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HISTORIC Downtown Prince George

- This is a virtual tour of Prince George's Historic Downtown. It includes both historical and recent photographs to illustrate the difference between the past and the present.
- A new feature this year is information about the public art along the tour route.



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Historic Downtown

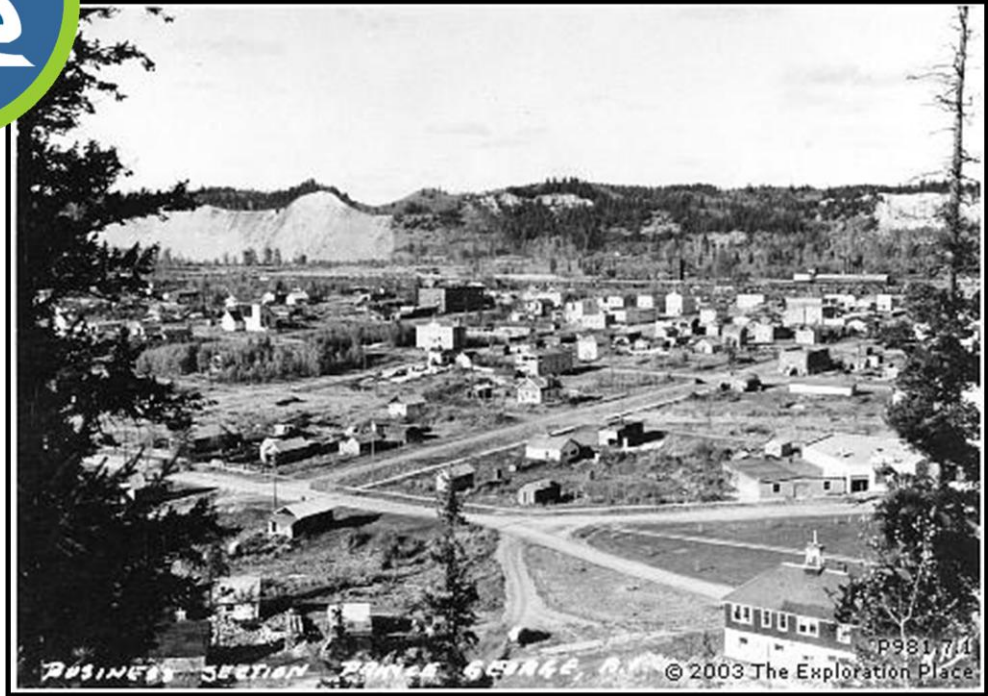


- The tour goes out of the civic plaza, along 7th until reaching City Hall and the Cenotaph and the beginning of George Street. It then goes down George Street until 3rd Avenue. Then, the tour follows 3rd avenue for 3 blocks until it reaches Brunswick Street. Brunswick Street until 5th Avenue, back towards the library for one block along 5th, left down Quebec and then right onto 4th Avenue before turning right onto Dominion and heading back to the Civic Plaza and the Library for the end of the tour.



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History of Prince George



- Downtown Prince George is on the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh, a Carrier nation whose name means 'People of the Two Rivers'. The two rivers are the Fraser and the Nechako, which meet to the north east of downtown. The confluence can be seen from the rail yard which is past First Avenue.
- Simon Fraser founded Fort George in 1807. The Hudson's Bay Company used to send workers who were out of favour here and Fort George was known as 'Little Siberia' for that reason.
- There was a First Nations village on the site as well, where Fort George Park is now.
- The first train came into Prince George in 1914 and changed the town forever.
- Let's start our tour off at the main branch of the Prince George Public Library.



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Bob Harkins Branch



- Completed in 1981, the building was the result of an architectural contest. The original plans included an Art Gallery and a Performing Arts Centre in the same building but those parts were never completed.
- The library building met opposition and it took two referendums before it was approved
- Named the Bob Harkins Branch in 2001 in honour of lifelong library supporter, community volunteer, library trustee, politician and broadcaster Bob Harkins.



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Rosée du Matin



*Photo
provided
by the
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George*

- Made by Marc LaCaille
- Placed in 2010, made of fibreglass and acrylic paint, 2m high
- The name means 'morning dew' in French. This eagle is part of a series of 'Eagles in the City' that were painted and sold to raise money for the BC Lions Club which is a charity that helps children with disabilities.



