

A MULTIFAITH HERITAGE



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SITUATION BRIEF # 42

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It has long been accepted that belief systems are the glue of communities. And, indeed, that has certainly been true of Victoria although in recent times we have come to understand there was also a dark side to that history. Victoria's faith history is in one of the richest heritage components of Victoria's urban - and cultural - landscape.

First Nations faith beliefs and practices involve few built structures. Rather, the natural landscape is infused with belief system, places where memory is reinforced by ceremonial practice. Spiritual sites remain as major geographical markers in our environment, from sites for purification rites at Tillicum Narrows on the Gorge or Mystic Springs in Oak Bay, and burial sites on islets in Victoria Harbour along with Laurel Point. Also, significant landforms such as **P'kols** (Mount Tolmie), **P'Laals** (Mount Douglas), **P'Kaals** (Mountain Tolmie), and **P'álac'əs** (Songhees Point) are also given special significance for the role they play in foundational stories relating to Creation beliefs.

The banning of the Potlatch and related cultural practices by the Dominion Government in 1884 and the establishment of Indian Residential schools under the ideology of assimilation suppressed the rich ceremonial life

of local First Nations. Both spiritual knowledge and open observance had to go underground. One outcome was the local adoption of Shakerism among the American Northwest tribes which gave traditional customs and beliefs a Christian-settler face. A Shaker church survives on the Saanich Tsartlip reserve.

More traditional Settler religious denominations arrived in concert with the founding of Fort Victoria in 1843. It wasn't long before church building became a competitive industry.

Religious proselytization was an important component of colonisation, both to acculturate indigenous peoples, and control settler populations. In the Americas the European powers deployed two main religious traditions as part of their imperial ambitions: Roman Catholicism (France, Spain and Portugal) and Protestantism (Continental Europe and Great Britain). And these two, and some subsets thereof, still mark the urban skyline of the Greater Victoria. By 1861 a population of 600 supported 5 churches.

Settler religious institutions quickly marked their arrival, and rivalry, on the local landscape, challenging the traditional First Nations' command of the topography. The Anglican cathedral, mother church of the British Imperial order, was accorded its own "reserve" atop Church Hill forming a towering backdrop to developing town site below. The Catholics claimed the valley below, commanding the vista at the head of James Bay harbour terminating a view to their first Cathedral, convent, school and hospital. Spires marked the evolution of the City as the Christian non-conforming faiths first built in what is now the Old Town core, but by the mid 1890s moved to the business periphery along the down-town residential divide, the Blanshard/Quadra corridor where they joined the first Jewish synagogue. An early break-away Anglican group, Church of Our Lord Episcopal, inserted itself in front of the Catholic complex at the head of Humboldt estuary. As the Hudson's Bay Company subdivided their lands,

first as farms from Sooke to Saanich, then as residential subdivisions in James Bay, Fairfield, Fernwood and Oak Bay church towers dotted the landscape; rural grave-yard churches in the hinterland, spires at small community/retail hubs in the suburban neighbourhoods. Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians all vied for adherents and attention in these outlying communities. Non-conformist groups collaborated to build the British Columbia Orphans home, upstaging the Anglicans, with a landmark building atop one of highest points of land in the City.



St. Ann's Academy and Gardens J. Michaud, J. Teague, T. Hooper architects
(gardens A. J. Vullingsh)

Foundational faiths were embedded in the ethnic structure of the Hudson's Bay Company itself. As Fort Victoria's trading and agricultural enterprises found their feet, Chief Factor James Douglas was quick to appoint Church of England minister, Rev. Staines, as chaplain and teacher to his cohort of Scots traders and administrators. He also welcomed Roman Catholic Bishop Demers to administer to the Roman Catholic Metis and Hawaiian labourers and technicians throughout the HBC's trading territory.

