

# HERITAGE CHURCHES

**of the Indigenous Peoples of British Columbia**

*Historical Events & Architectural*

*Elements of Church Structures*

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## British Columbia - Regional Map



# PUBLISHERS NOTE

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during this important era of truth & reconciliation, we believe it is important to first acknowledge the atrocities that Indigenous Peoples faced from provincial, territorial and federal governments since colonization in Canada began. In addition, recognizing the persecution, destruction and loss of many cultural elements of First Nations peoples as a result of religious and government organisations actions may have had positive intentions, but ultimately has led to the loss of much cultural diversity across this vast country.

Over 150,000 First Nations children attended some 132 residential schools established across Canada by the Canadian government and with the help of the Catholic, United, Anglican and Presbyterian churches between 1857 and 1996. While intentions of these groups at the time may have been honourable, and likely in some cases, less so, the ultimate result was a severe loss and extinction of some Indigenous cultural elements, including language, art and other cultural expressions- including First Nations religious practices.

As a publishing house with a long history of producing works with Indigenous content, particularly focusing on the Pacific Northwest region, we were initially hesitant of pursuing this title given the justifiable scrutiny that religious organisations have faced in regards to their historic treatment of First Nations Peoples and the role that churches played during this time.

After some careful consideration, we believed the author demonstrated a true desire to showcase some of the unique architectural and historic elements of many of these old structures that were slowly returning back to the earth from which they were originally derived. Given no other publication that we could find had made such a strong attempt to capture these old buildings in written or photographic form, we believed this represented an opportunity to ensure that whatever unique Indigenous elements that had been incorporated into these buildings was not lost as well.

We hope the reader, particularly the Indigenous ones, might be able to glean some sense of appreciation and interest in the convergence of the colonial and Aboriginal cultures and how these were expressed at a local level at each one of these churches. These historic buildings may also act as a reminder of how societal and cultural beliefs and perspectives have changed over time.

-- HANCOCK HOUSE PUBLISHERS

## ST. MARY AND ST. PAUL

- Lytton -

**A**lmost overnight during the 1850s a gold rush made the small village of Lytton a boom town. Prospectors by the thousands traveled through this area. Some settled in the area, while others headed further north to the Cariboo gold fields and others northeast to Fort Kamloops and beyond.

Lytton is located high up on a plateau above the confluence of the mighty Fraser River and the clear waters of the Thompson River. This is where, in 1808, Simon Fraser named the river formerly called the Sheewap in honour of his friend David Thompson.

At the north end of town is a wonderful early-1900s church that stands above the Thompson River and below the present-day Trans-Canada Highway.



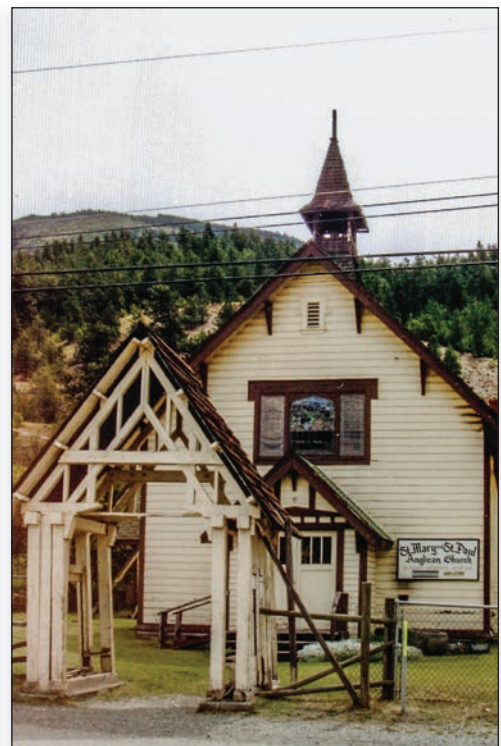
St. Mary and St. Paul Anglican Church is believed to be the second church at this site, the former building having been constructed sometime in the mid- to late 1800s. St. Mary and St. Paul has a blend of architectural elements reminiscent of Gothic, Tudor and modern styles.

The front porch is nicely accented in a Tudor-style trim complete with gable brackets. Above the porch is an exceptional stained-glass commemorative window depicting a visiting priest on horseback on his way to or from a church in the region.

Beneath the front roof fascia boards are four large gable brackets, seemingly placed there to enhance the appearance of the main structure. Situated on the roof is a four-posted belfry complete with a classic bell-cast style steeple. The steeple is shingled in the tradition of the period. The roof is covered in a modern asphalt shingle.

