



130th Anniversary History Walk

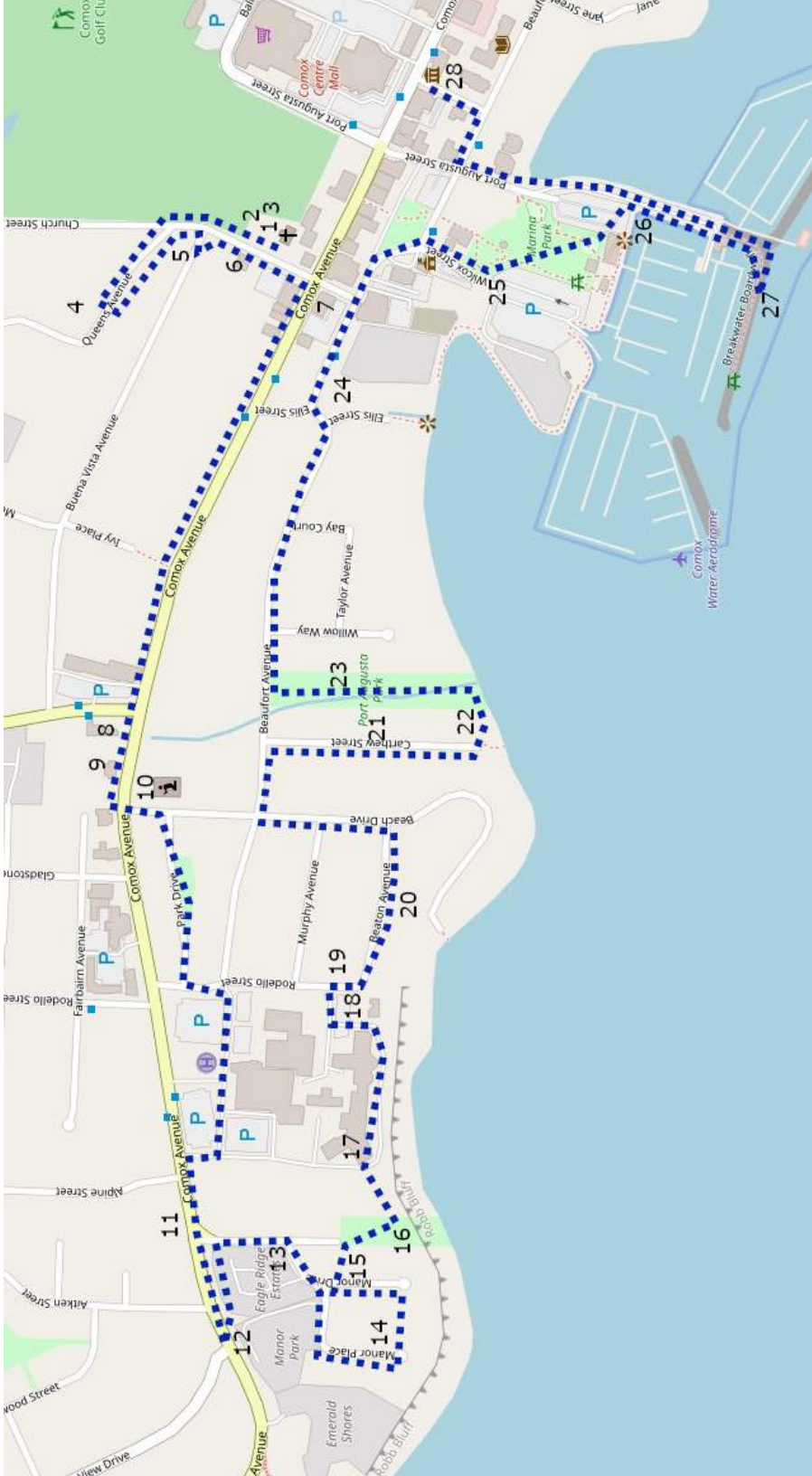


Research & writing Rev Sulin Milne
Photography Jim Peacock
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Thank you for taking part in the St Peter's Comox History Walk. This booklet leads you through a history of our town with an emphasis on the role of St Peter's in making the town what it is today. Please wear comfortable strong shoes or boots, bring a bottle of water, and walking poles if you would normally use them on uneven ground. You are responsible for your own safety, so please take care on all surfaces, and when crossing the street. This walk is designed to be part of the 130th anniversary celebration of St Peter's Church in September 2021, where there are opportunities to join the walk in-person. With the help of this booklet, it can be taken as a self-guided walk at any time. Additional copies of this booklet can be purchased by contacting St Peter's Church Office at 250-941-5388 or by emailing admin@stpeterscomox.ca. The booklet has many old photographs and documents from St Peter's archives, unavailable elsewhere. Profits from the sale of this booklet will go to fund St Peter's work in the community. The walk covers approximately 5km with stops for information along the way, taking around two hours to complete.

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Route:

1. St Peter's Church 2. St Peter's Grounds
3. Church House / Rectory
4. Queens Avenue houses 5. 1809 Buena Vista
6. Comox United site, 215 Church Street
7. The Legion, at Church St. and Comox Ave.
8. Bottom of Anderton / 2016 Comox Avenue
9. 2026 Comox Avenue
10. Comox United Church, 250 Beach Drive
11. Little Red Church, 243 Alpine Street
12. Head of Dyke Road 13. Manor Drive
14. The Fort, 156 Manor Place
15. Jail 16. Pioneer Memorial Park
17. West side St Joseph's 18. East side
19. Beaton and Rodello Junction
20. 2057 Beaton Avenue 21. Carthew Street
22. The shore 23. Port Augusta Park
24. Ellis at Beaufort Avenue
25. Site of Robb farm near Waterfront Walkway
26. The Wharf info board with picture of St Peter's
27. The promenade to view Goose Spit
28. Martine's Bistro, 1754 Beaufort Avenue
29. End at the Comox Museum, 1729 Comox Ave.



Introduction: An Apology

This history is largely taken from a settler viewpoint. It is important to include the Indigenous history in the Valley, but the history in this booklet was written through the eyes of the pioneers. I apologize for this. The Indigenous peoples, who had been in this area for 4,000 years before the arrival of the settlers, would tell the same stories from a very different viewpoint, and would tell different stories altogether. This walk must begin with the acknowledgement that the walk we take is on the lands of the Puntledge and K'omoks First Nations, land which was under their care and stewardship long before the settlers arrived.

Please note that on this walk the original occupants of this land are referred to as Indigenous or First Nations. The term 'Indian' is used only in direct quotes from writers of the past when that term was in use.





COMOX, 1939.

ST. PETER'S W.A.