The Roman Catholic diocese when founded in 1846 was one of the largest Sees in North America, encompassing Vancouver Island, most of present-day

British Columbia, the Yukon and Alaska. Even then it started life as a suffrage See, attached to the Archdiocese of Portland, only to achieve independent status in 1903. In 1858 the small cohort of priests under Bishop Modeste Demers was joined in 1858 by a group of nuns from the Montreal-based Sisters of St. Ann to start a school. The same year the Catholics built their first Cathedral, a small French-Canadian Recollet-style church which some years later would be incorporated into the rapidly expanding St. Ann's Convent (construction started 1871). Now, with latter addition, the entire complex and landscaped grounds is a National Historic Site. This includes the convent, novitiate, school, chapel and extensive gardens. The present size of this institution, along with the historic St. Joseph's Hospital and School of Nursing nearby, attests to the rapid expansion of the Order of St. Ann as it built a network of schools, orphanages and hospitals (including farms and other supporting enterprises) throughout British Columbia, Yukon and Alaska.



St. Andrew's Cathedral Perrault & Mesnard architects

St. Andrew's, the Gothic Revival Cathedral building which replaced the temporary pro-cathedral in 1892 (and now a National Historic Site), belies the shifting demographic of Catholics at the time as Victoria became home to a wave of Irish immigrant labourers fleeing famine and destitution in their home country, and the axis of ecclesiastical relations shifted to eastern Canada, particularly Montreal. Designed by Montreal architects, St. Andrew's was built from a duplicate set of plans for a parish church in Vaudreuil.

When colonial surveyor J. D. Pemberton laid out the Victoria townsite he no doubt envisaged an English Cathedral town. A large 'church reserve' was designated atop the tallest near promontory overlooking the harbour. Today the present Anglican Christ Church Cathedral (1926) still dominates the city from there. Unfortunately, a massive central crossing tower was never built although the front twin towers make a bold enough statement. The symbolic landscape



St. Stephens Church, Saanichton, John Wright architect.

dominance of Anglicanism as the state religion was a standard feature of British Imperial town-planning throughout the Empire and can still be seen today in colonial era towns of the Gold-Rush period from New Westminster and Nanaimo

to Yale, Hope and Barkerville.

The Anglican Diocese of British Columbia, founded in 1857, was backed by an overseas missions fund established by philanthropist Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts. As an heir to the Coutts banking family she was one Britain's wealthiest women and she also provided endowments for the diocese of Cape Town, South Africa and Adelaide, Australia. Angela College, originally built as a Queen-Ann Gothic-style girls school (1865) still stands on Burdett Avenue atop Church Hill. The Victoria Gothic-Revival Anglican parish church of St. John the Divine (1912) replaced the Coutt's-funded prefabricated iron church brought out by Bishop Hills from England.

In all likelihood the Wakefield System of settlement, intended as the blue-print for Victoria as an agrarian-based colony, is echoed in the small Gothic-revival-style picturesque grave-yard churches that still dot the landscape of the Victoria region: St. Stephens Anglican (Saanichton, 1862), St. Lukes Anglican (Cedar Hill, 1888) and St. Michaels and All Angels Anglican (Royal Oak, 1883), St Saviours (Victoria West, 1891), St. Mary the Virgin (1873)), St. Paul's garrison church, Esquimalt (1866). In contrast, small rural Catholic churches, such as the Church of the Assumption (1869, 1876 and rebuilt 1892) on the Saanich eastern shoreline were primarily mission churches to the First Nations people. The unpretentious Shady Creek Methodist church was built for the local community of American-immigrant black farmers in 1893 (now a national historic site).

The fissiparous nature of Protestantism soon manifested itself in Victoria. The Carpenter-Gothic Church of Our Lord, down the hill in the Humboldt Valley was the result of an early rift between the high Anglicanism of Bishop Hills and the former HBC chaplain, Rev Cridge, who took with him a sizable slice of the Church of England congregation to his own Church of Our Lord built in 1894. (Reformed Episcopal). Cridge's name is memorialized today, however, by the

eponymous Cridge Centre. Originally the British Columbia Protestant Orphanage (1892), a red-brick American version of the Queen Ann style, it now broods over the City from the leafy garry oak canopy of its hill-top location on upper Cook street.

Other denominations were also quickly established. Although obviously catering to the local Scottish population, the Presbyterian presence was actually established by its Irish missionary arm. Rev. John Hall arrived in 1861 and immediately attracted HBC-linked founding families. The first church was built in 1863 on Pandora Avenue where a plaque marks the spot today. However again a split over management practices resulted a break-away congregation founding their own parish, building the Church of St. Andrew's at Courtney and Gordon Street in 1868 ultimately replaced by the current Scottish-Baronial-style church in 1889 on Douglas Street. The original congregation would rebuild their own church in redbrick Gothic on Quadra Street in 1912 where it vies with its near neighbour, the Anglican St. John the Divine (1912) .