On the side of the building are large gothic-style windows customary in old church construction. Near the front corners are wedge-like buttresses, which provide additional wall strength as well as style. In addition, it appears that a series of tie rods have been installed, which is not unusual in older buildings.

At the front of the property, in line with the entrance to the church, is a complex post-and-beam style lych gate, the roofed gateway that is a typical Anglican feature. It was, and perhaps still is, used as a resting place for a coffin before burial.



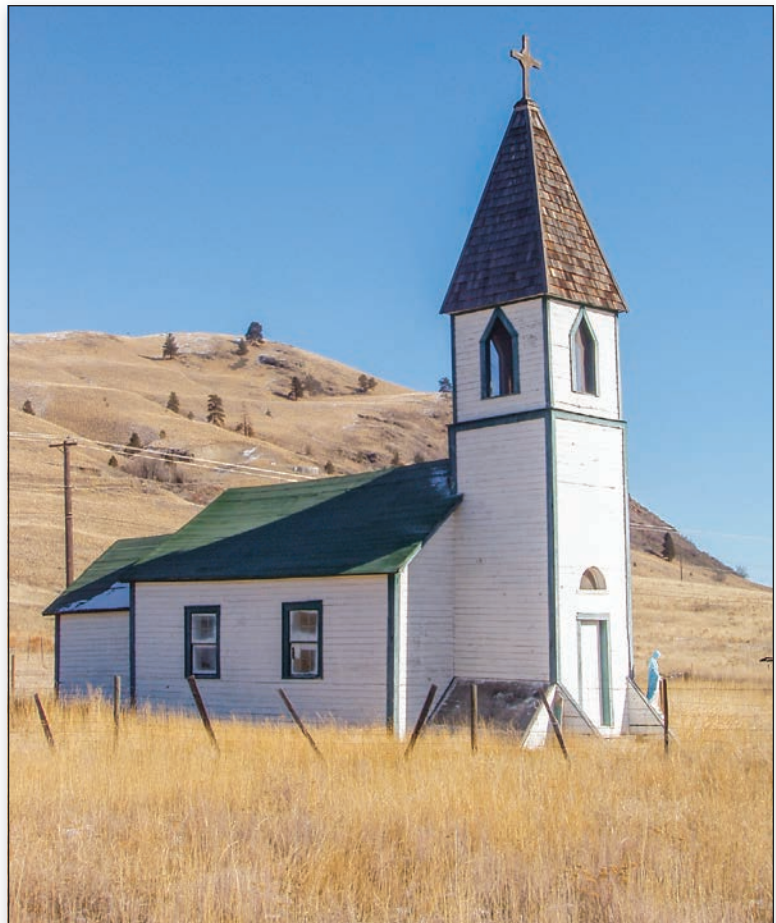
## ST. NICHOLAS'S CHURCH - 1887

### *Spahomin – Douglas Lake*

About a 90-minute drive south of Kamloops is the ranch of the famous Douglas Lake Cattle Company, long considered Canada's largest cattle "empire" at half a million acres. The ranch began in 1872 as a small homestead established by John Douglas in an area called Upper Nicola. Throughout this area, ancient aboriginal trails crossed the open range lands from Quilchena to the small settlement of Westwold, formerly called Grande Prairie. Over time, these trails evolved into wagon roads now referred to as the Douglas Lake Road.

Near Douglas Lake and the homestead is the aboriginal community of Spahomin, whose people have occupied this area for more than a hundred years and other parts of the region for thousands of years. The Spahomin area is now called Upper Nicola. Many generations of local First Nations people have been employed on the Douglas Ranch.