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Two Rivers Art Gallery



Photo provided by the City of Prince George

- Completed in 2000
- The building is symbolic in design and inspired by the geography of the area. The sloping roof, arching ribs, and forecourt of boulders and shrubs symbolize the cut banks and riverbeds of the Nechako and the Fraser. The ribs, made of Douglas fir, represent the importance of the forest industry to the area.
- Free admission on Thursdays



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Balance



*Photo
provided
by the
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George*

- Made by Peter von Tiesenhausen
- Placed in 2009, 5m high
- The human figure was carved with a chainsaw into a tree trunk and then cast in iron. The tree part was charred, before being cast in bronze. The two trees used for this statue both died because of a mountain pine beetle infestation.
- This statue is meant to embody the hope for a thriving ecosphere in balance. It reflects humanity's position as entwined with a single, dynamic global system.



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Totem Pole



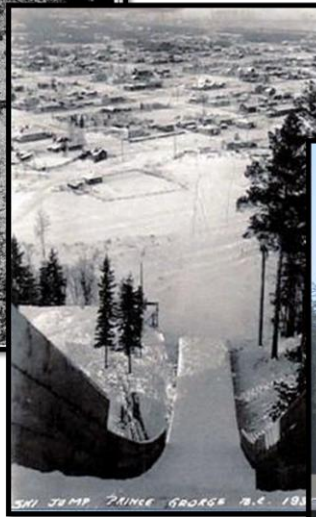
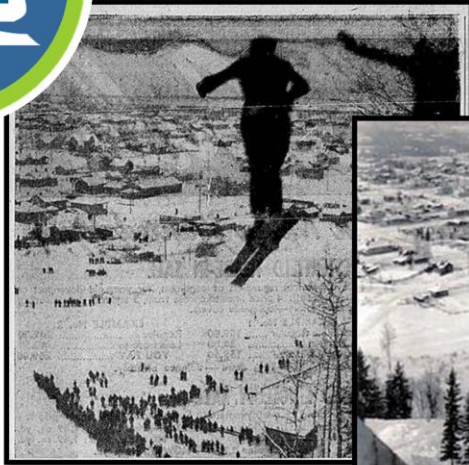
*Photo
provided
by the
City of
Prince
George*

- Called the 'Millennium Unity Pole', made by Ronald A. Sebastian
- Placed in 2000, 10 m high, made of cedar
- The totem pole's story is read from bottom to top.
- The Bear is one of the main house groups of the Carrier Nation. The bear's stomach is a hollowed cave out of which the four main house groups - wolf, frog, grouse and fireweed- emerge. This symbolizes Aboriginal peoples coming out of the hibernation and emergence from oppression.
- Four humans painted black, yellow, white, and red represent all the peoples from all four directions of the earth. The four colours also represent the four futures: love, honour, trust, and respect. The red female figure represents equality and recognizes the importance of women in the family and community. Salmon flowing through humans represent the rivers and waters, the source of one of the main foods that nurture our bodies.
- The Beaver is for the Canadian emblem, the symbol of all Canada united.
- The Eagle holding feather symbolizes freedom and represents the cleansing of the people and the land. On each of the eagle's wings are two watchmen guarding the land and watching for enemies or invaders. There is also an eye on the wing representing all our ancestors' spirits who witness the future.
- The entire pole is an expression of unity and a celebration of the multicultural and aboriginal nature of Prince George.



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Connaught Hill Ski Jump



- Trees were cleared from Connaught Hill in 1920 to give residents a place to toboggan and ski.
- In 1930, the city commissioned a trestle ski jump, made to Olympic standards. It was illuminated for night-use and was the 2nd illuminated ski jump in the World (after Norway). A good jumper would be able to fly over 150 feet (more than 4 totem poles). The original ski jump blew down in 1938.
- During the 1950s, Connaught Hill was a winter sport paradise with its sledding hill, slalom course, and a curling rink at the base of the hill. The winter sports eventually moved to other locations in and around the city
- During the busiest times on the hill, the city would close Patricia Blvd to keep the vehicles from getting in the way.



