



One of the oldest churches in Maple Ridge

Maple Ridge – January 2021

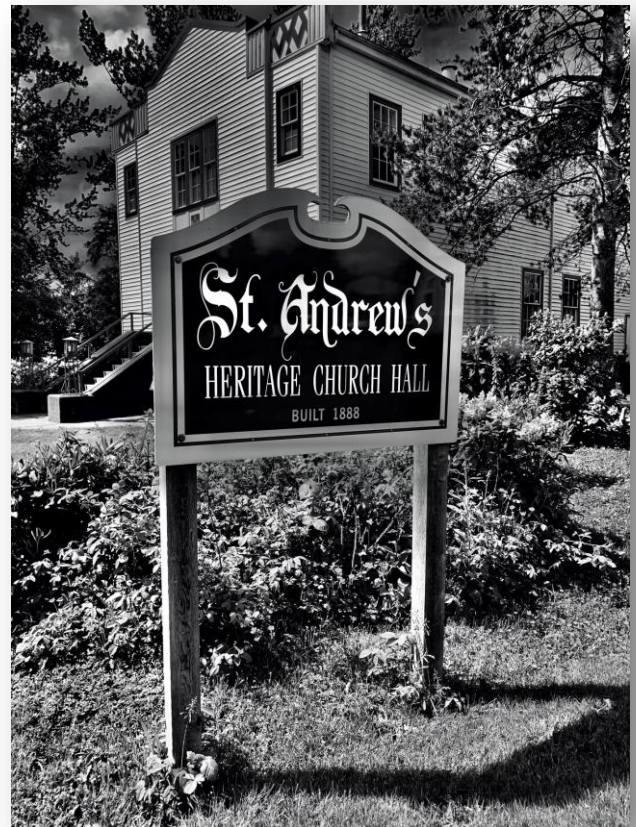
It seems quite fitting to write about St. Andrew's Church in January 2021 as construction of the symbolic but unassuming building began in January, 1888. This not an elaborate or grand building but is very valued as far as community significance goes. The church's Gothic stylings are reflected by the pointy arches in the window insets. This old historic church is a representation of community spirit in early Maple Ridge heritage. It is one of the oldest churches in the city. The land was originally donated by pioneer Thomas Haney, who was a Catholic. Thomas Haney was one of the earliest settlers. He bought up a fair bit of land and was responsible for established much of the area. The Haney House, his former family home is also a heritage site.

The bricks and building materials for the construction of the church were donated by some of the owners of the small kilns which were located nearby. At the time, Port Haney was an up and coming community in which a budding commercial atmosphere began to emerge. Located near the middle of Fraser River, Port Haney became a transportation hub during the early years

and today the whole area still serves as a tribute to early heritage. Before the development of roads the Fraser was the lifeline which provided access to allow residential and commercial access to the community.

Today it's hard to picture an area that was extremely sparsely settled as early pioneers dug into the unforgiving wilderness, constructing their humble homes, slowly and patiently weaving separate buildings into communities. We've seen many photos from the Maple Ridge Archives and like many early settlements in BC, the conditions were rugged, inconvenient and somewhat desolate. During the late 1800's much clearing had to be done before areas of land were even slightly inhabitable. Maple Ridge wasn't connected to New Westminster until 1913 with the construction of River Road and the Pitt River Bridge. So the erection of a church was truly symbolic that a community had, in fact, started to emerge. Just as the Fraser River was a thread which connected early settlements, the church was the thread which united the pioneering community members.

The church was built in the new community by volunteer labor as the early settlers chipped away at making the building a symbol of permanence in the community. The church served as a place of worship and as an activity centre. It was undoubtedly a source of pride as the town began to flourish. Today The Church is valued as one of the few early churches in British Columbia clad with brick. A reflection of the bustling brick making businesses in the area, this structure is unique among the early pioneer churches of the region. At the time we went to visit, the inside was not open, however admiring it as it stood in the sun, steadfast for over 100 years, it was a worthy site to visit from the outside. Quietly unassuming it was once the centre of a bustling new settlement.



St. Andrews's Church operated as a Presbyterian Church until 1925 when it merged with the Maple Ridge Methodist Church and became St. Andrew's United Church. An interesting fact to learn was that the church steeple was built in 1934 to house the bell from the Maple Ridge Methodist Church. The bell followed the congregation to a new church built nearby on Dewdney Trunk Road. Even then, the individuals in the community valued preservation as is shown as the community found it important to preserve the bell. The church was acquired by the City of Maple Ridge in 1983 and it was completely restored by the Maple Ridge Historical Society.

As we couldn't go inside on the particular day we visited, we were able to chat with one person who lives near St. Andrews. We asked about any unusual activity as there was nothing notable in our research online. The gentleman, who was incidentally, walking his cat, said the only thing he heard in passing was that a couple of folks in the neighbourhood have heard voices of what sounded like a smaller crowd coming from what seemed to be the church grounds or parking lot at night. We weren't too surprised to hear this as the building is used as a hall for events and can be rented out. However, when this 'crowd' has been heard, nearby residence would look outside to see the source of the sounds, they didn't see anyone and the church itself was completely dark.



We're not sure if this is anything but a speculation or legend but it seems to be something which could warrant further digging. With a building so rich in history and being such a pinnacle of the community it wouldn't be a surprise if some of the early parishioners are still lingering in or around their beloved church. Is it a ghostly congregation leaving an ethereal church service? This year, we must make it a point to see the inside if possible. From the outside it feels like a welcoming place and the early stories of the settlers seems to reflect community spirit as the area grew.

In 1882-1883 the Williams Small Business Directory states:

"Port Haney is the place chosen for the railway station, and will soon it is expected become a village of some importance. All the steamboats in going up and down the river generally stop here. A number of steamers are now running to and from Yale besides the regular mail steamer

which runs up and down twice a week. Two of these are through boats to and from Victoria. At Port Haney there is already a licensed hotel built and kept by Mr. Ross, where board and lodging may be obtained. Below Port Haney is a public wharf where the mails from and to Victoria are delivered and received twice a week. At the mail landing are two stores for general merchandise. There is also a boarding house at which good board and lodging can be obtained, and it is expected that ere long other business places will be established."

So, through our research we appreciate that the community we live in was once a very exciting, bustling place with great opportunities. If we are able to visit the inside of St. Andrews Church later this year, if there are any ghostly pioneers still hanging about we have no doubt they will welcome us with great pride to their special place.