



The exterior of St. John the Divine Anglican Church, 2008.

St. John the Divine Anglican Church

THE ST. JOHN THE DIVINE ANGLICAN CHURCH, located on the northeast corner of Laity Street and River Road, holds the distinction of being the oldest church on the mainland of British Columbia. The church was built in 1859 at Derby by the Royal Engineers to cater to the needs of miners participating in the Fraser River gold rush. The lumber for its construction consisted of California Redwood that was brought up by ship to Derby as there were no sawmills in British Columbia. When the townsite of Derby was definitely abandoned as the new capital, the people at Yale petitioned the Governor Douglas asking that the church be moved there, but Douglas considered such a move—70-odd miles against the fast-flowing water of the Fraser River—to be impossible.

In 1881 the Canadian Pacific Railway started construction through Maple Ridge. Settlers, attracted by the new railway, began streaming

into the district and the Anglican parishioners decided it was time they had a church. The Reverend Thomas H. Gilbert, in charge of the Anglican Fraser River Mission and ordained by Bishop Sillitoe, was instrumental in bringing the church across the river to Maple Ridge.

The Bishop and Mrs. Sillitoe with Reverend Gilbert took their lives in their hands and were rowed across the Fraser in a boat, described by Mrs. Sillitoe in a letter as “of the crankiest description, dug out of a log. It leaked so much that the Bishop and I had to bail the whole time.”

The building was examined and though over 20 years old, was judged to be in good condition. In the fall of 1882 Samuel Edge took charge of some men and after dismantling the church, moved it with some difficulty on rollers down to the river bank. Here it was transported across the swift waters of the Fraser and downstream on a raft of its own timbers to the north bank. Then another tedious session followed with rollers, bull teams and windlasses as the church was drawn up a 30-40 degree slope a distance of 200 to 300 feet before being re-erected at the intersection of Laity and River Roads.

The interior of St. John the Divine Anglican Church with Reverend Charles Balfour, 2008.