ST. PETER'S CHURCH COMOX

INCUMBENTS

WILLEMAR, JULES	1891-1912
LAYCOCK, EDWARD	1913-1916
WATSON, FRANKLIN	1914-1916
COLLISON, H.A.	1918-1922
LEAKEY, JOHN	1922-1924
CORKER, ARTHUR	1925-1944
BROWNE, FRANK	1944-1949
HENDY, A.E.	1949-1950
CHAPPELL, L.G.	1950-1955
CAMERON, ANGUS	1955-1958
LONSDALE, C.E.	1959-1968
WILSON, T.W.	1968-1975
SPENCER, RICHARD	1975-1986
PAETKAU, JOHN	1987-2003
LYSTER, JAMES	2004-2018
MILNE, SULIN	2019-

1. St. Peter's Church

Anglican services had been held in the Comox Valley since the earliest days of the settlers, but in 1862 Rev Good, sent by Bishop Hills, pre-empted land in Sandwich for the use of the Church. The first permanent Anglican minister in the Valley was Rev Willemar, who from 1871 travelled to Comox, usually by canoe, to hold services at The Landing, the area where the wharf now stands. In 1891 a vision for a new church building arose and a building committee

was formed at The Landing. A parcel of land for the building of the church was given by Mr William Rowley Robb, on the condition that work "commenced not later than 40 days from the date of his offer (June 10, 1891) and progressed continually, at a cost of not less than \$2,000 when completed." As soon as the frame was up and the roof covered, the lot would be conveyed to the church. The building committee contracted a Mr. Samuel Creech to construct the building. He was to "complete it in a substantial and workmanlike manner on or before



the 30th day of September 1891" (just 3.5 months after Mr Robb's offer). Lumber for the building of the church was landed at the wharf and the cost of hauling it up to the church site was about 70¢ a thousand feet. The

church had to be fenced upon completion, and the whole project cost \$2218. Although records indicate the church was consecrated in 1893, a handwritten note on an old document states the church was never actually consecrated because it was never free from encumbrances, debt having been a barrier.

The church was named "St Peter's" after the New Testament Peter who was the brother of Andrew, and the church at Sandwick was already designated St Andrew's! At first the parish of Comox included the whole of the Comox Valley; Courtenay, Sandwick and Comox, and in the very earliest days extended beyond the Valley up towards Campbell River. In 1914 the present parish of Comox was formed, which includes Kye Bay and Little River. It has been recorded that the parishioners who worshipped in that first church building would often bring their rifles, in order to shoot game on their way home for Sunday lunch. Although it's not clear whether this was said of St Andrew's or St Peter's, the chances are it was common practice and happened at both!

In 1931 some workers doing repairs noticed that the cornerstone was loose. In removing it, they found a hidden box containing coins and papers which were too faded to read. The last service in the old church took place on May 25th 1939, and then it was pulled down, with the help of two horses, Stella and Queen.

LAST SERVICE IN ST. PETER'S

Old Church at Comox Being Torn Down

For the last time on Sunday morning the congregation of St. Peter's at Comox met in the old church: the very next morning the work of demolition had begun.

The Vicar said on Sunday there appeared to be some doubt of the exact date of the building of the church: but the time of its erection has been made quite definite since then by the production of an account



Rev Corker



The present St Peter's Church was built in 1939 with the cornerstone that is still to be seen near the entrance, laid 3rd September that year. From a newspaper of the time: *"The building of the Church may have been delayed for we learn from Mr. John Hawkins, who, then was a trustee, that when the rafters were put in, a gale of wind came and blew them all down and the contractor threw up the job, but Mr. Hawkins and another man took them apart and knocked out the nails, etc, then the building proceeded.*

The Rev. J. X. Willemar, who built it, had a very fine eye for an outstanding site for a church and he set it well above the old harbor on the slope of the ridge: it has always been one of the landmarks of Comox.



The new building cost three times as much as the original —\$6000 was raised for the purpose before construction started. Rev Corker had insisted there be no debt on the church, possibly because of the experience with the first building, so by the time it was complete it stood debt-free.

To the Glory of God

The Corner Stone of this new
St Peter's Church was laid by
The Rev H.M. Ellis M.A.
this 3rd day of September 1939
The Lord Bishop of Columbia
conducted the Service.

Haveli Columbia

Rev. Canon Vicar

Frederic C. Chapman
My M. Ellis R.I.

G.H. Ellis Chairman

L. Curtis Secretary

W. B. Smith Treasurer

P. Agillpursey

Robert Langford
built the old

The crosses on the church roof were reused from the previous structure, as was the tower bell, which had been cast in San Francisco in 1897. The contents of the original church



were temporarily stored in Rev Corker's house while the new one was built. They were

moved into the new St Peter's in November 1939. The contractor responsible for building the church was a Mr Hagarty. He must have built it well, as in 1946, just seven years after it was completed, there was an earthquake. The light fixtures swung wildly back and forth and the cross careened precariously on the very edge of the altar as the whole building shook. Rev Brown cautioned the children "to all sit

FREDERICK FIELD
NOTARY PUBLIC
REAL ESTATE, FINANCIAL AND INSURANCE AGENT

Witness 53 to 209
Safety Boxes
20 1001
Agent for
Canadian
National
Railways

COURTENAY, B.C.
November 13 1929

Mr. C. C. Piercy
Comox B.C.

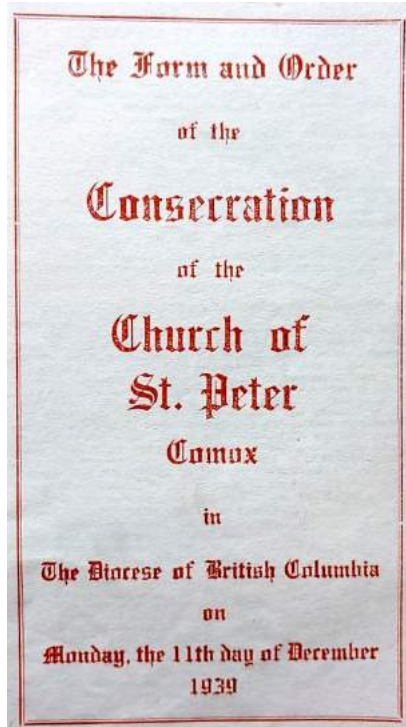
Dear Mr. Piercy:-

I am enclosing herewith REMOVAL PERMIT, for attachment to London & County Fire Insurance policy #34099, and which removes the contents of the Church from Mr. Corker's house into the new Church, and which I understood from Mr. Corker was to be done last Friday.

Will you also let me know please, when Mr. Hagarty ceases to have any further interest in the construction of the new building. When the insurance was issued covering the new Church, the policies were issued to both the Anglican synod of B.C. and Mr. Hagarty as Contractor, naturally when the latter has been paid, it becomes necessary for Mr. Hagarty to sign a release to the insurance, so, as I say, I shall be glad to hear from you as soon as Mr. Hagarty has been paid in full.

Yours very truly
F. Field

Encl.
F.



still, everything is under control", and the congregation quietly waited with no panic. The building survived well, with only minor damage to the chimney.



In 2007, the parish renovated the church and associated buildings. The interior of the church was stripped down to its outer beams, and its foundations were strengthened to incorporate earthquake protection. It is possible to view the interior of the church by arrangement with the St Peter's office.



2. Grounds and graves

The grounds and gardens are well kept by church members and the public are encouraged to come in and



enjoy the peace that is to be found here. The stone wall that exists now was built during Rev Corker's time, between 1925-1944. He was an artistic man and to help raise money for the wall Rev Corker painted trays and other objects with native signs. The stones were donated by Mr Filberg.



