



A History of the Marble Arts Centre

This document tells the story of the Marble Arts Centre, from construction as a church in 1864 through its evolution to a community arts and culture hub with the Tweed & Area Art Council and now Tweed & Company Theatre. Some interesting details on the laying of the cornerstone, the history of Actinolite itself, and the Church founders are also provided¹.

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¹ Materials on the Church and Tweed & Area Arts Council history were collected and reported by T&AAC Director Bonnie Marentette; these have been synthesized, photos and more recent history added by T&AAC Director Vicki McCulloch. *Note – there are more details available in other documents in the files of the Tweed & Area Arts Council (the ‘In 1895 (Actinolite ON)’, ‘Actinolite Methodist Church Krassoc 2013’, ‘The History of the Marble Church 2016’, and ‘Welcome to Actinolite Municipality of Tweed Marentette 2016’ documents) – these will be incorporated into this consolidated history in the future as time permits.*

Construction of the Wesleyan Methodist Church

Built between 1864 to 1866, the Marble Arts Centre (MAC) started as the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Bridgewater, Elzevir Township (previously Troy, now the hamlet of Actinolite in the Municipality of Tweed; *see a brief history of Actinolite below*), and then became Actinolite United Church. Erected of white marble, quarried about 200 feet to the north-east – the structure is thought to be the only church built of white marble in Canada. On May 10, 1863 the Rev. Egerton Ryerson Young was received on probation in the Wesleyan

Methodist Church; he travelled the Hungerford (Township) circuit while based mainly at Bridgewater. He preached his first funeral sermon on 11 July 1863 over the “rum soaked body” of a new camp meeting convert saved “by the skin of his teeth.” Records show that \$2,264 was raised by 47 founders of the church; the population of Bridgewater at that time was 311 (*see more detail below*).



Figure 1: Actinolite United Church (1950s?)



Figure 2: Bell Removal (2018)

The masonry work was done by Mr. Francis Tucker and the joiner work by W. Kerr, both of Bridgewater. The architect was Mr. A.J. Stap. The painting was done by Wm. and Arthur Wensley of Belleville.

A fine-toned bell was installed in the tower (and this 600-lb bell, made in Sheffield, England, remained there until July 2018 when it was removed for safety reasons) and an excellent organ in the choir loft. The seating capacity was 500, compared to the current capacity of approximately 130. It took nearly two years to complete the construction of the building. The Wesleyan Methodist Church was dedicated March 4, 1866, and the first resident Minister, Rev. Thomas Cullen, was ordained at Bridgewater in 1866/67.

June 21, 1864 was a red-letter day in the history of the village of Bridgewater, for it witnessed the laying of the corner stone of the beautiful Marble Church. A box containing various mementos was

placed in the cornerstone – it remains a mystery as to whether it was ever retrieved. Interestingly, the trowel that laid the cornerstone was returned after 155 years to the MAC / Tweed & Area Arts Council in 2019 by the family of a former minister; it is on display in the new atrium (*see more details below on the laying of the cornerstone and the story of the trowel*).

Following a fire on May 24, 1889 that destroyed much of the community, only the four walls of the church were left standing, but the church was restored.

A 'Road Trips in Hastings County' video featuring the MAC is one of a series by YourTV Quinte and the Hastings County Historical Society was filmed in summer 2020, and is available on YouTube. T&AAC Director Bonnie Marentette describes the history of the Church and its transformation to the MAC. The series includes several different Tweed locations, as well as other regional communities. Check it out at <https://youtu.be/Oq8XQZouO8c>.



Actinolite United Church

When church union took place in 1925, the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches joined, and the Marble Church, as it was often called, was renamed Actinolite United Church. The Church's 100th anniversary was celebrated in 1964.



Figure 3: Actinolite United Church (approx. 1960s?)

