



**AT THE CORNER OF 28TH AND
SOPHIA**

A Prehistory of Cityview Church

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Foreword

The all-important takeaway of this short history is that at this writing, there has been a continuous Christian presence at the corner of 28th Avenue and Sophia Street for 111 years.

Mountain View's Churches (1902-67)

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Vancouver's southern boundary (outside the Downtown Peninsula) was 16th Avenue. Everything south of that down to the Fraser River was part of the short-lived (1892-1929) municipality of South Vancouver. It was largely a rural area of farms and orchards and forests. But that was about to change. Over the next decade, the Lower Mainland's boom economy attracted tens of thousands of new immigrants. Vancouver grew from 27,010 people in 1901 to 100,401 in 1911—an increase of 271 per cent. South Vancouver's growth was even greater, going from around 1,500 in 1901 to 35,000 by 1911.¹

Among the many riding the wave of this rapid growth were local Methodists who saw it as an opportunity to establish a formal presence in the Mountain View neighbourhood of South Vancouver, which before their eyes was changing “from a rural situation to a suburban one.”²

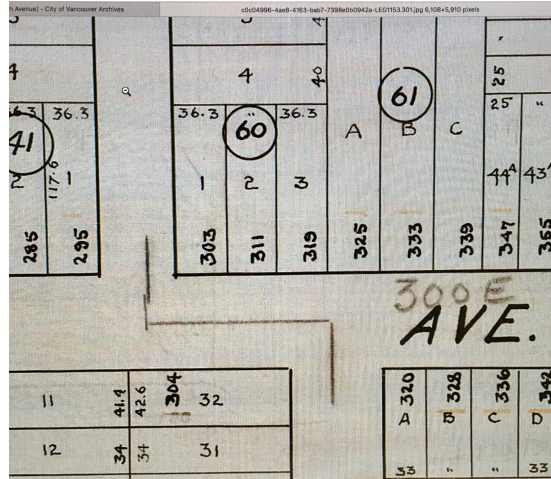
On September 28, 1902, they met together in worship for the first time in a one-room school house at the corner of Westminster Avenue (now Main Street) and Horn Road (now 28th Avenue). Two years later, after the school board banned religious services in the school, a church family invited them to meet in a small building on a corner of their property, a chicken farm and orchard, on Seacome Road (now Prince Edward Street).

In 1908, the Methodist conference decided to make the Seacome Road gathering an autonomous entity which it named Mountain View Methodist Church. The following year, the church decided that it was time to move into a larger, more permanent building—and bought three lots at the corner of Walton Street (now Sophia) and Horn Road for \$2,000. On it they put up a building that cost about \$17,000, of which \$13,000 was still to be raised. They also arranged a mortgage of \$8,000.³ The building was dedicated on December 18, 1910.

¹ John Mackie (August 11, 2018). “This Week in History: 1931: Vancouver becomes Canada's Third-Largest City.” *Vancouver Sun*. <https://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/this-week-in-history-1931-vancouver-becomes-canadas-third-largest-city>.

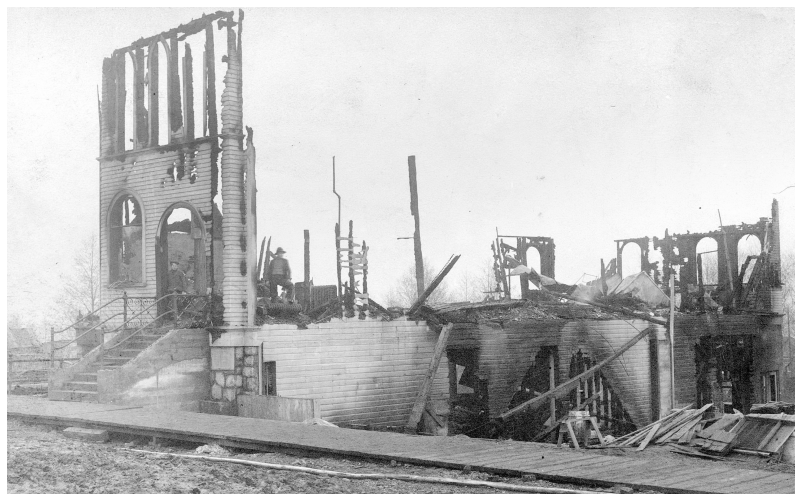
² City of Vancouver Archives: Gordon F. Dangerfield (1967). *History of Mountain View United Church*, 1.AM-1519-: 627-C-02.

