



Esquimalt United Church, 500 Admirals Road

Barry F. King

LANDMARKS

Esquimalt church with a strong military association

Geoffrey Castle

The year 1911 was one of transition for Victoria. Building permits were up markedly and carpenters were calling for \$4.50 per 10-hour day. In late spring, a flock of sheep was seen being driven along a Victoria street and an airplane flew over the city.

It was into this scenario that Esquimalt United Church came into being on May 31, when 17 persons met at the premises of photographer John W. Jones at the corner of Esquimalt and Canteen roads, where the streetcar line terminated. Among those present were Rev. Thomas Keyworth, who began his ministerial career preaching at outdoor meetings in England in 1899, and Rev. T. Holling from Metropolitan Methodist (United since 1925) Church. Support was also promised from the officers and men of HMCS Rainbow.

As sometimes happens when churches are founded, a Sunday school was already operating. It was at the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home (now the Tudor House Hotel). Sunday services and Thursday evening prayer meetings were held in a room

over a store at Esquimalt Road and Constance Avenue, for which the \$20-a-month rent included electric light and chairs. For a manse, a small house was rented nearby for half that amount.

Miss Lizzie Rowe, who would be the church organist for the next 23 years, started with a borrowed instrument. Within a year, the present building site on Admirals Road at Lyall Street was purchased and construction of the wood-frame building took place. The Esquimalt Methodist Naval and Military Church, as it was first known, served the needs of both service personnel and the growing number of local residents. Since the armed forces did not provide base chapels until the Second World War, the ministers were frequently padres.

The forces connection was accentuated with naval parades held every Sunday and there was an army parade once a month. Financial support came from a 10-cent weekly pay deduction

among Protestant sailors and a five-cent deduction from the soldiers at the Garrison Barracks.

On June 11, 1936, the congregation attended a mortgage burning ceremony which took place with Miss Rowe, Rev. Keyworth and R. W. Davis, an original church trustee, present.

By 1950, the peaked roof of the tower was no longer watertight and had become a haven for pigeons. Consequently, structural alterations were made. A new organ was acquired in 1952. It commemorated Lizzie Rowe, also men who lost their lives serving aboard HMCS Fraser.

Two years later, Rev. Douglas Pilkey became the first full-time minister at Esquimalt United Church. The former nearby Ringstrom property at Constance and Lyall Steets was bought for constructing the Christian Education building. Since that time, alterations carried out at the church include opening up the balcony and installing stairs, relocation of the organ and pulpit, and construction of a chapel.

Geoffrey Castle is president of the Victoria section of the B.C. Historical Federation.