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Terry Fox



*Photo provided by
the City of Prince
George*



- Made by Nathan Scott, who also created the Bridget Moran statue we will see later
- Placed in 2005, life-size, made of bronze powder suspended in resin with a structural network of rebar embedded fibreglass.
- On Sept 1, 1979, when he was 21, Terry Fox came to Prince George to participate in the Prince George to Boston Marathon. Missing his right leg due to cancer, Terry was determined to complete the marathon's 17.5 mile course (from here to the Hart and back). He came in last place by only 14 minutes. At the banquet after, Terry revealed his hope to journey across the country raising awareness and funds In hopes of finding a cure for cancer. In early April 1980, Terry left the west coast for the east to begin the journey across the country. He ran for 143 days, from Newfoundland to Thunder Bay, Ontario, before he had to stop. He died the next year from lung cancer.



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Centennial Fountain



Photo provided by the City of Prince George

- Made by Gwen Boyle, Naomi Patterson, and Gino Lenarduzzi
- Placed in 1967, fountain removed in 2007
- 8.5 m high, made of concrete and Venetian glass tile
- Made to celebrate Canada's 100th birthday, the mosaic shows settler history



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En Cha Ghuna (He Too Lives)



Photo provided by the City of Prince George

- Made by Robert Frederick (canoe) and Jennifer Pighin (tile mosaic)
- The tiles were done in 2011, and the canoe was placed several months later in 2012. The canoe is 16 feet long and the mosaic is 25 feet long.
- The name means ‘showing respect’ in Carrier. The sculpture was sponsored in part by the Lheidli T’enneh band.
- Canoe is carved with images recounting a First Nation’s legend. A fibreglass casting replica was made of a traditional dugout canoe made from a cottonwood tree. The complimentary tile mosaic shows eleven life-size local fish.



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City Hall



- Prince George started with a rivalry between towns.
- Central Fort George, around where Spruceland Mall is today, was a family-oriented, no-alcohol town with a prompt postal service and big dreams of prosperity and growth.
- The original town site, South Fort George, by Fort George Park, was a bachelor town, with most residents working as construction workers, and included many bars, gambling houses, and brothels.
- When the railroad surveyors showed up, they looked at the land surrounding each town site as potential sites for the railway line. They ended up choosing neither. Instead in 1912, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway bought land between the two George's, where downtown Prince George is today, from a First Nations band, who were then relocated to the Shelley area. The railway bought the land at \$91/acre (more than \$2000/acre in our money).

- The new town site of Prince George's borders excluded both Central and South Fort George.
- The first train arrived in Prince George on January 27, 1914 bringing the new town and Fort George to life.
- Prince George was first incorporated and held its first elections in 1915. W.G. Gillett, a construction contractor, became the first mayor. The city's name was also voted on to be either Prince George or Fort George and Prince George won overwhelmingly (153 to 13).
- A temporary city hall was found north of Edmonton Street. A newspaper found out that it was a former bordello that had been moved from South Fort George. It had only been a bordello for a single day in the city but it was still as scandal.
- As a result a brand new city hall was built here in 1918 which served the city until it was replaced with the current city hall building in 1967. Since then, there has been a three storey addition added in 1975.
- At the official opening ceremony for the new City Hall back in 1967, a photographer had placed a picture of a pinup girl beneath the cloth where the official plaque should have been. The mayor removed the cloth and was shocked at what he saw. The photographer took a candid picture, which was printed in the newspaper, but the photographer was fired for setting it up.



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Ed Delorme's Auto Services



- Even though Prince George was a small, bush town, the early residents of our community were very excited about cars. They put the majority of the garages and dealerships in a prominent location, right in front of city hall. Ed Delorme's garage was built in the 1940s.



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Cenotaph



- Prince George had no cenotaph until 1958 when the public expressed its desire for a permanent war memorial to recognize and pay tribute to those from this region who fought and died in wars.
- The current cenotaph was dedicated on the 66th anniversary of D-Day, June 6, 2010. It was built as part of the plaza refurbishments
- The cenotaph plaza is also the spot where the city's Dutch community plants tulips to commemorate and celebrate the role Canada played in the liberation of the Netherlands from German occupation in May of 1945. The practise was discontinued for about 30 years but started up again in 2010.