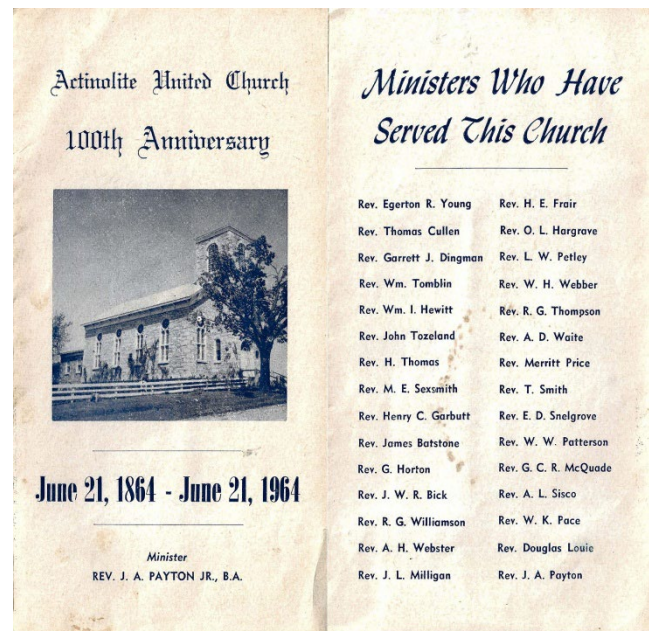


Figure 4: Actinolite United Church 100th Anniversary Program (1964, Part 1)

Historical Programme

MONDAY, JUNE 22, 1964, 7:30 P.M.

GUEST SPEAKER — Mr. Gerald Boyce B.A.
Curator Hastings County Museum

TOPIC — Actinolite

1864 Fashion Parade

Selections by Actinolite Public School Chorus

Unveiling of Historical Plaque

SPEAKERS — Reeve C. A. McMurray

Prof. G. F. G. Stanley
Representing Historical Sites
Board of Ontario

M.L.A. C. T. Rollins

DEDICATION — Rev. J. A. Payton B.A.

Assisted by Senior Citizens

Mrs. Alice Parks

Mr. David Lockwood

Services

Morning Worship

11:00 A.M.

SERMON — Rev. A. D. Waite

ANTHEM — "Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus"
St. John's Boys Choir

ANTHEM — "Glory to God For His
Sunshine is Free"

Actinolite Junior Choir

Evening Worship

7:30 P.M.

SERMON — Rev. W. J. Price B.A.

ANTHEM — "Bless This House"
St. John's Girls Choir

ANTHEM — "In the Service of The King"

Actinolite Junior Choir

Figure 5: Actinolite United Church 100th Anniversary Program (1964, Part 2)

1864 - Our Church - 1964

The cornerstone of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in the village of Bridgewater (now Actinolite) was laid by Miss Eliza Jane Holton of Belleville assisted by Mr. Billa Flint, one hundred years ago on June 21, 1864.

The church was completed two years later with a seating capacity of five hundred. The tower and spire rose to a height of 101 feet. Built of white marble quarried nearby, it is believed to be the only white marble church in Canada.

Dedicatory services were held on March 4, 1866. Morning, afternoon and evening services were conducted by Rev. G. R. Sanderson, chairman of Belleville District and Rev. J. Gemeley of the Kingston District.

The first resident minister was Rev. Thomas Cullen. True to the Wesleyan Methodist tradition the Church, the Class Meeting, Weekly Prayer Meeting and Sabbath School flourished, exercising a powerful influence for good in the community.

On May 24, 1889 the church was gutted by a disastrous fire which swept away most of the village. Only the walls were left standing.

Nothing daunted, the congregation rallied its forces to the task of restoring their place of worship. By cooperation and sacrifice the church was rebuilt as it stands today. With Church Union in 1925 it became the Actinolite United Church.

Despite the many misfortunes which have fallen upon the village, the Marble Church still stands serene, and firmly planted as the rocks and hills surrounding it of which it seems a part.

Built and consecrated to His Service we pray that all who worship here may truly find God.

