



Foundations

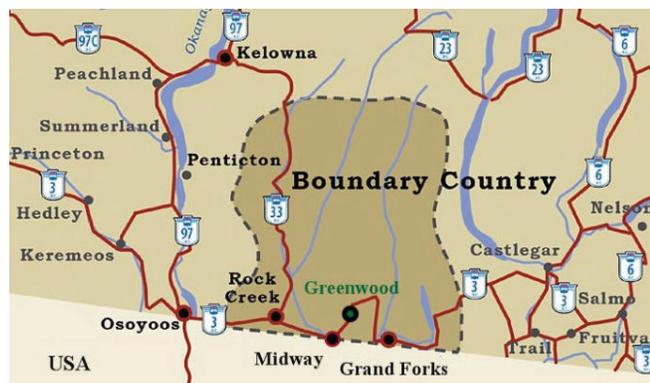
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The History of Sacred Heart Hospital, Greenwood BC, 1901-1918 The Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace

by Greg J. Humbert

GREENWOOD, BRITISH COLUMBIA

The origins of Greenwood go back to 1891 with the discovery of gold, silver and copper in the region and with the flourishing of a thriving mining camp. Several mining claims had been staked within a narrow gulch ten miles north of the mouth of Boundary Creek. The ore discovered was high grade copper and again some years later, more claims were staked in the area. By 1895 a merchant named Robert Wood erected a log store which was the humble beginnings of the city of Greenwood.



Original map credit Boundary Country Tourism

Greenwood grew rapidly. By 1896 there were three hotels, a general store, a livery stable, two assay offices, a mining broker, an opera house, and a dozen other establishments. Greenwood was incorporated as a city on July 12, 1897. The population climbed to 3,000 by 1899 and a railway called the Columbia and Western Railway reached Greenwood from the east. In 1901 the BC Copper Company was built bringing further prosperity to the city which had already become known as the “hub” of the Boundary.

The surrounding mines brought fortune seekers from many parts of the world, but the boom was short lived and by the end of World War I, copper prices plummeted and Greenwood’s success soon diminished. People left in droves and by 1940 the population had dwindled to a few hundred.

THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF PEACE

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace were originally founded by Margaret Anna Cusack from Dublin, Ireland who was a convert from the Anglican faith to Catholicism in 1858. She entered the Irish Poor Clare Sisters and during the next 21 years took the religious name Sister Francis Clare dedicating herself to writing with a particular interest in the liberation of women and children who were victims of oppression and poverty as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Income from her books and from her famine relief fund was distributed throughout Ireland. Later she founded an industrial school for young women and initiated evening classes for daytime land workers. As a result of this hands-on outreach, several women were attracted by her energy and dedication, and so in 1884 she decided to found her own community, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace.

In time Sr. Francis Clare traveled to New Jersey in the United States to continue her work with immigrant Irish women by establishing homes for young Irish working women providing a place where they could live in a safe environment. She continued to be an untiring advocate for change and justice. This resulted in her becoming physically exhausted, sick and disillusioned with a patriarchal Church, and in time she withdrew from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace and left behind the Sisters she so dearly loved. Yet she continued to

have an attachment to the Sisters and from afar she encouraged and kept informed of their ministry. She eventually returned to her natal roots in the Church of England and on June 5, 1899 she died and was buried in the cemetery reserved for the Church of England at Leamington, England.

When Mother Clare left the Congregation, “she left sorrowfully, saying [to Mother Evangelista] Have courage, Mother, the finger of God is in all. You are the new Leader.” And so Sister Evangelista Gaffney took over leadership of the congregation. The community grew and attracted new members. Its particular apostolate and charism grew as well, focusing on human rights, the needs of the poor and especially women’s rights. To this day, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace seek to realize the goal stated so well in their Constitutions, “Our charism of peace challenges us to prophetic risk so that God’s reign might be more fully realized. Confident of God’s faithful love and collaborating with others who work for justice and peace, we face the future with gratitude and hope.” (Constitution 12)

SACRED HEART HOSPITAL, GREENWOOD, BC

The Sisters came to Greenwood with the purpose of opening a hospital because of the missionary activities of the Oblate Fathers in the region. In May, 1901, Father Bedard O.M.I., appealed to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace to establish a hospital in Greenwood, which, as the center of a newly developed and prospering copper mining enterprise, was in great need of such an institution. With the necessary permission from the Mother General in Jersey City USA, Sister Teresa the acting Provincial, and Sister Teresa, Superior of Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Rossland, BC visited Greenwood to explore the possibility. The first thing they did was to seek an interview with the Mayor and City Council who were all enthusiastically in favor of the project.