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Prince George Hotel



- The first business to official open on George Street in 1914; it was operated as little more than a bar by its first owner, E.E. Phair, who shut it down immediately after prohibition was introduced in the province in 1916. It stood empty until 1919, when it was bought by J.H. Johnson, who proceeded to turn it into one of the most popular hotels in the city because it was equipped with modern plumbing and heating. J.H. Johnson was the single largest property owner in town, and a mayor of Prince George.
- The city was a very quiet place because very few people lived here; so whenever a train came in, the hotel owners would rush down to the train station to fight over any passenger that got off the train, trying to get them to stay at their hotel. To cover up the fact that no one was staying at the hotels, Johnson would ask that any new shipment of cars that came in for the dealerships be parked them around the PG hotel, to make it look busy.
- There was a lounge in the PG Hotel for quite some time until 1994 when that became the liquor store. It also had a barber shop at one point.
- It had been closed for a number of years due to asbestos and has recently been demolished as part of the downtown revitalization.



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Ritts Kiefer Building

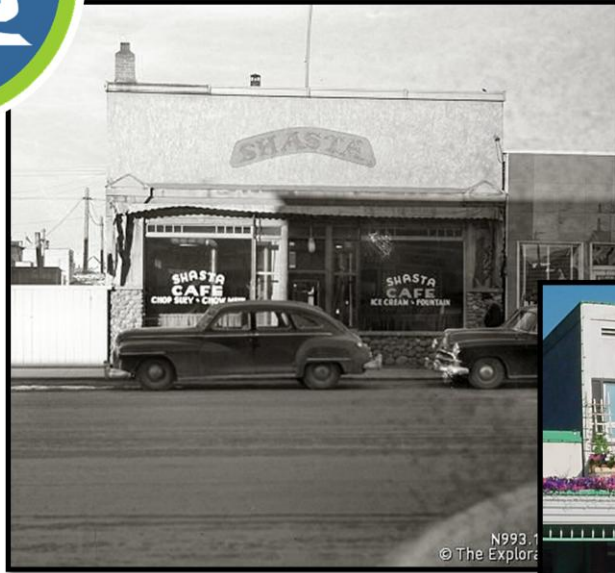


- From its opening with a Boxing Match in 1914, the Hall was the heart of the community; it hosted all manner of important events in the city and was the social gathering place in the new city of Prince George.
- It was also the birth place of CKPG Radio in 1946 as well as the home of Wally West's first photography studio in the city. The second-floor office space was coal-heated and the coal needed to be carried up by hand every day.
- CKPG was the first radio station in town and had regular programmed broadcasting from 7 am to midnight. This radio station allowed people to use it to send messages to outlying areas around the city and so, to everyone's amusement, people would invited friends to meet them at the McDonald Hotel, or advise relatives living in isolated areas of the arrival of a grandchild.
- CKPG expanded into television and became a division of the Jim Pattison Broadcasting Group.
- The Hall burned down in 1957 in the dead of winter, in the middle of the night when the temperature was -50 degrees. The difference in temperature between the air and the fire resulted in the charred ruins of the Hall turning into a shattered ice palace. The 'ice palace' makes for an incredible picture, but it was a big disappointment for the town. The Ramada Hotel was later built on the site.



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Shasta Cafe



- The Shasta Cafe was one of the nicest restaurants in town. People would line up outside every day to eat there. It was open from 1933 to 1978 and it saw Prince George go from a town of 2500 to a city of 60000 plus people.
- By 1946, the opening owner, William Manson, was ready to retire, partly due to the difficulties of WWII rationing. (Rationing continued after the war because people were coming home from P.O.W. camps and still needed food. Rationing booklets were last sent out in 1946, with rationing concluding in 1947.)
- He sold his restaurant to brothers Wayne and Henry Chow. The Chow's found it difficult to operate the restaurant under the strict rationing, so they applied for a new assessment and got more goods that way.
- Around 1973, Johnny Leong bought the Cafe and managed to keep the success of the Shasta alive for five more years through his restaurant, Shasta Smorgy, a Chinese/Western smorgasbord.



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McDonald Hotel- Courthouse



- Before 1923, Prince George didn't have a permanent courthouse. Trials and hearings were held at City Hall
- In 1923, the provincial government acquired the Alexandra Hotel (which we will see later on).
- In the late 1950s, the courthouse moved to 2nd Ave, where the Native Friendship Centre is today.
- After a few more moves, this building was constructed in 1997.
- Interestingly, the original building on this site, the McDonald Hotel, burned down in 1970 because a juke box burst into flames... two days after the hotel passed its fire inspection



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Untitled



Photo provided by the City of Prince George

- Painted by Milan Basic in 2011. He added to it in 2012 and 2013. It's one of his personal favourites and he will title it when it's finished.
- The wall is 70 feet long and 15 feet high. Latex paint was used for the background and spray paint for the details.
- Milan also painted the mural on the Canada Winter Games House that is in honour of the 2015 Canada Winter Games, to be held in Prince George (in our centennial year!)



