



The Prince George
Public Library

The Downtown Walking Tour of Historic Prince George

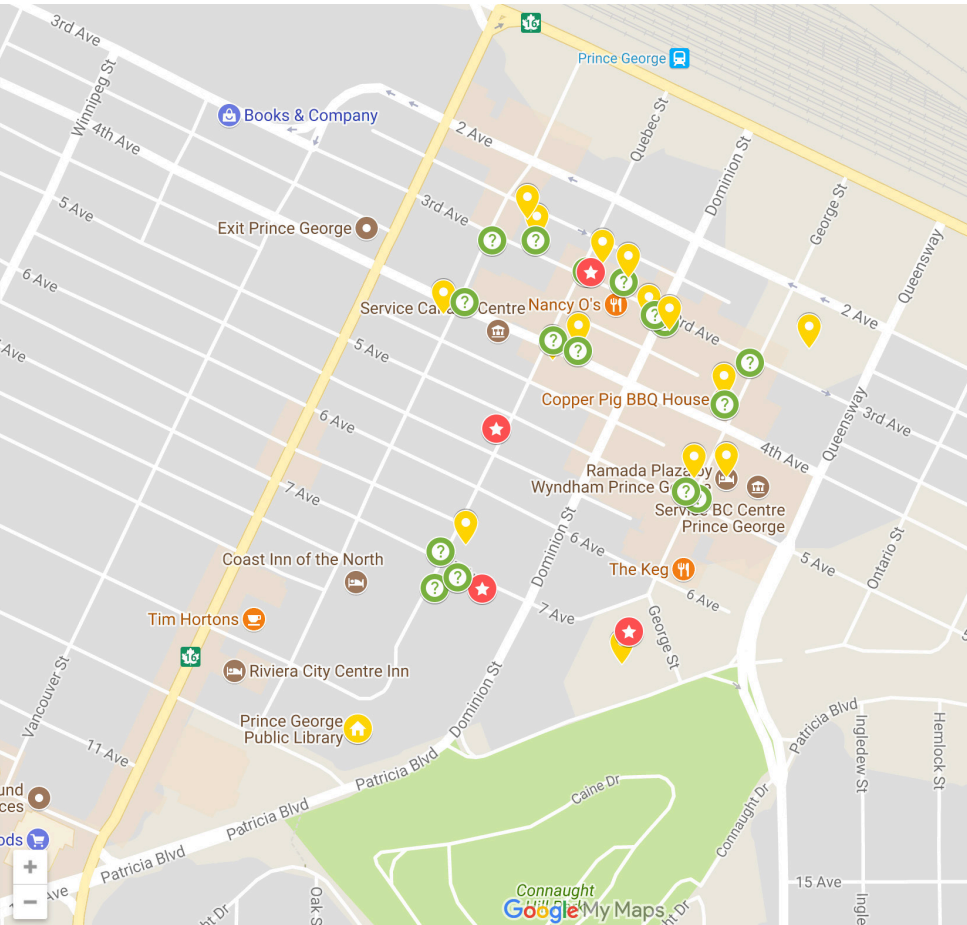
Hello!

Welcome to the Prince George heritage tour!

This is a virtual recreation of the summer walking tours offered by the Prince George Public Library, and will guide you through various heritage sites located around the downtown area.

As shown opposite, the tour begins at the library's downtown branch and proceeds toward City Hall before continuing up George St., down 3rd Avenue, and looping around back toward the library.

To begin, let's head out to the Knowledge Garden and talk a little bit about the history of the library and the city itself.



The Prince George Public Library

The tour starts at the Bob Harkins branch of the Prince George Public Library (there is also another branch in the Hart called the Nechako branch). Combined, the two branches have a collection of over 171,000 items and serve a patron base of over 51,000 individuals.

This building was designed in 1981 by a man named Graham Tudor, who won the contract as a part of an architectural competition, and was dedicated twenty years later in 2001 to Bob Harkins. Harkins was a local broadcaster, city councillor, and library trustee, as well as an outspoken advocate for literacy.





The Knowledge Garden

The Knowledge Garden is located directly adjacent to the library itself, and was opened in the summer of 2013.

Maintained solely through donations, it is filled with regionally domestic plants and trees and hosts a variety of library-affiliated programs and speakers.

The Knowledge Garden has wifi access and is open to the public on a daily basis from 10:00 AM until 30 minutes before closing, Monday through Saturday.





Fort George Trading Post

Back in 1807, a Northwest Co. employee named Simon Fraser was sent to the BC interior to establish new fur trading routes for the company.

He set up a trading post at the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser rivers, which was later named Fort George.

