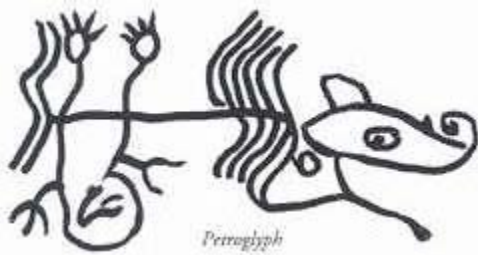


NANAIMO'S HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT:

The uneven shoreline, sheltered islands and sandy beaches of the east coast of Vancouver Island have been, for centuries, a place of beauty and plenty. Aboriginal people were the first to make this sheltered stretch of coastline their home. Eventually settling in what are today, Departure Bay and Nanaimo, the Snuneymuxw, a Coast Salish people, found food, fresh water, and winter shelter among the islands and inlets. It was this wealth of natural resources that encouraged the migration of Europeans to this coast many years later. Animals harvested for furs, forests for timber and fish for food were just some of the treasures found here, but it was coal, the black fuel of the 19th century, that would forever mark the heritage of Nanaimo. Today, the houses, commercial buildings, the city plan and the very shape of the land records the progress of a community that grew from a company coal town to a thriving port city.



The Snunéymuxw left abundant traces of their original settlement in the Nanaimo district, which are evidenced by the many archaeological sites in the area. Their homes, the first architectural structures to be built in Nanaimo, were great longhouses measuring about 100 feet long by 30 feet wide. Built with skeletons of log beams, the longhouses had split cedar planks for the walls and shed roofs with a smoke hole. Each longhouse housed several families, providing a place for sleeping, cooking and celebrating.

The east coast of Vancouver Island was first explored by Europeans when Spaniard Juan de Fuca sailed north up the continent in 1592. The English, represented by Captain James Cook, did not arrive until 1778 when Cook landed on the west coast of the island. The Spanish continued to explore the waters around the island giving the names we still use today to the islands and waterways. Commodore Alejandro Malaspina sailed into the sheltered bays around Nanaimo in 1791 and named them Boca de Winthuysen or Winthuysen Inlet-a name that was used until the British settled the area in the next century. In 1794, Captain George Vancouver negotiated the final Nootka Convention that gave the British possession of the island. It was not until 1843, however, that the British established Fort Victoria, their first island settlement.

It was the discovery of coal that soon attracted the British to the island north of Victoria. In 1849, the Hudson's Bay Company began mining in Fort Rupert on the northern tip of the Island. A few years later, the existence of coal seams was confirmed in, what is today, downtown Nanaimo. In 1852, the Company brought the Fort Rupert miners to Nanaimo to work the coal seams in the new mine. It is believed that Douglas named the new company settlement Colviletown after Andrew Colvile, the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. Colviletown was rough and temporary. Log cabins and bunkhouses provided shelter to the small, mainly male population. Buildings were constructed near the waterfront and close to the mine workings so that the men could easily walk a dirt track to work. Wharves for loading coal were built on the shore. A

sawmill was established on the Millstone River to provide finished wood for the mine and for housing. The Snuneymuxw people continued to inhabit their traditional village by Cameron Island until 1862 when they were removed from this location to their southern village site, now Reserve No.1. Many Snuneymuxw were employed by the Company. The small settlement grew in 1854 with the arrival of 24 mining families from England. To house the settlers, the Company erected a neat row of small, 600 square foot timber cottages along Front Street. These duplex homes, which featured a shared central chimney, were temporary and the families eventually relocated to more permanent housing on land leased from the Company.

For the next ten years, the town grew haphazardly with the mine and the shoreline governing its pattern of growth. Shops and businesses lined the rough roads named Commercial, Wharf, and Bastion Streets. In 1860, the town was renamed Nanaimo (derived from Snuneymuxw) and in 1862, the Hudson's Bay Company sold their mine interests and the town to the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company, a British-owned conglomerate. The deal included the mines, buildings and 6,193 acres of land.

