



The Treasures of St. Augustine's



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INTRODUCTION The treasures of St. Augustine's Church are numerous, valuable and deserve to be well-maintained. This brief, weekly series will discuss the history of St. Augustine's and feature some of the visible—as well as some less visible items and artifacts. As always, appreciation is enhanced by knowledge. For example, many people are aware of our lovely stained glass windows especially when the sun shines through and casts a beautiful glow, but very few have been able to look at them closely.



St. Augustine's Catholic Church

SOME HISTORY The original St. Augustine's Church in Kitsilano was located at the southwest corner of Arbutus Street and West 7th Avenue, now the site of the existing St. Augustine School. Our Church was not named after the renowned St. Augustine of Hippo, who died in 435 AD. It was named in honour of **Saint Augustine of Canterbury**, who led the famed **Gregorian Mission** to Britain in 597 AD, and who is also known as the **Apostle to the English**.

Some two hundred years after St. Augustine of Hippo published his famous *Confessions*, Pope Gregory the Great selected “our” Augustine—then a prior at the Abbey of St. Andrew in Rome—to embark on what the Pope knew would be a vitally important journey to England. Along with forty other missionaries, they arrived in Kent in southeastern England to convert King Ethelbert and his kingdom from Anglo-Saxon paganism to Christianity. Such was their success that by the seventh century, the Christianization of Britain was complete, and **Augustine became the first Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury**, and was canonized a saint in 604 AD. [The *Gregorian Mission* took place a thousand years before King Henry VIII provoked a major schism with Rome following his demand for a divorce from

Catherine of Aragon.] <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/St-Augustine-Christianity-England/>

In British Columbia, by the end of 1910, the Catholic order of *Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate* had already completed 50 years of service, establishing missions, churches, hospitals and schools throughout the Province. Having also built *Holy Rosary Cathedral* plus three parishes in Vancouver, Archbishop Neil McNeil invited the Oblate Fathers to establish a parish in the fast-growing Fairview/Kitsilano area. Using the words, *in gratitude at least, if not in justice*, the Archbishop officially deeded the Fairview-Kitsilano parish in perpetuity to the Oblate Fathers in May 1911. [With thanks to the Archdiocese of Vancouver Archives for much of this and the following historical information.]

The cornerstone of this first St. Augustine's Church and School in Kitsilano was blessed by Archbishop McNeil on July 23, 1911.



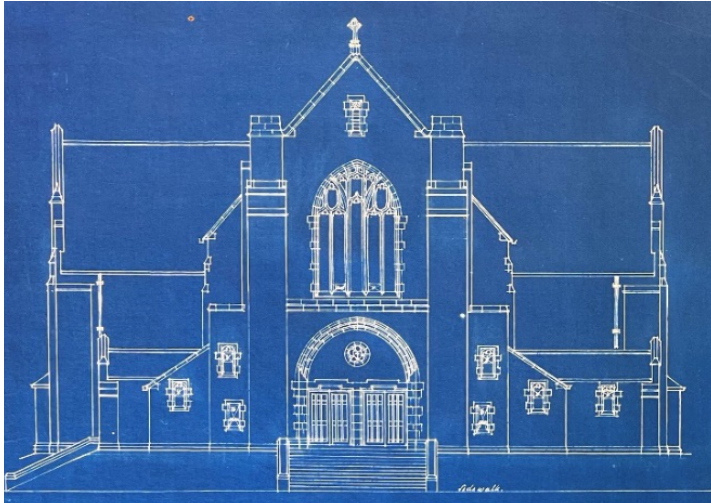
The first Church and School

The new building housed the Parish Hall on the ground floor, plus the School (administered by the Sisters of St. Anne) on the second floor, and the Church on the third floor—42 steps up from the sidewalk!

Two decades later and one block to the east, the cornerstone for the present St. Augustine's Church was blessed by Archbishop W.M. Duke in August of 1931 and the church was completed and dedicated on February 7, 1932, with Father Charles Fallon, the new Pastor, in attendance. [Vancouver's population was only 245,000 at that time, but many of those were immigrant artisans and skilled tradesmen—more as a percentage of the population than we see today—which partially accounts for the speed at which even

prominent buildings were able to be completed in those days. <https://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/this-week-in-history-1931-vancouver-becomes-canadas-third-largest-city>]

Our Church was designed by the local architectural firm founded by Englishmen Robert and George Twizzle, who were strongly influenced by Pastor E.W. Connolly (formerly the curate, organist, and choir director of *Holy Rosary Cathedral*). While studying for the priesthood in Belgium, Father Connolly greatly admired the *Cathedral of the Holy Saviour*, in Bruges, which is a magnificent example of Gothic Revival architecture.



Architect's 1931 Drawing of the North Elevation

Twizzle & Twizzle took design inspiration from various details of the Cathedral (but without the steeple).



Cathedral of the Holy Saviour, in Bruges

One of the Parish's darkest moments occurred in the early morning hours of June 2, 1980, when an electrical fire started in the church's choir loft. The organ and the beautiful arched window of stained-glass above the main entrance, plus the choir loft, were destroyed along with fire, smoke and water damage to many other areas and articles. It ended up being a total of \$700,000 in damage, which, in today's dollars,

would amount to \$2,527,000. <https://www.inflationtool.com/canadian-dollar/1980-to-present-value>

In a positive vein, the Parish felt that the fire was, perhaps, a blessing in disguise, and they took the opportunity during restoration to attend to numerous long-overdue deficiencies in the structure, including updating the furnace and the electrical wiring, re-designing the sanctuary layout and fixing improperly applied plaster on the many decorative arches. Church services were held in the school until the extensive renovations were finally completed during Holy Week in 1981, at which time, Archbishop James Carney celebrated Mass in honour of the re-opening.

Since 1995, the City of Vancouver has designated St. Augustine's as an "A-listed" Heritage Building, protected by a *Heritage Conservation Covenant* that is registered on title at the Land Title Office. An A-listed building is defined as having *primary significance*—with both architectural merit and historical importance—and having only very limited alterations to the exterior. Adding to its heritage significance, is the fact that St. Augustine's was originally, and still is, being used as a church.



How special is it to be A-listed? In a City that has about 100,000 buildings (excluding single-family homes), about 2,260 (2%) are considered worthy of historical preservation, but of that, only 272 are A-listed heritage buildings. <https://guidelines.vancouver.ca/policy-vancouver-heritage-register.pdf>

The present St. Augustine's church has been here for almost 100 years. It represents much more than just its impressive physical structure—it symbolizes a welcoming place of worship and serves as a focal point for our community. Yet, for a church to continue meeting these needs—and those associated with its Heritage Designation—the building itself and its surrounding grounds need to be well maintained.

Next week, a discussion about one of the most prized treasures of St. Augustine's—the beautiful stained glass windows.