For many decades the area was primarily occupied by the local First Nations population and the employees of the Fort, but in the early 1900s rumours of a new railroad line encouraged further development.

The Grand Trunk Pacific Railroad was said to be passing directly through the Fort George area, and rival land speculation companies soon began to buy up and distribute property. This led to the establishment of two different communities; one on the banks of the Nechako River, named Central Fort George, and one on the banks of the Fraser, named South Fort George.

Both communities wanted to be the site of the future railway station, but the Grand Trunk instead chose to acquire the land between the Central and South Forts that the original trading post stood on and build there instead.

The acquisition of this land has been a topic of much debate over the years, as it was originally the site of a Lheidli T'enneh village whose inhabitants were forcibly evicted when the railroad company decided that it needed said land. Efforts to address the issue of ownership are still in effect today, with the land Prince George stands on being officially considered uncaded First Nations territory.

The new development site gradually grew in size as more settlers and businesses began to appear, and it was officially recognized as an independent township on March 6th, 1915. It was named Prince George, likely in honour of King George V's fourth child, who later died in Scotland in 1942 while serving in the Royal Air Force.

Early Development

1930

As evidenced below, development proceeded at a relatively rapid rate. In 1913 there were very few buildings located along what would later become George St., but by 1915 this same area was significantly busier.

By 1930 it was well on its way to becoming a hub of Northern industry, with George St. and the surrounding area expanding rapidly.