The new company, under the management of Charles Nicol, very quickly instituted more order to the physical layout of the town. In 1864, the company hired an architect in Britain to draft a town plan based on topographical maps of the area which gave Nanaimo one of its most distinctive features, the fan shaped pattern of the downtown streets. Rather than section the town into a grid of regular rectangles, the streets follow the natural downward slope and bowl formation of the land. Such responsive planning was popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the construction of new towns. The radial plan also reflects aesthetic ideals popular in civic architecture at the time. City planning in London, Paris, and in newer American cities emphasized both beauty and reason. Wide avenues and streets were constructed to provide the most attractive sight lines and efficiently move traffic to important districts. In the case of Nanaimo, the radial plan leads the traveller to the primary business district and towards the natural beauty of the harbour.



Rowbottom Residence, 100 Cameron Road - (Miner's Cottage)

The town plan was the initial step towards Nanaimo's eventual incorporation in 1874. Once the plan was developed in 1864, the company auctioned off city lots. The new owners were the entrepreneurs, business owners, mine bosses and investors in Victoria who must have felt that Nanaimo had a future. Later, mine workers, living in company-owned houses, were offered five acre farms in the area west of the town. Purchased on a rent-to-own basis, the farms provided the miner's family with land to build a home and a means of supplementing their incomes which was especially important during the frequent mine layoffs. Many of the original farm homes, now

surrounded by modern housing, may still be seen in Harewood neighbourhoods. The Newbury Farm House at 678-696 Second Street is a good example.

The development of such a distinctive town plan and the sale of city lots indicates that after only ten years, Nanaimo's future was considered bright. Fishing, logging, lumber milling, sandstone quarrying and transport industries were all developed. Communities were forming around Nanaimo as other coal deposits were discovered and worked. The Wellington Mine, for example, was opened in 1869 by Robert Dunsmuir. He built a rough railway from Wellington to Departure Bay to ship his coal. In 1886, the E & N Railway, also built by Dunsmuir, provided the first land route between Nanaimo and Victoria.

Mining was also significant in reshaping Nanaimo's shoreline and harbour. Mine tailings were used to expand the land area along the waterfront and fill in the tidal ravine inlet that once divided the downtown along Terminal Avenue. The filling and shaping of the waterfront has continued into the 20th century with the most recent additions of Swy-A-Lana Park (1984) and the waterfront promenades (begun 1988).

Nanaimo's growth is also recorded in its architecture. The first permanent structure to be built in the town was the Bastion (98 Front Street). Its design is consistent with the initial fortifications constructed at the HBC trading posts throughout Canada. Built of hand hewn logs in 1852 by two French Canadian axemen, it has served as a jail, a store, a clubhouse, a museum, and most recently, an interpretative centre.



St. Paul's Anglican Church, 100 Chapel Street

By 1860, Christian church ministers had arrived, arguably providing a "civilizing" influence in a town populated primarily by rowdy, single men. The Methodists built their first church at Commercial and Skinner Streets in 1862. They were soon followed in 1865 by St. Paul's Anglican on its site at 100 Chapel Street. Both denominations reflect the predominantly English and Scottish population of Nanaimo. Likewise, the church architectural styles were drawn from British designs favouring such Neo-Gothic features as steeples and pointed windows and doors. The Canadian buildings, however, were built of local timber rather than costly brick or stone. As congregations grew, many of Nanaimo's original churches were eventually rebuilt. Today, the oldest standing churches are the Haliburton Street Methodist Church at 602 Haliburton Street and St. Andrew's United (originally Presbyterian) at 315 Fitzwilliam Street.

Between 1881 and 1925, coal was the primary fuel of the western world and Nanaimo enjoyed its most productive and prosperous years. The wealth and confidence in the economic future of

Nanaimo inspired a construction boom. The earliest buildings along Commercial, Bastion and Wharf Streets were modest timber buildings. As the town grew, the wooden buildings became more elaborate with attractive windows, decorative finishes and high false fronts as we see on Johnson's Hardware (39-45 Victoria Crescent) and at 33-35 Victoria Crescent. During these prosperous decades, brick buildings like the Earl Block (2-4 Church Street), the Rogers Block (83-87 Commercial Street) and the Hirst Block (93-99 Commercial Street) replaced their wooden predecessors. Providing a sense of wealth and stability, these brick structures also emphasize a proud consideration of architectural detail in elaborate cornices, bay windows and symmetrical designs.



Nanaimo Courthouse, 31-35 Front Street (Richardsonian Romanesque)

The strength and stability of Nanaimo are also felt in the design of Fire Hall #2 (34 Nicol Street), the Courthouse (31-35 Front Street) and the Bank of Commerce, now the Great National Land Building (5-17 Church Street). All three buildings are designed with a monumental sense of authority typical of British architecture. The brick firehall adopts the crenellated features of a castle or battlement. The large rusticated arches and stone construction of the courthouse give it visual weight and solidity. The colossal temple porch of the Bank emphasizes the power and might of the classical past.