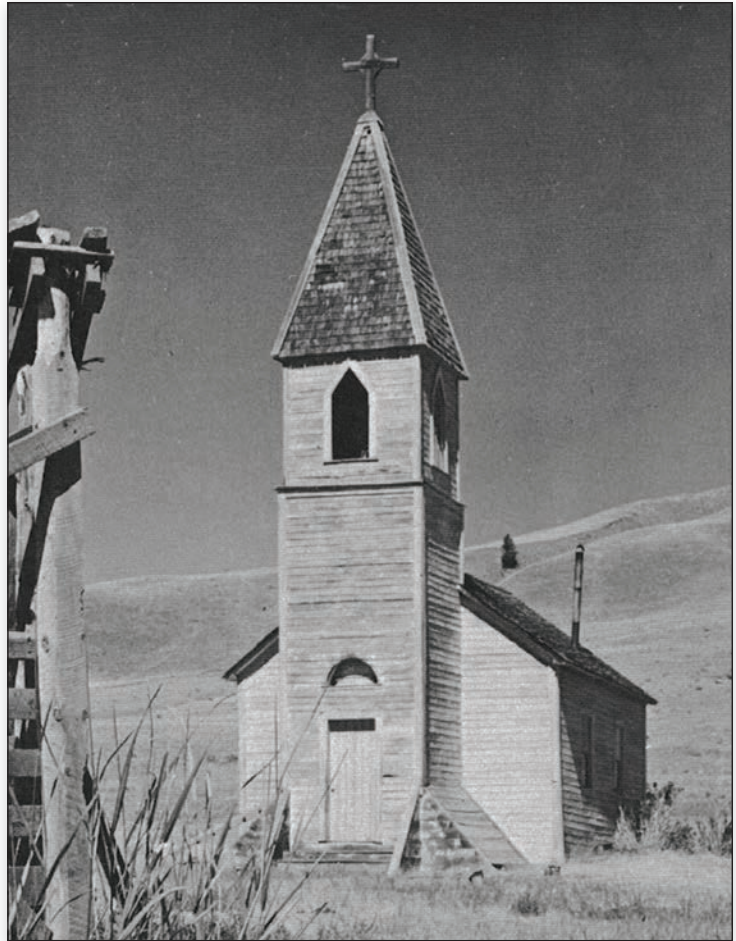
In the early fur trade period, what's now known as Upper Nicola was named for the revered chief Hwistesmexé'quen (Walking Grizzly Bear), who had been dubbed Nicholas by the fur traders. The traders recognized Hwistesmexé'quen as



the most powerful and influential chief in the southern Interior. The French pronunciation of his Christian name eventually was rendered as simply Nicola.

The first church at Spahomin was dedicated to St. Agnes in 1887, and Father Jean-Marie-Raphaël Le Jeune was involved in its construction. Later on, the church was renamed after St. Nicholas to honour the memory of the chief.

St. Nicholas's Church is very characteristic of early frontier construction methods: sturdy, unassuming but somewhat charming in its beautiful setting of grassland and rolling hills, rustic and in unspoiled condition.



St. Nicholas's Church, 1969.  
Photo from *Old Wooden Buildings*,  
Hancock House, 1978



St. Nicholas's Church February 2006

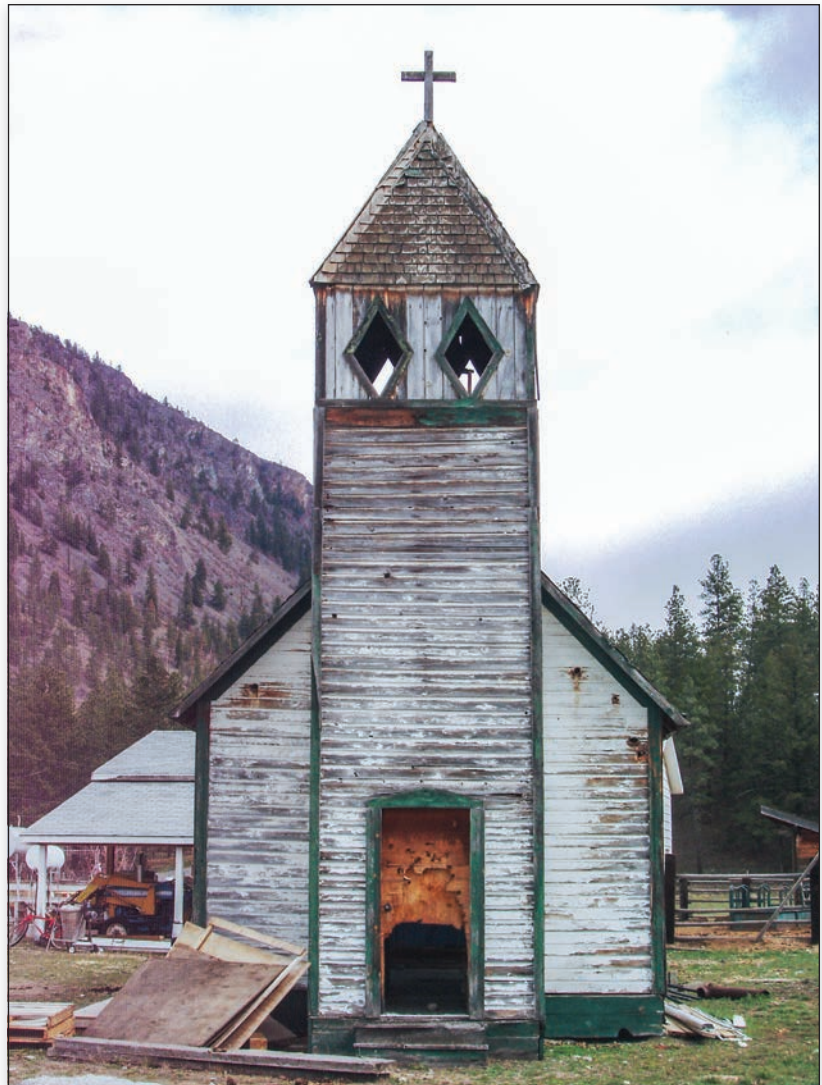
## ST. PHILIP'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

