

Ladysmith Heritage Walk II: Buildings highlights Ladysmith's iconic streetscape that was created virtually overnight, with many buildings transported from Nanaimo at the turn of the last century. This diverse group of heritage structures is a vibrant legacy and source of community pride.

BUILDINGS

THE EARLY YEARS

Ladysmith, originally named Oyster Harbour, was founded in 1898 by the coal baron, James Dunsmuir, as a community for the coal miners who worked in Dunsmuir's collieries at Extension, 17 km to the northwest. The Town was incorporated in 1904 – like many other coal-mining towns, Ladysmith experienced an early period of rapid development and attracted people from around the globe.

JAMES DUNSMUIR, THE MAN WHO MADE A TOWN

At the time of establishing Ladysmith, Dunsmuir was near the peak of his career, which included managing the family's coal and railway empire, being elected the province's Premier and then becoming its Lieutenant-Governor. Dunsmuir donated building sites to the four major Christian denominations for the construction of churches. The buildings identified at numbers 24, 25 and 26 are visible reminders of that action.

GROWTH, DISASTER AND UNREST

Ladysmith's early years were characterized by economic growth. However, along with this optimism and enthusiasm came a number of mining disasters at the Extension mine, including a fire in 1901 that killed 16 men, and an explosion in 1909 in which another 32 lost their lives. The optimistic mood was further shaken by the prolonged labour unrest of the "Great Strike" of 1912-14, which coincided with a general economic recession. The strikers fought for the right to unionize, and the strike was one of the longest in Canadian history. A dramatic turning point in Ladysmith's early history, it divided the town, led to unheard-of violence in the Island's coal-mining communities, and only ended with the beginning of the First World War.

BUILDINGS THAT WERE MOVED

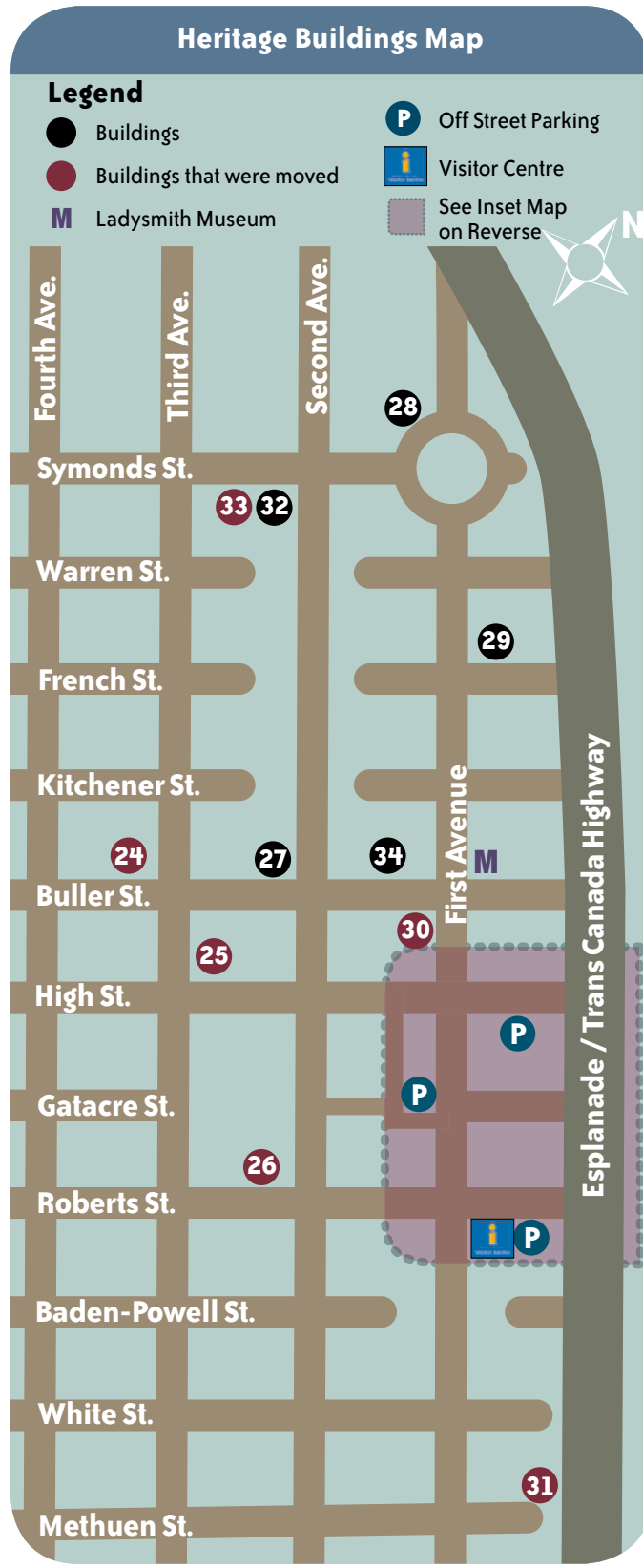
Many buildings were dismantled and relocated here from the mining communities of Wellington or Extension as the Dunsmuir coal business moved to Ladysmith. Imagine the effort that it would have taken for these first residents to move buildings and set up shop in their new community!