The United Church of Canada resulted from the 1925 union which brought together the Methodist, Congregationalist and some of the Presbyterian Churches, and thus changes for four Down-Town churches. Two Methodist churches, both major architectural statements constructed in the American Richardson Romanesque style (and based on American precedents) changed adherence. Metropolitan Methodist (1890) on Pandora and Centennial Methodist (1891) on Gorge Road each dominate major street intersections. The red-brick Centennial, which unfortunately lost its spire in 1931, now must play second fiddle to the more ornate cluster of chateausque turrets and spires of Metropolitan although while the former hosts an active congregation, the latter now serves as home for the Victoria Academy of Music. An out-reach into rural Saanich was accomplished with Wilkinson Road Methodist Church (Strawberry

Vale, 1913)

The third partner in the 1925 amalgamation, the Congregationalist, turned over their 1912 temple-fronted classical building on Quadra Street to the local Baptist Community in 1936. More recently it has been given a new and different life as condominiums, after a faithful restoration of the exterior. The Baptists reached out into the Fernwood neighbourhood with a spare Carpenter-Gothic church in 1887, expanding to a much larger building featuring a tower,



Friends (Quakers) Meeting House Henry Clark designer

belfry and spire in 1892. It is now a thriving community theatre.

Congregationalism was established early in Victoria's history in 1859 by Americans and flourished until 1864. In 1895 it was revived as an outreach from Port Angeles, Washington State. In 1901, the congregation erected a small church on the corner of Pandora and Blanshard Streets. For a very short period known it was known as Pilgrim United Church. Congregationalists built their new Quadra Street church in 1912 where they stayed until the congregation merged with Metropolitan United Church in September, 1925.

Particularly unique among the neighbourhood places of worship is the

Arts and Crafts style Wesley Methodist Church (1912) now used by the Salvation Army which nestles in among the bungalows and cottages of this character Vic West neighbourhood. The Quakers established their presence in the Jubilee neighbourhood in 1913 with an Arts-and-Crafts bungalow-style meeting house.

Adopting a variation, if somewhat a grander version of the same classical temple form as the Congregationalists, the First Church of Christ Scientist (1912) dominates the sylvan vista at the eastern end of the Pandora Street median. Also, like the Congregationalists, Christian Scientists also share American roots. This is evident in the fact that the church is modelled on its mother-church in Boston, Massachusetts.

Perhaps the most significant of the Downtown places of worship is the 1863 Jewish Synagogue (Temple Emmanuel) on Pandora at Blanshard. It is the oldest Jewish synagogue in continual use in Canada and marks the early importance of the Jewish traders and entrepreneurs who settled the City during the gold-rush period. It has been meticulously restored and designated a National Historic Site.



Temple Emanuel 1863 John Wright architect

Chinese settlers arrived in numbers via San Francisco to join the gold rush in 1858. One such is Tam Kung Buddhist Temple is located on the top floor of the Yen Wo Society Building. It has served the Chinese community since 1875 and is the oldest Chinese temple in Canada. It is associated with the Hakka people from Guangdong. They founded the Yen Wo Society in 1905, preserved the temple and moved into their new building in 1912. It is open to the public. A second temple, the Palace of Saints, is preserved on the top floor of the Chinese Public School. It is a South Chinese shrine and altar brought to Victoria in 1885 and was first installed in the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association Building on lower Fisgard Street. In 1996 the shrine was moved to its present location and is open to the public.

The Chinatown temples were both places of refuge and signs of resistance for the Chinese community which faced constant discrimination and exploitation including the imposition of the hated immigration head tax and banning children from the public education system. Canada finally issued a formal apology in 2014.

Gurdwara (The Khalsa Diwan Society) was first established in 1912 by Sikh pioneers. The new modern building of Gurdwara (Sikh temple) in High



Chinese Cemetery Harling Point

Quadra dates from 1969 though Sikh immigrations to Victoria started in 1904. The first Sikhs to enter British Columbia were actually on an official trip as part of the Hong Kong army regiments who were travelling through Canada in commemoration of the Queen Victoria of England's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. A second contingent of Punjabi soldiers visited British Columbia in celebration of the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902 which raised interest in Victoria as an economic opportunity for people in the Punjab. As with the Chinese, Indian immigration was resisted, culminating in Komagata Maru incident where an immigrant ship was forced to return to India resulting in the deaths of many would-be-migrant passengers. Only in 2016 did Canada issue an official apology.