As a result of this meeting, the Mayor and Council decided to advance the Sisters a sum of \$3,500 providing them with \$500 in cash and three promissory notes of \$1,000, each payable in three successive years with interest. This amount was voted on by Council to enable the Sisters to purchase (from the City of Greenwood) the unused Queen Victoria Regina School house and premises, together with a block of land (#33)

that was adjoining the Sacred Heart Church grounds. The property cost \$2,000. It was also required by the City Council that the remaining \$1,000 should be given to Doctor Jakes as compensation for the closing of his private hospital which he was operating in connection with his medical practice. This was a satisfactory settlement for the doctor since he had intended leaving Greenwood as soon as he could practically dispose of his hospital.

The school building was a large two story structure with an attic and with a screened-in porch at the rear of the second floor. Considerable alterations and additions were deemed necessary in order to make it suitable as a hospital. The work was embarked on immediately and completed at an additional cost of \$2,500.00. This amount was paid for by a loan from the Community Fund of Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Rossland, BC and by the Sisters’ ongoing collections in and around the town of Greenwood.

When the renovations were completed the hospital was blessed by Father Bedard O.M.I. under the title of Sacred Heart Hospital. The first patient was admitted on August 1, 1901. In 1902 a new ward, an operating room and a sun parlor were then added to the hospital at a cost of \$2,000.