HOTELS AND BOARDING HOUSES

Ladysmith was home to numerous hotels and boarding houses. Hotels offered affordable living quarters to a transient population of single males, while their saloons and restaurants were lively social hubs. The buildings that remain are a reminder of their importance in Ladysmith's early years as a mining community.

COMMUNITY HERITAGE REGISTER BUILDINGS

Introduced in 2006, the Register includes places and buildings in Ladysmith identified as having heritage value or character. Many of the buildings are also represented on the Canadian Register of Historic Places.



Anglican Church

Arriving from Wellington in 1900, this was used as a school for the children of Anglican miners until 1902 when Ladysmith opened a public school. It then became the community's Anglican church. The parish hall was added in 1955. This and the following two buildings (see 25 and 26) sit on land that was donated by James Dunsmuir.



United Church

Moved from Wellington, this was originally a Presbyterian church. When the Presbyterians and the Methodists joined to form the United Church in 1925, the congregation chose this building as their church, and the Methodist Church (see 26 below) became their Church Hall. The attached hall was constructed circa 1952.



Methodist Church

The Methodist Church was built in Wellington in 1876 and moved in 1900. When the United Church was formed (see 25 above) this building became the community's United Church Hall. Eventually it became a private residence.



Convent School

The only original school building left in Ladysmith, the Convent School opened in 1910 with several classrooms, a music room, vestry, chapel, dining room, kitchen, pantry, parlour and chambers. Apart from an addition on the west side, its exterior is largely unchanged. The school closed in 1970. The building is now an apartment block.



Aggie Hall

Built in just seven weeks, the Agricultural Hall, or Aggie, has long been the heart of Ladysmith's social life, hosting community and sporting events. Rock legends Buddy Holly and Jerry Lee Lewis played here. It is also home to the Air Cadets, who were instrumental in restoring the building in the 1980s.



Eagles Hall

Ladysmith's first newspaper was published here in 1901. The building became a barracks for Lt. Col Arthur Currie's 5th Reg Canadian Garrison Artillery, brought in to restore order after the 1913 riots. In 1932 it was bought by the Native Sons and Daughters, and has been a hub of community social life ever since.



The Ladysmith Inn

A small creek that ran underneath the building was used to cool kegs of beer here in one of Ladysmith's oldest hotels. The original name, the New Western Hotel, remains embedded in the floor at the entrance, and in the pub the original ceiling is intact.



Extension Hotel

So-called because it was moved from the town of Extension, this is one of the many hotels that once lined the Esplanade (now the Trans Canada Highway). In 1910, as the town prospered, this modest wooden building was improved, the brick exterior was added and it was renamed the Bayview. It is now an apartment block.



1040 Second Avenue Residence

Built by George Cassidy, this is possibly Ladysmith's very first house. Cassidy was a provincial constable circa 1900-1915; the Cassidy district north of Ladysmith is named after one of his cousins.



209 Symonds Street Residence

Originally built in Extension and relocated to Ladysmith in 1900, this is a typical example of the many houses moved from Wellington and Extension when Dunsmuir established his new company town. It was owned by the Johnsons, one of Ladysmith's original families.



112-122 Buller Street Cottages

These are typical examples of the small cottages and residences built for single miners or married miners without children. The larger, barrack-like structures, such as the one shown here, would have been divided into single rooms for bachelors.



Acknowledgements

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Ladysmith Heritage Revitalization Advisory Commission
 Building inventory from R Goodacre (1990) A Walk Down Memory Lane, Ladysmith Heritage Inventory Historical photos courtesy of the Ladysmith Archives

From our past

Mining was a dangerous business. The town's first hospital, depicted below, was built on Fourth Avenue in 1911 with financial support of the miners' Accident and Burial Fund. It was demolished in 1957 to make way for the current Ladysmith Community Health Centre.



Built in 1902, the Public School overlooked the town and harbour from its site on Third Avenue. It was demolished in 1958 to make way for the current Ladysmith Intermediate School.



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TOWN OF LADYSMITH
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Walkem and Hall Buildings

Realtor W. W. Walkem, twice mayor of Ladysmith, purchased this building in 1919. Next door, J. X. Smith ran a café downstairs, while out back he raised the chickens he served in the cafe. He also rented out upstairs rooms where less respectable conduct – involving gambling and related activities – took place.



1 1910 & 1906

Trading Company

Residents purchased dry goods, everything from boots to diapers, from this old-fashioned department store for over a century. For decades, the iconic lettering on the façade told people, including airplane pilots, they had arrived in Ladysmith. The business was operated by the Rogers family from 1922 to 2009.