There are five Royal Navy graves in the garden of St



Peter's, just inside the boundary wall. Family of just one of these sailors, Herbert Allsop, have been traced. Herbert drowned aged 23. Take a moment to look at the plaque just inside the church wall which gives information about these young men.

At the rear of the church lies a single grave - Horace Smith 1842-1910. Horace Smith Jr, son of the above,



arrived in Comox from England in 1885, travelling with James Morley Curtis, who lived on Buena Vista. Horace's wife Maud and sister Ella followed three years later and settled near Merville. Three sons, one also named Horace, were born to them, and all were members of St Peter's. Horace and his brother Jack were partners in a lumber hauling business. In fact, one of the tenders put in for hauling the lumber from the wharf to the site of the first St Peter's Church was written on a rough piece of paper that said

simply: *"I will haul lumber for 70¢. Horace Smith"*. However, the grave is not of this Horace but of his father Horace Sr, who came to Comox about six months after the rest of the family and is registered on the 1891 census as a farmer. In 1920, ten years after the date of death recorded on the grave, the Comox Argus stated that the best shingles in the district came from Horace Smith's property, so Horace Jr was alive and well and still in business. You may wonder why Horace was buried here, when most were buried at the cemetery at St Andrew's. This is not entirely clear, but the whole family were Anglicans so would have been part of St Peter's and the wife of Horace Smith (Jr), was a great supporter of the church. From Land of Plenty:

Mrs Horace Smith, using local talent, put on grand concerts in the aid of the Anglican Church of Comox....church parades filled the little buildings.



The Church House was built around 1906 by a James Carthew, about whom you will hear more throughout this walk. It has a 'unique facade' and we believe it is the oldest still-occupied house in the valley. The house was renovated extensively around 1955 and again in 1967, and it served as a rectory (the home of the priest/rector) until the 1980s. The current rector, Rev Sulin Milne, arrived in 2019, at which time the building was being used as offices

and a meeting space. Her first impression of the place was that it would make a really lovely home. Some months later the decision was taken to restore the rectory to a family home. As the building had retained



the kitchen, bathroom and all other features that made it a home, the job was straightforward. It proved to be very solidly built, which was remarked upon by all the renovators who blunted their tools on the old growth timber in the walls of the house. The Church Office continues to function three days a week from the rectory.

4. Queens Avenue houses

Six small houses were built here on Queens Avenue in the 1930s by a Mr Petter, a member of St Peter's Church whom you will hear more of later. Originally built as workers' cottages, during WWII they were used to house evacuees, women and children brought over to escape



the Blitz in Great Britain. This illustrates St Peter's long association with supporting refugees. We have been instrumental in bringing several refugee families to Canada over the years and currently facilitate the Church Street Refugee Sponsorship Group who are bringing in more. The houses must have been sturdily built -- at least four of the original houses are still intact.

14

5. 1809 Buena Vista

Rev Corker was the priest at St Peter's from 1925-1944. In 1934, the house on the corner of Church Street and Buena Vista was built for him. It has been described thus: *This 'very welcoming' house features three very old stained-glass windows (one of which can be seen in the front door)*

and a 10ft high cove ceiling.

In 1983 the church was thinking of buying 1809 Buena¹⁵



Vista, to rezone the property in order to use it for parking. It was rented out by St. Peter's until 1994, when it was sold in the fall of that year. The funds raised by the sale were to purchase a plot of land on Idiens Way with a view to move St Peter's to a new building there. Thankfully the move never happened, and St Peter's remains in the centre of Comox, well placed to serve the community of the downtown area. 1809 Buena Vista is currently occupied by a local family, but at least two individuals who now live elsewhere on this street grew up in the house and remember it fondly.

6. Site of the old Comox United Church – 215 Church St.

The old Comox United Church began life in 1901 as a Presbyterian church. In January 1938 the average attendance was 24 families, plus eight single persons connected to the church. In 1939, this church was enlarged and renovated. In 1940, the church became officially known as Comox United Church. Some 28 years passed before the congregation moved into its new

location on Beach Drive. The building on Church Street became first an art shop, then an upholstery shop, then a Masonic Lodge, before being demolished to make way for the next generation of buildings on the site.



7. Legion Building

1939 marked the beginning of WWII. With Canada's entry into the war on 10th September 1939, (exactly one week after the laying of the new St Peter's Church cornerstone), Goose Spit was rapidly established as a naval training school. By 1941 there were 460 officers, men and ratings attached to the naval base, known as HMCS Naden (III), and in May, Canadian Legion #160 in Comox opened its doors to Her Majesty's Forces. The Legion hall was completed in November, and by the late 1940s St Peter's Sunday School was held there at 9:45 am Sunday mornings.



THE LEAFLET

BE NOT AFRAID



ONLY BELIEVE

Parish of Comox, Diocese of British Columbia

No. 26

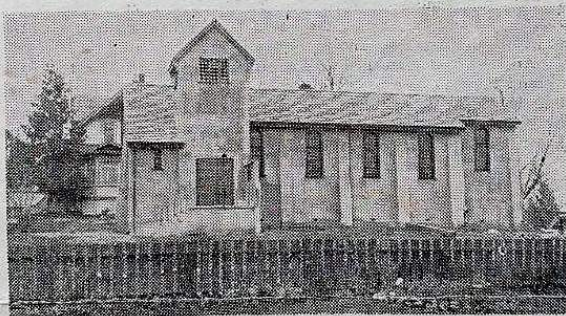
Easter 1948

ST. PETER'S CHURCH SERVICES

Every Sunday	Holy Communion 8:30 a.m.
2nd Sunday	Holy Communion 11:00 a.m.
Other Sundays	Morning Prayer 11:00 a.m.
4th Sunday	Children's Service 9:45 a.m.

Sunday School at Legion Hall - 9:45 a.m.

HOLY BAPTISM AND MARRIAGE BY APPOINTMENT



VICAR:

Reverend Frank Browne

Vicar's Warden - Mr. Geo. Reed People's Warden—Jack Noel

President Women's Auxiliary,
MRS. HEBER COOKE
MRS. FRANK BROWNE

Envelope Secretary
MRS. JEFFREY

Girls' Auxilliary, (vacant)

Sunday School Superintendent
MISS LILLIAN PICKERING

Junior W.A.
MRS. BOB HARDING
Little Helpers

Organist
MISS LILLIAN PICKERING

MRS. FRANK BROWNE

8a. 2016 Comox Avenue

A house was built on this site by James Carthew and Son in 1907, not long after he built the St Peter's Rectory. In 1935 the Hatfield family moved here from Courtenay. Burton Hatfield opened a gas station on this site and operated a tourist camp comprising several small cabins along Anderton Road. The cabin rentals and small store on the site were managed by Burton's wife, Constance, and the children helped clean the cabins. The gas station and store closed around 1950, and the last of the cabins were demolished in 1990. While his wife kept the tourist camp going, Burton continued his job as a mechanic in Courtenay. During his working life he lost the sight in one eye to a steel splinter from a lathe. During his retirement Burton Hatfield turned to music making—literally, as he not only learned to play the violin but also to make them. The present buildings on the site were built by Hatfield's son, John, soon after he returned from service in WWII. Until the early 1980s he ran a soft-serve ice-cream and



