

Our Lady of Victory:

A Brief History

The impetus to build a Catholic Church on Gabriola came from the Crocker family. Abraham Crocker was married to Louise Silva, daughter of John and Louisa Silva, and it was Abraham who persuaded his father-in-law, John, to donate the land to build a church.

With the use of horses, Daniel McConvey, along with his son William, removed logs on the site in preparation for construction, and together with Jack Finnamore, James Gray, Thomas Degnan and other islanders, undertook the hard work of cutting, notching and assembling the logs. Gabriola Brickyard manger, Charles DeLong, donated money and the pews for the new church. The Women's Auxiliary provided altar linens and other essentials. Paintings, money and labour were donated by the Catholic community on the island.

The log structure was completed on July 19, 1925, when Bishop O'Donnell of Victoria arrived to open and bless the church. Following this dedication, services were held monthly at the church with priests coming over to Gabriola from what was then known as Kuper Island, now known as Penelakut Island.

In 1926 the half acre of land on which the church is located was formally transferred to the Diocese of Victoria from John Silva for the sum of \$1, and the little log church has its home completed.

During the 1940's and 50's Kitty Silva, one of John Silva's daughters-in-law, played the organ at the church during weddings and other occasions.

In the mid 1980's, when the church building was in need of repair and was not being used, discussions were being held between Anglicans and Catholics on the possibility of holding services together. Following renovations, services began on Wednesday evenings and later on Sunday mornings, with Catholics and Anglicans worshipping together. This arrangement continued until 2004, when a newly-appointed Bishop in Victoria discontinued it, and the Gabriola Ecumenical Society was founded.

On July 10, 2005 there was a re-dedication and special Mass with Bishop Gagnon from Victoria and Father Zarebski from Nanaimo as co-celebrants.

In the grounds outside there is a wooden crucifix sculpture by the late Alfred Kristianson entitled “The Shepherd,” with a protecting roof over the top built by John Bryson. There is also a statue of the Virgin Mary fitted into a sandstone grotto, and smaller figure of Mary on a sandstone pedestal.

For 100 years now the little log church has been serving the spiritual needs of Gabriola with church services, weddings and baptisms. For all of these, thanks should go to Abraham Crocker, his father-in-law John Silva, Dan McConvey, and the many other volunteers and donors who contributed to provide the community with a church.