2 1904

Travellers Hotel

The size and detail of this lovely Edwardian building mark Ladysmith's transformation from a mining boom town to a bustling and prosperous commercial centre. The striking symbols on the front façade symbolize good luck in Sanskrit. Although they resemble the German swastika symbol, they were a common decorative element of the era.



3 1913

Sutherland Block

The attractive continuous façade hides the fact that until 1936 or so, these were really two buildings of different heights. For many years – perhaps as far back as 1901 – one half of this building was a bakery.



4 pre-1908

Nicholson Block

This Edwardian building has seen continuous commercial use for over a century – the Wigwag restaurant has been in operation since circa 1925. During the Great Strike, the United Mineworkers of America held meetings upstairs to discuss miners' demands for better wages, working conditions and the right to unionize.



5 1909

Island Hotel

One of the first hotels to be built here, "The Europe" underwent a dramatic architectural transition in 1913 to take its present form. It had been a two-storey wooden building with a balcony. Overlooking the railway station, it was an important part of the original cityscape. (see archive image on the cover)



6 1900

Mainstreet Building

This Edwardian Classical Revival style building with its symmetrical façade, colourful brickwork, and decorative details, symbolized the downtown's growing prosperity. The land originally belonged to dry goods and grocery baron Simon Leiser. During the age of horse-drawn traffic, a livery stable was located here.



7 1922

Four Shops

This run of four shops (see picture to the right and numbers 8 to 11 below), built between 1901 and 1909, are relics of First Avenue's early commercial streetscape. The larger two-storey buildings had shops at street level and living quarters above, while to the rear, a slaughterhouse belonging to the butcher's shop (see 9) added even more colour to the locale.

516 First Avenue

This building was moved several feet south in the 1950s to make room for the expansion of the neighbouring building. It was the first building to be renovated as part of the Town's Heritage Revitalization program of 1985.



8 1909

Johnson's Shoes Building

Built in 1901, this was once a butcher shop, but became a shoe repair shop run by 'Johnny the Jazz', so nicknamed because he loved to dance. For many years it was Johnson's Shoes – the family lived upstairs – and is still owned by a member of this pioneer family.



9 1901

530 First Avenue

This simple boom town store is a survivor from the community's earliest days. The tiny shop is made to appear much larger thanks to a false front. Several similar buildings (see 13, 16, 18, 19, 20) are still dotted around the downtown.



10 circa 1900

532/534 First Avenue

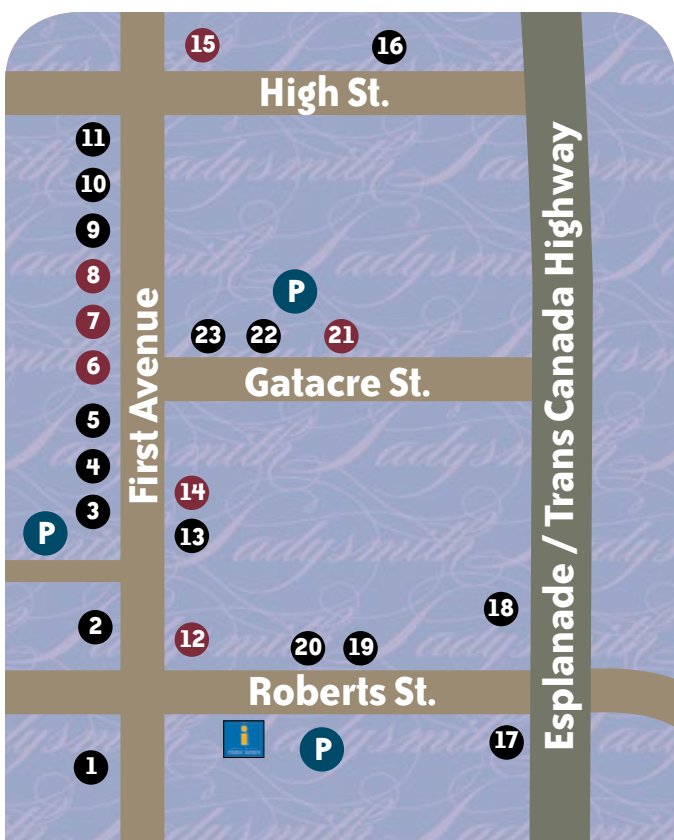
Like its neighbours, little has changed for this wood-frame building over the last hundred years – it has been home to a long succession of retail shops at street level, and offered accommodation above.



11 1904



First Avenue from High Street to Roberts Street has long been considered the iconic centre and heart of Ladysmith. Although from different eras and of varying styles, these buildings create a cohesive streetscape and significantly contribute to the historic character of the commercial core.