HATFIELD HOME

BUILT 1907



8b. Bottom of Anderton Road

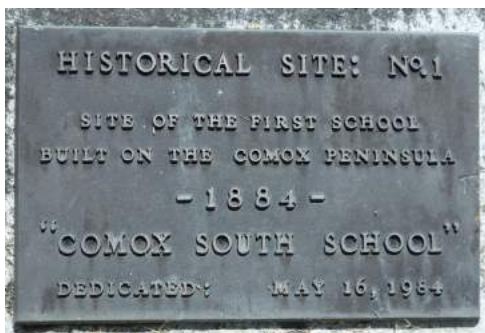
Travel up Anderton Road past the former location of the cabins, all the way to the Leeward liquor store (649 Anderton), and you will see a plaque marking the site of the first settler school building in the Valley. It was known as Comox South School. This comment on the state of local education is taken from *Land of Plenty: 1876: Comox. With a school population of 40, and with numerous roads and bridges, the average attendance here should be nearly 30. The fact that it is not much over one-third of that number, does not indicate much anxiety on the part of parents to avail themselves of the educational privileges placed within their reach.*

Teachers in the Comox South School

1884-1887	Miss Heard
1887-1888	Miss Butler
1888-1890	Mr. Sutherland
1890-1892	Miss Skinner
1892-1894	Miss Carscadden
1894-1895	Mr. H. N. Muir
1895-1897	Miss Cathcart
1897-1898	Miss Bissett
1898-1899	Miss Netherby
1899-1900	J. N. Muir
1880?-1901	Miss M. Smith
1901-1904	Miss Moffatt
1904-1904	Mr. S. Moore ($\frac{1}{2}$ year)
1905-1907	Miss Boak
1907-1908	Mrs. McLennan
1909-1909	Mr. F. Dunn ($\frac{1}{2}$ year)
1909-1911	Miss Blankenbach
1911-1914	Miss Wilson

Despite poor educational attendance the decade before, Comox South School was built. It was a one-room school serving grades 1-8, and opened in 1884. It was a bit far from the centre of town, but as it served Comox Bay, Lazo and Little River, its location made sense.

In 1914 it closed after combining with another local school to form Comox Elementary—a couple of blocks further down from this site.



9. 2026 Comox Avenue

The old Spencer Farm barn was on this site and was also reputed to have been built by Carthew. In 1991 (the year of St Peter's centenary), it was described as being over 100 years old.



10. Comox United Church



This is where the Comox United Church congregation moved when the building opposite St Peter's closed. The following is taken from the Comox United Church website: *Comox continued to expand until the building on Church Street was no longer big enough. Fundraising began in 1959 and continued for almost nine years. The property on Beach Drive was purchased in 1966. From 1970 to 1976, we shared our facilities with the Roman Catholic congregation of St. John the Baptist while they were in the process of re-organizing and erecting a new building.*

In the last year or so St Peter's and Comox United have supported each other in some of our ministries, so we still function as bringers of God's Kingdom together, even though we are no longer neighbours on the same street.

A member of Comox United Church hands over a donation to the St Peter's Bridging the Gap Food Bank while Rev Sulin enjoys a hot chocolate in the background - note the Covid 19 masks!



11. Little Red Church – 243 Alpine St



There had been a Catholic church on Wharf Street prior to the one that remains here on the corner of Alpine and Comox Ave. As Anglican Bishop George Hills noted when he visited the area in 1885: *Mr Willemar told me the Romanists have sold their chapel (on Wharf Street) which is now a butcher shop. They talk of building a better one but the visits of priests are not frequent and there are not many Romanists in Comox.* Construction of the Catholic Church of St. John the Baptist began on this site in 1885, and was completed in 1886. The following year, during a fierce windstorm two tall fir trees crashed down on the church, crushing it and cutting it in half! But, the pioneers of the Comox Valley rallied round to make good the damage. In 1888, St. John the Baptist Church was reconstructed and re-consecrated. Lumber from the mills was shipped to

the wharf; cartage from there was one dollar a load, which was more than the 70-75¢ quoted for St Peter's. It pays to be sited close to the wharf! Although the church was in use in 1886, it was neither officially opened nor assigned a parish priest until 1888. This delay was due to the murder of Bishop Seghers while visiting Alaskan missions. Father Durrand was the Comox Valley's first Catholic priest. The church was originally built to seat 80. It was not red in those early days, but white. By the 2000's the church saw little use. The Catholic congregation had moved out, and the hall was used only occasionally. Around 2010 a group came together to save and renovate the church for community use, and the result is what you see here (see Little Red Church website for details). An Italian settler named Joseph Rodello (who will be mentioned again later), bought a large piece of land adjacent to this church not long after it was built, intending to establish a subdivision. He built a series of small houses and cabins which he rented to miners, and the area became known locally as "Joetown".

12. Head of the Dyke Road

As recently as the 1990s a six-acre old growth forest stood here. It was the very last stand of virgin forest in



the Comox Valley, an example of a forest ecosystem in miniature. Recent nearby construction has resulted in a disturbed ecosystem, and some of the old growth trees have since died or have fallen and 'a desire for a view' has

resulted in other old trees disappearing. There remain a few larger trees in this area, but it no longer feels like a true old growth forest.

13. Manor Drive

The K'omoks First Nation have a reserve down on the Dyke Road, but there was once also an Indigenous fortified settlement up here.

The first full time vicar of St Peter's, Rev Willemar, first arrived in the Valley in 1871. He quickly engaged with the local Indigenous population. A month after his arrival, 25th October 1871, he wrote:

After church last Sunday we went to the Indian village to have a talk with them... There were about 30 Indians at the instruction, they were going to have a dance, but when they saw us coming, they put it off until after the instruction. Many of them were dressed up and painted for the dance, or the number of those attending would have been greater.

Along with his assistant, Mr Guillod, he organized a day school somewhere in this general area for the Indigenous children.

With the discovery of the graves at various residential schools, we instantly recoil when we think of the church offering education to the Indigenous population, and we have reason to do so, but according to the written history, the school here was not run like the residential schools, as it was located in the K'omoks village and the children came daily from their own homes.

As for the location of the school, Rev Willemar's reminiscences describe the camp where he taught school as being four miles from the Mission at Sandwick, which places it closer to this site than to the current band office down the hill. Wherever it was, Rev Willemar taught the children in the common (trading) language of the Pacific Northwest (Chinook), in their own settlement.

As stated in *Land of Plenty*:

In one of the diocesan annual reports, Willemar mentioned the difficulties he and Guillod faced in teaching Indian children reading, writing, spelling and Bible stories in a smoke-filled Indian house with no seats, no desks and Indians squatting on mats.

This first school was in a house "cheerfully lent to us by this Indian without remuneration for school and church

purposes". Between 16 and 30 Indigenous children attended Rev Willemar's school.

In 1874 he constructed a purpose-built combined school and church at the Indigenous settlement on the Dyke. The services held there were conducted in Chinook, and were attended by Indigenous people from miles around. The *Land of Plenty* states:

The service consists, wrote Mr Guillod, of an address in Chinook by Mr Willemar, followed by another by myself and the singing of a short litany both before and after the address. The school (I quote) had to be given up on the account of the arrival of many more settlers and the clergyman's time had to be devoted to other matters.