THE FOUNDING OF ACTINOLITE

In 1853 Billa Flint (1805-94), a lumberman, built sawmills here on the Skootamatta River. A village, at first named Troy but soon renamed Bridgewater, was laid out the same year. Extensive marble deposits were subsequently discovered here and this church, erected 1864-66, is believed to be the only one in Canada constructed of that material. In 1883 the mining of actinolite, a mineral used in the manufacture of roofing material, was begun nearby, and about 1895 the village received its present name. Billa Flint was for 21 years reeve of Elzevir Township; represented North Hastings, 1847-51, and South Hastings, 1854-57, in the legislative assembly; and was appointed to the senate in 1867.

Figure 6: Figure 4: Actinolite United Church 100th Anniversary Program (1964, Part 3)

In 2005, there were only 21 members left in the Church, so the decision was made to close the doors. The last service was held on June 26, 2005 on the 141st anniversary of the Church. The decision was taken to sell the building.



Figure 7: 'The Corner' (1970s?)



Figure 8: Actinolite United Church (2008)



Figure 9: Actinolite United Church Anniversary Service (1990)

One of the members of the committee that was selling the Church was also a local artist and part of the Tweed & Area Arts Council (T&AAC) that had incorporated in 2007. One of its mandates was to

create a center for the arts – all of the arts. Retired Lt. General

Jack Vance knew the potential of the Church and as a member of both groups encouraged T&AAC to buy the building.



Figure 10: Actinolite United Church Sanctuary (undated)



Figure 11: Actinolite United Church Sanctuary (1994; note the beautiful banners made by Mrs. Hawley to the left in these pics)

T&AAC Purchases the Church

The Municipality of Tweed loaned T&AAC enough money to buy the building in February 2008 – a loan that was paid back in 17 months. Through the work of members/other volunteers, donors, local businesses and granting agencies (such as the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the regional Community Futures Development Corporation, and Parrott Foundation), a number of improvements were made over the 13 years from 2008 to 2021 that the T&AAC owned the Marble Church Arts Center (MCAC, subsequently shortened to MAC_.

The Johnny-on-the-spot still resided inside the building when it was purchased, and so the first project was installation of a septic system, a well and then new toilets. A stage was built by IANA Theatre (now Tweed & Company Theatre) in approximately 2011. In 2014, the old pews were replaced with theatrical seating. Other improvements included new curtains in the auditorium, addition of a studio/kitchen, water treatment system, AED and more.

The first performance at the MAC was held on May 8, 2010, and featured The Young Family and many talented local artists, helping to raise money for a new sound system. The ribbon celebrating the official opening of the MAC was cut on June 11, 2011 by Major General Jonathan Vance. The MAC then officially began its time as a community cultural hub.



Figure 13: Roely DeVries, Jack Vance, Major General Jonathan Vance Wayne Kay, Mayor Jo-Anne Albert, Don Herbertson



Figure 12: Left to Right: John Wilson, Don Herbertson, Bonnie Marentette, Wayne Kay



Figure 14: Ghost Light presented by Tweed & Co. (2019)

Highlights include the Marble Arts Student Theatre classes and performances, The Marble Arts Players, and many concerts and theatrical presentations (including Tweed & Company Theatre shows) over the years. The MAC closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic in spring 2020, reopening in December 2021 with a concert by 'Silent Winters' as part of the Ontario Festival of Small Halls.



Figure 15: MAC 2012



Figure 16: The Marble Arts Players, 'Derp, Solstice Anyone?' (2016)



Figure 17: MAC January 2018



Figure 18: Royal Wood, Ontario Festival of Small Halls (2018)



Figure 19: 'The Rebel of Hungerford' (Mark LeSage, 2018)



Figure 20: Student Theatre (2012)



Figure 21: Marble Arts Student Theatre (April 2018)

T&AAC Donates the MAC to Tweed & Company Theatre



Figure 22: Atrium Opening Event (March 2025)

In January 2022, the Arts Council gifted the MAC to Tweed & Company Theatre. In July of that year, a tornado caused damage, peeling the roof from the bell tower and affecting the integrity of the main roof, and damaging several windows. In late 2024/early 2025, Tweed & Company Theatre completed a major refurbishment of the auditorium (new stage, curtains, lighting and more), and added a new atrium space housing a lobby, box office and gallery.

