Fuller John
Fuller George
Gault Robert
Gerrett John
Gillatley John
Gove Mr
Graham Peter
Griffith James
Gurd R. S.
Hagle Luke
Hagle Miles
Hall Joseph
Hardie Rev. D.

Harper Thomas
Harris A.G.
Harrison F. L.
Harvey Dr.
Haskins Mrs B.
Healey Thomas B.
Hodgins Ada
Holing John
Hossie David
Hume J.H.
Hume Alex
Hume Robert M.
Hume Arthur
Hume William
Humphries John
Janes William
Jardine Robert
Johnston A.
Johnston Charles R.
Jones E. A.
Jones Thomas
Kaegen D.
Keady Thomas
Kenward Franklin
Kerfoot William
Kerr Henry
Kingston Peter
Kingston William H.
Kingstone Charles J.
Kingstone A.J.
Kingstone A.J. Sr.
Knight Henry
Laird Mrs Alex
Lambert Levi
Lampman Charles
Laws Thomas B.
Leach William
Lett Robert
Lett John
Lett James
Luckham William
Mains Henry

McAlpine Andrew
 McCormack Robert
 McCormick Samuel
 McCormick William
 McCormick Matthew
 McDonald Mrs B.
 McDonald Angus
 McDougall John
 McGarvey Albert
 McGillicuddy E.
 McGregor Alex
 McIlmurray John
 McIlmurray James
 McIntyre Alex
 McKenzie Charles
 McKenzie D.
 McLaren W.P.
 McLeay Murdo
 McLeay Robert B.
 McLelland John
 McMannis Mrs J.
 McPherson Joseph
 McPherson John
 McPherson Giles
 McPherson William
 McRorie William
 Menery Albert
 Minielly ?
 Minielly Andrew
 Mitchell Robert
 Moody Robert
 Morris T.G.
 Morris Joseph
 Morris Vaughn
 Morris William
 Morris Mrs T.G.
 Morris Mrs H.
 Morris Mrs. R.
 Murray W.H.
 Mustard H.
 Nash H. J., M.D.
 Paimns John
 Palmer R.C.
 Pardee T.B.
 Proctor M.B.
 Proctor E.M.
 Prout John
 Rawlings A.

Reaney Daniel
 Reaney Mrs. D.
 Reycraft John
 Richmond Benjamin
 Roach John
 Roger Jacob
 Rogers William
 Rogers David
 Ross D.
 Rowland Edward
 Sanders C.
 Scott Thomas R.K.
 Scott S.T.
 Shannon William
 Shaw William
 Shaw Hannah
 Shaw William George
 Shaw Mrs William
 Shaw John J.
 Shaw William J.
 Shaw James E.
 Shaw Kate
 Shaw Mrs J.B.
 Shaw J.B.
 Shaw John H.
 Shaw Sara
 Shaw Mary H.
 Shepherd Samuel
 Shepherd Thomas
 Shepherd Mrs M.
 Shepherd Miss A.
 Shepherd S. Sr.
 Shepherd Rachael
 Shepherd L.C.
 Shepherd James
 Shepherd John
 Shepherd George
 Shepherd J.C.
 Shepherd William
 Shepherd James Sr.
 Shirley George
 Simpson J.
 Smith James A.
 Smith James
 Smith James
 Smith John
 Smith William
 Smith Charles

Smith Jacob
 Stanley Dr.
 Stillwell George
 Sullivan John
 Sutton William
 Tanner John
 Tanner James
 Thompson William Sr.
 Thompson Ebenezer
 Thompson J.B.
 Thornton James
 Tinkler William
 Tompkins Elisha
 Tripp Newton
 Utter Jacob
 Vance Henry
 Ward William
 Ward Catherine
 Watson John
 Watson William
 Watt David
 Waugh Henry
 Wellington Henry
 Williams David
 Williams Joseph
 Williams Mrs John
 Williston Rev. J.K.
 Wilson John
 Wynne John

The following persons subscribed to the fund the sum of fifty cents:--

Acton Richard	Hay Eliza	Moody William
Aikens Robert	Hayne Mr.	Moore Richard
Alexander A.	Heal Robert	Morgan Robert
Allingham John	Herbert Robert	Morgan J.
Anderson Donald	Hillis John	Morris William
Anderson Alex	Hoskin J.	Morris Thomas
Bailey Robert	Hoskins J.	Morrison John
Baley James F.	Howden Noble	Neal Benjamin
Barnes S . D .	Hume James	Orme T. H.
Barron Henry	Hume Robert	O'Brien J. D.
Beacom George	Hume James	Parker Ann
Bennest A. F.	Hume William	Parker Edward
Bishop George Sr.	Hume Joseph	Phillips Alfred
Blunden A. E.	Humphries William	Pollock J. C.
Bodaly Thomas	Jariott James	Proctor George A.
Booth Henry	Johnston G. A.	Prout Mrs. J.
Brush Mrs.	Johnston D .S.	Rae Mrs. Robert
Burney J.	Jones William	Reaney Charles
Calborn Duncan	Jones George	Robertson Edward
Callum John	Kelly Captain William	Robertson William
Callum D .	Kenny Randall	Robinson T.
Cameron Mrs. Alex	Kenny James R.	Robinson William
Campbell Humphrey	King John	Roger Bros.
Campbell Malcolm	Lambert John	Rogers William
Carter W.E.	Lambert W. H.	Ross David M.
Caughlin Michael	Lambert James	Ross John
Caughlin John	Laws Mrs. William B.	Saunders Elisha
Clark Mrs. Thomas	Leacock Mrs. William Jr.	Simpson W. G.
Clement John J.	Lenham James Jr.	Sitlington Henry
Climie L.	LeSeuer R. E.	Smith William
Collins W. B.	Lucas John	Smith D.
Cox Richard	Lucas George	Southorn Thomas
Cox Alfred	Lucas Andrew	Sproule William
Craig John	Lucas George	Stanley M.
Currie Alexander	Lucas Mrs. John	Storey William
Dale John B.	Maidment William	Sykes John
Dewer Alex Jr.	Mason John	Symington J. D.
Dewer John	Massenda William	T. G.
Dewer George	Maxwell R.	Talbun Donald
Dickey R. R.	McAusland Robert	Taylor Peter
Dodds James	McCallum W.W.	Thompson William Jr.
Dodge William	McConnell Thomas	Tilley John
Duncan William	McCormick John	Tuck Mary
Eccles D .	McGregor John	Vahey H. D.
English W. J.	McIntyre D .	Vance Robert
Fenner George	McKenzie William	Weir Mrs.