14. The Fort a.k.a. The Manor

Around the time settlers came to the valley, there was some conflict between the Salultx (K'omoks), and the allied E'iksan and Pentlatch (Puntledge) bands. This



headland was used as a lookout site for the Puntledge Indigenous peoples, fearing raids from the Salultx (K'omoks) Territory which was then further north.

Trenches were dug, and they had a longhouse here, containing food, water, and weapons in case of attack.



The Manor House, known as the Fort in recognition of the Indigenous use of this site, dates to the same era that the current St Peter's was built, and the old United Church extended. A year earlier in 1938, the land here had been bought by engineer Sir Earnest Willoughby Petter. He built the house you see here, surrounded by forest and overlooking the waterfront. It was designed by a Victorian architect and was constructed mainly by local craftsmen. From *Land of Plenty*:

Sir Earnest adapted to life in the Valley without forsaking his formal lifestyle. The family dressed for dinner, served afternoon tea, and employed a nanny for the fourteen children that were brought over for safety from the Blitz during WWII.

It seems there were actually 'only' 10 children (aged 6 months to 10 years on arrival) and four mothers. These, it seems, were members of the Petter family. One of the mothers was expecting another child, who was born soon after their arrival in March 1941. This new grandson was known as "Extra Baggage"!!



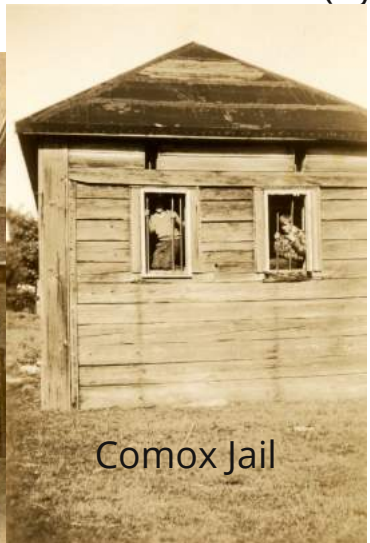
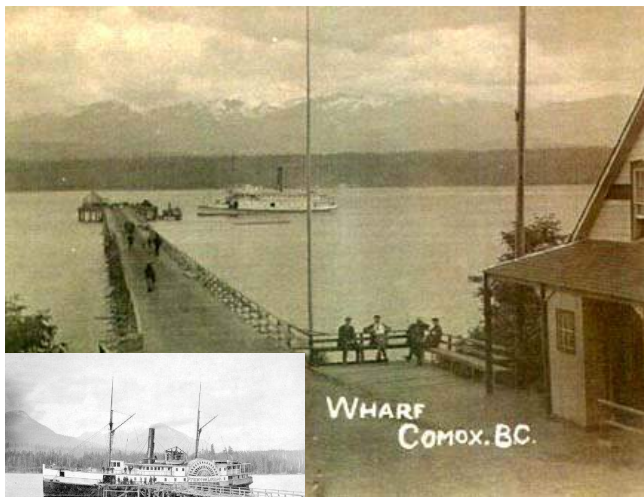


You may remember Petter also built the houses on Queens Avenue we saw earlier, which housed refugees in WWII. Seven of the refugees housed there were employed as servants at the Manor. As a member of St Peter's, Lady Petter hosted Strawberry Teas here at the Fort for the church. She can be seen in the 1939 photo of St Peter's Women's Auxiliary (WA), third from the right, back row. The evacuees returned to England after the war, and the Petters moved to Victoria. In 1945 the Fort was sold for a luxury hotel. Within a few years it was sold again, becoming a private hospital for the elderly. It has also been used as a medical clinic for obesity, an administration centre for North Island College, and now again for medical offices.

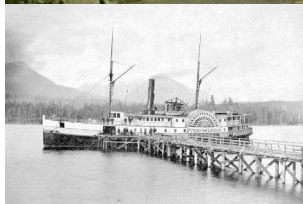
Brought forward -		92.55
Line 12	Proceeds of Garden Party Tea	25.00
	Home Cooking	38.60
	Chicken Dinner	32.00
	Strawberry Raffle	13.50
	Fine Dittie	6.90
	Hot Dogs	5.00
	Location	118.00
		255

15. The Jail?

A man from Denman Island named Bob Swan is reputed to have built a jail in this area between where the Fort and St Joseph's Hospital would one day be built. This was back in 1877 when Joseph Rodello was constable. It has been noted that this may not have been a great location for a jail, given its distance from the settlement at Sandwick and its lesser but no less inconvenient distance from Rodello's businesses (a hotel and store) at the wharf. However, given Rodello's interest in the land next to where the Catholic Church was built, which he would own a few years later, perhaps this location did make some sense. Reference to a wooden cell built in the Elk Hotel (by the Wharf) has been noted.



Comox Jail



16. Pioneer Memorial Park

This area was formerly the Catholic cemetery associated with St John the Baptist/Little Red Church, and many of the pioneers were buried here. It was deactivated in 1977, being no longer in use and having been extensively vandalised. The town of Comox has agreed to maintain the site as a memorial park in perpetuity. A list of those interred here is to be found at the entrance.



17. West side St Joseph's

We are on the grounds of St Joseph's Hospital, which served as the general hospital for Comox for over 100 years. The nuns who ran it came from the Order of St Joseph in Toronto. However, the hospital began in a farmhouse in the area known as "Joetown", the townsite established by Joseph Rodello. I like to think that was taken into consideration when they chose the name!

In a monthly publication called *Banner of Faith*, issued by the Church Sunday School Union in the 1880s, Rev Willemar, the first vicar of St Peter's, wrote this of the Valley:

The white population is about 300, but much scattered. Many of the settlers live in the centre of a clearing of their own making which they enlarge year by year. Though the life of the settler is hard work, it is a free and pleasant one and

they all make a living quite easily. There is room in the Comox Valley for at least 1000 people as there is plenty of unoccupied land available for cultivation and the soil is excellent. (Note, now there is a population of nearly 74,000 in the Comox Valley). As an aside, it is clear not everyone in Comox was able to make an easy living. I quote from a document in the St Peter's archives: To speak truly, there are some church people, like Mr Carwithen, who never have a 50 cent piece in their house. Mr Carwithen, I know, does not come to church because he has hardly anything but rags to wear and cannot give 25 cents at the offertory and there are two or three in the same state...

Reginald (a farmer) and Margaret Carwithen, along with two children, are recorded in Comox in the 1881 census. All are recorded as Anglicans, so would have been part of St Peter's. By the 1891 census another five children had come along. By the 1901 census there are only three Carwithens shown: Margaret Jr aged 13 (daughter), Christian aged 10 and Alfred aged 7 (sons). There is no head of household, only a 73 year-old widow named Jessie Lay, possibly the grandma, who presumably looked after the Carwithen children, as one of the children in the 1891 census was also called Jessie. None of them have any occupation listed. There is no later mention of any other members of the Carwithen family residing in the whole of BC.



18. East Side of St Joseph's

Rev Willemar went on to say of the valley:
It is a most healthy spot. There is no doctor nearer than 60 miles and we do very well without one.