Tweed & Company offers live theatre, concerts, classes for youth and adults, and much more at the MAC. Learn more at [Tweed & Company Theatre's website](https://www.tweedandcompanytheatre.com)! A registered charity based in Hastings County, Tweed & Company is a creator and producer of original Canadian musical theatre, as well as quality professional grassroots regional theatre. In addition to owning and operating the MAC, they operate the Bancroft Village

Playhouse. The Company has been active since the fall of 2009, and has produced a number of large-scale original Canadian musicals, countless other Canadian and international productions, and also produces site-specific work and special events.



Figure 23: Marble Arts Centre (Fall 2025)



Figure 24: A Night at the Grand Ghoulish Opry (2024)

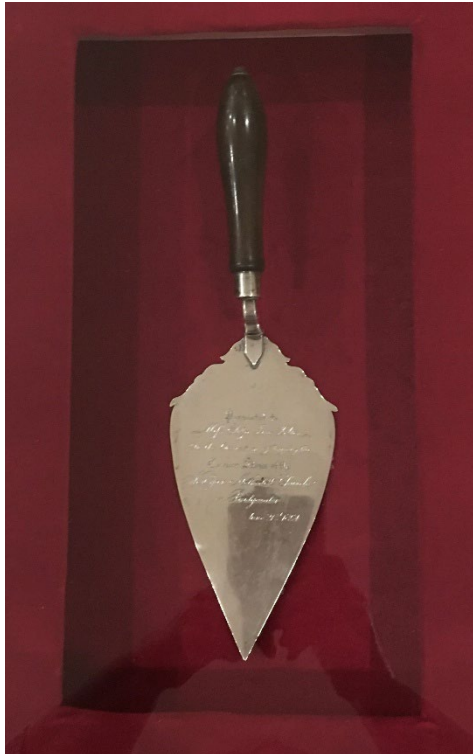


Figure 25: The Great Lakes Swimmers at the MAC (2024)

Laying the Cornerstone/ The Trowel Story

The trowel used to lay the cornerstone of the Wesleyan Methodist Church (now the Marble Arts Centre) in Bridgewater (now Actinolite in the Municipality of Tweed) in 1864 took a 155-year journey back to its home in 2019!

"The trowel was of solid silver and bore the following inscription: *Presented to Miss Eliza Jane Holton on the occasion of laying the cornerstone of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Bridgewater, June 21, 1864.* Miss Holton proceeded with the trowel to lay the mortar, after



which the stone was lowered to its place "properly square and level". Miss Holton gave the stone three raps with the mallet while the following words were said, "In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost we lay this cornerstone for the foundation of a house to be builded and consecrated to the service of Almighty God, according to the rites and usages of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada. Amen". (from *History of the Marble Church of Bridgewater 1864-1975* written by Mrs. J.H. Roberts)

In the summer of 2019, Jeff McKibbin of Sudbury, Ontario found the trowel while culling through old family photos and 'keepsakes'. He realized that it was used in laying the cornerstone of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. The trowel needed a polishing but was in otherwise perfect condition. Jeff got in touch with the Tweed & Area Arts Council. Jeff's father served as a United Church minister in Flinton (and a couple of other churches in the area) in 1976. Jeff's guess was that the trowel ended up in a moving box when the family moved onto Toronto, and that it was probably in that same box since. He donated the trowel to the Arts Council, and arranged for it's return home. Local resident Marj Buck has mounted the trowel in a beautiful shadow box for display in the Marble Arts Centre.

A Brief History of Actinolite



When Actinolite was founded in 1853, it was called Troy. The settlement was founded by Belleville lumber merchant Billa Flint (1805-1894), who established – amongst other businesses - a general store, a saw mill (1853) on the Skootamatta River, and a crusher to recover gold. By 1864, mining for gold and marble had attracted more than 300 inhabitants. In 1883 Joseph James bought much of Flint's property and started open pit mines to produce actinolite (a form of asbestos), which when mixed with coal tar, forms a roofing compound. In 1858/59, the community became Bridgewater; in 1895, it was renamed Actinolite. A major fire in 1889 destroyed much of the community, which never fully recovered. Actinolite was mined intermittently until the late 1920s.