Fero Jesse
Flin Richard
Ford Mrs.
Fowler T.
Gavigan Mrs.
Gurse P.D.
Hamilton Archie
Harrower Andrew
Harvey Rosey

McKenzie Alex
McLachlin A.
McLean Mrs. George
McLean Malcolm
McNaughton James
McRorie Daniel
Meadows S.
Miller G.
Minielly John

Wilford G.
Williamson David
Williamson Richard
Willoughby Thomas
Wray George
Wray William
Wray Mrs. John
Wynne Robert

The following persons subscribed to the fund the sum of twenty-five cents.

A Friend
A Friend
A Friend
Aiken Mrs.
Alexander William
Beatty James
Boyle William
Bryce Hugh
Bryce William
Bryce John H.
Bryce John
Bulma Thomas
Burgar W. K.
Calvert David
Campbell D.
Capes James
Carrick William
Carscaden W. R.
Carscaden D.
Carter R.
Cash
Connell John M.
Connell C. D.
Cooley L.
Coulter Moore
Couse Joseph
Crosbie Richard
Davidson John
Dawson H.
Dolan G.
Drader J.
East Dr.
Elliott Mrs. F.
Elliott H.
Equil G.

Faulkner Robert
Font Mrs.
Garrett James
Gavigan Thomas
Gilroy Wesley
Glendenning Miss
Gustin Mr.
Hamilton J.
Harrower Andrew Jr.
Hawkins James
Hillis Thomas
Hoskins William
J. G.
Jates William
Jay E.
Johnston S.
Jones James
Kennedy Joseph
Kenning Robert
Kirk James
Lapire Peter
Leckie John
Lowry Mrs.
Maidment Charles
Mason J.
Maxwell William
McDonald D.
McKellar Peter
McLaren Mrs. L.
McLean James
McLennon Donald
Millen R.
Milliken D.
Mills Silas
Pollock Mrs.

Prout R.
Purvis David
Raigle B. T.
Revington J.
Rincy James
Robertson William
Ross N. J.
Said Mrs.
Scouler Benjamin Sr.
Smith William J.
Smith F.
Spaulding John
Stewart W. F.
Sutton Samuel
Thexton Robert
Thomas Mrs.
Thomson James
Tool Mrs.
Tripp Hanson
Trusler P.
Tully James
W. L.
Watt Thompson
Weedmark William
Westgate Mrs. M.
Wheatley T. C.
Whiffen Miss
Williamson John
Williamson John
Williamson John Jr.
Williamson Mrs. David
Williamson Charles
Williamson James

[Additional donations]

Henry Shaw and Family [Montreal]	\$6.75
James Shaw and Family	\$5.00
Rev. Maxwell and Family	\$4.00
Bailey Robert G.	.75
McKenzie Hugh	.60
Clark John	.90
Alexander David	.40
Morgan James	.20
Harrower Mrs. J.	.20
Campbell H.	.20

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer and Sub-Treasurer's account of the monies collected and disbursements on account of the "Joseph Russell Little Memorial Fund":

Collected by:

Robert Anderson	\$26.50
William Leach	4.50
Robert Mitchell	13.00
Henry Waugh	21.75
Thomas G. Morris	6.00
Peter Kingston	26.65
Thomas Edwards	26.40
James Smith, D.R.	20.25
Henry Wellington	12.50
Robert Hume	6.50
J. H. Hume	11.75
W. H. Armstrong	11.00
George Everest	2.00
Henry Vance	9.00
Allan Duncan	4.00
Mrs. Henry Morris	19.45
William Shaw	64.60
John Prout	3.00
Benjamin Richmond	9.50
James Shepherd	20.00
Andrew Allingham	32.65
George Bell p'd S. Shepherd	3.50
Henry Shaw & Family Mont'l	6.75
J.D. Eccles	13.25
Arthur Hume	4.00
Total	\$378.50

DISBURSMENTS [sic]

By Remitted Rev J. G. Bricks to pay for coffin and charges to Montreal for Corpse	\$43.50
By Remitted H. J. Shaw, Montreal, to pay express charges of corpse to Watford	\$34.30
By Paid H. Cook for hearse, &c.,	\$9.00
By Paid Robert Moody for Monument	\$185.00
By Paid for digging grave	\$1.00
By Lighting fire day of funeral	\$1.00
By Hobbs, London, iron railing for fence.	\$48.25
By Paid express charges on railing	\$2.00
By Paid drayman	\$1.05
By Paid Livingstone for erecting iron fence stone for posts.	\$25.00
By Paid telegrams Henry Shaw Montreal	\$6.75
By Paid Collectors books and postage	\$1.50
By Paid advertising in two papers statement of accounts	\$20.15
	\$378.50

We, the undersigned have examined the various pass books of collectors, and accounts, of the "Little Fund", now in the hands of the Treasurer, find that the sum of \$378.50 has been collected and accounted for as shown in the above statement.

Signed,

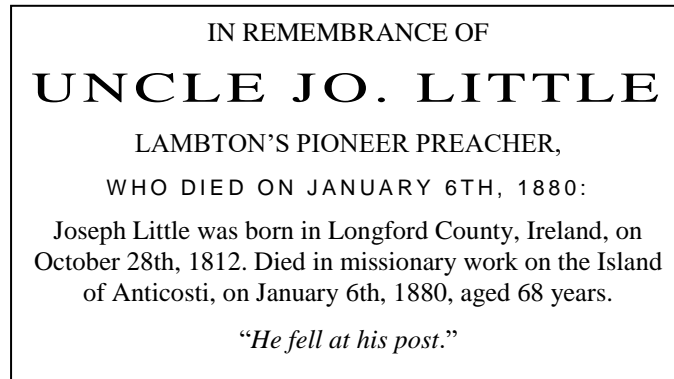
Thomas Doherty

William McLeay, Auditors.

*courtesy **Memories of Warwick Village** by John Thompson Smith*

THE FUNERAL

A memorial card was circulated at the time of Joseph Russell Little's funeral in Warwick in 1880.



Friday, November 26, 1880, was a very cold, stormy, winter day. But the weather did not deter the friends of Joseph Russell Little from paying their last respects to this beloved man. The funeral procession out of Watford was over two kilometres long. As it passed through Warwick Township, people who lived along the way joined in. At Warwick Village more people were waiting at the drill shed where the service was to take place. One estimate suggested that 6 000 people attended the funeral. Such a day has never been repeated in Warwick Village.