The pioneers may have managed without a doctor for a while, but occasionally they needed one! The Anglican church stepped in from time to time to assist in healing. In 1869 Rev Owen describes one incident as he was making to leave the Comox Valley:

...a settler came in whose wrist had been badly bitten by a pig. I had packed up all my things but fortunately the Archdeacon had in his pocket book a small piece of plaster, and with this we managed to close and dress the wound.

It was a good three decades before they got a hospital in Comox. St Joseph's began in 1913 in an eight-room farmhouse, set up by four nuns. This repurposed farmhouse could only accommodate up to 10 patients. An extension was built here by James Carthew in 1917 taking the capacity up to 17 beds. Some of the old hospital complex remains at the rear, part of the expansion of 1937. The new wing added at that time brought the bed count to 75. The nuns used to live in the green building near the Rodello Street entrance, where the old thrift store operated until fairly recently.



19. Rodello Street

Joseph Rodello was an early settler who came to the valley from Italy. This street named after him runs north-south all the way up to Gull Ave, on the way crossing Robb Ave, which runs east-west. Whoever named the streets had a sense of humour, because James Robb and Joseph Rodello, although similar in many ways, were rivals. Both had seen the possibilities in a wharf at Comox; both had devoted years to community service, although they were very different in character. Both had started a townsite in the area (the museum has a copy of a town plan proposed by Robb, which didn't come quite to fruition, see #23). It is interesting that Rodello, a Roman Catholic, chose to centre his townsite next to St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, across the road from what would become the Catholic-run St Joseph's hospital, whereas Robb, who was Anglican, established his townsite some way to the east, where St Peter's Anglican Church now stands.



Still, to have streets named after these two men, going in different directions, yet crossing over each other, reflects something of their relationship. James Robb was somewhat older than Rodello, the former listed as 62 years of age in the 1881 census, the latter only 37. Who would have guessed then that only eight years later, both

James Robb and the one he described as a 'thorn in his side', Joseph Rodello, would both die at more or less the same time, in the winter of 1889, and would be commemorated in the same death notice headed: *The Late James Robb and Joseph Rodello.*?



20. 2057 Beaton Avenue

Beaton Ave was named after Father Beaton, priest of the Catholic church here until 1940 (the street plan was established around 1954).

This was the site of the Carthew family sheep farm house. The farmhouse was built c. 1904, the farmlands covering 30 acres between Comox Ave and the



shore. The land was farmed up to the 1970s. There is a photograph of the property and a model of the house at the Museum. James Carthew lived on the farm with his wife and children. They appear in both the 1901 and 1911 censuses. They are listed as Anglican and attended St Peter's. Mrs Carthew was a member of St Peter's WA and can be seen in the 1939 picture, far right, front row. James and his wife Margaret either didn't know or didn't care how old they were, or couldn't remember the exact year they were born. In 1901 James Carthew gave the year of his birth as 1866, in 1911 he gave it as 1864. In 1901 he was 34 years old. Ten years later he was 47!! Similarly, his wife Margaret aged 12 years in that same decade. They seemed a little more certain of their children's birth years; and had two sons and three daughters in both censuses. Their daughter Hazel, who

was five in the 1901 census, doesn't appear in the 1911 census, and might have died or moved away before she was 15, but in that census the Carthews had another five year old daughter, Gladys. James had been born in Nova Scotia. Two of his children were born in Nanaimo, and two in Cumberland, where James was mayor (1900-01). He moved from Cumberland to Comox in 1903.



21. Carthew Street (This leads to a walk on a short section of the shore. You can bypass this and pass straight on to Port Augusta Park by Beaufort Avenue if you prefer.)



This street is on the Carthew farmland, so when the 1954 street plan was devised, a street in the vicinity was named after them. James Carthew was described as a "most kindly man". He is

listed on the 1901 census as a carpenter and along with his son was responsible for constructing many buildings in the early days of Comox. James Carthew was mentioned earlier as the builder of the Church House, some properties on Comox Ave. and the 1917 addition to St Joseph's Hospital. In addition, we know James did repair work on St Peter's Church in 1905, lining it and

strengthening its foundation. He also built the first permanent barracks on Goose Spit for the navy. James Carthew died on June 21st 1936 and was buried in the Anglican cemetery at Sandwick.

22. At the shore I want you to engage your imagination for a moment. Here is the story of the arrival to the valley of Rev Willemar, first permanent priest at St Peter's, written in the 1950s and taken from Willemar's Reminiscences:



Arriving in Comox in September, accompanied by Mr Harry Guillod, who acted as lay reader, was a different matter to arriving in that settlement now. There was no wharf, and what freight and passengers were landed, were taken ashore by canoe either by the Indians, or the white settlers. Before the arrival of Rev Willemar the mission lands at Sandwick had been purchased by the church, so that their destination was marked out for the two adventurers. At Comox the lumber was dropped overboard and made into a raft upon which the furniture, personal effects and supplies were loaded. This raft was piloted to the mouth of the Courtenay River and then up the river and the whole cargo

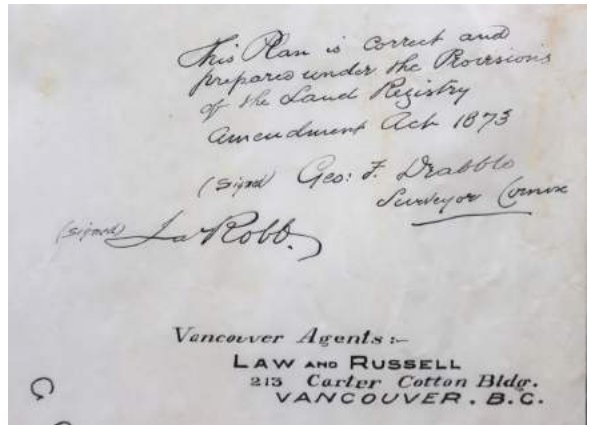
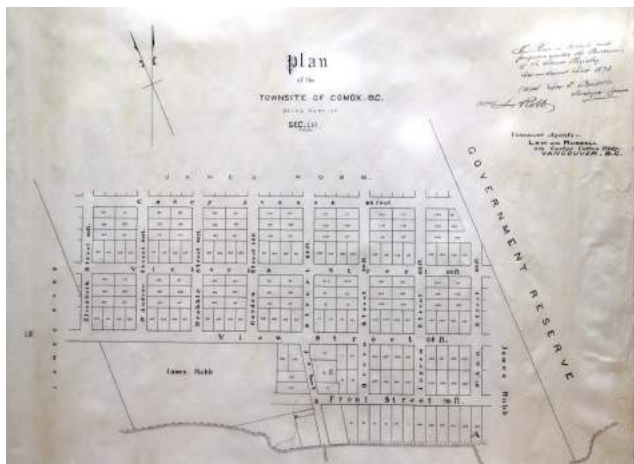
landed at the spot where the present Sandwich store is now located. The Indians made the trip on the raft and the white men came in a large canoe.

This walk has been put together for St Peter's 130th anniversary in September 2021, exactly 150 years removed from the September in which Rev Willemar arrived in the Valley. Standing here we can imagine the scene of the raft with his furniture and belongings being rowed up the river so long ago. Look out for the Great Comox Midden visible all along the estuary.