*Nooaitch – Lower Nicola*

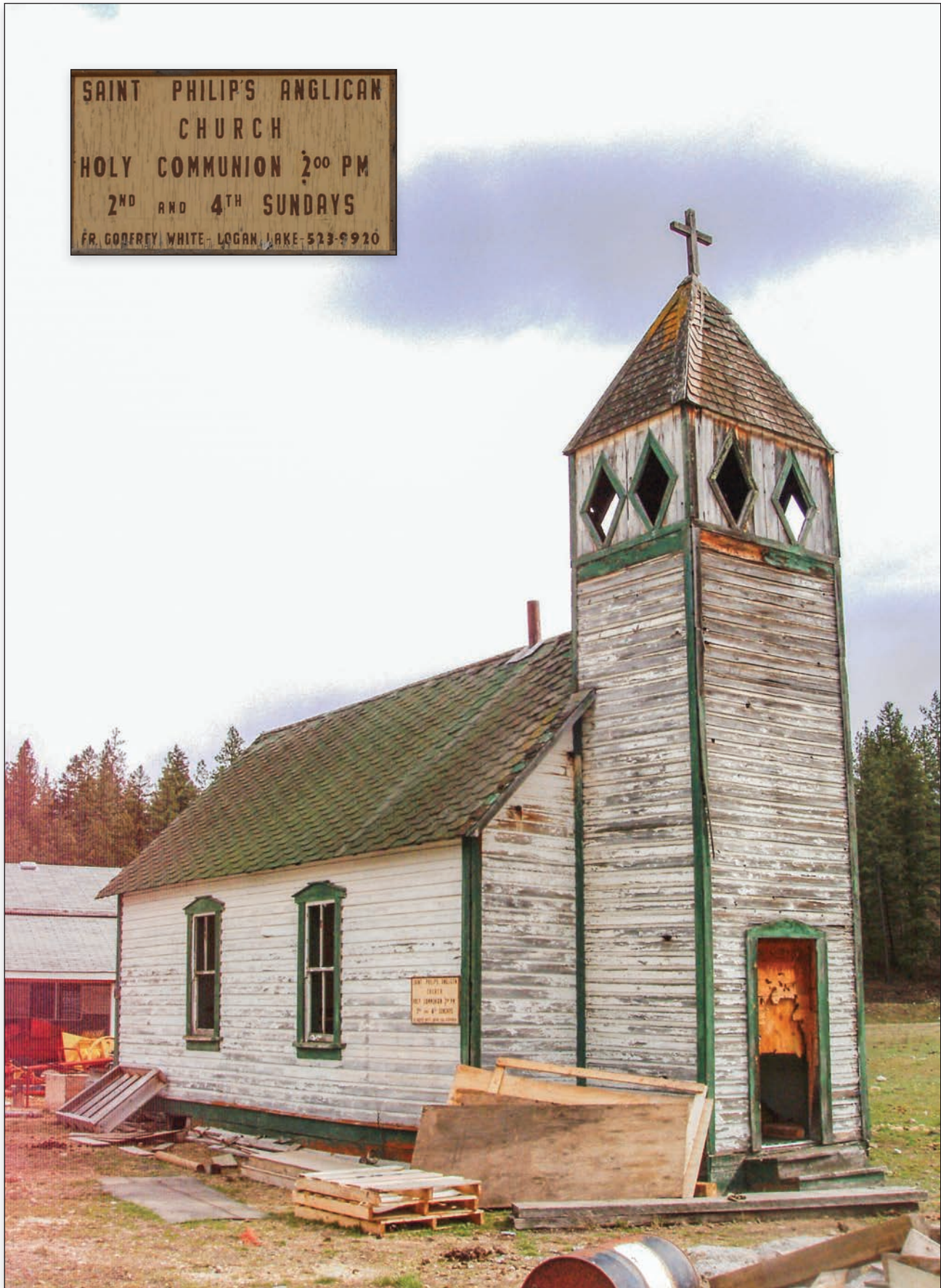
**W**est of the south-central Interior town of Merritt, near an area called Canford, is the First Nation community of Nooaitch and a great stop of interest at the Spius Creek Hatchery, where Chinook and Coho salmon hatchlings are reared. The Nooaitch First Nation community was established in 1878.