In its December 3, 1880 edition, the *Sarnia Observer* printed the following obituary.

FUNERAL OF THE LATE JOSEPH LITTLE

An Immense Gathering Assembled to Pay the Last Tribute of Respect to the Memory of a Good Man

(From Our Own Correspondent)

Watford, Dec. 1.

The funeral of the late Mr. Little which took place on Thursday⁴⁸ was the largest ever seen in Western Ontario. Friends from all parts of the County of Lambton were in attendance, as well as other parts of Ontario, and on arriving at Warwick the procession was over a mile in length. The services begun at the drill shed, which was comfortably arranged for the occasion.

After singing and prayer, the Rev. Mr. Goldie⁴⁹ read the Scripture lesson, 91st Psalm and 5th chapter of II Cor.

The Rev. Mr. Ferguson⁵⁰, of Watford, delivered a very suitable address, referring to the plan adopted by the Committee of giving as many as possible a chance of saying something on the occasion. He was not personally acquainted with "Uncle Joe" but was sure the genuine esteem in which he was held was proof that he was a plain, practical follower of Christ.

Rev. Mr. Whitney⁵¹, of Port Stanley, who labored on the circuit eleven years ago, had come expressly to take part in the services, and he found it difficult to refrain from saying a good deal. The smiling face of Uncle Joe was almost the first he saw on coming to the circuit and he was frequently with him in his labour of love.

The Rev A. G. Harris⁵² preached his trial sermon sixteen years ago and when descending from the pulpit was greeted with an earnest

shake of the hand from Uncle Joe accompanied by words of encouragement such as few others but Mr. Little could convey to a young man just starting in life. He believed Uncle Joe was the most devoted man he ever knew and hoped the remaining days of his (the speaker's) life would be characteristic of as much good.

Mr. Simon Sheppard⁵³, of Plympton, treasurer of the fund, said he had known Uncle Joe since the year 1834, meeting him first in Warwick Village, when he was acting in the capacity of Clerk to the Rev. Mr. Radcliff⁵⁴, who was then stationed in the diocese. Mr. Sheppard was deeply affected when referring to his early acquaintance with the deceased and passed on to the financial part of the undertaking. He was happy to say that they had paid all expenses and had a respectable amount left to erect a monument. He said a very graceful compliment to the Rev. Mr. Brick, superintendent of the Anticosti Mission, to whom they were principally indebted for having the body of their dear old friend sent for interment near the site of his first Canadian home.

J. D. Eccles, secretary of the committee, had known Uncle Joe since 1853, and had always found him a warm friend and good Christian. In the early days he had used his house for holding meetings, and had been greatly blessed by his teachings. He remembered on one occasion of hearing the old man say, "Thank God that we have not to live so long now as in the antediluvian age: we are nearer Heaven now."

John Shaw, a member of the executive

⁴⁸ It was actually, Friday, November 26.

⁴⁹ Rev. P. C. Goldie of Watford

⁵⁰ Rev. George Fergusson, Canada Methodist minister in charge of the circuit

⁵¹ Rev. James Whiting

⁵² Rev. Harris was from Forest.

⁵³ actually Simpson Shepherd

⁵⁴ Rev. John Radcliff of St. Mary's Anglican in Warwick Village

committee, had known the departed friend for nearly forty years, and as he had spent a great part of his time at his house he counted him as one of the family; and he thanked God who had sent them so kind a friend and so worthy an example. He never knew a man so unselfish as Bro. Little for he loved God with his whole heart and his neighbour as himself. He died at his post, and his works live after him.

Rev. H. J. Colwell had not personally known Uncle Joe; but he fancied that he knew him so well that he could go up to him and say, "How do you do, Uncle Joe?" He thought it looked well to see here people of all denominations—Catholics as well as Protestants—to sound the praises so richly merited by their departed friend.

Rev. J. H. Orme⁵⁵ was not intimately acquainted with the good man whom they all loved, but had met many persons who had been led to Christ through his teachings. He liked the idea of the memorial services spoken of by Mr. Harris, and he hoped all the churches would hold them. His influence at the tea-meeting had been spoken of, but he thought that it was in the love feast that he wielded special influence.

Rev. P. C. Goldie thought it was almost a hardship that he was not acquainted with Mr. Little. Such a meeting composed of old and young of all classes and creeds was a monument few people ever merited in a lifetime. It seemed to him that Uncle Joe was very eccentric, and that his whole bearing was so good that the very eccentricities endeared him to the masses. It was a great thing to say of a man that his good deeds live after him, and such a man could justly be called a great man.

Rev. Mr. Guthn⁵⁶ knew their dear old friend about eight years and found him one of the best men he ever knew. He had not earned a prominent place in fame, philosophy or science, but had gained a higher and greater—his Master's "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." He referred to Mr. Little's peculiar

adaptability for comforting pioneer life, showing that the poor and needy never went hungry when it was in the power of Uncle Joe to supply their wants.

Mr. Charles Smith, of Warwick, knew Bro. Little since their boyhood and in the fatherland, when a young man, he induced him to go to the first class meeting which Bro. Little ever attended and he had often received the good old friend's blessing for taking him to that meeting. Mr. Smith was much affected during the recital or his relationship with the departed, and the tears were noticed to run over the old man's cheeks—a sign of emotion which, by the way, prevailed throughout the whole audience.

The Rev. Mr. Ferguson closed the addresses, when a vote of thanks, at the wish of the Committee, was voted to Rev. Mr. Brick for his valuable assistance in carrying out the wishes of the people.

At this stage of the proceedings the procession reformed, and the casket, which had been strewn with flowers, was placed in the hearse by the pallbearers—John Shaw, Col. Campbell, Simon Sheppard, James Sheppard, C. J. and A. J. Kingston[e] , Robt. Anderson, Peter Kingston, Daniel Eccles, and Charles Smith.

The usual burial services of the C. M. [Canada Methodist] Church were conducted at the grave by the Revds. Ferguson, Whiting, Orme and Harris, and as the casket was lowered into the grave the congregation engaged in singing Uncle Joe's favorite hymn "Shall we gather at the River."

⁵⁵ Rev. Orme was from Arkona.

⁵⁶ Rev. M. Griffin of Parkhill

The article omitted very few details of the funeral service. But Rev. Bartlett's biography goes into even greater detail. His book notes the hymns sung at the funeral. Number 664 was *Come, Let Us Join Our Friends Above*; number 76 was *Who Are These Arrayed in White*. Also sung was *Give me the Wings of Faith*.