1913



1914



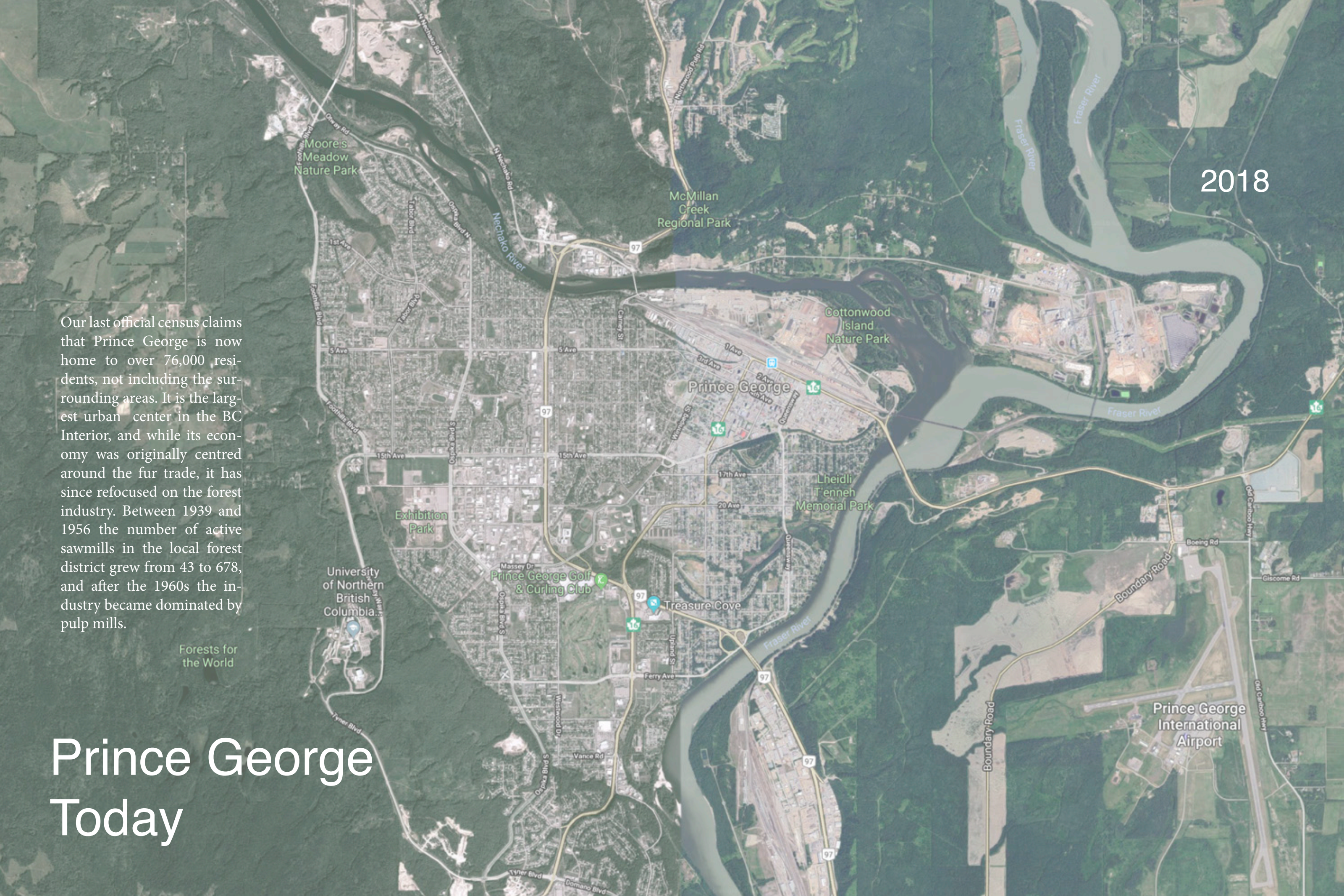
1915



2018

Our last official census claims that Prince George is now home to over 76,000 residents, not including the surrounding areas. It is the largest urban center in the BC Interior, and while its economy was originally centred around the fur trade, it has since refocused on the forest industry. Between 1939 and 1956 the number of active sawmills in the local forest district grew from 43 to 678, and after the 1960s the industry became dominated by pulp mills.

Prince George
Today



Canada Games Plaza

As you leave the library and the Knowledge Garden, you will enter the Canada Games Plaza (formerly known as the Civic Plaza). It was renamed and redesigned in preparation for the 2015 Canada Winter Games, which were held in Prince George.

It borders the library, the civic centre, and the Two Rivers Art Gallery, and now plays host to various local events throughout the year.



Connaught Hill Ski Jump

In 1920 the city cleared a significant number of trees from the side of Connaught Hill in order to provide residents with a site for recreational activities.

In 1930 an Olympic standard ski jump was commissioned and built at the top of the hill. It was illuminated for night use, making it the second such lighted jump in North America, and it was used enthusiastically right up until it collapsed in 1938.

Children continued to use the hill itself for skiing and sledding until Patricia Boulevard was constructed at the bottom, although the clearing has long since grown in and is no longer visible.

1930s. P.G. Ski-Jump on Connaught Hill. Second lighted (Placid first) hill in N.America. 1927.



Terry Fox Statue

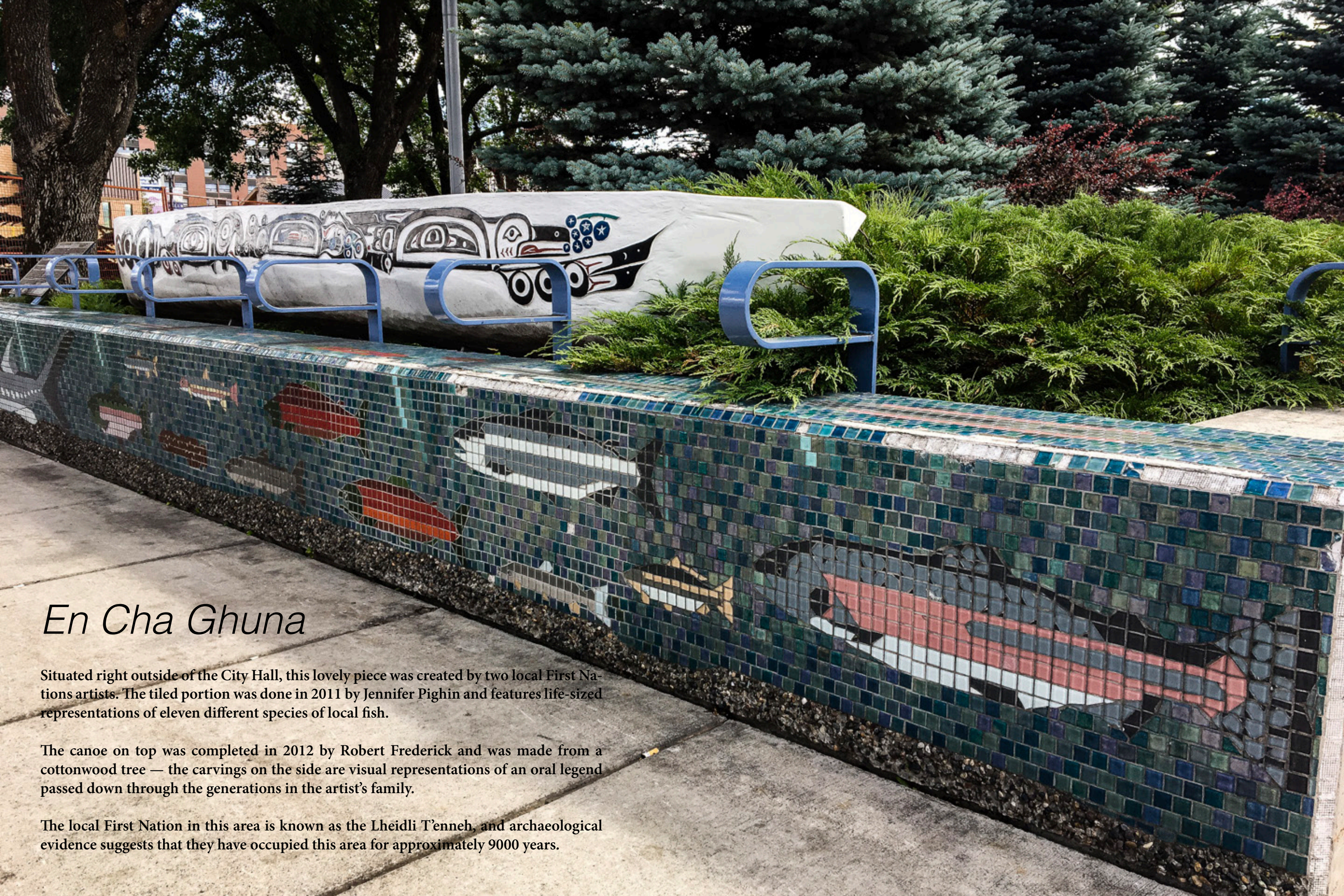
This copper statue of Terry Fox, the famous Canadian athlete, was created by Nathan Scott in 2005.