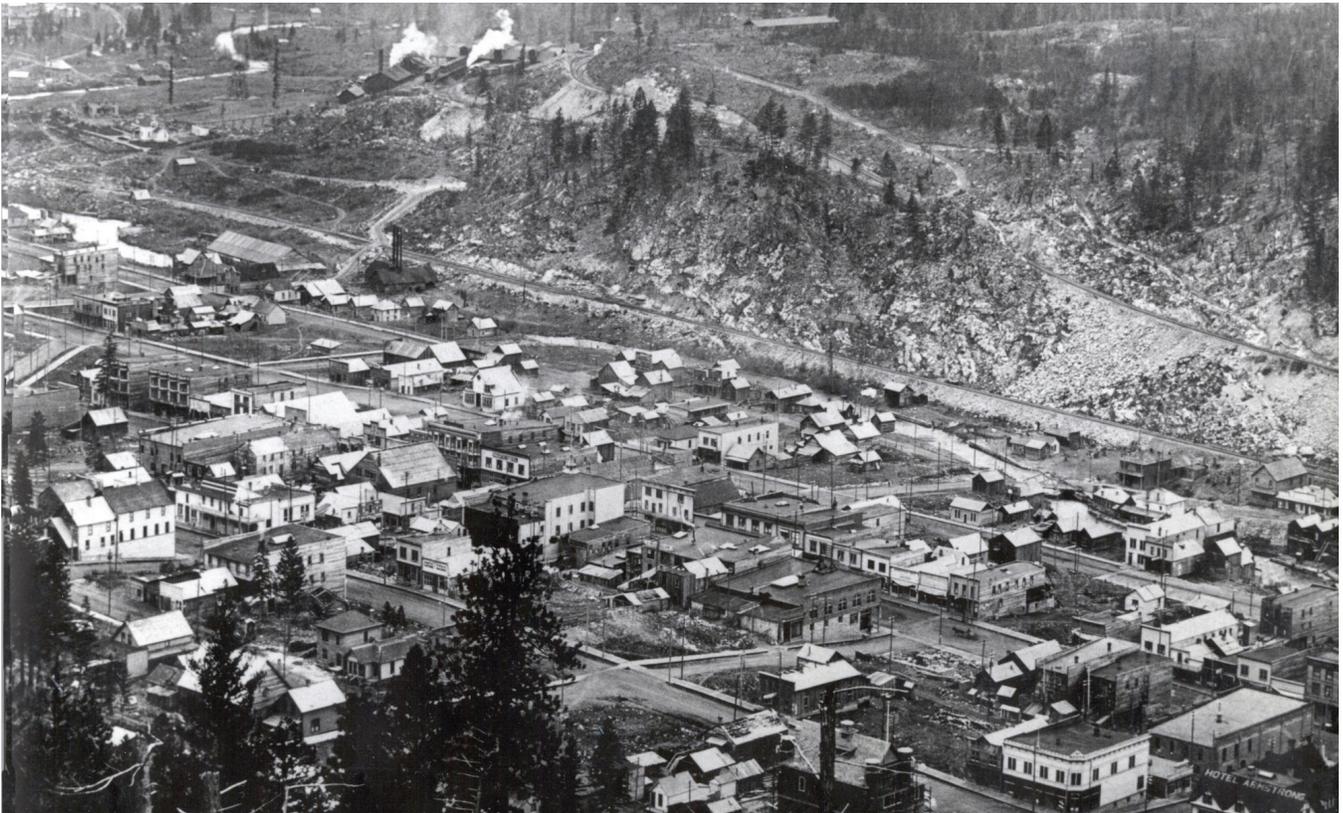
A NEW AMBULANCE

Emergency patient transport was assisted by an ambulance “purchased in St. Louis, Missouri and the finest of its kind in Western Canada. It had difficulty climbing the hill to the hospital and quite frequently teams of horses ... had to be hired to help it reach its destination,” remarked Mr. Dick Morrison who was born in the hospital and also served as a former Mayor of Greenwood.

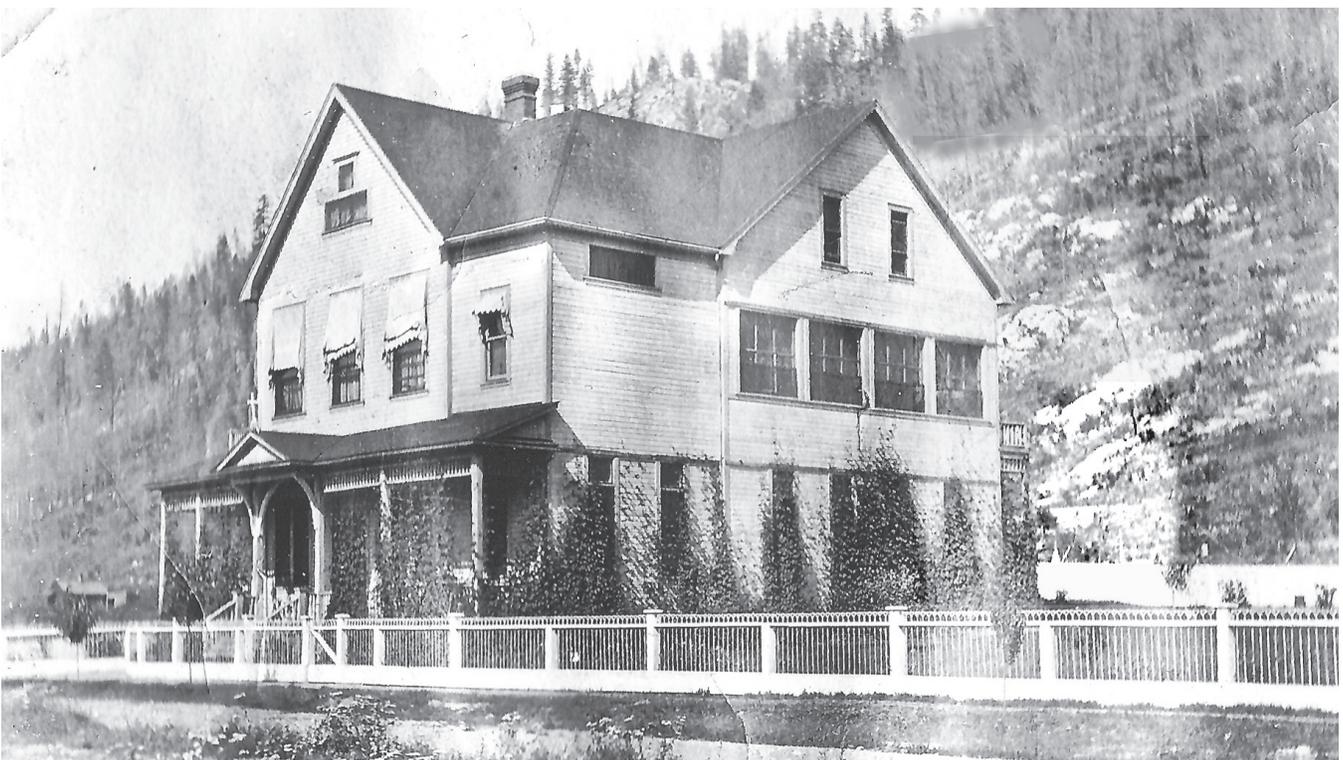
The idea of purchasing a new ambulance for service in Greenwood and the surrounding camps began in 1904. Citizens had banded together to raise funds for the project that was initiated in January 1905 with a dance at the Masonic Hall. Locals were encouraged to participate in the local newspaper, the *Boundary Creek Times* (January 13, 1905, p. 2) “A number of philanthropic ladies and gentlemen are endeavoring to provide the city and district with a new ambulance. Any object having in view the remedying of discomfort, or the alleviation of pain is well worthy of public support.