Bartlett also mentions others that spoke or wrote condolences. Notes were read from Rev. D. Hardy, Rev. P. Hyland and Rev. W. C. Henderson, who were unable to attend because of ill health, but "wanted to testify to the faithfulness and earnestness of Joseph Little." Rev. Dr. Carscadden of Forest spoke about meeting Uncle Joe on a very dark night a few days after Confederation. Rev. Carscadden was lost when a dark figure loomed up before him. As soon as he heard the name Uncle Joe he needed no further explanation, even though he had never seen him before.

As a final tribute, the remainder of the money collected for the funeral was used to erect a tall marble column made by Watford Marble Works. After a cedar tree was planted beside the grave, the entire plot, about nine feet by twelve feet, was enclosed with an iron railing.

The monument bears the following inscription:

IN
memory of
JOSEPH LITTLE,
Born in Longford Co. Ireland,
Oct. 28, 1812:

Died in missionary work in
connection with the Methodist
Church of Canada, on the
Island of Anticosti.
Jan. 6, 1880;
His remains were removed
here and this Monument
erected by His numerous
Friends.
He rests from his labours, and
his works do follow him.

LITTLE

EPILOGUE

Joseph Russell “Uncle Joe” Little died in 1880, at the age of 67. In 1993, 113 years later, he has not been forgotten.

His friends, who formed the Joseph Little Memorial Fund to have his remains brought back to “Old Warwick,” probably never fully realized just how highly thought of he was.

Photographs

By the time of the burial in Warwick in November, 1880, the *East Lambton Advocate* (published in Arkona by Rose and Bole, the owners of the *Watford Advocate*) was offering “a beautiful photograph” to every subscriber of the semi-weekly newspaper. At the same time, the *Watford Guide and Alvinston News* offered cabinet size photographs copied from “the only true and original picture of Uncle Joseph Little, procured from New York”⁵⁷ to their subscribers and customers. Undoubtedly Uncle Joe would have been shocked by the commercial use of his name.

Books

Perhaps Joseph Little would have felt honoured that so many writers and journalists considered his life as worthy a topic as the life of John Wesley. His friends would surely have appreciated the stories that writers like Rev. Leonard Bartlett and W. L. Smith wrote about Uncle Joe.

It was in 1903, after eight years of research, that Rev. Leonard Bartlett published his *Uncle Joe Little: Life and Memoirs of Joseph Russell Little*. He mentioned in his recollections that he first heard of Uncle Joe Little while he was stationed at Rutherford, Lambton County, in 1894. The village schoolmaster told him:

Billy Bray⁵⁸ was a noted and unique character. Years ago there was in this county one quite as worthy. One by the name of Little preached all over the county of Lambton and elsewhere as a lay preacher in the Methodist Church. He should not be forgotten. Facts and anecdotes of his work should be collected and put in some permanent form. But if someone does not do it, soon, all will be forgotten, and it will be a great loss.⁵⁹

Bartlett continued:

Soon I heard more—and more. I began to jot down what I heard, and to ask for more.... I would lecture in different churches and then ask the people to help me gather material for a book. The response was good.⁶⁰

Bartlett’s book is an interesting compilation of incidents and anecdotes in Little’s life.

Hugh Johnston, the friend to whom Uncle Joe had written about taking up a collection in 1852, was interviewed by W. L. Smith for his book *Pioneers of Old Ontario*. Johnston spoke about Joe Little’s days as tax collector.

⁵⁷ *Watford Guide and Alvinston News*, 29 October 1880.

⁵⁸ Billy Bray was a famous Scottish evangelist in the early 1800s.

⁵⁹ “Recollections of Rev. Leonard Bartlett,” *Western Ontario Historical Notes*, XVII, 1961, p.73.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

He soon found many who could not pay... and the result was that when he got through collecting, instead of having something coming to him, he was in debt.

The people thought Little would know better next time, so they appointed him collector for the following year as well. But the same thing happened again. Not only that, but once, when Little came across a poor settler with only one pair of boots, and these full of holes, he took off his own good shoes and exchanged them for those of the less fortunate fellow. Little had to use basswood bark to tie the worn-out boots to his feet as he went on his round. That is an illustration of the spirit of the pioneer days in Bosanquet.⁶¹

Articles

Newspaper articles over the years retold many of the same stories, but in varied ways. Uncle Joe was first mentioned in the *London Free Press* in 1933 in an article called “Kingstone Was Early Lambton County Settler”. Six years later, the same newspaper published two more articles: “Bishop of Warwick Lovable Character of Pioneer Lambton” and “‘Bishop of Warwick’ Claimed His Horse Knew the Sinners.” A few years later it focussed on “Grave of ‘Uncle Joe’ Little is Honored Spot in Lambton.” In 1948 Little was featured in “Pioneer Preacher Proved Poor Tax Collector” and “Beloved Cleric’s Body Returned to Lambton.”

Seventy-three years after his death, the *London Free Press* reported “‘Uncle Joe’ Little’s Grave in Old Warwick Cemetery Recalls Pioneer Preacher.” It later ran a story about “Rev. Leonard Bartlett (who) Wrote Biography 60 Years Ago of Famous Saddlebag Preacher.” “Monument recalls circuit rider” was printed in 1965.

The *London Free Press* was not the only newspaper to revive the memory of Joseph Russell Little. In 1959 the *Forest Standard* wrote about “one of the best loved figures in Lambton’s early history”. As early as 1960, the possibility of erecting a plaque in memory of Uncle Joe was suggested in the *Thedford Enterprise* article “When Uncle Joe Little Was Legend in Lambton.” In 1975 the *Plympton-Wyoming Gazette* spoke of “Uncle Joe, the Circuit Rider.” As recently as 1991, the *Sarnia Observer* stated “Little was big in generosity even if it belonged to others.”

It is not only in newspapers that the name of Joseph Little appears. In the Summer, 1992, edition of *The Sampler*, published by the museums of Lambton County, a summary of the life of Joseph Little is given. It states that “Uncle Joe Little was an eccentric, lovable character, who always helped others.”

Church Histories

The influence of Uncle Joe in the community has not been forgotten in local history books. Burns Church (lot 16, concession 12, Moore Township, Lambton County) was built in 1863, when services were often conducted by missionaries.