Great National Land Building, 5-17 Church Street (Classical Revival)

Residential architecture also tells us something of Nanaimo's growth and prosperity. Many of Nanaimo's finer heritage houses, still standing and documented in the City's Heritage Register, were built between 1890 and 1920. These homes were distinguished more by their styles than by their building materials. Although there were a number of brick factories in the Nanaimo area

during this period, few residential buildings used this material. Timber was plentiful and likely the most affordable and efficient choice.

For housing style, builders and owners looked to Britain, eastern Canada and, in the early 20th century, to the United States. Building designs, specially for middle-class homes, were rarely produced by individual architects. Rather, the owners and builders found guidance in plan books, catalogues and building journals. One journal, *The Builder*, published in England as early as 1842, provided the most current British designs and floor plans. Canadians published their own interpretations of the current styles in *The Canadian Architect and Builder*, which began printing in Toronto in 1888. For lower-income homeowners and the “do-it-yourselfer”, whole house kits could be ordered from the Eaton’s catalogue or direct from companies such as British Columbia Mills Timber and Trading Company. The packages claimed to include all materials, from finishes to much needed instructions.



Harris Residence, 375 Franklyn Street (Late Victorian)

Three distinct architectural styles were popular and well recorded in Nanaimo’s heritage buildings. Late 19th century designs are noted for the Victoria style-evident in such homes as the Rowley Residence (426 Machleary Street), Wood Residence (133 Milton Street) and Harris Residence (375 Franklyn Street). The Victorian style home is often a one or 2 story house with complex rooflines, asymmetrical facades and bay windows. Decorative elements included fish scale or shingle siding (a substitute for the patterning of brick which would have been used in Britain) and scroll cut fingerboard on corners, eaves and porches.



Young Residence, 102 Fry (Late Victorian)

The Edwardian style, popular from about 1898 to 1910, is recognized for its simplicity and balance compared to the sometimes over complicated look of Victorian architecture. Less complex and decorative, this style tends towards a more symmetrical and classical appearance as

in the Schetky Residence (225 Vancouver Avenue), Rowe Residence (545 Haliburton Street) and the Residence at 467 Eighth Street.

The Victorian and Edwardian Style were direct imports from Britain and eastern Canada with their timber construction being the only vernacular adaptation. The third style, however, while rooted in Britain, is influenced by colonial India and the west coast United States.

Philosophically, the Craftsman style is based on the British Arts and Crafts movement of the 1860s. Founded by William Morris (1834-96), the Arts and Crafts style was noted for its rejection of the pretentious and often overdone decoration of 19th century classical and revival styles, Morris and his followers wanted to achieve a hand-crafted style that honestly reflected local culture and materials. Thus, Arts and Crafts architecture looked back to the simplicity of medieval building techniques and designs. Based on the medieval English cottage, house designs were rambling, asymmetrical formations that proudly displayed supporting timbers, brick work and thatched roofing.



Beck Residence, 610 Selby Street (Craftsman)

In Nanaimo, the Arts and Crafts style was introduced as the Craftsman or San Francisco style. In California, in the years preceding the first World War, the Arts and Crafts style was adapted to local materials, climate and a middle class market creating a distinctive style that, today, we see in every city on the west coast. The house designs were referred to as bungalows, a word derived from colonial India to describe a low, one storey building surrounded by wide verandahs. The Craftsman bungalow is a one or two storey building with wide overhanging and bracketed eaves. The front façade is usually dominated by a large verandah protected by an extended roof overhand supported by pillars. In keeping with Arts and Crafts principles, exposed brackets and simple timber details are the only decorations that are not just extraneous but reveal the structure of the building. The Craftsman style was popular in Nanaimo from about 1909 to 1925 when a growing middle class required housing. Examples of the most basic Craftsman designs are the Beck Residence (610 Selby Street), Galbraith Residence (164 Mount Benson Street), and Wilson Residence (697 Wentworth Street). More complex designs, which maintain the low height and horizontal emphasis of the bungalow, combined with varying roof lines and porches are the Rowbottom Residence (320 Machleary Street) and the Jenkins Residence (674 Wentworth Street).