Sacred Heart Hospital, Greenwood BC

All photos courtesy of the Greenwood Heritage Society, Greenwood, BC



City of Greenwood, BC in 1903



Sacred Heart Hospital, Greenwood, BC

In order to provide funds a dance will be given in the Masonic Hall on Friday night. Everybody who can afford it should buy a ticket for the coming event. It matters little whether one is able to dance or not. Accidents are not infrequent in the surrounding camps and the consciousness that one has done something towards aiding an injured brother will bring its own reward.”

When the hospital ambulance arrived it was kept at the Palace stables on Copper Street. It was described as a handsome vehicle complete in every particular and as up-to-date as those used in the large cities. It was described as having heavy rubber tires and with wheels fitted with brakes, presumably a new invention at the time. The sides were marked with the usual “red cross”. The interior was roomy and well furnished. Two sliding stretchers were fitted to the floor on which patients could be carried from the ambulance into the hospital. A folding seat was attached to the inside for the use of a necessary attendant. Several large windows supplied plenty of light to the interior. The new ambulance cost a total of \$809.50, of which \$164.50 was for freight, the balance of \$645 being the cost at the factory in Philadelphia. (*Boundary Creek Times*, February 9, 1906, page 1)

It was less than a month later that the ambulance was first called into service. “The ambulance had its first call Wednesday morning when it was used to convey John Cavanaugh from the Norden Hotel to the hospital. Mr. Cavanaugh came to Greenwood from Butte, Montana, and here he contracted pneumonia. His condition is not considered serious.”

HOSPITAL CLOSES

From its very beginning Sacred Heart Hospital received the most generous support and praise from the people of Greenwood and the surrounding area. However, on the occasion of a visit from the Superior General of the congregation of Sisters in 1918, the question of closing the hospital was considered. For some years the mining industry of the district had been in decline. One by one the principal mines had closed owing to the low market rate for copper.

This circumstance, together with the onslaught of WWI in Europe, had reduced the population to a few scattered families. Greenwood, which had been incorporated

as a city in 1897 with so much promise of prosperity, was rapidly becoming a ghost town. The Sisters at the hospital were deprived of Mass and the Sacraments for weeks at a time, as the priests attended to the outlying missions. Before any public announcement of the closing was made the Mayor and Council were notified. Two public meetings were held to get support for maintaining the hospital but the Sisters made it clear that it was not possible to operate a hospital for an occasional patient.

As a result of this assessment and decision, Sacred Heart Hospital in Greenwood was formally closed on August 12, 1918.

The furniture was subsequently distributed between the Sisters’ convent houses in Rossland and Vancouver in British Columbia, and Bellingham and Wenatchee in Washington State.

In September, 1921, Sister Fidelis, superior of St. Joseph’s Convent in Nelson, paid a bill of \$403.06 for delinquent taxes owing on Sacred Heart Hospital. She was then able to acquire permission to have the hospital dismantled which sadly became the fate of most of the better buildings in Greenwood. The lumber, doors, windows, stairs, fences, and other salvageable materials were shipped to Nelson, BC and stored. They would later be used when St. Joseph’s School in Nelson, which the Sisters had opened in 1900, needed to be enlarged.

SISTERS WHO SERVED AT SACRED HEART HOSPITAL, GREENWOOD

Sr. Aloysius Deignan, first Superior and Administrator

Sr. St. Stephen Dooley

Sr. Ursula Murray

Sr. Scholastica O’Gara

Sr. Berchman Rossiter

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SOURCES

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Greenwood's First Ambulance. <https://www.beautifulgreenwood.com/features/03-20/feature232.html>



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