In 1979 Prince George was the host of a race (now known as the Labour Day Classic), and this race happened to be the very first one that Terry Fox competed in after losing his right leg to cancer at the age of 18. He came last, but completed the entire course, and at the following banquet he announced his intentions to run across the country to raise funds and awareness for cancer research.

The following year he began his Marathon of Hope in Newfoundland, and made it as far as Thunder Bay, Ontario, before he was forced to withdraw due to his rapidly deteriorating health. He died just a year later, a mere 22 years old, but his legacy lives on as Canadians across the country participate in a variety of fundraising events every year in his honour.

Prince George's own annual Terry Fox Run begins at this very statue.





En Cha Ghuna

Situated right outside of the City Hall, this lovely piece was created by two local First Nations artists. The tiled portion was done in 2011 by Jennifer Pighin and features life-sized representations of eleven different species of local fish.

The canoe on top was completed in 2012 by Robert Frederick and was made from a cottonwood tree — the carvings on the side are visual representations of an oral legend passed down through the generations in the artist's family.

The local First Nation in this area is known as the Lheidli T'enneh, and archaeological evidence suggests that they have occupied this area for approximately 9000 years.



City Hall

When the city's first mayor — W.G. Gillett — was elected in 1915, he was immediately tasked with finding a location to serve as the city hall. The building he chose, somewhere near 3rd Avenue, boasted incredibly low rent and seemed perfect. It was soon discovered, however, that the building had formerly housed a local brothel, and that all the rent being paid by the city was going directly to a notorious former “lady of the night” named Irene Jordan.

This was apparently more scandalous than members of local government were comfortable with, and the first new city hall was constructed in 1918 on the same site as the current one. That first version stood until it was demolished in 1966 and replaced in 1967 with the current building, the top three stories of which were added later in 1975.

Cenotaph

The very first cenotaph was built in 1950, but within several years it began to fall into disrepair.

It was rebuilt in 1958 by the Canadian Legions, and again in 2010 when the entire Veteran's Plaza was redesigned.