³ City of Vancouver Archives: Florence Westoby (October 27, 1973). “Church with Dynamic History.” *Province*. AM-1519-: 750-A-3; Dangerfield. *History*, 3.



A section map created by the City Planning Department in 1929 showing the three lots—303, 311, 319.⁴

Sadly, the congregation’s rejoicing over their new building was to be very short-lived. Less than two months later, on February 8, 1911, it was completely destroyed in a fire. As Gordon F. Dangerfield, who was Mountain View’s minister in the mid-1960s, wrote in his history of the church, “the newly appointed janitor started [a] fire in the basement of the Church in readiness for the [Wednesday] prayer meeting, and then went home to supper. When he returned at 6:30, flames were leaping up from the building. He rang the tower bell to sound the alarm, but it was too late to save anything except the organ, a desk, and some chairs and books.”



The first Mountain View Methodist Church in ruins. Note the wooden sidewalk.⁵

Even before the flames were put out, friends of the church had pledged \$2,000 toward its reconstruction. Neighbors also loaned the church a vacant lot and built them a temporary structure for holding services. Construction on a new building got underway almost immediately.

⁴ City of Vancouver Archives: COV-S674-: Map 871-: LEG1153.301.

⁵ City of Vancouver Archives: Ch P70.2. Photo enhanced by Steven Tam.

Only eleven months later, on November 26, 1911, it opened with three services, “all attended,” said Dangerfield, “by large congregations.” The building had seating for six hundred people.⁶



The new Mountain View Methodist Church probably in early 1912⁷

Yet the fire placed a heavy financial burden on the church which it would not be able to shake off until mid-century. The original building had burned down “before insurance arrangements were complete.”⁸ As a result, the church was \$6,000 in debt before work on the new building even began. This in turn necessitated taking out two mortgages—and even then, all they could afford was a supposedly “temporary wooden structure”⁹ costing \$22,000. By the time the building opened, Mountain View’s debt had grown to \$19,000.¹⁰

For a brief while, though, the church’s prospects seemed bright. Within a year, they had reduced their debt by \$7,000. “All organizations were active and flourishing,” said Dangerfield.¹¹ But by 1913, the boom of the previous decade had ended. Then on August 4, 1914, the British Empire entered the First World War, which caused a local population slump due to wartime enlistment.¹² And then on October 5, 1918, the Spanish flu, which would claim more lives globally than the war itself, hit Vancouver. “Churches and theatres closed; shopping was

⁶ Dangerfield. *History*, 4.

⁷ City of Vancouver Archives: SGN 1030.2. Photo enhanced by Steven Tam.

⁸ City of Vancouver Archives. “Ambitious Project by Mountain View United” (January 13, 1951). *Province*. AM-54-: 865-C-01.

⁹ City of Vancouver Archives. “\$45,000 Sought for Church” (January 18, 1951). *Sun*. AM-54-: 865-C-01.

¹⁰ Dangerfield. *History*, 4.

¹¹ Dangerfield. *History*, 6.

¹² Norbert MacDonald (Spring 1973). “A Critical Growth Cycle for Vancouver, 1890-1914.” *B.C. Studies*, no. 17, 26. After rising to 39,000 by 1914, South Vancouver’s population fell to 25,000—or by more than one-third—by 1916. Mackie. “This Week in History.”

banned,” said historian Chuck Davis. “By November 14 there were over 400 dead in Vancouver alone. The worst was not over until the end of November.”¹³

By then the war was also over. But for Mountain View, the “difficult years” persisted.¹⁴ On June 10, 1925, Canada’s Methodist Church, the Congregational Union, and seventy per cent of the Presbyterian Church, merged to form the United Church of Canada. For its part, Mountain View merged with a former local Presbyterian church, holding their first worship service as Mountain View United Church on January 1, 1928.

But even though the former Presbyterian congregation had been almost twice the size of Mountain View’s prior to amalgamation, this new iteration left Mountain View actually slightly smaller, down from 251 members in 1924 to 237 in 1928.

“The decline,” said Dangerfield, “was due in part to the problem of integrating two congregations, and in part to the changing population of the community. West Point Grey, Dunbar Heights and Kerrisdale had superseded Mountain View as a preferred residential area, and many of the best supporters of the church moved to these newer areas.”¹⁵ But while the church’s numbers were dropping, South Vancouver as a whole was again booming, growing from 38,000 to 46,000 people during those same four years.¹⁶

Later that year, on October 17, voters approved the amalgamation of Vancouver with the municipalities of South Vancouver and West Point Grey to take effect on January 1, 1929.

