

GODERICH HISTORICAL AUDIO TOURS

By Paul Ciufu

North Street

From The Square follow North Street to the corner of Nelson Street to see an impressive Gothic building, St. George's Anglican Church.

The church opened on April 24th, 1881. The first Anglicans arrived in the Huron Tract decades earlier, with the first wave of settlers. In the early years, Anglicans held services in a school house and, later, a West Street stable.

In 1843 the parish built a substantial red brick church on St. George's Crescent. However, it was destroyed by fire in November 1879, just a week after it was consecrated because the debt was finally paid. The site of the new church was more centrally located; the thinking was that membership would get a boost.

The sod was turned on June 5, 1880; on June 25 both Goderich Masonic Lodges held a special ceremony laying the cornerstone at the northeast corner of the church. Meanwhile, Anglicans held services in the county courthouse in The Square; from there they could look up North Street and watch the progress on their church's construction. The bricks used were kilned in Kincardine; the freestone and trim were shipped from quarries in Ohio.

With heavy wooden ceiling arches and wainscoting along the walls, St. George's was built to have the warm feel of a prosperous English country church. The sloped floor and gas lighting were unique in the area. Its tall windows with pointed arches were filled with McCausland's stained glass. The church's most impressive feature was the 145-foot spire finished in slate; it was deliberately designed to rise 5 feet taller than the spire of St. Peter's Catholic Church a few hundred metres to the north.

On the Sunday following the day named for its patron saint, St. George's opened, and three well-attended services were held. A literary concert held on Monday by the women of the church raised fifty dollars to help cover the costs of the church carpeting. One parishioner promised to donate money for a Sunday Schoolhouse if the church was built without a basement; the result was the parish hall on the west side of the church, constructed in 1882. Its stage, kitchen, and gym floor has seen a wide variety of uses through the decades.

On the northwest wall of the church, see the stained glass window dedicated by the Railway Mail Service to Daniel Tye, a mail clerk who died in 1911 in Goderich's worst rail disaster. To learn more about this, listen to the "South and East Street" tour.

Perhaps the most famous visitor to St. George's was His Excellency Lord Stanley of Preston, Governor-General of Canada. The Queen's representative in Canada for many years, Lord Stanley's name lives on in sports history as the donor of hockey's Holy Grail, the Stanley Cup. Lord Stanley visited Goderich during a terrible blizzard in January 1893. He attended Sunday morning service at St. George's, and later an inspirational evensong service. After the evening service he asked Reverend Turnbull, St. George's Rector, to give his thanks to the choir. His Excellency also remarked that he was surprised and pleased with the fine architectural proportions of the beautiful church.

From St. George's, continue north to the Huron County Museum. It's on the east side of the street.

The museum is open year-round. Permanent exhibitions depict early Goderich and Huron County life, with agriculture, military, and main street galleries including a full-size steam locomotive. The property consists of a two-storey brick schoolhouse constructed in 1856 (to serve as Goderich's Central Public School), plus a log cabin built in 1875.

One of the oldest standing public buildings in Goderich and the Province of Ontario, the main building was built using warm local orange bricks. It displays civic grandeur through its height and outstanding façade. Typical of the Elizabethan style, the symmetrical façade is composed of 8 over 16 windows and a bold gabled frontispiece with a central entranceway. The north and south elevations feature protruding twin gables and tall rectangular brick chimneys. Surrounded by early Goderich homes, the building contributes to the historic streetscape.

Famously the school was attended by Elias Disney, father of Walt Disney. During a trip to explore his Canadian roots in 1947, Walt Disney paid an unexpected visit to the Grade One class at the school. The class was well-behaved until Disney began to draw swift circles on the blackboard and Mickey Mouse appeared; the students squealed and surrounded the famous animator. Teacher Helen Videan left the Mickey Mouse drawing on the blackboard until it completely faded.

The school closed in 1950 and the building was purchased by the Town of Goderich. In 1951 it opened as the Huron Pioneer Museum. In 1952 the cabin was transported log by log from Bluevale and reassembled. The two-storey cabin is made from various woods native to Huron County including hemlock, pine, cedar and basswood. Twelve-inch hand hewn logs are mortised tightly together to form the walls of the cabin.