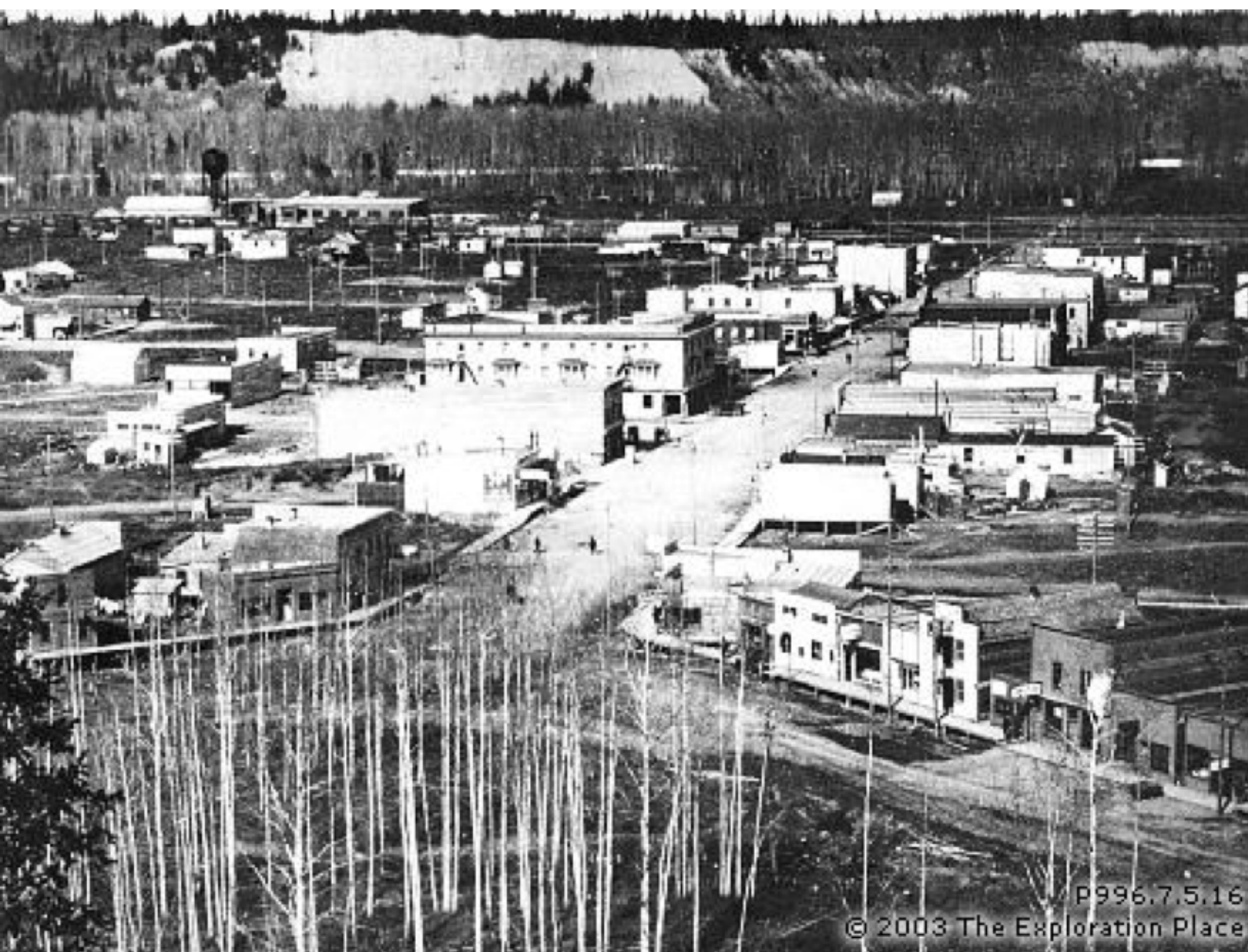
The newest iteration — pictured below — is meant to resemble the Vimy Ridge Memorial in France, and was dedicated on the 66th anniversary of D-Day (June 6th, 2010) to commemorate the many Canadian lives lost overseas.

City Hall (2018)



Cenotaph (2018)





George Street (1930s/40s)



Prince George Hotel

The Prince George Hotel was the first business to open on George St., in 1914, and was originally a bar run by a man named E.E. Phair. It was closed down when British Columbia underwent Prohibition in 1916, but was transformed into a hotel by J.H. Johnson in 1919.

The Prince George Hotel was extremely popular in its day and was considered to be quite luxurious, as Johnson outfitted it with modern amenities such as running water and indoor plumbing.

During Johnson's own time as mayor, however, the city fell into economic decline and business slowed dramatically. In an attempt to combat this increasingly negative image, Johnson demanded that the adjacent car dealership park the contents of its incoming shipments around his hotel to make it appear busier than it really was.

The hotel managed to stay afloat, and remained open until it was demolished in 2011. It is now the site of the Wood Innovation and Design Centre, a building devoted to the development of new uses for wood products. It is the second tallest contemporary wood building in North America, and hosts various UNBC programming as well as a satellite campus for the Emily Carr School of Art of Design. It is also backed by a research lab, which is primarily used for the testing of large scale wood models.







Ritts-Kifer Hall

The Ritts-Kifer Hall was opened in 1914, and by all accounts was the heart and soul of the community, hosting a wide range of events.

It tragically burned down in 1957 in the dead of winter, and the dramatic difference in temperature between the frigid -50 degree air and the flames themselves resulted in the unique 'ice palace' effect you can see in the photo above.

It is now the site of the Ramada, a local hotel (and the only Starbucks in the downtown area).