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Mason's Cafe



- Built in 1948, Mason's Cafe has a classic Art Deco style, shown in the building's rounded entry, strong horizontal lines, and evenly spaced windows.
- On the opening day of Mason's Cafe in 1949, the owner gave out free ice cream cones to children for an hour. He tore a ligament in his shoulder and had chest pains from scooping 300 hard ice cream cones.
- Eventually, because of its success, Mason's Cafe became Mason's Steak & Chops, a complete restaurant.



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Strand Theatre

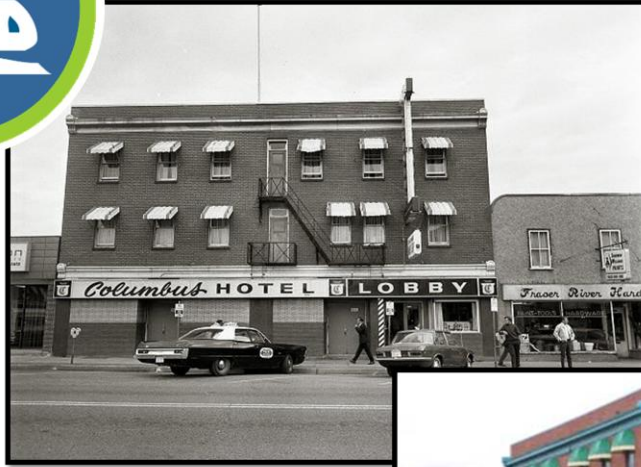


- Open from 1926 to 1976, it was one of two theatres operating in Prince George during the Second World War, offering relatively cheap entertainment for local residents.
- There was a population boom during WWII as American military sent men to improve the road access from Prince George to the north and monitor radio waves. The population of the small town grew exponentially over night. 10,000 soldiers arrived in a town of 1200 people. This was extremely good for businesses.
- John Mallock broke in the Strand Theatre in 1943 to get at a safe containing over \$600 in dimes and nickels. He entered the building after midnight by removing the slates covering a ventilation duct on the roof and lowered himself into the projection booth using a rope. Luckily, two patrolling police officers heard him from outside. When they entered, they found him in the basement, trying to dig his way out to escape them. He'd brought the safe with him and had almost succeeded in breaking it open. In court, Mallock pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 5 years in prison.



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Columbus Hotel



- Louis Zimmaro built the Columbus Hotel in 1916 and ran it with his family.
- The original building was on 2nd Avenue but a newer, larger building was finished in 1927 here.
- In 1949, the hotel had the first dishwashing machine in Northern BC. It could wash up to 4000 beer glasses an hour.
- The Hotel tragically burned down in 2008.



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Post Office



- Built in 1939. The exterior, as you see can see in the pictures, is the same now as it was its opening day. Only the clock is missing.
- Before this building was constructed, there was a lot of confusion about Prince George and Fort George and there was a three day delay for mail arriving in Fort George, a distance of almost 5 km (The two communities were still separate at the time).
- The community had to fight for this post office to be built. The citizens petitioned, fundraised and refused to take no for an answer, until finally the Federal Government in Ottawa passed the legislation to start construction
- The post master job was one of the highest paying jobs available because it paid \$13/day, compared to \$1-2/day for a waiter or \$2-3/day for a chef. He also made commission, to motivate him to work harder.
- After the post office moved to a larger space, the building was used for a variety of different things, including: a telegraph station, the first transmission tower for the CBC, and recently, the Intersect office.



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Bridget Moran



- Made by Nathan Scott
- Placed in 2003, life-size, made of a cementitious aggregate (sand, natural gravel, crushed stone) that appears bronze
- Bridget Moran's family emigrated from Northern Ireland in 1923, when she was a baby. She taught school in Saskatchewan and served in the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service during WWII. When she tried to get a Masters Degree in History, she was denied funding from the Department of Veterans because there were no women teaching in history departments in Canada.
- She moved to Prince George in 1954 and worked as a social worker, free-lance journalist and published writer. She is most famous for her book, *Stoney Creek Woman*. She is remembered for having consistently fought on behalf of the weak and underprivileged, especially those under government care.
- She was suspended from being a provincial social worker in 1964 for writing an open letter to the premier, accusing the provincial welfare department of neglecting the problems of British Columbia's needy. At the time, she was working part-time but was assigned 200 case files because of insufficient resources.
- She was awarded the Governor-General's Medal, Honorary Law-Degrees from UNBC and from UVic, and the Medal of History by the Lieutenant General of BC.