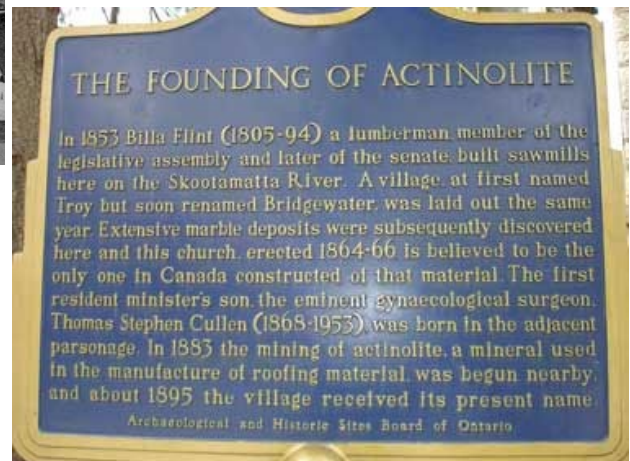
From: Historic Hastings, Gerald E. Boyce
Ontario Intelligencer 1967



The village of Actinolite in the early 1900's.



The Marble School at Actinolite (circa 1890s), showing Senator Billa Flint (white beard). Two walls of the school are field stone, while two others are white marble. The building is now the Actinolite Community Hall, and a day care is scheduled to open in part of the facility in fall 2025.



47 Founders of the Marble Church at Bridgewater/ Actinolite

• Hon. Billa Flint----- \$1,000	• Geo. W. Wood ----- \$25
• Thomas S. Bentley ----- \$100	• Chas. Merryday ----- \$20
• James Harrison ----- \$100	• John Raymond ----- \$20
• Andrew Higgenbottom -- \$100	• Silas Winter ----- \$20
• John Raymond ----- \$20	• Dr. EJisha Langman – \$18
• Wm. Garrett ----- \$60	• Edward Cronk ----- \$10
• Samuel Crawford ----- \$25	• Francis Empey ----- \$10
• Geo. Dickson ----- \$25	• Jeremiah Ferguson ---- \$10
• Joseph Frost ----- \$25	• Thomas Houston ----- \$10
• Oliver Frost ----- \$25	• Jas. Mairs ----- \$10
• W.B. Kemp ----- \$25	• Alfred McCallum ----- \$10
• Wm. Kerr ----- \$25	• John McNaughton ----- \$10
• Henry Kliensteuber ----- \$25	• George Wolfe ----- \$10
• Frances Lawrence ----- \$25	• Chas. Gunyea ----- \$8
• Walter Meacham ----- \$25	• John Credicott ----- \$5
• John McCammon ----- \$25	• Alfred Hardy ----- \$5
• Duncan McCallum ----- \$25	• Jas. Hardy ----- \$5
• Robert Nelson ----- \$25	• Jas. Houston ----- \$5
• Wm. Rath ----- \$25	• LaFontaine ----- \$5
• H. Rath ----- \$25	• G. Lindsay ----- \$5
• J.W. Robinson ----- \$25	• Robert Record ----- \$5
• Charles K. Thompson -- \$25	• Daniel Sedgewick ----- \$5
• Francis Tucker----- \$25	• Wm. Walker----- \$5
	• F. Hott ----- \$4

\$2,264.00

Population of Village at that time in 1863: 311

Note – there are more details available in other documents in the files of the Tweed & Area Arts Council (the 'In 1895 (Actinolite ON)', 'Actinolite Methodist Church Krassoc 2013', 'The History of the Marble Church 2016', and 'Welcome to Actinolite Municipality of Tweed Marentette 2016' documents) – these will be incorporated into this consolidated history in the future as time permits.