Shasta Cafe



The Shasta Café has a long history as one of Prince George's most popular restaurants. It was opened in 1933 by William Manson, who ran it until 1946 when he retired, weary of the challenges brought on by war-time rationing.

The café was then bought by the Chow brothers, Henry and Wayne, who maintained it successfully for years. It remained an extremely popular local enterprise and played a significant role in the development of Prince George's Chinese community.

It was sold again in 1972 to Johnny Leong, who ran it until it finally closed in 1978. It moved locations several times over the years, but the site on our tour now houses the Copper Pig, another popular local restaurant. While the prices aren't as low as they used to be (\$0.78 for a meal) the food is still delicious and well worth a visit!

McDonald Hotel

The McDonald Hotel (or the Mac, as it was affectionately known by locals) was built between 1915 and 1920, and served Prince George faithfully for decades.

It was famous for the life-sized stuffed moose occupying the lobby, and it seems that this sportsman-like theme extended to the rest of the decor as well (right). It burned down in 1970 when a jukebox caught fire (ironically just two days after a successfully passed fire inspection), but was rebuilt immediately and remained open until 1991 when it was demolished to make room for the courthouse that now stands in its place.

The courthouse itself (pictured below) was built between 1994 and 1996, and this site is thought to be the fourth or fifth location for the justice building since the founding of the city.





Mason's Cafe

This large white building is known as the Prudente Block, a large section of storefront space built in 1948. It is a classic example of the Art Deco style of architecture, with its rounded corners and emphasized horizontal lines, and has been home to a number of different tenants over the decades.

Mason's Café was an ice cream parlour that occupied the corner of the Prudente Block; on opening day in 1949 Mr. Mason offered free ice cream to all the local children, and was said to have actually strained a tendon in his shoulder from serving over 300 hard ice cream cones. The parlour was extremely successful and eventually became a fully developed restaurant called Mason's Steak & Chops, which operated until Mason retired in the 1970s.

The building now houses the White Goose Bistro, a well-known and quite beloved local restaurant.





EXPLORE
DOWNTOWN
PRINCE GEORGE

EXPLORE
DOWNTOWN
PRINCE GEORGE

NO PARKING
EXCEPT FOR
LOADING AND UNLOADING
PASSENGERS
OR PASSENGER VEHICLES
ONLY
NO PARKING
EXCEPT FOR
LOADING AND UNLOADING
PASSENGERS
OR PASSENGER VEHICLES
ONLY



WHITE GOOSE BISTRO



It's a Family Law



Strand Theatre

Prince George actually has a fairly long and involved history with the entertainment industry — the area's very first movie theatre, named the Fort George Theatre, opened in 1911. It had a sloped floor and a pit for musicians to provide accompaniment for silent films, and was so popular that three more theatres had opened by 1915, in addition to various others during the following years.

One of these was the Strand Theatre, which was located across the street from Mason's Café and was open from 1926 to 1976. It was especially popular during the WWII years, when over 10,000 American soldiers passed through the area on their way to work on the Alaska Highway project, and undoubtedly helped to make Mason's the success that it was. Its former location is now home to the Hospital Employees' Union (next page).





Dominion St





Columbus Hotel

The Columbus Hotel was another popular downtown establishment. It is said to have owned the very first dishwasher in Northern British Columbia, which could clean up to 4000 beer glasses per hour (significantly more than was possible by hand).