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Bank of Montreal



- Since its arrival in 1912, the Bank of Montreal was an important part of the community for number of reasons. It allowed residents access to banking services and its presence showed that people across Canada had confidence that Prince George could be an economic success. Newcomers looked for a bank and a post office; if they didn't see either, they moved on to the next town.
- The first bank building had a concrete foundation and living accommodations for the bank manager on the second floor
- In 1918, the bank building was physically moved backwards to 2nd Avenue to make room for the construction of a new building. The old building stayed open until the new one was completed so business would not be interrupted.



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W. D. West Studios



- Wally West was a nationally acclaimed photographer before he decided to settle in Prince George. In 1946, he opened a studio here, originally in the Ritts-Kifer Hall.
- With his studio, Wally brought something new to Prince George: the one-hour photo. Prior to this, film had to be sent to Vancouver to be developed, it was weeks before the pictures were delivered.
- West's photography once helped to break open a legal case in which he proved that a cheque had been forged through the use of his photo finishing technique. This was an important case in Prince George, as it marked the use of material evidence to prove guilt instead of just the verbal argument of the legal counsel.
- West took over 50,000 pictures of the Prince George area, most of which are held by the Exploration Place.
- This studio still does one-hour photo development, as well as photo repair and in-house portraits.



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Alexandra Hotel



- Opened in 1915 by J.H. Johnson (who also owned the Prince George Hotel)
- It was supposed to be called the “Alexander” hotel in honour of Johnson’s father but a mistake was made when the hotel was registered, and the name stuck.
- The Alexandra’s most esteemed guests were the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire in 1919. The Duke was our Province’s Governor General at the time.
- Johnson went out of his way to make an impression by organizing a horse race, fancy dinner and a ball. He also wanted to provide fancy alcoholic drinks, despite prohibition being enforced at the time. So Johnson went and talked to the Police Commissioner, who in turn *talked* to some bootleggers. The bootleggers coughed up the ingredients to make mint juleps, which would go on to become the Duke’s favourite drink.
- The building was eventually sold to the provincial government for \$48,500, at which point it was converted into a courthouse, prison, police detachment, forestry office and land settlement claim office.
- By the 1950s, it was called the “Leaning Tower of Government” as all the floors tilted in different directions.



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Northern Hardware



- Alex Moffat and Frank Whitmore bought out Northern Lumber in 1919, turning it into Northern Hardware. Since then, the store has become the longest running family owned business in the city.
- The Northern has operated since its opening day by the motto: “If we don’t have it, you don’t need it”. The store’s selection is impressive, to this day.
- It had many locations over the years but finally settled in its 3rd and Brunswick location in 1948.
- In its early years, the Northern had the account number 000000000005 with the Bank of Montreal (11 0s).



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Public Libraries – 1920s and 1961



- Building was designed by local architect, Trelle Morrow, in 1961.
- The first borrowing library in Prince George was set up by the First Presbyterian Church in 1910. In the 1920s, Pittman's Music Store offered customers the chance to borrow books from the back room for ten cents apiece.
- A board was created in the 1930s and the library was shuffled from the Assman Building, the Ritts-Kifer Hall, the Legion, and government-owned Army Barracks.
- In 1955, it was decided that the library would become a public service and the first full-time librarian was hired, Bill Fraser. If the books were overdue, Mr. Fraser would give you a call personally to let you know.
- The building was used by the Public Library until 1981 when the current building was completed, following a cry for more space.
- The building is now a Senior's Activity Centre, but the old book drop can still be seen by the front door.
- The new branch, The Bob Harkins Branch is 2½ times larger than the original library and ten days after opening, circulation was up by 150%.