One of these in 1866 bears a name that has become almost a legend in Lambton County. On September 18, 1866, a missionary of the Methodist

⁶¹ W. L. Smith, *The Pioneers of Old Ontario* (Toronto: George N. Morang, 1923), p.213.

church, Joseph Little, known to most of us as “Uncle Joe Little,” conducted the service of sacrament in the pioneer church.⁶²

Bert Patterson, writing about the early days of Camlachie United Church, states:

From that time on, [1840] for more than twenty years, Joseph Little (“Uncle Joe,” as he was familiarly known), a lay preacher of great influence, often preached and visited in this district. The writer has often heard his mother tell of times when, as a small child, she was sitting on Uncle Joe’s knee, when he visited her home on the farm now occupied by Bert Patterson.⁶³

The Methodist congregations of Forest and Arkona held services together by 1861. “Uncle Joe Little preached here in the early days.”⁶⁴ Forest United Church members recalled Uncle Joe being a good friend of the family. Mrs. Stanley Kernohan’s father, Christopher Wall, “often talked about the good times they had when Uncle Joe was there, helping them with the cooking and other chores, and of how delighted they always were to see him.”⁶⁵

London Road West United Church, Sarnia, reports that Lambton’s famous saddlebag preacher from Warwick Village was “well-known for travelling throughout Southwestern Ontario on horseback and spreading the word of God whenever and wherever he could.”⁶⁶ He began preaching regularly in a house on lot 8, concession 7, Sarnia Township, owned by Samuel Hitchcock of Port Sarnia.

Warwick United Church remembers Joseph Little in its history book in the following way.

“He did more than any other man to spread the Gospel as it is taught in the Methodist Church in the following townships: Adelaide, Warwick, Bosanquet, Plympton, Brooke and Enniskillen.”⁶⁷

Watford’s history pays tribute to the “saddle-baggers” who carried the Good News wherever they saw smoke curling from a cabin chimney. Of the “saddle-baggers,” we think of “Uncle Joe Little and his pony Toby,” who had most of Lambton as their parish, bringing cheer and faith wherever they traveled.⁶⁸

⁶² *Burns Church, 1863–1963*

⁶³ Bert Patterson, “An Historic Sketch in Two Parts/Part 1: From 1834 to Union 1925,” *History of Camlachie United Church From its Early Pioneering Days to the Opening of the New Church of 1956*, p.6.

⁶⁴ *Forest Centennial 1859–1959*, p.13.

⁶⁵ Eleanor Nielsen, *Pioneers and Preachers* (Forest: J. E. Pole Printing, 1977), p.10.

⁶⁶ *Our Church – Then and Now*, (London Road West United Church, 1993).

⁶⁷ *The History of Warwick United Church 1834–1975*, p.1.

⁶⁸ Ross Cumming, *This Living Village: Watford’s First Fifty Years* (Watford: Guide-Advocate Print. 1965), p.25.

Ross Cumming wrote a poem:

TO THE MEMORY OF UNCLE JOE LITTLE

In this village churchyard they have laid him to rest,
With friends whom he loved in his youth.
Let his name be revered, let his memory be blest
For his life was a tribute to truth.

From Warwick as centre, north, south, east and west.
On Toby he rode through the land;
He preached to the sinners, God's people he blessed:
And strengthened by word, look and hand.

He had but one coat, for if e'er he had two on
And met a poor sinner with none,
'Tho a cold winter day and that coat were new,
He'd clothe the poor shivering one.

A long time ago, when these townships were forests,
With only a home here and there,
He preached to the poor, the lonely encouraged
With sweet songs of Zion and prayer.

So he girded his armor, though aged and hoary,
And bravely went forth to the fight,
And he died at his post in the work of the Saviour,
And entered the kingdom of light.⁶⁹

During the early days of Wyoming, "barn raisings, tea-meetings, picnics, camp-meetings, etc., pioneers furnished mutual help and recreation. The spiritual welfare of the people was looked after by the pioneer circuit rider, Joe Little, whose name was venerated among the people in the early [18]60s."⁷⁰

Because Uncle Joe preached in Zion United Church over a period of thirty years:

It seems fitting that special reference be made to the work of 'Uncle Joe Little,' who for a number of years was often to be seen riding through this part on his faithful 'Toby.' He was the friend and helper of everyone, and often preached in this Church.⁷¹

Outside Lambton County, references are also made to Lambton's saddlebag preacher. Arva United Church, Middlesex County, includes Uncle Joe Little of Watford as one of the pioneer preachers who visited and worshipped with a small group of Wesleyan Methodists in a log cabin near the village of Arva, at that time called St. John's.⁷²

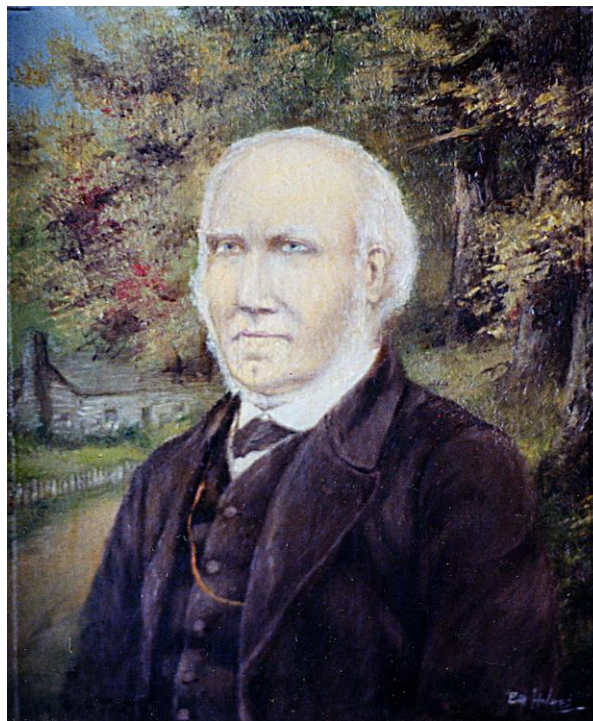
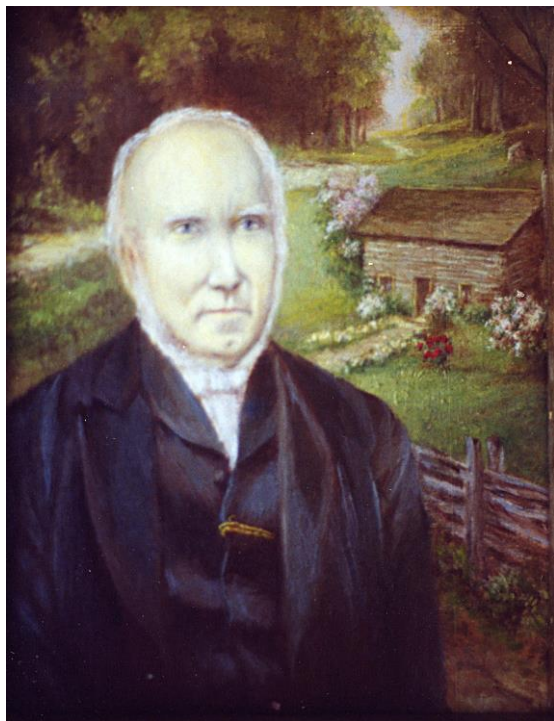
⁶⁹ Ibid., p.27.

