

Castle & King - blue book

The First United Church

QUADRA STREET AND BALMORAL

When the Reverend John Hall of the Irish Presbyterian Church arrived in Victoria on Sunday, 14 April 1861, there was no one to welcome him. As a missionary he had to search out others of the faith. There were already two Anglican churches and one church each for the Roman Catholic, Congregational and Methodist groups.

Hall's first service was held a week later with thirty worshippers in attendance at Moore's Music Hall, on the south side of Yates Street at Langley Street, but the First Presbyterian Church of Vancouver Island really began 3 February 1862, when fourteen men and two women met at Smith's Hall on Government Street, opposite W. & J. Wilson's. Later that year they purchased a building lot for \$1100 at the northeast corner of Blanshard and Pandora.

Two church trustees, architects John Wright and ^{George} Sanders designed the new church. The project was completed for a cost of \$6000 in October 1863. The nave measured 30 feet by 70 feet and the spire was 100 feet high.

With his mission completed, the Reverend John Hall left for New Zealand. Unfortunately, a schism developed over church dogma when his successor, Reverend T. Somerville, and two-thirds of the congregation split away, leading to the formation of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. This action resulted in the closing of the First Presbyterian Church on Pandora Street, opposite the Jewish Synagogue, in 1867.

When Christ Church Cathedral burned on 1 October 1869, the Anglicans accepted the offer of the trustees of First Presbyterian Church to use their vacant place of worship until

the new cathedral was completed in 1872. Again, a schism in the Anglican church in October 1874, saw Dean Cridge and his followers using the First Presbyterian Church until the Church of Our Lord was completed in 1876. Later that year, the First Presbyterian Church was re-opened under the minister-ship of the Reverend John Reid who brought many of the old congregation members back together. The members were a younger and more vigorous lot than most, and became well known for their basketball team and prize-winning choir group.

After a fire in 1883 which destroyed part of the church, architect John Teague supervised the reconstruction but later when it was obvious that the church was inadequate for a growing congregation it was sold. The building was used variously as a public market, auto paint shop, and a second-hand store before it was demolished in 1928.

The last service was begun 11 May 1913 at the old Pandora Avenue Church and concluded in the new Quadra Street building designed by architect J. C. Malcolm Keith.

With the union of the churches in 1925 this Presbyterian church became the First United Church of Victoria. After surviving fires and changing times, the 125th anniversary was celebrated in 1987.