The wealthier residents of Nanaimo, the mine and mill owners, were known to have built some very grand homes. Choice of style for these homes varied according to the taste and pretension of the owner. Examples of wealthier resident's homes include the Wilkinson Residence (305 Kennedy Street), McKechnie Residence (546 Prideaux Street) and Beban House (2290 Bowen Road).

As a mining town, Nanaimo had a very large population of transient single men. These men found board and room at the many hotels in the downtown and along Haliburton Street. Hotels such as the Globe (25 Front Street), Palace (275 Skinner Street), Queen's (34 Victoria Crescent) and Terminal (63 Commercial Street) were all built at the turn of the century and survive today because of their brick construction. Hotel pubs were also the main source of entertainment for single working men. The Occidental Hotel (432 Fitzwilliam Street) was particularly popular as it was the first pub the men would pass after they returned, by train, from the mines in Wellington and Departure Bay.

Nanaimo, like most British colonial towns, was a very segregated society and this is evident from its neighbourhoods. Within the British community, the management structure of the mines dictated the class divisions of the neighbourhoods. Miners' cottages were typically situated close to the different mine workings. These houses were sited on narrow lots along Fry Street, Strickland Street and in Brechin. Their homes, sometimes company owned houses, were modest in design and ornament as in the Rowbottom Residence or the Miner's Cottage (100 Cameron Road). The middle class, comprising mine managers, business owners and trades people was primarily located in the upper part of the downtown along Selby, Milton and Kennedy Streets. Upper class houses were located along the Esplanade, Nob Hill and Newcastle area. The monumental estates of the mine owners and wealthier members of the community were located on large pieces of land primarily to the north and west of town.

As with many North American communities, Nanaimo was a place of opportunity. Miners might begin their careers in the lowest paid jobs but could find new opportunities and wealth by starting their own businesses, moving into another trade or, even, by gaining promotions within the mine company. Such changes also meant moving to a new neighbourhood. A record of these individual successes is recorded in a number of Nanaimo's heritage homes such the Harris Residence (375 Franklyn Street) and the Adams Residence (547 Kennedy Street).



Wardill Residence, 755 Terminal Avenue N. (Streamline Moderne)

While segregation within the British community was defined by class structure, Nanaimo was also clearly divided by race. The Snunéymuxw were gradually pushed to the south end of Nanaimo to make way for the building of wharves. On their designated reserves they had their own churches, stores and schools. Erected by the government or by mission societies, these buildings reflect British rather than native Snunéymuxw architecture.

Attracted by work in the mines or business opportunities, other ethnic groups, including the Chinese, Japanese, Croation, Finns and Italians, came to settle in Nanaimo. While language created some barriers, the British population was always wary of integration. The most visible groups such as the Japanese and Chinese were forced to create their own communities with businesses and churches. The Japanese settled in the Brechin area close to the Newcastle waterfront where they operated herring salteries and boat works. The Chinese came to Nanaimo as early as the 1860s. Many came from the United States, the Klondyke or from building the Canadian railway. They settled in Nanaimo to work in the mines or to open businesses. The Chinese constructed buildings that combined their memories of southern Chinese architecture and the frontier architecture of the Klondyke. Using wood, their buildings rose two to three storeys high and many were faced with balconies on each floor. Most of Chinatown was destroyed by fire in 1960. One of the last remaining buildings, the Wah Ying Huk Jan Building was destroyed by fire in 2001.

As Nanaimo grew, it pushed its boundaries past the original town plan developed by George Deverill. By the mid-1970s, many of the original outlying communities, including Harewood, Cedar and Departure Bay, were amalgamated with Nanaimo.



Tom Brown's Auto Body, 375 Franklyn Street (Streamline Moderne)

One by one, the mines closed as oil gradually replaced coal as the primary fuel source. Nanaimo's location as the "hub" of Vancouver Island and the development of other industries saved it from becoming a mining ghost like so many other early British Columbia communities.

A pulp and paper mill at Harmac was built in 1950 giving the town, once again, a major industrial employer. Unlike the mines, Harmac was located outside of the Nanaimo municipal area and thus never had the same kind of physical influence as the mining industry. Today, with the coal mines gone, new industries define life in Nanaimo. Shipping, tourism and a range of industrial, commercial and service industries provide livelihoods for the residents but will leave quite different heritage resources to shape Nanaimo's future.

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