⁷⁰ Victor Lauriston, *Lambton's Hundred Years 1849-1949* (Sarnia: Haines Frontier Printing Co., 1949). p.155.

⁷¹ *Zion United Church, Warwick Twp., 1865-1952*. p. 5.

⁷² Jennie Raycraft Lewis, "*Llyndinshire*" – *London Township* (1967), p. 84.

One of the first preachers on the Sylvan Circuit was “Uncle Joe Little of Warwick Village, who with his pony, Toby, was a very welcome visitor and friend to everyone.”⁷³ He preached there in 1863.



*Paintings located in Watford United Church and Warwick United Church
by Arkona Artist Bill Holmes*

The Shawville United Church in Renfrew County states that the Reverend J. Little served the circuit in 1873–1874. While in the Clarendon-Shawville Circuit, Uncle Joe continued to follow biblical precepts. In a letter written to Francis Armstrong on August 26, 1875 Little said:

I should have written to you before this time but was waiting to get a little of the needful to send you. I had got it but met a good fellow from the West above Hamilton (who) had run short of funds and I thought I would trespass on your good nature and let him have a little to take him home.⁷⁴

Joseph Little has been remembered not only in writing, but also in other ways. When Watford Central United Church was built in 1953, one of their fourteen memorial windows was dedicated to him. The focal point of the window is an open Bible. Joe Little’s portrait, painted by Bill Holmes⁷⁵, now hangs in the Uncle Joe Little Memorial Room of Watford United Church. A similar painting hangs in Warwick United Church.

On June 20, 1993, the Ontario Heritage Foundation unveiled a plaque on 9 sideroad south of Highway 7 near Warwick Village with the following inscription:

⁷³ *Parkhill Centennial 1860–1960*, p. 63.

⁷⁴ J. Lloyd Armstrong, *Clarendon and Shawville*, p.115.

⁷⁵ William R. Holmes (1881–1959) born in Arkona, Ontario. Although he had no formal training as an artist, he had unusual ability with both oils and pastels, painting flower arrangements or local scenes.



*Uncle Joe's tombstone
Warwick United Church Cemetery*

JOSEPH RUSSELL LITTLE 1812–1880

Joseph Little came to Warwick Township from Ireland in 1833 to manage the estate of a large landowner. The poverty of many pioneers so shocked him that, indifferent to his own comfort, he gradually gave away his savings, wages, clothing, even his employers' profits, to those in need. A fervent adherent of Wesleyan Methodism, Little had a natural ability in leading song and prayer. As an itinerant lay preacher, he helped establish many Methodist congregations in Lambton County and, after 1871, in backwoods communities in eastern Ontario. When friends of "Uncle Joe" heard of his death on Anticosti Island, they collected money to have him returned to Warwick for burial. His grave is in the United Church cemetery just south of here.

*Ontario Heritage Foundation plaque, 1993
Warwick Conservation Area*

APPENDIX

James Gordon presented the following song on the CBC Radio program *Ontario Morning* on March 23, 1993 as a special tribute to Lambton's beloved preacher.

UNCLE JOE'S LAST RIDE

Well they say that a crowd of six thousand strong
Came out to meet the Watford Train
The procession to Warwick was two miles long,
To bring Uncle Joe home again.
To bring Uncle Joe home again.

And who was this man
Who seemed to command
Such love and respect in these parts?
Just a simple preacher
Who somehow had reached
Out to touch Lambton County's Heart.

It was way back in 1833.
When Uncle Joe Little came to town
Warwick was nothing but swamps and trees
And some lost souls looking to be found
And some lost souls looking to be found

The legends are told
Of his heart of gold
And the kindness that Uncle Joe showed
And how you'd see him roam
On his Indian pony
Along those old corduroy roads

Well his saddle was his Pulpit
And his church was the trail
Of those Lambton pioneers
His sermons were only homespun tales
That brought them some hope and cheer.
That brought them some hope and cheer.

And they still talk about
How no one ever did without
When Uncle Joe came around
He'd give them something to eat
Or the boots from his feet
Or some lodging that he had found.

As Warwick prospered, well Uncle Joe started
To travel far and wide
Giving all that he had, giving all of his heart
Till the day of his last ride,
Till the day of his last ride.

ADDENDUM I

The following four pages are the program for the unveiling of the Joseph Russell Little plaque in June, 1993.

The Unveiling of an
Ontario Heritage Foundation
historical plaque
commemorating



Joseph "Uncle Joe" Little

1812-1880

a pioneer preacher of Lambton County

Warwick Conservation Area
Sideroad 9, South of Hwy 7

Sunday June 20, 1993, 2:00 pm

Sponsored by Warwick United Church, Warwick
Women's Institute, and Warwick Township Council

Programme

- 2:00 pm *Welcome:* **Mac Parker**, Mayor
Warwick Township
Master of Ceremonies
- Hymn:* *Shall We Gather at the River*
(see lyrics on opposite page)
- 2:05 pm *Speakers:* **Joanna Bedard**, Director
Ontario Heritage Foundation
- William Boyd**, Chair
St. Clair Region Conservation Authority
- Rev. Alymer Smith**, Pastor
Warwick United Church
- 2:15 pm *Song:* **James Gordon: *Uncle Joe's Last Ride***
- 2:20 pm *Speakers:* **Elizabeth Tenhoeve**, Chair
Egremont Road Heritage Committee
- Ken Blain**, Chair
Warwick United Church Cemetery Board
- Rev. Stanley McDonald**, Chair
Lambton Presbytery
- 2:30 pm *Hymn:* *Rest in Heaven*
(see lyrics on opposite page)
- 2:35 pm *Historical Background:*
Mary Janes: *Joseph Russell Little: Saddlebag Preacher*
- 2:45 pm *Unveiling:* **Mary and Paul Janes**
- After the Ceremony:* **James Gordon:** *Hometown Tunes Concert*
- Refreshments
- Visit to Joseph Little grave at Warwick United Church Cemetery

