

Statement of Heritage Significance-United Church

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The United Church of Okanagan Falls represents a colorful era in the history of the south Okanagan, the gold rush era, and it is a memorial to many of our community's ancestors. The church was original built in 1898 in the town of Fairview, BC. Fairview sprung up in 1890 as a result of the discovery of gold and became one of the largest towns in the south Okanagan at the turn of the century with a population of 500. However, as the gold supply diminished so did Fairview and in 1920 Oliver sprang up in its wake. Fairview was located on the benches above and approximately 3 ½ km west of Oliver. All of the buildings at Fairview were either torn down, or moved over time to Oliver, leaving only the cemetery to show that a town existed.

In 1929 Reverend Feir, a Presbyterian minister who was holding church services in a store in Okanagan Falls, spearheaded a movement to acquire the church building in Fairview. Under the direction of an engineer named Harley Hatfield, four sticks of dynamite were hung from the rafters of the church, the windows boarded up on the inside and the fuse ignited. This process loosened the nails so that it could be easily taken apart, transported and reassembled in Okanagan Falls. It was officially reopened as the United Church with a dedication service on January 19, 1930.

The Church was the only place of worship here in Okanagan Falls in 1930 so the United Church congregation held its service on Sunday morning and the Anglican congregation used it in the afternoon. It, also, served as a meeting place for several youth groups and the Women's Association, which was formed with members from both congregations.

Today this beautiful 110 year old church sits at the corner of 11th and Willow Street in Okanagan Falls. It has survived through unusual times in the South Okanagan: the gold rush; rise and fall of Fairview; and the flooding of Shuttleworth Creek in 1936 in Okanagan Falls.

The United Church has significance to the community of Okanagan Falls for several reasons:

1. It is a memorial to the hard work and determination of the ancestors of many of our present day community members who wanted to provide their families with a formal place to worship.
2. It has played a key role in bringing the families of our rural area together for 99 years to worship, to socialize, to celebrate births, marriages and to recognize the passing of a loved one.
3. It is one of only a very few buildings left in our community that dates back a hundred years.
4. Because of the unique method used in disassembling it, the church has become widely known as "The Blasted Church", which intrigues locals and tourists alike and makes it a building of interest.
5. It is a repository of local historical artifacts such as:
 - a. The pews were made from hand sawn lumber by Jim & Arthur Madden for the community hall in Fairview. Elliott's Hall served as a place for all of Fairview's social events, including the venue for famous BC artist, Pauline Johnson's speaking engagement in 1902. When the hall was torn down the pews were then moved to the Fairview church and moved to Okanagan Falls with the church.
 - b. The Baptismal Font was handcarved by a local orchardist and environmentalist, Carleton MacNaughton.
 - c. The stain glass window to the north was donated by Major Hugh Fraser in memory of his mother.
 - d. The stain glass window to the south was donated by Arthur and Rachel Bengel in memory of Mrs. Olive Cartwright.