

Mill Bay Historic Church

Location: 2851 Trans Canada Hwy, Mill Bay, BC

Formally Recognized: 2009/06/10

Other Names: Mill Bay Church and Historic Cemetery, Mill Bay Church, Sylvan United Church, Mill Bay United Church, Mill Bay Methodist Church

Construction Dates: 1897; 2012-



Front View of Church



North Side View of Church and Cemetery

Statement of Significance for Mill Bay Historic Church

Description of the Historic Place

The Mill Bay Historic Church is a white wooden one-storey steep-roofed church building with a prominent elevated entrance and arched windows. The church is surrounded to the north and the south by a cemetery. Situated on a large lot overlooking the Trans-Canada Highway, the church is located in the town of Mill Bay, British Columbia. This historic place includes the church, the surrounding cemetery and grounds.

Heritage Values

The Mill Bay Historic Church has significant value as an illustration of achievement for the early settler community, both in design and in spiritual development. A key aspect of the church's heritage values lies within its association to the lives of persons of historical importance to the Cowichan Valley. The church's central location between the communities of Mill Bay, Shawnigan Lake, and Cobble Hill provides a symbol of the area's early settlement patterns.

The Mill Bay Historic Church was built in 1897 on land donated by pioneers in order to fulfill the community's dream of having an official church. Noteworthy community members involved in the development of the first community church include the Copley, Garnett, and Chapman families, and Hans Peter Peterson; many of these community members were interred at the Mill Bay Church cemetery. They helped lay the foundation for a thriving community, evident by their many descendants still living within the Cowichan Valley.

Opened in 1898, the Mill Bay Historic Church functioned as a Methodist Church until 1925 and as a United Church for many years thereafter; it was the central community meeting place of the Mill Bay and Shawnigan Lake settlers, and thus greatly contributed to the development and settlement patterns of this area. A functioning parish for over a hundred years, the Mill Bay Historic Church continued to offer a central meeting place for the residences of the community. The restored church exists today as a representation of cultural tradition to the communities of Mill Bay and Shawnigan Lake.

Architecturally, this church exhibits a simple Gothic Revival influence. This architectural style is observed in the arched windows and steeply pitched gable roof. This is an important aspect to note because Gothic Revival was the most popular architectural style during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Canada. The architecture of this church, while modest, illustrates a great achievement in design and development for the Mill Bay community, as the early pioneers built the Mill Bay Historic Church by hand.

The building's prominent location, at a major intersection just off the Trans-Canada highway, makes it a significant historical landmark. The site is surrounded by mature trees, creating a natural sound barrier and serene atmosphere.

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Mill Bay Historic Church include:

- The original elements of the Gothic Revival style building including the arched windows and steeply pitched gable-roof
- The building's visible location off a major highway
- The cemetery
- The mature trees
- The Church and grounds as a community meeting place for over a hundred years
- Its position on its original location
- The building's simple massing, rectangular form and horizontal siding
- The gable-roofed prominent entrance



South Side View of Church and Cemetery



Headstone of Francis Garnett in the Cemetery

Historical Information

Timeline

- 1896. Clara Copley proposes the idea of building a church.
- 1897. Summer; Hans Peter Peterson donates \$50 for the building of the church.
- 1897. Summer; William P. Sayward donates land.
- 1897. Summer; Francis Garnett leads the construction of the church.
- 1897. Fall; Church is completed.
- 1898. May 28; Church is opened and formally dedicated by Revered Winslow.
- 1925. June; Mill Bay Methodist Church becomes Mill Bay United Church.
- 1928. May; 30th Anniversary of the church is celebrated.
- 1935. Renovation of church, led by Mr. Craig, Mr. Hawthorne, Mr. Dujjan, Mr. Blythe, Mrs. Berry, and Mrs. Frayne.
- 1935. June 13; Church is reopened with Reverend Burns.
- 1996. Mill Bay United Church and Shawnigan Lake United Church becomes Sylvan United Congregation.
- 1998. May; 100th Anniversary of the church is celebrated.

Important Facts

- Infant Lizzie Manley was the first to be buried in the Mill Bay Historic Church cemetery (1898).
- All early settlers were buried on the south side of the church; later settlers were buried on the north side.
- Noteworthy pioneers at rest in the cemetery include Hans Peter Peterson and Francis Garnett.



View of the new wheelchair accessible ramp

Current Information

Function

- Thanks to the generous donation by the Sylvan United Church, the Mill Bay Historic Church is now owned by the CVRD and managed as a South Cowichan Community Park.
- The cemetery is classified as a closed cemetery; therefore, no new additions to the gravesite are allowed unless previously reserved.
- Future use of the church will be determined through public process.
- For information on the Mill Bay Historic Church visit: www.cvrld.bc.ca/parks under Community Parks.

Construction

- The Mill Bay Historic Church was first renovated in 1935.
- A hall was attached in 1953, and torn down in 2012.
- In 2012, structural renovations occurred that consisted of raising the church and putting in a foundation and crawl space as well as upgrading the electrical system and installing a 2000 gallon cistern for a water supply to the washroom.
- In 2013, the washroom in the church was upgraded to current building code standards.
- In 2014, a wheelchair accessible ramp was completed.
- Interior renovations are slated to begin in 2016.

Heritage Status

- The Mill Bay Historic Church is provincially recognized for its heritage value on the BC Register of Historic Places.