The museum's first curator was Joseph Herbert ("Herbie") Neill from the village of Gorrie. Neill had an excellent private collection of Huron County relics which served as the first exhibits of the museum. Neill was so passionate about the museum and his collection that he moved to its grounds. The log cabin was as an exhibit and Neill's home.

Neill had started his collection in the 1930s while at a family picnic in Stratford. He was drawn to an abandoned saw mill and, fascinated by its operation, he began scouring the banks of the Maitland River for old water mill parts. By the late 1930s he had amassed thousands of items, many saved from scrap heaps. His travelling museum of oddities, curios and machines became a major attraction at local fall fairs, Women's Institutes meetings, schools, and ploughing matches. He towed his travelling museum on a trailer behind his Essex car.

Neill understood that the commonplace was interesting, that people could feel connected to the past by the everyday tools and implements of a bygone era. Unlike most museums, the new museum in Goderich featured working models meant to be handled; children could turn the crank on a gristmill, sawmill, or threshing machine.

The museum eventually outgrew the schoolhouse; in the 1980s an addition was made and built around the steam locomotive engine purchased from the Canadian Pacific Railway. On the 39th anniversary of his death, a monument to Neill was unveiled at the museum.

Walk north from the museum and you will soon reach St. Peter's Catholic Church.

The roots of Roman Catholicism in the area run deep. Legend suggests Samuel de Champlain camped on the future site of Goderich during his voyage along Lake Huron in 1615 and 1616. Subsequently fur traders and Jesuit priests visited the area, ending in 1648 when Jesuit Missions were destroyed on the south shore of Georgian Bay. Jean de Brebeuf, Gabriel Lalemant, and other Jesuit martyrs, tasked with Christianizing the indigenous Huron between Georgian Bay and Lake Huron, may have walked on the banks of the Maitland River and gazed at sunsets from the future site of Goderich.

The first priest to arrive in Goderich after its founding was Father Lawrence Dempsey, who visited in 1831. In 1834 Goderich was placed under the care of Father Joseph Louis Wiriath who secured a site on North Street and had a frame church built, the first church building erected in Goderich. Visiting priests cared for Goderich until 1843 when the first resident pastor was appointed, Father Peter Schneider.

Father Schneider was an interesting character; born in Alsace, France, he served as a soldier in Napoleon's army and fought at Waterloo. He served as a priest in his native France, New York, Montreal, Kingston, and Toronto before landing in Goderich. Due to his efforts in this area he became known as The Apostle of Huron County, and was described as a man who strode along in his soutane as if a sabre was still clattering by his side. He travelled from township to township, by foot and on horseback, through the bush or on trails blazed through the forests, his rotund figure emphasized by the cassock he always wore. Once the railroad came, he rode

the engine to get to some of his missions. Father Schneider started the parish records in 1844; to this day in his handwriting you can read the record of Baptisms, Marriages, and Deaths.

Over time the frame church was remodeled and enlarged, and eventually in 1896 it was replaced by the structure that still stands today. The cost to construct the new church was \$17,000. It was made of stones quarried from the Maitland River banks under the supervision of the priest at that time, Father (later Monsignor) Thomas West.

Continue north to the end of North Street and turn right on Gloucester Terrace to reach the Huron Historic Gaol. This last story has descriptions of inmate life and public executions. If you're sensitive to descriptions of suffering or violence feel free to skip the rest of the tour.

The jail opened in 1841, made with stone from the Maitland River Valley and from Michigan. The octagonal structure, designed by Thomas Young, followed the panopticon design for prison construction. The design intends to allow all prisoners of an institution to be observed by a single security guard, without inmates being able to tell whether they are being observed. Although a single guard cannot see all the inmates' cells at once, the inmates cannot know whether they are being watched. So, inmates are motivated to regulate their own behavior as though they are being observed constantly.

A temporary courtroom and Council Chambers were set up on the jail's third floor. It was in this makeshift Council Chamber that the first Huron District Council meeting was held in February 1842. Church services and other public gatherings were held on the third floor before proper buildings were available. The building served dually as jail and courthouse until the county courthouse opened in 1856 in The Square. To learn more about the courthouse, listen to "The Square" tour.

The Governor of the Gaol originally lived on the second floor of the jail with his family but eventually Huron County Council was convinced to build a proper home. The Governor's House was built in 1901. It is part of the present-day Gaol Museum.

