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The little log church at Silva Bay

by E. Joyce White



To Gabriolans, it is affectionately known as “the little log church”, but the official name is Our Lady of Victory Roman Catholic Church, Gabriola; Mission of St. Peter’s Parish, Nanaimo; Diocese of Victoria.

The impetus to build a Catholic Church on Gabriola was from the Crocker family. Abraham Crocker was married to Louise Silva, daughter of John and Louisa Silva, and it was Abraham who persuaded his father-in-law, John, to donate the land to build a church.

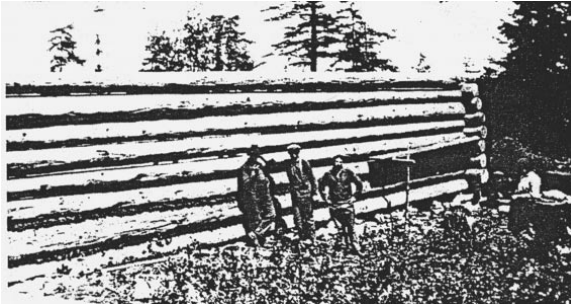
With the use of horses, Daniel McConvey, along with his son William, removed logs on the site in preparation for construction. Financing and labour were donated by Gabriola Island residents.

The log structure was completed on July 19, 1925, when Bishop O’Donnell of Victoria arrived on the new Catholic Mission Boat, *Maris Stellar*, to open and bless the church. Following this dedication, services were held monthly at the church with the priests coming over to Gabriola from what was then Kuper Island, now known as Penelakut Island.

Kitty Silva played the organ for the first wedding at the church. This organ has since been donated to the Gabriola Museum.¹

George Westarp recalls when he came to the island in the summer of 1974, the priest came from Nanaimo on Sunday afternoons

¹ Booklet: Our Lady of Victory—Past to Present.



One of the earliest, if not the earliest photograph of the church, showing according to the caption, Jack Fynamore, Abraham Crocker, and others. Dated 1912, but Abe would have only been 13 years old then. More likely is the early 1920s.

Peggy Lewis Imredy, *Three Schools*

to conduct Mass for island residents, and for the boaters docked at Silva Bay.

Imelda Cuthbertson also recalls evening services being held by the Trinity Fathers in the years 1984 to 1986.

When Ted and Phyllis Reeve arrived to take over Page's Marina in 1987, the church was not in use. At that time, discussions were being held between Roman Catholics and Anglicans on the possibility of holding services together. The Anglicans had in earlier years held services at the Women's Institute; the old South School building, which they converted to a church; and the United Church as they do again now.

The Reeve's daughter, Gloria, wanted to be married at the church, but it needed repairs. Phyllis Reeve remembers residents helping with the work around the church, climbing up to repair the roof cross for instance, almost always without charge, and whether or not they were churchgoers as it was "for the church". Gloria Reeve and her fiancé Ken Hatfield were married in the church on September 16, 1989.²

² The Hatfields now operate Page's Resort and Marina in Silva Bay.

Following the renovations, services began on Wednesday evenings, and later on Sunday mornings, with Roman Catholics and Anglicans worshipping together. One week, services were led by the St. Martin Anglicans, who also occasionally conducted a Lutheran service, and the next week, by the Our Lady of Victory Catholics. Two Nuns brought the consecrated host over from St. Peter's for the Catholic service, and the Rev. Donald Gordon and others conducted the Eucharist for the Anglicans. This arrangement continued until 2004, when a newly-appointed Roman Catholic Bishop to Victoria ended it, a painful breakup for the Gabriolan Christian community, but one that contributed to the foundation of the non-denominational Gabriola Ecumenical Society. On the 80th Anniversary of the log church, July 10, 2005, there was a re-dedication and special Mass with Bishop Richard Gagnon and Father Dariusz Zarebski, Parish Priest of St. Peter's Nanaimo, the co-celebrants.

In the grounds outside, there is a wooden crucifix sculpture by the late Alfred Kristianson entitled *The Shepherd*, a statue of the Virgin Mary fitted into a sandstone grotto, and a smaller figurine of Mary on a sandstone pedestal.





The Hatfields' wedding in 1989 in the newly-renovated little log church.

Presently, Catholics celebrate Mass every Sunday afternoon with a priest coming over from Nanaimo for the service.

For almost 90 years, the little log church has been serving the spiritual needs of Gabriola with church services, weddings, and baptisms. For all of these thanks should go to Abraham Crocker, his father-in-law John Silva, Dan McConvey, and the many other volunteers and donors for having the foresight and the will to provide the community with a church.

Acknowledgements

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*There is also more on the history of the church in June Lewis-Harrison's, *The People of Gabriola*, pp.184-6 and p.122. ◇*