



Archives

Description and Finding Aid

**ALEXANDER NEIL BETHUNE COLLECTION
F2022**

Prepared by Marion Magee, 2010

ALEXANDER NEIL BETHUNE COLLECTION

Dates of creation:

1835-1866

Extent:

7cm of textual material

Biographical sketch:

Alexander Neil Bethune was born on 28 August 1800 at Williamstown, Charlottenburg Township, Upper Canada, and died on 3 February 1879 at Toronto, Ontario. He married Jane Eliza Crooks and had ten children.

From 1810 to 1812 Alexander Neil was a student at the grammar school run by the Reverend John Strachan at Cornwall, Upper Canada. His movements from 1812 to 1819 are not known for certain, but in the autumn of 1819 he wrote from Montreal that he had determined to go to York "to place himself under the care and direction of Dr. Strachan." From 1819 to 1823 Bethune remained at York as a student of divinity supported by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. He was made a deacon by Bishop Jacob Mountain on 24 August 1823 and priest on 26 September 1824. He had charge of the parish of The Forty (Grimsby) and an out-station at Twelve Mile Creek (St. Catharines). In 1827 Bethune became the incumbent of the parish of Cobourg; he was later its rector and served there until 1867.

In 1831 he made the first of a number of trips to England on behalf of the Church of England in the colony, on this occasion in support of the University of King's College (later the University of Toronto) and the Church of England's rights to the clergy reserves in Upper Canada, questions on which his views resembled closely those of Strachan.

While at Cobourg, Bethune became first editor of *The Church*, a weekly newspaper that began publication on 6 May 1837. The newspaper's founding came from the need to rally Church support for its stand on the clergy reserves. Bethune had made a careful study of the whole question, and Strachan, chairman of the newspaper's committee, found in Bethune a man whom he could trust and in whom he could confide. Indeed Strachan directed much of the editorial policy.

When the diocese of Toronto was carved out of that of Quebec in 1839, Strachan became its first bishop and he appointed Bethune as one of his chaplains. In October 1841 Strachan asked his chaplains (Bethune, Henry James Grasett, and Henry Scadding) to draw up a plan for training divinity students pending the establishment of a regular college. The plan was submitted, and on 27 November Strachan announced the appointment of Bethune, though he did not have a degree, as professor of theology. The Diocesan Theological Institution opened in Cobourg in January 1842 with 15 students but was attended by indifferent success and considerable controversy and ten years later was merged with the University of Trinity College.

In 1845 Strachan appointed Bethune his ecclesiastical commissary for the archdeaconry of York with the title of "the Reverend Official." In 1847, upon Strachan's resignation, Bethune

became archdeacon of York. He gave up the editorship of *The Church* while remaining principal of the college. As Strachan's chief administrative assistant, he made regular visitations of the parishes, checking church buildings and rectories, reviewing parish registers, advising on pastoral problems, and making reports to the bishop.

Strachan prevailed upon King's College, Aberdeen, to confer upon his archdeacon the degree of doctor of divinity in 1847; ten years later Trinity College conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Canon Law. In the spring of 1852 Bethune went to England at Strachan's bidding to raise financial support for Trinity College. Bethune was also his church's spokesman in England during the final battle over the clergy reserves. He met with limited success in both tasks.

When the diocese of Toronto was subdivided in 1857 and again in 1862, Bethune lost both episcopal elections to local candidates in part because opposition in the Church to Strachan spilled over onto Bethune. However in 1866 Strachan requested a coadjutor and on 21 September Bethune was elected (after the withdrawal of George Whitaker, the provost of Trinity College). Bethune took the title of bishop of Niagara and was consecrated by Strachan on 25 January 1867.

Later that year Bethune represented the diocese of Toronto in place of the failing Strachan at the first Lambeth Conference. He returned to Toronto just before Strachan's funeral on 5 November. Bethune succeeded his mentor on 1 November 1867, resigning both the rectory of Cobourg and the archdeaconry of York. He continued as bishop of Toronto until his death in 1879 but he was never able to escape the opposition which Strachan's methods and policies had stirred up and his tenure was dogged with controversy between the 'high' church and 'low' church factions within the diocese.

[Source: Arthur N. Thompson, "Alexander Neil Bethune," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. X.]