A community event cannot be successful without willing workers. We would like to thank the following people and groups who made this day possible:

COMMITTEE:

Glen Ferguson and Ken Blain, Warwick United Church Cemetery Board
Margaret Ford, Warwick United Church Women
Gerald Herbert, St. Mary's Anglican Church
Mary and Paul Janes
Don McCormick, Warwick United Church Session
Mac Parker, Mayor, Warwick Township
Margaret Redmond, Warwick Women's Institute
Rev. Alymer Smith, Pastor, Watford-Warwick Charge

ASSISTANCE:

Kevin Baker, St. Clair Region Conservation Authority
Florence Main
Michael Power

DISPLAYS:

Lambton Heritage Museum
Warwick Orchards and Nursery

REFRESHMENTS:

Warwick Women's Institute
Warwick United Church Women

SET UP:

Warwick Conservation Area
Parking crew: Brad Blain, Duane Ferguson, Ed Janes, Tim McCormick

PHOTOGRAPHER:

Cathy Fraser

COVER ILLUSTRATION

Robert Turnbull

**Ontario
Heritage
Foundation**

*An agency of the Ontario Ministry
of Culture, Tourism and Recreation*

Joseph Little: A Brief Chronology

- 1812 October 28, Joseph Russell Little born at Coolnahinch Farm, near Kenagh, Longford County, Ireland; one of five children of Thomas Little and Jane Russell Little
- 1815 Death of Joseph's mother
- 1831 Little converted publicly to Methodism (Wesleyan), after meeting with evangelist Gideon Ouseley
- 1833 April 10, started voyage from Ireland via Liverpool and New York to Western District, Upper Canada, to take job as managing agent of Arthur J. Kingstone's 1600 acres in Warwick Twp.
helped build Irwin church, 4th line, Sarnia Township
preached in homes and barns in Lambton (Bosanquet, Brooke, Enniskillen, Warwick Twps.) and Middlesex (Adelaide, Caradoc, Williams Twps.)
- 1844 lost his job as managing agent because the Kingstone Estate had been losing money for eleven years; Little had been too generous, giving away food and clothing to those less fortunate
Kingstone sympathized with him and gave him two hundred acres (lot 5, concession 6 NER) on condition that Little not be allowed to sell it
- 1840s hired as tax collector for Warwick Township
used his salary to pay taxes of poor township sold his farm for back taxes and debt
considered himself free to do the Lord's work
sold books for the Religious Tract Society - did not make enough to be able to replenish his stock of books
- 1851 adopted life of homeless itinerant lay preacher and pastor, riding on his Indian pony Toby
assisted ordained ministers, taught Sunday School, served as trustee on Warwick Circuit, steward at Plympton Ridge, on building committee at Warwick and Watford
- 1871 May 5, attended Methodist conference in Belleville, hired as local preacher in Garafraxa Mission (Wellington County and Dufferin County)
thrown off his horse and received numerous injuries from which he never fully recovered
- 1873 went to Westmeath Circuit (Renfrew County)
- 1874 Clarendon Circuit (Pontiac County)
- 1875 Franktown Mission (Perth District)
- 1876 Glen Tay Mission (Frontenac County)
- 1877. Arundel Mission (Ottawa District)
- 1878 Arden Mission (Kingston District)
- 1879 June 18, at Kingston Conference, volunteered to go to Fox Bay Mission, Anticosti Island
- 1880 January 6, died and buried at Fox Bay
May 25, Joseph Little Memorial Fund started to bring him back to Lambton
November 26, Little reburied in Warwick Cemetery

This is the invitation that was distributed for the Little plaque unveiling in 1993.

*You are invited to attend
the unveiling of the*

Ontario Heritage Foundation
*historical plaque commemorating
Lambton County's pioneer
Methodist preacher*



Joseph Little
1812-1880

*Sunday, June 20, 1993
2:00 p.m.*

*Warwick Conservation Area
Sideroad 9, south of Hwy 7*

*Music and refreshments will
follow the plaque unveiling*

*Sponsored by
Warwick United Church
Warwick Women's Institute
Warwick Township Council*

ADDENDUM II

Another of Joseph Russell's letters, this lengthy one to Brother Fuller, was written in 1873. It shows his sense of humour. This is a copy of his handwritten work, pages 1 and 4; following is pages 2 and 3. A transcription of the letter follows. courtesy Eric & Franklin Fuller

Today that of the Psalmist 103
 Psalm. Bless the Lord O my soul
 and forget not all his benefits
 I was delighted to hear from ^{to time}
 the prosperity of our Zion on the
 Warwick ^{circuit} a place dear to me. let
 me wander where I may the friends
 that I received so much kindness ^{from}
 I never can forget - Morning and
 evening in secret prayer I re-
 member you all may the Lord
 bless you more and more now
 Brother I ask you to forgive my
 long silence and the only way that
 I will know that you do forgive me
 is to write me a long letter and give
 me all the news - give my kindest
 regards to M^{rs} Fuller and all the
 Children Father Mother Uncle Aunt
 I may say every body - God bless you ^{amen}
 (page for me) Joe Little

my Post Office is — Reading
 22nd March 1873
 Brother Fuller
 I have many
 a time reproached myself for
 not writing to you before this
 One Year and four Months has
 rolled into Eternity since I pro-
 mised to write to you - of course I
 heard about you from time to
 time and you heard from me by
 Brother Hicks and Bro Maxwell
 and others that I corresponded
 with but all this did not fulfil
 my promise to you - well the
 truth is this I live without rule
 or system continually running
 hither and thither - the day that
 I am determined to write to some
 friend perhaps have two or three

pressing invitations to attend a
Tea meeting or Picnic or Temperance
Meetings so that I get bewildered
the people here are very kind to
me - all the Denominations Church
of England Presbyterian Congre-
gational and New-connaion and
Episcopal I am often ashamed
of myself receiving so much kind-
ness from every one young and old
I had no intention staying more
than one year but I could not
get away from the friends I in-
tend to pay a visit to Illinois
in June and then after that
Locate get married and be
somebody in the end of my days
however there may be some diffi-
culty about that matter I won't
say positively about this affair

as of necessity another person
will have something to say in
the matter - but what an illas-
tured lot of people there must
be in Warwick and all that
region of Country not one of them
came to my Funeral last Summer
when I died - and here I am
not buried yet - I made some
people laugh with Mr. Hicks re-
marks about ^{it} he said I done
no such thing that he knew that
would be the last thing I would
do - praise the Lord my health
never was better I am astonished
at the goodness of my Heavenly
Father to me - Oh - I ought to love
him and serve him better than I
do - Oh to grace how great a deb-
tor - the language of my heart is

