

## The Reverend Charles Etienne Luce, First Rector of St Nicholas' Church

1912-1920

Born on 16 May 1881 in Gloucester, England, Charles Luce was the eldest son (and one of 13 children) of Alice C. Luce (Stubbs) and John James Luce, the evangelical vicar of St Nicholas' Church, Westgate Street. After attending (1896-99) a well-known evangelical public school, Dean Close School in Cheltenham, Charles spent "some years in business." At least two of his brothers became noted scholars. He immigrated to Canada, subsequently settled in Toronto, and in 1906 entered University College at the University of Toronto, from which he graduated in classics (BA) in 1911. Luce appears to have immediately begun studies at



*The Reverend Charles E. Luce, incumbent 1912-1920, and Mrs. Helen Luce*

Wycliffe College, destined for the Anglican ministry, though at some point he was on the staff of both Upper Canada College and the Toronto Bible Training School. While at Wycliffe "Charlie" also served on its athletic executive.

In early 1912, following the path of many Wycliffe students, Luce was sent as a missionary to Scarborough Township for training under the auspices of the Students' Mission Society at Wycliffe. A noted source of missionary endeavour, this society was administered by Wycliffe's principal, the Reverend Dr Thomas Robert O'Meara, in his capacity as professor of

practical theology. Among the society's objectives was the opening of "new Mission Stations as give promise of developing into self-supporting parishes." In Scarborough, A. M. I. Durnford, the rector of St Margaret's, West Hill, took a leading role in encouraging Wycliffe students to lead prayer and study sessions in homes. Ordained deacon on 2 June 1912, Luce was officially appointed incumbent of Scarborough Junction (Church of the Epiphany) and Agincourt (St Timothy's Mission Hall) three days later. Thus established, on 23 September in Eglinton village, North Toronto, he married Helen Emma, daughter of John J. Gartshore, a prominent Toronto businessman (railway equipment), Presbyterian, and YMCA enthusiast, and they took up residence at Scarborough Junction. In 1913 Luce received his diploma in theology from Wycliffe, and was made a priest that year on 8 June.

At the beginning of his charge, Luce had also been taking steps to set up a church in the emerging, semi-rural village of Birch Cliff, east of Toronto on Kingston Road. On 12 June 1912 he called a meeting at the home of businessman George F. Davis, who offered the use of his stable. The first service was held on his lawn on 25 June. Following the frame building's renovation, St Nicholas' Church was dedicated by the bishop of Toronto on 9 August. Expanded in 1914, but burned in 1916, the church was rebuilt that year on its present site, at Manderley Drive and Kingston Road. (At some point the Luces would move to a house nearby.) The architect was the English-trained Harold Carter of the firm of Sproatt and Rolph, who, with local associate Albert W. Ford, used the Collegiate Gothic style for the new brick church. It was dedicated on 29 May 1917, at which time it received its present oak pulpit as a gift from St Nicholas, Gloucester, "With the earnest prayer and hope that this pulpit may ever remain true to the Protestant Evangelical principles of the Church of England."

In 1920, after taking the requisite courses, Luce received his bachelor of divinity degree from Wycliffe. At the request of his “aged” father, in 1919 or (more likely) 1920 he had returned to England. He first took up a staff position and the assistant chaplaincy at Dean Close School, then in 1924 went briefly to Bridlington, Yorkshire, as assistant curate, and finally succeeded his father as vicar of St Nicholas, Gloucester. While at Dean Close School he judged athletic events and gave lectures, among them “Sport and Camp Life in Canada.”

During his time in Scarborough, St Nicholas’ congregation had grown rapidly, and on 10 Oct. 1922, with some 335 families, it became a separate parish. Charles E. Luce died unexpectedly on 21 September 1927 in Providence, Rhode Island, on his way to Toronto for the 50th anniversary of Wycliffe. Following a service in its chapel, he was buried in Toronto’s Mount Pleasant Cemetery. His wife – they had no children – stayed in Toronto and lived until 1967.

*This sketch is dedicated to the late Jack ShawShaw, the former organist at St Nicholas who sparked our interest in Charles Luce"*