The jail opened as a penal institution, however it also served as the last refuge for the poor, elderly, infirm, and mentally ill. People in these conditions outnumbered the prison population in the jail throughout the nineteenth century. The alternative was abandoning them to a cruel fate in the frontier environment. Many were held in the jail on charges of "vagrancy", a humane and legal means of housing someone unable to look after themselves. In the county jail they could get some care and attention.

For example, John Faix was found in a drunken stupor on the Goderich lake bank at midnight on July 20, 1848 and brought to the jail. He died the next day from apoplexy produced by taking opium while in a state of intoxication. It was also reported that Faix smelled of tincture of Spanish flies which was then a treatment for venereal disease. Farm labourer James Stinson

was brought to the jail on a vagrancy charge in late February 1878. He was in an advanced state of weakness, and in early March he died from pulmonary consumption or tuberculosis. William Woodson, a 37-year-old farmer from Brussels, was brought to the jail in October 1892 in a helpless state; he died about a month later from meningitis.

Robert Van Horn, at 2 months, was the youngest recorded death. The infant's desperate mother, Ella, travelled from Brussels to the county jail in late January 1879. Dr. Shannon would testify at the subsequent inquest that Ella had little food for the child and what there was of bad quality. The jail's matron did what she could to save the child's life but on February 10 he died.

After the death of 70-year-old George Whittaker in July 1881 from self-inflicted head injuries while confined in the jail as a so-called lunatic, the inquest jury recommended that the jail be equipped with a padded cell.

James Fitzgerald, 16, was committed to the jail on February 4, 1895 as a so-called violent insane person who had to be carried into the building. Jailer William Dickson would testify that Fitzgerald tore his clothes off and would not put anything on, refused food and kept screaming in his cell until the early morning hours of his death on February 10.

Margaret Linfield died of exposure to a cold cell in October 1885. She had kept throwing off her bed clothes. It was concluded at Linfield's inquest that the jail was not a good place for people like Linfield who were elderly and mentally ill. At another inquest Dr. Shannon reported that many of those kept in the jail should be instead in Houses of Industry, Hospitals, Asylums for the Insane, poor houses, and hospitals. Ground-breaking investigative journalism by The Huron Signal helped raise awareness throughout the province about the plight of the mentally ill in jails. However, the county jail served as a charity hospital until well into the twentieth century.

Three inmates were hanged at the jail, with two of the hangings conducted publicly. In December 1861 William Mahone was hung outside the jail walls, as was Nicholas Melady in December 1869. You could probably have seen them from where you're standing.

Melady's hanging was the last public execution in Canada. He had been convicted of murdering his father and stepmother. A wooden scaffold was constructed outside the jail walls. His cell was nearby, so he could hear the workers building the structure. The execution was held several hours before the scheduled time out of fear of a mob. Melady was marched out from inside the jail walls, and the noose was put around his neck. He was dropped over seven feet, considered more humane since his neck was instantly dislocated, rendering him unconscious until he died.

Edward Jardine was executed on June 16, 1911, but it was not a public hanging; the scaffolding was built inside the prison walls. It was less than a minute from the time Jardine left his cell to the moment the scaffold's drop door was released. However, it took him seven and a half minutes to die.

Steven Truscott, age 14, convicted of the murder of Lynne Harper, awaited execution in the jail beginning on September 30, 1959. On January 22, 1960 his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. On August 28, 2007 Truscott was acquitted of the charges and set free.

The building stopped functioning as a jail in 1972 and inmates were transferred to Walkerton and Stratford jails. In 1973 it was designated a National Historic Site of Canada. A year later the jail and governor's house opened to the public as a museum.

Refurbished to its approximate state in Victorian times, the museum is open to the public from May to October. Visitors can explore the building and view the courtroom, holding cells, cell blocks, and working rooms such as the Turnkey's office, medical room, kitchen, laundry and living quarters. Over the years special events have been held onsite including plays and concerts held in the jail courtyard.

Consider heading north on Victoria Street (Highway 21) and taking your first left on North Harbour Road. A ten-minute walk will bring you to the Goderich to Auburn Rail Trail. Then listen to the tour, "Menesetung Bridge, and Tiger Dunlop's Tomb".