Legend

- Buildings
- Buildings that were moved
- P Off Street Parking
- i Visitor Centre

Nicholson Building

Ladysmith's first bank – The Canadian Bank of Commerce – opened on this site in 1902. It has also been a liquor store, furniture store, second hand store and Cedar Econo Mart. Originally this was three separate buildings – you can see the original form from the back.



12 1901

Nicholson House

Converted to a store in the 1920s, this was built by Don Nicholson as a three-room house for his bride. Nicholson started out in the mines, but quickly achieved prominence as a contractor (he built the first hospital as well as the many 'Nicholson' buildings around town) and as mayor.



13 1900

Ladysmith Hotel

This building is back to front – it moved from across the street, but was not turned around. Chris and Annie Stevens, who made a fortune in the Alaskan gold rush, owned it. In 1900 they used their money to buy much of what would eventually become downtown Ladysmith from the E&N.



14 1900

Temperance Hotel

Outwardly, little has changed for the Temperance – the only town hotel that didn't serve liquor. During the 1913 riots, striking miners exploded a bomb nearby to intimidate strikebreakers lodging inside; and it served as an emergency ward during the flu epidemic of 1918-19. Its wood-frame construction is typical of the early days.



15 1900

Jessup's Drug Store

This false-fronted shop is one of the few examples left of the many small shops built on half-size lots during Ladysmith's early years. Buildings like this would have once lined High Street. Mr Jessup ran the town's first drug store and first library from here.



16 1900

Old Post Office

Virtually unchanged since it was built, this former post office and customs house became an instant landmark that architecturally signalled the rising status of Ladysmith – its first post office was a boxcar near the railway station. At a cost of \$45,000, it was the most expensive building of the era.



17 1908

Old Telephone Office

Once a cigar factory, in the 1920s and 1930s this was the town's telephone office. The small building on the left was added so people could make private calls. Telephone service arrived in Ladysmith in 1904, and rates were high – a one-minute call to Nanaimo cost 50 cents.



18 1903

18 Roberts Street

This is a fine example of an early, single-storey false-fronted commercial building. It was built by John Stewart, a prominent citizen who served as the town's first bank manager, first city clerk, secretary of the Board of Trade and Commerce and as a magistrate known for being strict.



19 1905

28a Roberts Street

John Stewart opened his first real estate and insurance office here in 1903. In the evenings it became the gathering place for members of the Board of Trade and Commerce who were keen to see Ladysmith incorporated as a city. As such it is perhaps the 'birthplace' of the town.



20 1901

Jones Hotel

Built in Wellington in about 1881, this hotel catered to single miners, and later, loggers. It was dismantled and moved by rail to its present location in 1900. Outhouses and bathhouses would have stood out back. It escaped the 1912 fire that destroyed the rest of the street.



21 1900

Masonic Hall

This brick building replaced the original St. John's Masonic Lodge destroyed in the 1912 fire. Since 1901, the Masons have met upstairs, and they provided room for Ladysmith's first school.



22 1913

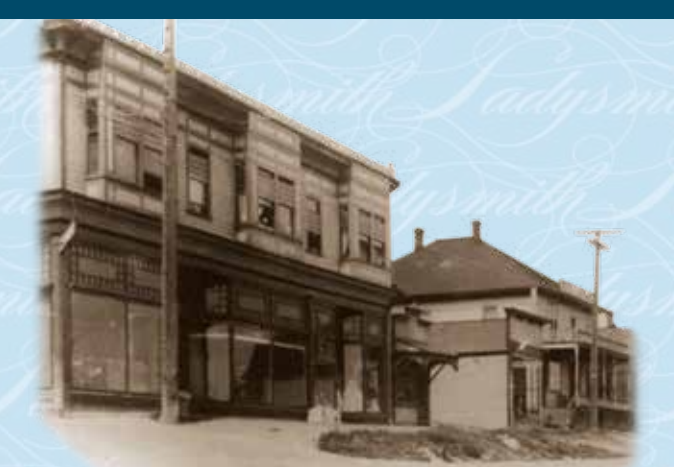
Extension Mine Explosion

On October 5 1909 an explosion at Extension Mine #2 killed 32 men, most from Ladysmith. Mining was a dangerous occupation, but the scale of this tragedy left few in the community untouched – funeral corteges passed through town to the cemetery continuously for two days.



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From our past



The photo above shows the Trading Company 2 on the left and the Ladysmith Hotel 14 on the right when they were situated on the same side of First Avenue, before the Ladysmith Hotel was moved across the street to make way for the Travellers Hotel 3.



Looking up Gatacre Street from Esplanade, the hotel at the end of the street is the Island Hotel 6 as it would have looked in its early years to people arriving from the train station. The dark building to the right, above the people, is the Jones Hotel 21.



The Old Post Office 17 shortly after it was constructed. It has changed remarkably little over the years.