

Heritage

Church styles differ

by J. KENT SEDGWICK

For those with an eye for heritage buildings, British Columbia's historical landscape is dotted with a great number of wooden churches.

Most were built during the last half of the 19th century in association with missions to the Native people. Some of the finest examples are found in the Cariboo, Chilcotin and Central Interior in the former fur trade district of New Caledonia.

The Roman Catholic Father, Modeste Demers, was the first missionary to New Caledonia. He travelled to Fort St. James from the Columbia River with the Hudson Bay Company supply brigade in 1842. On his return late that year, he stopped at Fort Alexandria and supervised the construction of the first church in British Columbia.

Over the next half century, other denominations such as the Anglican, Methodist, and Salvation Army were active in different regions of the province.

For example, the Catholic Oblate Fathers (OMI) were prominent in the Central Interior and the Anglicans in the Skeena and Nass valleys. Each of these denominations had their own traditional church styles and now there is a regional pattern to the architecture of these historic mission churches.

The Catholics built in the tradition of the French Gothic cathedrals with a linear emphasis shown by the long, narrow floor plan and the tall towers and spires. The Anglicans followed the tradition of the English Gothic parish churches. They had blocky floor plans with a porch at the southwest corner and a substantial tower often crowned by "battlements".

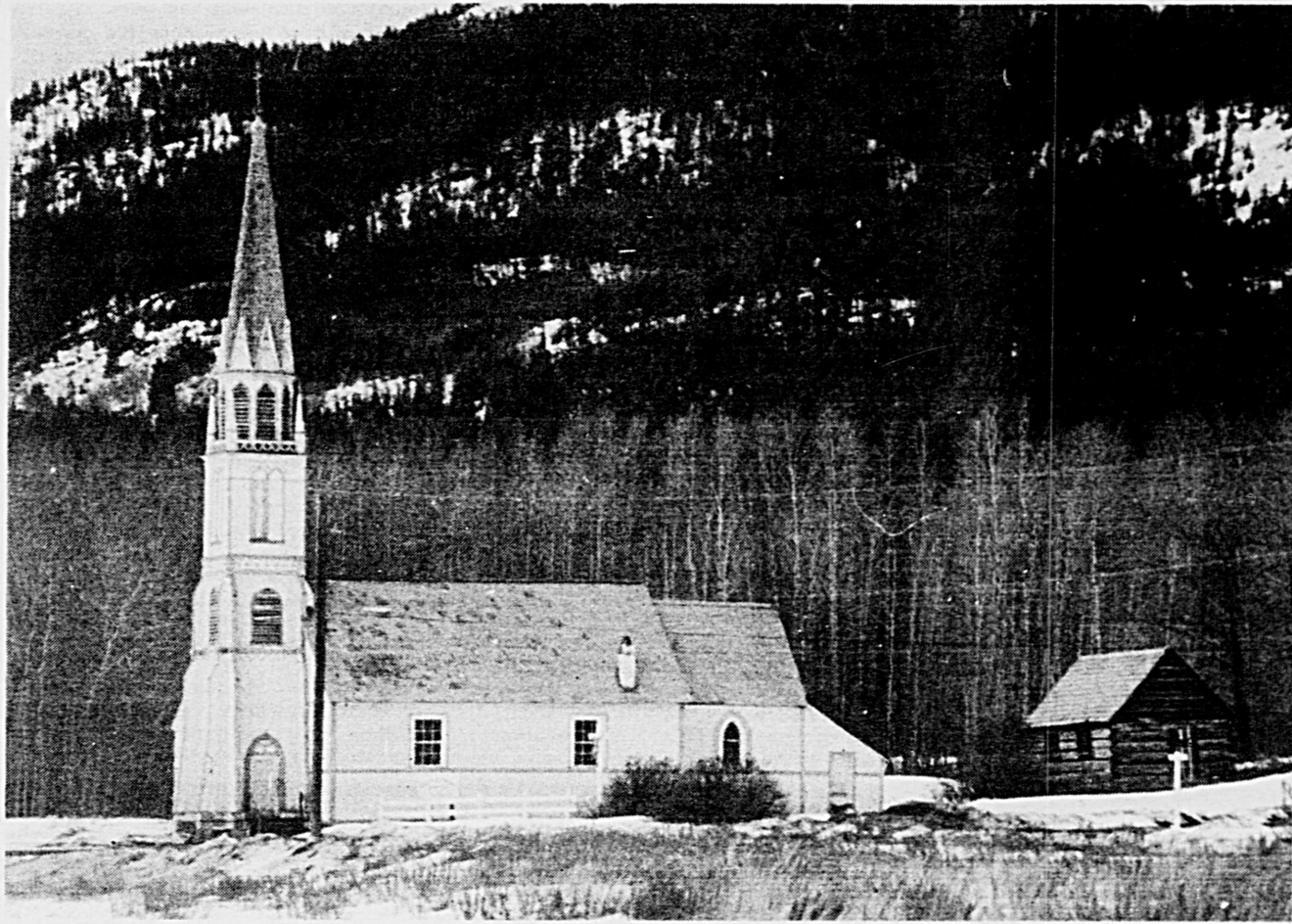
Delegates to the annual conference of the Heritage Society of B.C., to be held in Prince George in June, will have an opportunity to see examples of these distinctive styles of historic churches.

At Fort St. James, the Catholic church, Our Lady of Good Hope, is one of the finest examples of the vertical French tradition. Built of logs about 1873, it was remodelled around 1905 with a striking tower and spire.

St. Pius X at Shelley has three steeples, a main central one and two corner elements. The notable stained glass windows are reputed to have come from Europe.

In contrast, the English parish church tradition can be seen in Knox Church (1922) in Prince George. It shows the arched windows of the Gothic and the solid tower with battlements.

Another example of this form of tower occurs on the small Anglican church, St. Patrick in the village of Fort St. James. One of the finest examples of the Anglican parish tradition is St. Peter's, built in 1900, at Hazelton.



Striking spire on church in Fort St. James.



Archive photo of Knox United in Prince George. Note small size of trees.

Planning

FROM PAGE 4

inal plan and the result has been to make access more difficult than it was originally. The concept of the crescents is typical of City Beautiful plans and the same design elements are evident in the plan for Prince Rupert as well.

In addition, two short diagonal streets (also typical of City Beautiful ideas), which have since disappeared,

connected directly from First Avenue and the railways to Third Avenue, which led westward to Central Fort George.

In looking back on Prince George's town plan, three observations are notable:

- First, the town plan was a modest version of the American "City Beautiful" idea transposed into the Canadian wilderness.

- Second, as Expo 86, a world's fair emphasizing transportation, approaches, it is interesting that the railway townsites plan stemmed from

ideas seen at the Chicago world's fair of 1893.

- Third, now that Winnipeg Street has become a significant arterial route accessing the downtown, Seventh Avenue may finally fulfill its intended role in the town by becoming a major thoroughfare.

The Grand Trunk Pacific's town plan for Prince George is evidence that heritage is more than old buildings. It includes the ideas that result in the distinctiveness and personality of a community.

Prince George was an instant planned town with a difference.