My post office is Reading
22nd March, 1873

Brother Fuller,

I have many a time reproached myself for not writing to you before this One Year and four months has rolled into Eternity since I promised to write to you—of course I heard about you from time to time and you heard from me by Brother Hicks and Bro. Maxwell and others that I corresponded with but all this did not fulfill my promise to you—well the truth is this. I live without rule or system continually running hither and thither—the day that I am determined to write to some friend perhaps have two or three pressing invitations to attend a Tea meeting or Picnic or Temperance Meeting so that I get bewildered the people here are very kind to me—all the Denominations Church of England Presbyterian Congregational and Newconxion [sic] and Episcopal I am often ashamed of myself receiving so much Kindness from every one young and old I had no intention of staying more than one year but I could not get away from the friends I intend to pay a visit to Illinois in June and then after that Locate get married and be somebody in the end of my days however there may be some difficulty about that matter I wont say positively about this affair as of necessity another person will have something to say in the matter—but what an ill-natured lot of people there must be in Warwick and all that region of Country not one of them came to my Funeral last summer when I died—and here I am not buried yet—I made some people laugh with Mr. Hicks remarks about it he said I done no such thing that he Knew that would be the last thing I would do—praise the Lord my health never was better I am astonished at the goodness of my Heavenly Father to me—Oh—I ought to love him and serve him better than I do—Oh to grace how great a debtor—the language of my heart is today that of the Psalmist 103 Psalm X Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all his benefits I was delighted to hear from time to time the prosperity of our Zion on the Warwick circuit a place dear to me—let me wander where I may the friends from that I received so much Kindness I never can forget—morning and evening in secret prayer I remember you all may the Lord bless you more and more now Brother I ask you to forgive my long silence and the only way that I will know that you do forgive me is to write me a long letter and give me all the news—give my kindest regards to Mrs. Fuller and all the Children Father. Mother. Uncle Aunt I may say every body—God bless you Amen

(Pray for me)

Joe Little

ADDENDUM III

In 1869 Joseph Russell Little was in Mooretown when he wrote to David Williams in Arkona. He wrote about his work week and also of some of his experiences in the southern part of Lambton County. The original of this letter is not available at the time of writing this addendum, but following is the transcription of that letter. *courtesy Lambton Heritage Museum*

Mooretown, Ontario,
June 8th, 1869

Mr. David Williams,
Arkona, Ontario

My Dear David,

I will give you one week's work, and then you will see why I forgot to write to you. Next Sabbath I have three appointments on the river: Monday start for Enniskillen, north of Petrolea; Tuesday, south-east of Petrolea; Wednesday, to Oil Springs; Thursday, to Brother Brock's; Friday to a school-house on the twelfth concession. 'Men shall run to and fro in the earth, and knowledge shall increase' ... Oh, the folly and the madness of thousands that think their happiness consists in the enjoyment of the things of this life! Oh, what a delusion! About four weeks ago I witnessed an affecting scene at Oil Springs. A man that was considered to be the wickedest blasphemer that could be found was taken down with heart disease and a tumor on the liver. He told different persons to send me to his home as soon as I would come. Accordingly I went, and when I came he was propped up with pillows in a chair. He could not lie down. The Bible was soon laid on the table. I read two or three chapters, sang part of the first hymn and if ever I prayed for a sinner it was for that man. After prayer he told his wife to get that passage, to ask me to explain to them Matt. xii. 30, 31. I told him the very circumstances of having a desire to be saved was proof that he had not committed the unpardonable sin. These desires were produced by the Spirit. I called again the next morning, read and prayed and talked to him about the ability and willingness of Christ to save. He died that day, but told his father that he was pardoned, and that now he could die happy.

"Oh, the blood of Jesus,
The precious blood of Jesus!
It cleanses from all sin."

Yours faithfully,
Joe Little

ADDENDUM IV

Ross Cumming (see Epilogue) was not the only person to write a poem about Uncle Joe Little. Following is a poem written by Alex. Glindinning, probably in 1880 at the time of his funeral. It appears to have been published in a local newspaper.

courtesy Clarence & Clara Hodgson

UNCLE JO. LITTLE

Last Monday at four in the afternoon,
A train from the east arrived in town,
Bringing all that was mortal of Uncle Jo.
The good old man whom we all used to know.

He was one of the early settlers here,
And proved himself a good pioneer;
He taught the children to read and write,
To shun the wrong and to choose the right.

For his highest aim in the training of youth,
Was to guide their feet in the path of truth;
With genial feelings and fancx [sic] bright,
He was jocund and joyful from morn till night.

But his head was clear and his heart was right,
And his Master's work was his whole delight;
He was ever ready to preach or pray,
On Sunday or on any other day—
It made no difference about the pay,
His motto: "We must work while we may."

He would counsel his friends to obey the truth,
To seek their Creator in the days of youth,
While the sun and the light made their pathway plain,
And the clouds returned not after the rain;
"Time past," he would say, "is forever gone,
Time future is hid in a world unknown,
This moment is all we can call our own;
Past, present, future Time to you,
Centres all in one emphatic 'Now.'
Now is the accepted day of grace;
Now you have one to plead your case,
A powerful Advocate on high,
Turn ye, oh! Turn, why will ye die?"

To comfort the sorrowing, soothe the sick,
And a word in season to all to speak,

He would travel far, on an Indian trail,
In the sultry breeze or the wintry gale,
Picking his way over quaking bogs,
Or crossing Bear Creek on fallen logs;
His friendly smile and familiar name,
Spread sunshine around him where'er he came;
From first to last he seemed fully bent,
In his Master's work to spend and be spent;
But the end has come—on the barren coast
Of the bleak, lone Island of Anticost—
A faithful soldier, "he dies at his post."

THE FUNERAL

To-day, in Warwick's old burial ground,
Where the turf is marked with many a mound,
We left him to sleep in an iron shell,
'Mid the graves of the friends he had loved so well,
To sleep [?] season. There cometh a day,
When then the grave shall give up its prey,
When God—the Conqueror of Death—shall come,
To gather his saints to their final home.
Let the aging Christian take comfort here,
His very dust to a Saviour is dear,
And not one atom shall ever be lost,
Of the good old soldier, "Who died at his post."

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The English side of the plaque, 2000. The French translation is on the reverse side.