Three cemeteries memorialize Settler faith traditions. Pioneer Square cemetery adjacent to Christ Church Cathedral amalgamated graves from the Old Burial Grounds in Old Town and was in use from 1855-1872. It was then replaced by Ross Bay Cemetery which, though partitioned welcomed all faiths (or none) and is noted for Victorian Picturesque landscape design. The Jewish Cemetery overlooking the City the junction of Fernwood and Cedar Hill streets was established in 1860. These latter two are still in use today. The early Chinese population, in response to early discrimination and the singular practice of temporary burial before sending human remains back to China for internment, established their own cemetery at Harling Point in 1903 on the Oak Bay coast line. The site met the tenets of ancient beliefs associated with feng shui. The twin towers of the ceremonial altar mark the centre of the site and is used for burning joss sticks and for offerings of food, all part of funeral rituals. The cemetery was designated a National Historic Site in 1996.

Church buildings, particularly those of the Victoria and Edwardian periods, provided ample opportunity for a flourishing of the decorative arts. St. Andrew's Presbyterian, St. George's Anglican Naval Church, St. Andrews

Cathedral and Christ Church Cathedral all boast magnificent stained glass windows, albeit produced mainly in Ontario and Quebec. St. Andrew's Cathedral was the first in the modern era to address the Catholic legacy of its early colonial missionary activity among Island First Nations by commissioning a new high altar,



Raising the S,yewe pole, 1990, University of Victoria C. W. Elliott artist

related sanctuary furnishing items, and stained glass, from Indigenous artists. They are now the highpoint of the building's 1990s interior restoration work.

Victoria's faith communities working with local architects continued to add major monuments to the urban landscape during post WWII rapid economic expansion. Major architectural practices such as John DiCastrì's designed Catholic parish churches (St. Patrick's Oak Bay, Sacred Heart and St. Joseph's, Queenswood House of Studies for the Sisters of St. Ann, Saanich echo the inspiration of Frank Lloyd Wright), also Wagg and Hambleton (Holy Cross Catholic and Gordon Head United, Gordon Head). The large architectural firm headed by John Wade completed Christ Church Cathedral with a modernist east end, and also provided a series of neighbourhood churches in West Coast

Modern style (i.e. Grace Lutheran in Rockland and St. Mary the Virgin Anglican, Oak Bay). The most recent addition to the local faith landscape is Victoria's first Muslim Masjid erected in 2012 on Quadra Street.

Both the Anglican Diocese and the Roman Catholic Diocese maintain publicly accessible archives which document over 150 years of their missionary and settler service in the Pacific North West. The extensive archives of the Sisters of St. Ann are maintained within the British Columbia Provincial Archives at the Royal British Columbia Museum.

The faith histories of Victoria are commemorated in the numerous historic buildings and places that survive, and many are still in use by those faith traditions. But just as importantly they preserve not only belief systems but also rich traditions of knowledge, rituals and practices which form part of the Victoria's intangible heritage.

OBSERVATIONS

- While the region's rich heritage of ecclesiastical architecture is well maintained, and widely appreciated, modern secularism has been expressed by a substantial and ongoing decline in attendance making church redundancy a constant threat and fact. Recent actual (Fairfield United) and threatened (Oak Bay United) demolitions spotlight the need for innovative initiatives to find new community uses, and life, for these landscape and cultural landmarks.
- An emerging, and compounding threat to the major ecclesiastical monuments is the ongoing tightening of the national/provincial building code, particularly as it applies to seismic resilience and carbon efficiency. Creative approaches to planning tools such as density transfers, adjacent redevelopment, but also changes in use, may be critical in future preservation

efforts.

- Reference points for First Nations spiritual heritage are embedded in the natural heritage and topography of region. This is increasingly threatened by urban densification and land-use changes as infrastructure. High-rise development obscures views capes and obliterates natural landscape features. These need to be inventoried and protected by expanding park reserves and natural habitat conservation initiatives, along with public interpretation.

RESOURCES

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