Within the village stands the abandoned St. Philip's Anglican Church, which was built in the late 1800s or early 1900s. The general condition of this structure is very poor and seemingly destined to be pulled down within the next few years or brought down by the erosion process of Mother Nature, whichever comes first.

Architecturally, this church has little to distinguish it in the overall design; it is more or less a plain, unembellished building of its period. However, the bell tower does incorporate eight diamond-shaped openings in the belfry, a detail not often seen. In addition, the two windows on each side of the main building are nicely framed and offer a good example of frontier Anglican architecture.







## ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - 1907

- *Alexandria* -

**A**long the east bank of Fraser River, at a place called Fort Alexandria, the Hudson's Bay Company established a fur trading fort and supply depot. The fort became a central collection point for furs from the north country and was the most northern starting point for the great horse brigades that transported hundreds of bales of fur overland to Fort Kamloops and beyond, to Fort Colvile on the Columbia River.

Today a cairn marks the location of the old fort at a pullout off Highway 97, just south of Quesnel.



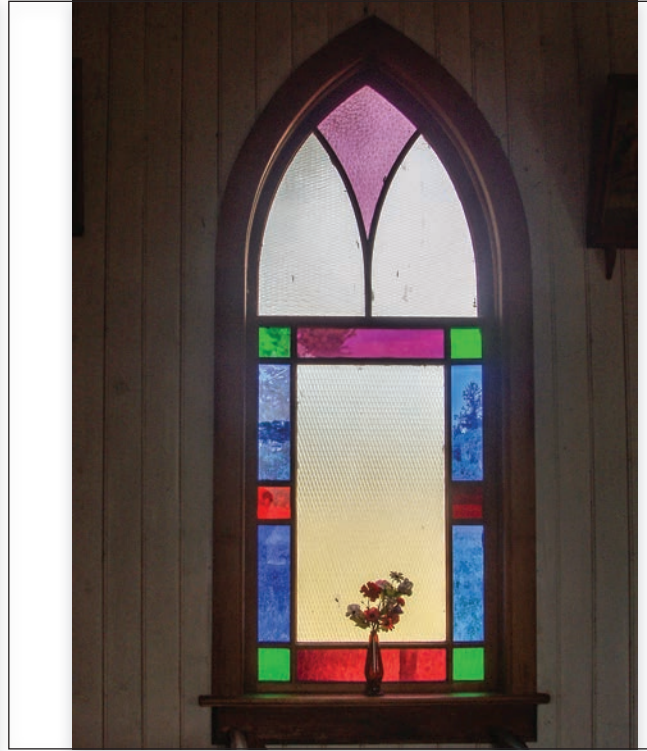


Not far from the old fort location stands St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church, built around 1907, according to the caretaker in the area. The church stands alone by a large single pine tree in an open grassy field overlooking the Fraser River. This venerable wooden structure is in poor condition and badly needs foundation work as well as restoration to the exterior.

The pointed-arch window frames are impressively detailed, with the arched portion giving the appearance of being supported by columns on each side of the lower section—overall, a pleasing and well-executed design.

While the exterior of St. Paul's is fairly typical of church construction of its period, the bell tower is not. The tower leaves the impression of being an afterthought; to some degree it breaks the continuity of the overall church design. However, the tower by itself is elaborately constructed in four separate and distinct elements, perhaps built by a local craftsman from the community.

Sometime in the past 20 years or so, a makeshift shed roof was added, presumably to help protect the front door and porch area.



The interior of the church is, of course, entirely opposite to the rather windswept, wilderness appearance of the exterior. Upon entering the church, what you see is absolutely stunning. It immediately transports visitors to a place of calm. Its unspoiled condition is so welcoming, you might think you were either first to arrive or a little too late for a service.

The altar is a remarkable work of carpentry and original to the building. The statues flanking the altar are boxed with impressive sawtooth framing. The pews are plainly built but in exceptional condition. In the center of the room is an old wood-burning barrel stove for the comfort of the parishioners.

Decorative stained-glass windows provide a rich lighting effect that accentuates this setting of harmony, peace and worship. Decorating the upper areas of the walls are Stations of the Cross, and above them a distinctive lozenge and dentil cornice.

St. Paul's Church is occasionally used for weddings, baptisms, and other special occasions, a beautiful gem waiting to be rediscovered.



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