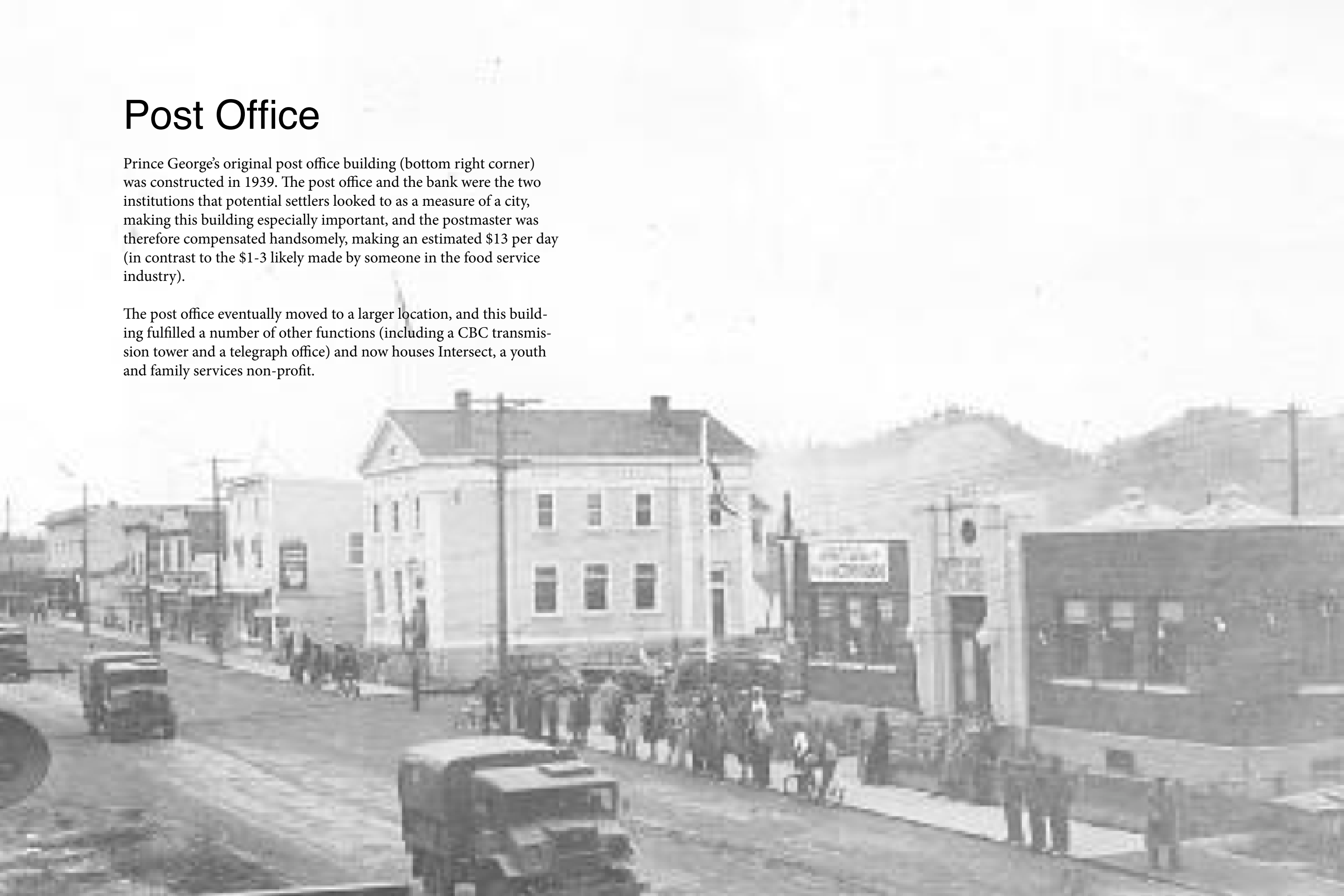
The Columbus also fell victim to a fire in 2008, and was never rebuilt — its former 3rd Avenue location is now an empty lot (bottom left).



Post Office

Prince George's original post office building (bottom right corner) was constructed in 1939. The post office and the bank were the two institutions that potential settlers looked to as a measure of a city, making this building especially important, and the postmaster was therefore compensated handsomely, making an estimated \$13 per day (in contrast to the \$1-3 likely made by someone in the food service industry).

The post office eventually moved to a larger location, and this building fulfilled a number of other functions (including a CBC transmission tower and a telegraph office) and now houses Intersect, a youth and family services non-profit.





ST. 1939

4 3rd Ave.

INTERSECT
AND FAMILY SERVICES



Bridget Moran Statue

This statue of Bridget Moran was also created by Nathan Scott, and was placed in 2003.

Ms. Moran came to Prince George in 1954, and was a published author, a freelance journalist, and a social worker, as well as an outspoken advocate for the underprivileged in government care. Several of her books can be found in the library's own local history collection.

During her lifetime she was awarded the Governor General's Award, honorary law degrees from the University of Northern British Columbia and the University of Victoria, and was presented the Medal of History by the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia.



W.D. West Studios

W.D. West Studios was opened by Wally West in 1946. Prior to its establishment photos had needed to be sent to Vancouver for development, which took weeks, but Wally introduced the city of Prince George to same-day photos.

West was a nationally renowned photographer, and in 1938 his photos were used in a case of supposed cheque forgery, marking the first time that British Columbia courts had admitted photographic evidence.

Wally ran the studio until the 1990s, when he finally retired and left it in the care of a long-time employee, and over 56,000 of his photos can still be found in the Exploration Place's archives.



W.D. WEST STUDIOS

W.D. West
STUDIOS
STUDIO ENTRANCE

OPEN

PLEASE USE
OTHER DOOR
←



Northern Hardware

After being denied a position as a city clerk in 1917, pioneer Alex Moffat partnered with Frank Whitmore and bought Northern Lumber, renaming it Northern Hardware and turning it into a wildly successful enterprise.

