

The Amelia / Cormorant Cluster sits in the middle of central Victoria like an oasis in the desert. These seven houses, dating to the late nineteenth century, stand surrounded by warehouses, high-rise apartments and fast food restaurants. They are significant largely because they represent an intact, period grouping. All are close in age and style and all are rhythmically aligned, close to the street and close to one another. They are all variations of the Italianate style, a popular style for homes of this period. The low roots, and bay windows are features of this style. Particularly notable and attractive were the Corinthian columns and pilasters which graced 1519 and 1521 until their theft just last year, and the Art Nouveau wood and glass doors at 1517. The wood frame and brick constructions employed on Amelia and Cormorant Streets harmonize well and further add to the rhythm and charm of the cluster. The Amelia /Cormorant buildings are living examples of history, each with its own unique story.

In the early 1870's, when the first of the Amelia Street houses was built this was a further edge of Victoria. The first owner /builder, S.T. Styles, was a contractor and Victoria City Alderman from 1886-89. He lived alone on Amelia Street for nearly twenty years. There are indications in city records that he owned much of what is now the Amelia / Cormorant Cluster. Styles came to Victoria from England in the early 1870's. He and his partner, John Kinsman, started one of the first building firms in the province, taking on such commissions as the New Westminster penitentiary and the naval buildings in Esquimalt. Styles may have been responsible for the building of 1519, 1521, 1525 Amelia and 836 Cormorant. (Styles is listed as "possible owner/builder" of 1527 & 1529 Amelia also, but with no supporting documentation.)

By the late 1880's, Victoria was growing and Amelia Street began to develop as a street of working class homes. 1525 was built c. 1886 and Assistant Fire Chief and Dominion Government Messenger Thomas Deasy was its first occupant. In 1888, 1527 Amelia was built. Henry Thomas, an employee of Bornstein's, lived there. By 1891, Thomas Deasy had risen to be the Fire Chief and given up his second job. A duplicate of 1519 but in brick was built at 1521, and Deasy moved from 1525 to 1521. In 1893, 1529 Amelia was built. Bill and Bessie Lucas and their large family lived there. Bill was a shoemaker and Bessie gave music lessons. The listing of occupants in the City Directories, in context with Bill's occupation, puts one in mind of the rhyme about the old woman who lived in the shoe.

Cormorant Street was still largely undeveloped. Thomas Hooper has his home at (then) 148 Cormorant Street, now the site of a parking lot.

Toward the turn of the century, the Chinese community began to expand across Douglas Street and build along this block of Cormorant. The Amelia / Cormorant area became an area in transition. In 1904, 840 (then 144) Cormorant was built, possibly by its owner James McGregor, who was a carpenter. Its style harkened back to the earlier Italianate and stick styles. In 1907, 836 Cormorant was built, probably by S. T. Styles. It stood vacant for a few months until the first of its series of occupants moved in. Both 836 and 840 were owned and occupied by various individuals, becoming boarding houses in the 1920's.

The Amelia Cormorant Cluster story is one of perseverance and vision, oft times in spite of overwhelming neglect. When 1525 Amelia was purchased by its present occupant, Claude Maurice, in 1973, it was surrounded by well kept residences. During the next 16 years, he held on to and maintained his property despite the growing neglect of those around him

and the blow of the overpowering B.C. Medical Services Building construction in 1975. The owners of 836/840 Cormorant Street, Jim Partlow and George Nagel, deserve similar recognition, both for purchasing under the shadow of the BCMS Building, in 1978, and for maintaining their structures in the face of years of neighborhood neglect. Gil Nicholls, owner of 1519, took over what may have been the worst possible scenario when he purchased 1519, 1521 & 1517 from the estate of the former owner. Both 1519 and 1521 had been allowed to fall into almost total ruin, occupied by penned dogs and vandalized to an unbelievable degree. The exteriors you see today are the results of his time, money and commitment. Owners of the Amelia houses at 1521, 1527 and 1529 are relatively recent, but so far the work done indicates a sincere commitment to the restoration of Amelia Street. 1521's owner, Bruce Maycock, is well on his way to a high quality period rehabilitation of the interior of his building, complete with mahogany floors and counters and period light fixtures. The Amelia Group, owners of 1529, have stripped the exterior of their building under guidance of Steve Barber, City of Victoria Heritage planner. Their work continues on the interior of their building. The most neglected Amelia Street building is 1527, which has suffered under years of tenant abuse and owner neglect. We can only hope that the new owner, Dave Vandy, will take advantage of the resources available to him through City Hall and the Hallmark Society to restore this unique building to its former charm. We urge the Cormorant / Amelia owners to unite and apply for assistance under the HARP program, and to specifically look at landscaping as one way to soften the effects of the surrounding buildings and to return some to the beauty and charm which has been lost through overdevelopment. Congratulations to them all!