23. Port Augusta Park

Port Augusta, the original name for the town of Comox, is now preserved as a park name, street name, reflected in the name of some local businesses as well as being the name of the Comox mall. The name of the village, the bay and the Valley was changed from Port Augusta to Comox by the provincial government, with no consultation with the local residents. The change happened in 1893, two years after St Peter's was built, so for those two years, the church was St Peter's, Port Augusta, not St Peter's, Comox! There was also a change of street name. Church Street had been named Drabble Street on James Robb's townsite plan, after early settler and surveyor, George Drabble.



24. Ellis Street (at Beaufort) Here to our left and right is Ellis Street. George Henry Ellis and his family were members of St Peter's and he was a prominent member of the community. He owned The Bay General Store, and The Bay Hardware on Comox Avenue. Members of the Ellis



family have been associated with St Peter's for generations. George and his wife lost their son Henry in WWII and gave the current font to St Peter's in his memory. The

Comox, B. C., December 21, 1939

M St. Peter's Church-

Comox, B. C.
To Account With

THE BAY STORE
O. H. ELLIS, Prop.
GENERAL MERCHANDISE and BUTCHER SHOP

Livestock, Boots and Shoes, Hardware, Sporting Goods, etc. Phone 55 R

Aug.	5	Wine	1.50
Oct.	7	Port Wine	1.50
Nov.	4	Sand Paper	.15
	6	19 Hat and Coat Hooks	.40
	8	Brush	.10
	11	1 Mat 2.75, 1 Mat 1.75	4.50
	23	Dust Pan	.20
	2	Files	5.26
	22	Furnace Scoop	1.00
Dec.	5	Axe	1.90
	7	12 Screws	.10
	7	1 pt. Stain	.40
	11	Wire	.20
	21	Port Wine	1.50
		Total	\$19.76

*1 paid with check.
Dec 20/39
O.H. Ellis*

earlier font was donated by the officers and men of the British Navy when the first St Peter's was built. Mrs. Ellis appears in the WA photo, third from the left in the back row. The Comox Museum has in its possession the Ellis family christening gown, which was worn by their babies when they were brought for baptism at St Peter's. Barbara Anne Ellis, whose baptism was held on March 14th

1948, is one example. The gown dates from the 1880s and is on display in the Comox Museum.

The extension to the rear of St Peter's Church Hall is named after George Ellis, one of the volunteers from the church who helped build it, doing so much of the work that they chose to name the main room of the extension after him.



25 Site of Robb farm – head of the waterfront walkway
 The waterfront farm belonging to the Robb family was located around here, just down the hill from St Peter's Church. A holding of 262 acres, the house and the barn are pictured on the information board on the wharf, along with the original St Peter's church. The farm went



on the market (in the late 1800s) but remained unsold because the asking price was prohibitive (rumoured to be \$80,000!) Land prices had increased in 1884 due to a provincial government act which abolished the onerous



requirement for settlers to improve the land they had purchased. Robb at that time was selling individual lots in the wake of this change for the grand sum of \$300.

When St Peter's was built the farm was largely still in the possession of the

Robb family. It was James Robb's son, William Robb who gave the land for the construction of St Peter's, two years after James Robb's death. Given the location of the

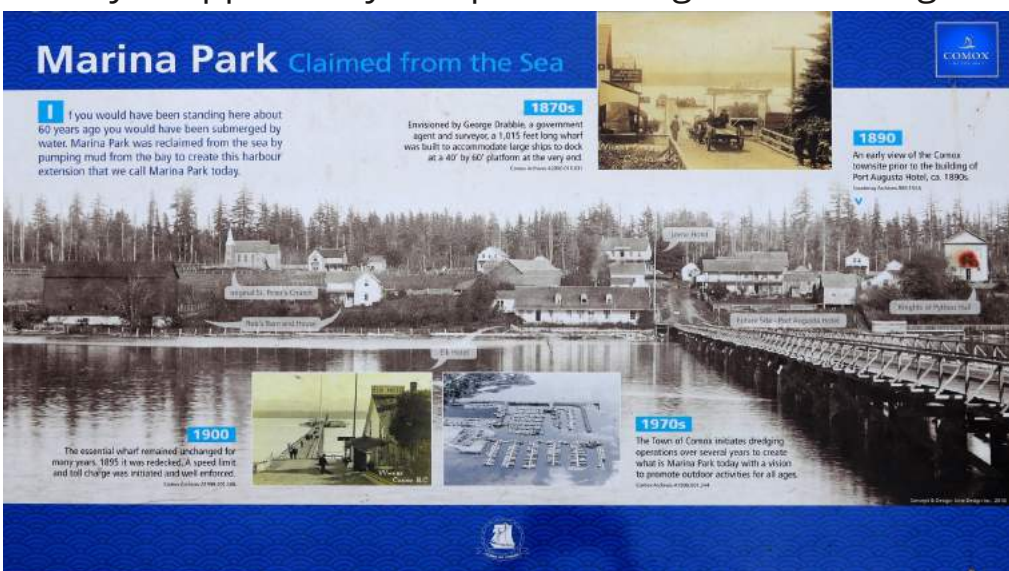
farmhouse, it may be guessed that the site of St Peter's lay at the edge of the Robb farm's lands. William appears as "farmer" in the 1901 census. The date of the Robb family's immigration into Canada is given as 1862, putting them among the first group of settlers to arrive, James having been 44 and William a young man of just 20 years.



While we are here with this wonderful view, I want to engage your imagination again. The following is taken from the writings of an early churchman as he travelled to Comox in the 1860s: *...on the third night (out from Nanaimo) we slept rolled in our blankets on the sandy sloping beach of an island just before sighting Comox, with the canopy of heaven brilliantly studded with stars for our covering... The natural beauty of Comox cannot be exaggerated. I recall with pleasure the first Sunday morning of my stay at one of the farms...where I was to hold services for all the newcomers in this beautiful valley, literally encircled with mountains and forests through which a fine river abounding with trout flowed on its course... The fern abounding on all sides stood as high as one's head. All kinds of flowers gemmed the meadows...grouse whirled around disturbed by our presence and deer startled by our footsteps sprang away to the covert beyond, whilst mountain and woody slopes bathed in the flood of early sunshine constituted a very Sabbath of stillness and delight.*

26. Wharf

The wharf was constructed in 1874, twelve years after the arrival of the first influx of settlers, at a cost of \$3,337, the money supplied by a provincial government grant.



James Robb and Joseph Rodello were involved in bringing about the construction of the Wharf, in the area that had been known as The Landing. Because of the construction of the Wharf, business in Comox began to flourish. The Elk and Port Augusta hotels lay at either side of the wharf road. Further information is on the boards on the wharf and the promenade where you will also see images of the original St Peter's Church building. No decent road existed between Comox and towns further south on the Island until 1910. Before that date there was nothing more than a bridle path with a few bridges. Flooding and tree falls made maintenance of the path onerous, and the trail was soon abandoned. So, the wharf provided the only real means of household goods, medical supplies, mail and livestock reaching the Valley. One of my favorite images is of the Postmaster Mr. C.C. Piercy, pushing mail up and down Wharf Street in a wheelbarrow to and from the boat City of Nanaimo. His need to do this ended in 1913 when one of the Cliffe sons was contracted to collect the mail by horse and cart. To the right of the wharf road as you look



Princess Louisa at
Comox BC Aug 20,
1879

inland is the site of the Port Augusta Hotel, built in 1898 by long-standing St Peter's Church warden, Mr. J.B. Holmes. The hotel served as a church at times, presumably when the St Peter's Church building was not usable.