The Moffat family bought out Whitmore's shares in 1946 and still owns the company today, making it the city's oldest family-run business.

Northern Hardware has relocated several times over the last century, but has been in its current location since 1940.





Public Library

The very first lending library in the area was established in 1911 and run by the First Presbyterian Church. There were around 200 titles available, and membership cost approximately a dollar per year.

The library moved around a lot in its early years; for a while in the 1920s it was located in the back of Pittman's music store, and it eventually settled in the building pictured on the bottom left, which was designed by architect Trelle Morrow in 1961 (Mr. Morrow still lives in the area, and currently serves on the Prince George Heritage Commission).

The first full-time librarian was named Bill Fraser, and when a patron had an overdue book he would call them personally to let them know about it.

The building to the left is now a senior's activity centre, as the library has moved to the Bob Harkins location we saw earlier.



The image shows the exterior of a modern building with large glass windows and a light-colored facade. The building's name, "MCINNIS LIGHTING", is displayed in large, white, three-dimensional block letters on the upper right portion of the facade. A tree with green leaves is visible on the left side of the frame, partially obscuring the building. The sky is overcast.

MCINNIS LIGHTING

McInnis Building Supplies

John McInnis moved to Prince George in 1910 by horse-drawn sleigh, and was a very influential figure in early Prince George history.

McInnis was a carpenter and contractor by trade, and he built the first office building in South Fort George as well as later establishing McInnis Building Supplies in 1920.

McInnis Lighting (pictured below) is still owned and operated by the family, making it another long-running local family business.



Corless House

Corless House is one of the few remaining historic houses in the area, and was constructed in 1918. It was originally the home of Dick Corless and his family; Corless was a pioneer Prince George businessman who sold cars and furniture before later becoming the city's undertaker.

Dick started out assisting the city's then undertaker, J.W. Sandiford, but when the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic broke out and Sandiford fled, he was forced to assume the role himself. He studied Sandiford's textbooks and took over, with undertaking soon becoming the family business.

Even his 11 year old son, Tom, helped, driving the Ford Model T ambulance around the community to collect the bodies of the deceased, and the Corless family remained the city's undertakers until Harold Assman bought them out in 1936.

Canada Games Mural

This mural was done by a local artist named Milan Basic, who painted it in 2012 in honour of the upcoming 2015 Canada Winter Games.

Created using latex and spray paint and measuring 27 by 20 feet, the work was done over the course of four nights in order to ensure that no-one saw it until it was complete.



Simon Fraser Hotel

Formerly the site of the Prince George arena, which collapsed in the 1950s, this location became home to the Simon Fraser Hotel in 1960.

Named in honour of the original Northwest Co. trading post founder, the hotel cost \$1.2 million to build and was the most luxurious and modern one in the region at the time. It had an on-site hair salon and lounge, and boasted imported wood panelling from Japan in addition to in-room music and wall to wall carpeting.

In 2008 the hotel was eventually converted into a Days Inn (next page), which is now closed, and is rumoured to be the future site of a downtown aquatics facility.



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© The Exploration Place



Days Inn

Days Inn



Pride Crosswalk

This is one of three rainbow crosswalks in Prince George (the others are at the Pine Centre Mall and the College of New Caledonia).

It was painted on June 14th of 2016, following the massacre at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and is meant to represent diversity and inclusivity, acting as a visible symbol of support for the LGBTQ+ community.



Millennium Unity Pole

This is another beautiful piece of public art, and is located directly outside of the Two Rivers Art Gallery. It was created by a master carver and member of the Gitksan and Wet'suet'en First Nations (from the Hagwilget and Hazeltons area) named Ron Sebastian, who was assisted by apprentice Peter George.

The pole was erected in the year 2000 and is meant to represent the cultural diversity of the Northern Interior.



Two Rivers Gallery

This beautiful gallery also opened in the year 2000, and is located directly across the Canada Games Plaza from the library. Its construction is meant to be reflective of local geography and industry, with the curved shape of the sides mirroring the shape of the Cutbanks, and the wooden ribs gesturing toward Prince George's long history with the forest industry.

The large number of windows also provide lots of natural light to the space within, mimicing the “daylighting” technique used in 19th century picture galleries.

Thank you for reading!

If you are interested in learning more about the history of the Prince George area, feel free to check out the library's local history collection or the Exploration Place's archives.

All of the historic photos seen in this document are courtesy of the Exploration Place, and the present day pictures were taken by the 2018 heritage page (Cecilia Larson).