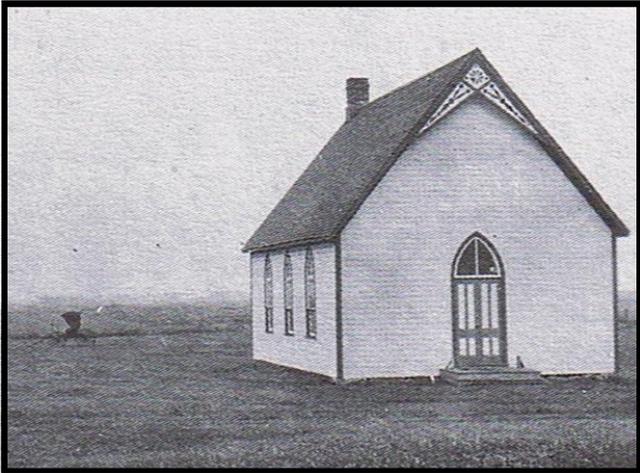


# Purple Hill Church

*There's something I love about rural churches: the idea of people travelling by horse or automobile to attend a church in the middle of the prairie . . . Of muddy Sunday mornings in spring and skies as blue as a bluebird . . .*



I'm going to start the story of the Purple Hill Church in Lincolnshire, England, in 1882. In this year Elizabeth Richardson was born, the first child of John Richardson and his wife. The family moved to Napinka, Manitoba in 1892 where John took up farming.

Church services in the Purple Hill district had up until this time been held in the school (built in 1887). In 1897 however, a plot of land about 5 kms east of Napinka was reserved as church property. A group of trustees were appointed to organise the construction and decoration of what was to become the Purple Hill Methodist Church. John Richardson, Elizabeth's father, was asked to construct the pulpit and library. Others were appointed to purchase lamps and chairs. The ladies of the district came together to do anything that needed doing: this included upholstering the pulpit and chairs and carpeting the platform. Speculation suggests that the Purple Hill Church got its name from the nearby rural school. The school in turn likely was named for the vision of Turtle Mountain on the distant horizon.

In 1898 the Purple Hill Church was opened and dedicated. The service was accompanied by a local choir and organist. The organ used on the opening day belonged to the Richardson family, though the church later bought their own. John's daughter Elizabeth became the church's first permanent organist.

When the church was dedicated, a local farmer by the name of Nicholas Cates became the Superintendent of Sunday School. Nicholas had come to Manitoba from

1898—1968

Quebec in 1883. He was 18 years old when his family moved to southwest Manitoba and he watched the construction crews that laid the rails through what would become the town of Napinka. Two years later he obtained a homestead that was within a mile of the Purple Hill Church. Nicholas Cates and Elizabeth Richardson were married in 1903. Nicholas retained his position at the church until 1944 when he retired from the farm.

A Local Union of churches was formed in 1917 between the Zion Methodist Church, Napinka Presbyterian Church and Purple Hill Church.

In 1958 a colourful celebration was held at Purple Hill in honour of the church's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The building was filled to capacity and a crowd of people listened to the service on loudspeakers outside. Thirteen attendees were honoured with corsages due to

## Elizabeth became the church's first permanent organist

their having been present for the opening of the church six decades earlier. Nicholas and Elizabeth Cates

were among those honoured. For several years after the anniversary celebration the church continued services with a small congregation. In 1963 weekly services were discontinued and members of the congregation travelled to either Medora or Napinka every Sunday. Nicholas and

► Elizabeth and Nicholas Cates were actively involved in the Purple Hill Church. Elizabeth was the church's first organist and Nicholas was the first Superintendent of Sunday School.

Elizabeth retired to Napinka where they became members of the Zion United Church. Even after its closure, however, the Purple Hill Church continued to hold an anniversary service each June. These services were attended by a large and enthusiastic crowd each year.

Nicholas Cates died in 1966, but his wife Elizabeth attended the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Purple Hill Church in 1968. Elizabeth was asked to cut the anniversary cake.

In 1972 the Purple Hill Church building was moved to a farm just south of Napinka. A plaque was ordered to take its place. In 1973 a group of young men from the district came together to erect the cairn. Over its life the Purple Hill Church hosted one funeral, three memorial services, seven weddings and 35 baptisms.

Elizabeth Cates was present for the dedication of the Purple Hill Church in 1898 and the dedication of the cairn that replaced it 74 years later. She died at the age of 94 in 1976.

Source:

Brenda History Committee. *Bridging Brenda Vol 1*.  
Altona: Friesen Printers, 1990. Pgs 297-9, 537-8.  
Photos: Above source.

