

“To many the Christian religion will always be a more real and vital thing, because they have known Thomas Bone.” That is the last sentence in a book titled “Thomas Bone The Sailors’ Friend”, “the story of his work on the Welland Canal”, written by Rev. Jesse Gibson in 1908 and published by The Upper Canada Tract Society, 102 Yonge Street, Toronto. Having read the book, and finding it quite interesting, I thought I would extract the personal data about Thomas Bone from the book and see what else I could find and write a short article about him and his family.

Thomas Bone was born on January 1, 1825 in Bellhaven, Scotland. At the age of nineteen he became active as an evangelist in the Glasgow area. He married Agnes Mathew on October 8, 1847 in Haddingtonshire, Scotland. In 1852 he brought his young family initially to Rochester, New York and then to St. Catharines, Ontario in 1853.

Thomas was ordained at the Queen Street Baptist Church here in St. Catharines. In 1868 he began a lifetime in Christian Missionary work along the Welland Canal as a member of the Upper Canada Religious Tract and Book Society which supported him as he fostered what became known as the Welland Canal Mission to Sailors. He went on board ships as they transited the canal to hand out bible tracts and hold prayer services. When the shipping season ended he would spend his time visiting hospitals, factories and speaking at various church gatherings.

In November of 1893 he traveled to Atlanta, Georgia to attend and speak at the World Convention of Christian Workers. His topic was “Colportage Work on the Welland Canal.” In the newspaper (The Atlanta Constitution, November 10, 1893) report on his speech it stated that “... his speech was full of dry,

delightful humour. He told several good stories. ... The little address put the audience in a splendid humour and the genial old Scot received a hearty round of applause as he took his seat." Also during the convention Thomas made a report on the Welland Canal missionary work, stating that it was now in its sixty-first year.

Thomas and his wife Agnes had seven children.

1. George Jamieson – their son who had been born in Scotland drowned at Port Dalhousie, Ontario on July 16, 1861 at the age of 13 years.
2. Alexander – their son died as a baby.
3. Thomas Gardiner – their son obtained his diploma as a druggist in 1880 but gave up that profession to enter mission work with his brother-in-law Rev. A.E. de St.Dalmas near Peterborough. Thomas died on October 6, 1888 at the age of 26 years.
4. Beatrice – their daughter was born in Scotland c1852, at the time of her mother's death in 1899 she was living in Edinburgh, Scotland and married to Mr. R. D. Shanks.
5. Agnes – their daughter married Melville F. Proctor on June 7, 1882 in St. Catharines and they lived in St. Catharines
6. Magdaline – their daughter married Rev. Alfred Ede St. Dalmas on June 28, 1883 in St. Catharines and they lived in Dixville, Quebec

7. Francis Carey – their son lived in New Rochelle, New York.  
Francis died on October 18, 1915 in St. Catharines

The family residence was 11 Wellington Street, St. Catharines.  
Mrs. Agnes Bone died on July 14, 1899 in St. Catharines at the age  
of 77 years. Thomas died of pneumonia in St. Catharines on  
November 22, 1906, with the funeral service at Queen Street  
Baptist Church and burial in old cemetery Section 'B', Division 45  
west, lot 1, grave 4, of Victoria Lawn Cemetery on November 26,  
1906.