



# CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL A BRIEF HISTORY





*Christ Church 1889, the 'Root House'*

## A CHURCH IS BORN

On May 2, 1888, the first meeting was held to consider building a church in a residential neighbourhood in the west end of the small logging town known as Vancouver. This church would be an Anglican church but would be more protestant and evangelical than the already existing 'high' Anglican church, St. James located on the east side of the city. Several months later the first rector of the newly named **Christ Church** was appointed by the Bishop of New Westminster and the first service was held, without a church building, on December 23, 1888 at 720 Granville Street.

February 14, 1889, a building committee was formed to collect the necessary funds to purchase land from the Canadian Pacific Railway for \$2,500 and commence construction. The architect chosen was C.O. Wickenden, from Winnipeg. Henry John Cambie, chief engineer of the CPR's Pacific Division and People's Warden of the new parish, was a key negotiator in acquiring the property. Cambie was also the CPR executive who insisted that Vancouver be the termination of the new cross-Canada railway as opposed to the area's largest and Capital city of the commonwealth colony of British Columbia, New Westminster.

## THE FIRST SERVICE

By October 1889, Christ Church's basement was built and on October 6, the opening service was held for 52 parishioners. The church was heated with a coal-fire boiler and illuminated with gas lanterns and

Nave Roof  
1/2" scale

sconces. In 1891 the CPR objected to the unfinished building that had quickly been nicknamed the 'root house', stating that it was a detriment to the sale of the adjoining property. Christ Church was in imminent danger of eviction, because, to complete architect's plans for the stone church, they would need to raise approximately \$25,000. J.W. Weart, a parishioner and law student, devised a complicated scheme. He incorporated "The Christ Church Building Co., Limited Liability." The company was authorized to issue 600 shares of stock, each at a \$100 value. 100 shares went to the church in exchange for title to its assets, and 400 shares were sold to subscribers, most of them men in the congregation. This raised \$4,000 cash and an uncalled asset of \$36,000. Weart then went to the Sun Life Insurance Company and putting up the building company's assets as security, obtained a mortgage loan of \$18,000, enough to pay for construction.



*A Spring Wedding 1908*

### **BUILDING A FUTURE CATHEDRAL**

The corner-stone was laid by the local order of Masons on Saturday, July 28, 1894, and the dedication service for the completed church was held on Sunday, February 17, 1895. Designed and built in "Gothic Revival Style" with ceiling beams of douglas fir, arches and stained glass windows, the building was and is a wonderful combination of old world design and new world materials. The first organ was installed



*The First Renovation, 1909*

the same year and used an organ blower who was hired at \$5 per month. The first renovation took place in 1909: the building was lengthened and widened to the north and a balcony constructed over the narthex. This expansion increased seating to 1200.

By 1911 the first organ had already worn out and was replaced by a new Hope-Jones Organ. Manufactured by Wurlitzer, it had over one thousand pipes, four manuals (keyboards), and two electric motors.

Construction and enhancements to the church continued. In 1920, electric lights replaced candle chandeliers, and in the 1930s the lanterns now in the church were installed. In 1929, the Archbishop of New Westminster constituted Christ Church as the Cathedral Church of the Diocese and the cathedra (the throne of the bishop) and canopy located now in the northwest corner of the Chancel was moved from its former site, Holy Trinity Cathedral, New Westminster.

By 1930 the legal representatives of the estate of Cathedral benefactor Edward Disney Farmer purchased the 37-foot adjoining property at the north end of the Church to extend the chancel. The new chancel was not built until 1937 due to the depression. The church planned to build a bell tower (campanile), but in 1943, the city by-laws were changed to restrict church bells.

Then in 1949, after many alterations, a Casavant & Frere organ was installed. It incorporated pipes from the previous organ, and typically for the post-war

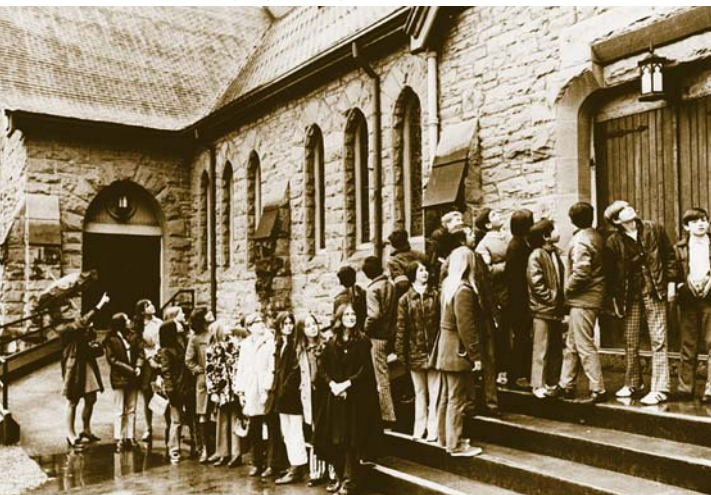
period, many other recycled materials. The Casavant featured 2750 pipes and a 600 pound electric motor. Its pipes filled the chancel pipe galleries and were hidden by a glorious façade of large pipes previously part of the Hope-Jones Organ. The Casavant had its ups and downs over its 54 year life span and now 1700 of its pipes live on, in the Kenneth Jones tracker action pipe organ, custom built in Ireland and installed on the brand new south gallery in 2004.