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When Raven Becomes Spider



*Photo
provided
by the
City of
Prince
George*

- Painted by Sonny Assu
- Placed in 2006, 2m high, made of fibreglass with acrylic paint
- Painted to look like Spiderman but with First Nation design patterns, this Spirit Bear is part of a series of bears that were painted and sold to raise money for the BC Lions Club



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Speedee Printers



- Speedee Printers opened in 1958. The current owner, David George, started working in his father's print shop as a teen where he ran the press, made rubber stamps, and cleaned the store. After college, he returned to Speedee Printers and ran the business alongside his father for a couple years.
- Today, the company employs over 100 people, with locations in Prince George, Smithers, and Terrace.



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Knox United Church



- Knox United Presbyterian Church was built in 1922 to accommodate the rapid growth of the Presbyterian community in Prince George.
- An important community center as a large number of community social functions and fundraisers took place there, and still do today.
- In 1943, the mortgage for the church grounds was paid off and to celebrate, the Church held a bonfire night where they threw the mortgage papers into the flames to celebrate.
- Trelle Morrow helped design the addition to the Knox in 1955. It, like the old library building, features laminated timber beams.



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Northern Flight



*Photo
provided
by the
City of
Prince
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- Painted by Jody Spies
- Placed in 2010, made of fibreglass with acrylic paint
- Painted with symbols of BC, this Eagle is part of the Eagles in the City that were painted and sold to raise money for the BC Lions



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New Post Office



*Photo provided
by the City of
Prince George*

- Built in 1953
- It is a historic building, even though it isn't as old as the 'Old Post Office'.
- Milan Basic's mural is on the Brunswick Street side of the building, since the Canada Winter Games House shares the building with the post office. The mural was done with spray paint in 2012 and is 20m by 23m.



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McInnis Building Supplies



- John McInnis moved into this area in 1910. He worked as a carpenter and contractor and built the first office building in South Fort George
- In 1920, he started his own construction supply company, McInnis Building Supplies
- McInnis Lighting, still owned and operated by the family, is on the site of the original lumber yard



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Corless House



- Finished in 1918, Corless House is one of Prince George's very few remaining historic houses.
- Before the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, Dick Corless had been assisting the Sandford Undertakers in Central Fort George. When the flu struck, the owners fled, leaving all of the equipment.
- Dick and his wife took over the practice. Tom, Dick's son, was 11 at the time and drove the Ford Model T ambulance, picking up bodies. He didn't even catch a cold. In the winter of 1918, digging holes in the frozen ground was difficult. Later, Mrs. Corless told her son, John, that they had as many as 14 naturally frozen bodies laid out in the woodshed, awaiting burial. John asked her "Weren't you scared?" and she replied, "Don't worry about the dead ones, it's the live ones you have to keep an eye on!"
- The Corless's continued as undertakers for Prince George until 1936 when Harold Assman bought them out.
- The Corless family left the house in 1933. Since then, it has been used as a real estate and insurance office and for the past nine years, it has been the location of the specialty store, J.J. Springers.



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Government Liquor Store



P993.11.1.627.5
EXPLORATION PLACE

*Colour photo
courtesy of
Terra
Housing.ca*

- Yellow walls remaining from a government liquor store constructed in 1949. Designed in the Streamline Moderne style, its facade featured glazed brick tiles and the use of “ultra modern” glass bricks, which were not only stylish but also prevented underage youth from seeing inside. Though it was a common enough style of building in the late 1940s, there are now only two examples of it in BC (the other is in Nanaimo and ours is in much better shape).
- It was an old style liquor store, where all the alcohol was kept behind the counter and customers had to ask the clerk for each bottle they wanted. It closed in the mid-1980s and was bought by the Multicultural Heritage Society.
- On April 6, 1987, the walls of government liquor store became Prince George’s first Designated Heritage Building. These walls enclose the courtyard of a new, larger building. When the larger building was under construction, the yellow walls were braced but part of one fell down and needed to be restored.
- The new building is Bridget Moran Place, which is run by Active Support Against Poverty. It provides emergency shelter and apartments for rent for adults who are homeless or at risk.



Interested in learning more?

Check out the local history section at the Bob Harkins
Branch of the Prince George Public Library: 887
Dominion Street, Prince George BC

Browse online collections on the Exploration Place
website.

Thank you!

- The document was adapted and expanded in June 2013 by Jessica Brown, Summer Heritage Project Assistant for the Prince George Public Library.
- List of sources available on request: jbrown@lib.pg.bc.ca or 250-563-9251

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