Scope and content:

The collection consists primarily of correspondence between John Strachan and Bethune. Also included are published inserts, memoranda, sermons and copies of letters.

Contains series:

1. Correspondence 1835-1866
2. Miscellaneous documents

Notes

Acquisition history:

Not known for accession 985-0083; accession 985-0066 was received from Beatrice M. Bethune (a granddaughter of A.N. Bethune), date unknown; accession 006-0017 deaccessioned from Archives of Ontario and given to Trinity Archives in 2006.

Arrangement:

The original arrangement of four packets (with their inserts) has been maintained. The two miscellaneous documents are in separate files.

Restrictions on access:

None.

Terms governing use and reproduction / publication:

Public domain

Associated material:

Other records relating to Bethune exist in the Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Toronto, and at the Archives of Ontario.

Provenance access points:

Bethune, Alexander Neil (1800-1879)

SERIES 1: Correspondence**Dates of creation:**

1835-1866

Extent:

7cm

Scope and content:

Series consists mainly of correspondence from John Strachan to Bethune (but including published inserts, memoranda, sermons and copies of letters) relating to Church matters including the establishment of the diocese of Toronto, the running of the Diocesan Theological Institution, *The Church* newspaper, the management of clerical appointments etc in various parishes and missions, visits to parishes, finances.

Location: Box 1

FOLDER/ UNIT TITLE	START DATE	END DATE	CONTENTS	BOX/ FILE #
Correspondence 1835-1844	3 June 1835	28 December 1844	- 3 letters, Strachan to Bethune, 3 June-28 December 1835 - 11 letters, Strachan to Bethune, 1 May 1843-10 December 1844	1-1
Correspondence 1844-1849	26 July 1844	19 December 1849	- 64 letters, Strachan to Bethune, 26 July 1844-19 December 1849 -letter J. William Barron to Strachan, 26 September 1844	1-2

			- letter, Bethune to Strachan, 5 May 1847	
			- letter, Robert Gregg Cox to Bethune, 10 April 1849	
			- copies of 2 letters from Strachan to the Rev. T. Lockett (24 June 1847 & 29 December 1848)	
			- copy of [Oxford] Monthly Tract no. 1 on the Resurrection, "by Members of the Universities Addressed to all Christians," with interpolations, no date.	
Correspondence 1850-1859	20 February 1850	22 December 1859	- 123 letters Strachan to Bethune, 20 February 1850-22 December 1859	1-3
			- memorandum & letter from churchwardens of Stirling (late Rawdon) to Bethune, 20 August 1853	
			- letters, E.H. Dewar to Bethune, 3 & 10 May, 11 June 1855	
			- letter to Francis Hincks from Strachan, 16 May 1855, included in letter sent to Bethune the same day for his comments	
			-copy of letter from Strachan to George Boulton, 2 November 1857	
Correspondence 1860-1866	20 January 1860	13 October 1866	- 59 letters Strachan to Bethune, 20 January 1860-6 October 1866	1-4
			- letter to Strachan from J. Hillyard Cameron, 27 June 1860	
			- letter to Strachan [?] from Colonel Robert William Lowry, 11 January 1866	
			- letter Bethune to Strachan, 8 October 1866	
			- circular letter from Archbishop of London [England], 13 October 1866	
			- statement of Episcopal Fund [circa November 1866]	
			- note on canon law re coadjutor bishops, no date [possibly 1866]	

SERIES 2: Miscellaneous documents
Dates of creation:

1843-[1861]

Extent:

1 file folder

Scope and content:

Series consists of two documents linked to Bethune but acquired separately.

Location: Box 1

FOLDER/UNIT TITLE	START DATE	END DATE	CONTENTS	BOX/ FILE #
Miscellaneous	1843	1843	- Letter from A. Deacon to Bethune, 14 June 1843, complaining about timber being sold from a Clergy Reserve. [formerly 006-0017]	1-5
Miscellaneous	[1861]	[1861]	- List of persons (surnames only) of the students at the Diocesan Theological Institution, Cobourg, 1842-1851, prepared (probably in 1861) for Bishop Strachan's report on the Institution to the IX Synod. Robert Black's research for the Divinity 150 Project in 1992 confirmed the presence of these people at the Institution.	1-6