By the 1920s the old growth douglas fir floor of the original building had been covered up by carpeting and in the 1940s it was covered even more completely by industrial red linoleum. The beautiful cedar boards of the ceiling were covered up in 1958 by white fibreboard and painted strategically in the popular Tudor style.

In 1971 a feasibility study investigated the possibility of demolishing the existing church and placing it in the body of a multi-storied high rise complex designed by Arthur Erickson. Although the redevelopment was supported by the majority of the congregation, it was opposed by the public, and after much lobbying, in 1976 the cathedral was named a Heritage building in the municipality of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia.

By 1985, an additional stage of renovation had taken place. These renovations created new office space on the lower level and redesigned the northwest entrance way with further exterior additions of granite to continue the stone integrity of the original construction.

*A School group visiting the Cathedral in 1970.*





*Pre-Restoration, The Nave with Tudor Style ceiling.*

## RESTORATION & RENEWAL

In 1995 the congregation, with the generous support of the greater community, initiated a long overdue program of restoration and renewal. Phase one was the exterior building work including: the plaza, extensive repair of the original stonework (sandstone that had been transported to the mainland from the Gulf Islands), wheelchair ramps, lighting, stained glass window maintenance, information kiosks and landscaping. This phase was completed in 1998.

Detailed interior restoration, seismic upgrading and installation of a custom built tracker pipe organ was the goal of phase two. The church closed down for the first time in its history, April 22, 2003 and after a year of intense construction and restoration the Cathedral re-opened for worship April 4, 2004.

The most visible portion of the work is the rejuvenation of the original cedar ceiling and douglas fir flooring, hand-built by skilled craftspeople (many from the shipbuilding trades) recapturing their original lustre after 50 years of hibernation under fibreboard and linoleum, the legacy of an earlier renovation. The glorious pipe organ installed on the new floating gallery soars dramatically to the apex of the ceiling and dominates the south end of the church. Chancel alcoves, galleries, wheelchair ramps

and state of the art sound, light and temperature systems complete this ambitious project. Spacious, modern washroom facilities are located on the lower level at the foot of the new double stairway.

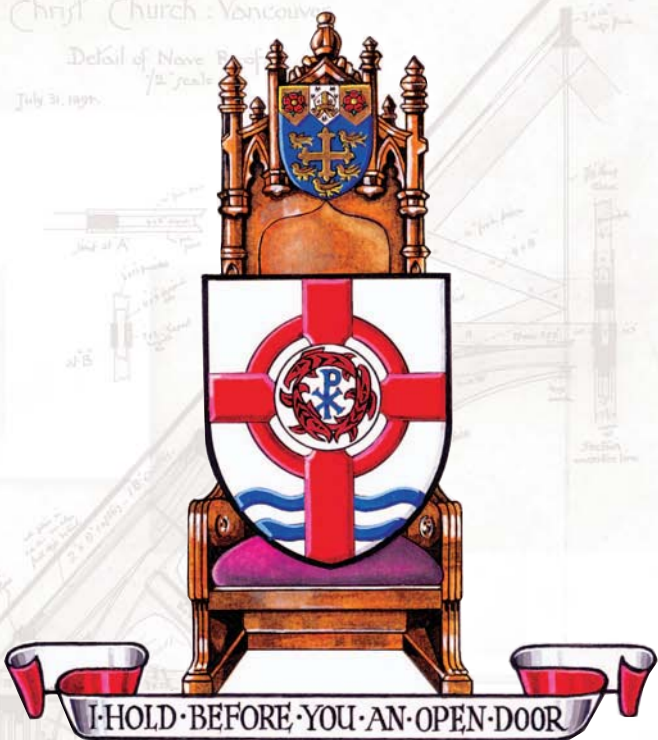
An elevator, staircase and upper level wheelchair accessible restroom will be built on the northeast corner September 2005. At the completion of this the third phase of the current restoration the cost will be in excess of 11.4 million dollars.

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Christ Church Cathedral and parish has been the location of many significant events in Vancouver's past. Funerals of prominent Canadians Pauline Johnson, 'Chunky' Woodward and H.R. McMillan were held here. Queen Elizabeth visited in 1952 when still a Princess, and Prince Charles with Diana, Princess of Wales worshipped here in 1986. The Cathedral has 32 beautiful stained glass windows from England and Canada, most of them memorials. Christ Church Cathedral is also a Regimental Church. Please visit the Repository for Regimental Colours found in the east Chancel alcove. Most importantly, the Cathedral is a place of great significance to many people in British Columbia's lower mainland who treasure its history, appreciate its beauty and strive for its continuation as a Christian witness in the heart of the city.

*Post-Restoration, gleaming cedar woodwork is now a highlight in the Nave.*





## THE CATHEDRAL HERALDRY

The Celtic Cross, which is found on both the Cathedral's exterior and interior, represents the roots of the Anglican Communion in the British Isles. The spindle whorl and the three salmon in the style of the Coast Salish nation represent the First Peoples of Canada and the original inhabitants of the west coast. The Greek letters Chi (X) and Rho (P) in the centre are the initials of the words *Christus Rex*, Christ the King. Our motto: *Open Doors, Open Hearts, Open Minds* is based on the title of the first sermon preached here by the Rector, the Rev. H.B. Hobson, on December 23rd, 1888. "I hold before you an open door" (Revelation 3.8).



### Christ Church Cathedral

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**Open doors Open hearts Open minds**