27. On the Promenade in view of Goose Spit

A spit is formed by a geological process where sand and sediment is washed along the shore in the direction of the current, and when the coastline takes a turn, it carries forward to form a sandspit. Information on its formation lies outside of the remit of a history walk, but more can be found online. Both sides of the spit were used by local



First Nations to collect clams and cockles in spring and to fish for salmon in winter. Reginald Pidcock, who in 1862, was the first settler to make his home on the west side of the Courtenay River, wrote of his first sight of the valley: *The tide was in our favour & running very swiftly. We made capital way & soon caught sight of the entrance to Comox harbour or Bay while we were still 10 or 13 miles off. The first that catches the eye is a long sand bluff which is on the other side of the harbour & terminates in a cape which is Cape Lazo. As we neared the Bay we could see what we thought were houses but which turned afterwards to be Indian Tombs with white calico nailed on to a structure something like the frame of a small wooden house which is built over the grave. They are on a long sandy spit which runs out about 2 miles on a long sand and forms a breakwater & fair harbour where ships of any tonnage can come to an anchor.* From here on the Promenade you can see a First Nations totem pole, erected in recent times. Pidcock travelled to the Valley with three other young men. It is recorded that not long after they began to erect their cabins, they were taken aback to see an Anglican Bishop in full ecclesiastical garb walking along the wilderness trail. This would have been Bishop Hills, who visited the valley in that same year, arriving on the ship HMS Grappler and who



assigned a Rev J.B. Good to make regular visits to the Valley on behalf of the Anglican church. The other visible structures on the spit belong to the naval base. Goose Spit has

been in use by the navy for training since 1876. James Carthew built the first barracks there, and the army used it as the home of the 102nd Battalion of Canadian Expeditionary Force during WWI. With Canada's entry into the Second World War in September 1939, there was

much activity on Goose Spit. Naval warships were frequently anchored in the bay, but now there came an urgency to establish a training base for gunnery and seamanship. An electric line went over to the Spit from Comox. Water was piped across from the vicinity of the Lorne Hotel (where the farmers market now operates), to a water tower on the Spit. Three shifts worked non-stop to build barracks, offices, and instructional facilities. Even though the works were not yet complete, in May of 1940, 92 ratings were already in training there, living in tents while the barracks were completed. By 1941 the number of officers, men and ratings had increased to 460. Any sailors needing hospitalization were cared for at St Joseph's, before an eight-bed unit was constructed on the Spit.



28. Martine's Bistro

The sailors received gracious hospitality from the residents of Comox. Around the turn of the 20th century, they showed their gratitude to the town. Taken from Comox Past to Present: *The sailors often performed concerts for the pioneers in the Knights of Pythias Hall (now Martine's Bistro) where Naval decorations and the music of the hornpipes provided much appreciated entertainment for the pioneers. The sailors gallantly painted the Anglican Church (St Peter's) as thanks for the hospitality of the village.*



29. End at the museum for displays and refreshments I want to end where I began, with an acknowledgement of the Indigenous people on whose ancestral lands this walk has been taken. Again, I apologise that the following has been taken from a European history (by Rev Owen). Local bands engaged positively with the settlers and created defensive alliances with other bands in the Salish sea area. The Puntledge tribe welcomed the E'iksan, a neighbouring tribe who *"...came regularly to procure salmon, which are extraordinarily plentiful here. Some of them took wives from the Puntledges.... the descendants of these now form the Comox tribe. Of the old Puntledge tribe but six now remain, the others being absorbed and their tribal distinctiveness lost (i.e. in 1869)."* Rev Owens observed a fluctuating number of people living in the Indigenous settlements. There were about 100 individuals, sometimes increased due to visiting tribes, some of whom came to find employment in the potato fields of the Valley. At that time a very similar number of settlers inhabited the area, the 1871 census showing only 102 settlers. Early settler Eric Duncan, historian and poet, reminisces: *"The prominent old Indians then were Beaverskin and Blueskin, who used to bring up gangs of Indian women in October to scratch up the white men's potatoes. Broken-nosed Tom, who in later years worked steadily at the Urquhart Bros. Sawmill; Old George, who used to lie, minus any clothing but his blanket on the platform outside his dwelling all the long summer days, sometimes joined by Blueskin or Beaverskin: his stout old wife, Mrs. George, who trudged up once every week to help Mrs. Willemar [wife of the vicar] with her washing, and who had half a dozen sturdy sons; and old Nim-nim, a much bigger man than his son Joe, who was about my own age, and whom the George boys called Joe Seaweed".*

Thank you for joining this walking tour of St Peter's history in Comox. If you are visiting the museum during September 2021, you will see a display of historical items (clothing, documents, and images) from St Peter's Church. At other times you may still be able to see some of the exhibits referred to in this booklet.



Our Vision

To reflect the love of Jesus, to be caring, inclusive and just

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Postscript from the Rector: 13th July 2021

As I write we are emerging from a pandemic. Except for a short interlude last summer and fall, church services have been suspended, our buildings have been closed since March of 2020. Masks have had to be worn, we have had to remain 2m away from each other, and we have had to wash and sanitize everything we touch. We are now beginning tentatively to emerge from all the restrictions, but Covid has hit St Peter's hard, with our finances under strain because of the many factors which have affected people's ability to maintain their level of giving to the Church. We depend on the generosity of our members and other supporters to be able to do the work we love to do in the community and continue to serve the town of Comox.

Historically, this is not the first time St Peter's has faced financial challenges. As stated above the first church may have spent its whole life in debt, trying to recover the costs of the building project. Rev Willemar once offered

to have his already modest salary reduced because the church was struggling to meet its financial obligations.

Your purchase of this booklet helps us cover the cost of running our church during these hard times. If you would like to donate to us even more generously than by buying this booklet, either financially or in the form of food items, paper goods or toiletries for our Bridging the Gap food box outreach, or clothes and household goods for our Blessings Boutique, we would be glad to receive from you. Contact us as below for details of how you can help.

May God bless you richly.

Rev Sulin Milne (Rector St Peter's)

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Visit in person:

Church Office, 218 Church Street

opening hours Tues-Thurs 9-1

Designated donations which are received by St. Peter's Comox will be recorded. They will be used as the donor intended, with the understanding that when the funding for the relevant aspect of church operations is met, or there is no longer a need for funding in the designated area as confirmed by the Rector and Wardens, the remaining contributions will be allocated to the area which is deemed to be most compatible with the intentions of the donor.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all who gave your assistance, memories, time, and patience.

The staff and volunteers of the Comox Museum

Wedlidi Speck

K'omoks First Nation

Past and present members of St. Peter's