Only months later, Mountain View’s financial woes were further compounded when, on October 25, 1929, the New York Stock Exchange collapsed, ushering in the Great Depression. Vancouver’s property values tanked. For example, an ad in the *Province* on August 7, 1931, for an auction of oceanfront lots in Tsawwassen announced that although “previously priced at \$1,200 each [they] actually sold at \$450 each.”¹⁷ Likewise for Mountain View, Dangerfield said, “The financing of the church, which had always been difficult, became a major problem with the financial crash of 1929 and the ensuing Depression years.” By 1934, its membership had fallen to 151 while Sunday School enrolment fell from 466 to 371.¹⁸

By 1951, the membership had rebounded to about 300. But apparently nothing could arrest the decline of what one contributor to the *Province* called their forty-year-old “uncompleted edifice.” In January, the church launched a “whirlwind campaign” to raise \$45,000 toward a new building. The plan was to canvas 4,300 homes in the vicinity of the church in one week. As both newspapers reported, “The aim ... is to start construction on the new building with the first of good weather this spring.” Plans for the new building included “a gymnasium and other community service features which will benefit the whole district. For this reason, all residents will be canvassed.”¹⁹

¹³ Chuck Davis (2011). *The Chuck Davis History of Metropolitan Vancouver*. Vancouver: Harbour Publishing, 106.

¹⁴ Westoby. “Church with Dynamic History.”

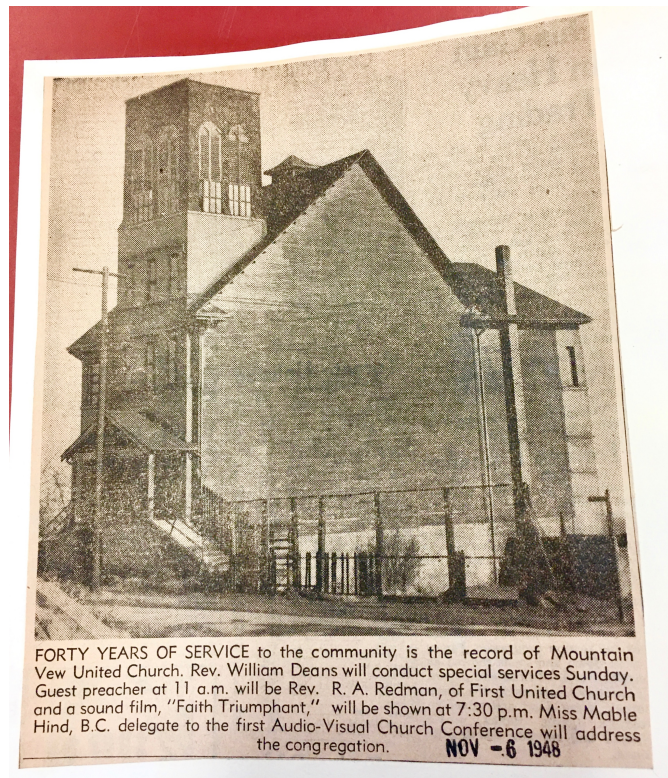
¹⁵ Dangerfield. *History*, 17.

¹⁶ Mackie. “This Week in History.”

¹⁷ Mackie. “This Week in History.”

¹⁸ Dangerfield. *History*, 17.

¹⁹ “Ambitious Project”; “\$45,000 Sought.”



*Mountain View United Church in 1948*²⁰

The campaign seems to have failed to reach its target; certainly, no new construction was undertaken that spring. Then another plan emerged. During discussions over what the church should do next, *Mountain View almost sold the property*. "About that time," said Dangerfield,

there was a proposal that Mountain View and Windsor [at 4720 Elgin Street] might unite and build a new church on a new site. Early in 1952, this suggestion was explored by representatives of both churches and a lot approximately half way between the two selected as a site. Many were in favor of this move, but there was not sufficient agreement to carry it through. So Mountain View was back again to facing the need of building its own new church. Throughout 1952, planning for the building went forward, until it was decided to endure the old building for one more winter, and build a new church in 1953.

The church decided that it would be built adjacent to the old church—and would be "a building which was not too elaborate but equal to the needs of the congregation." (The area vacated by the old building is now the parking lot.) The contract was let on August 16 for \$33,950. The new—and current—building was dedicated the following April 11, 1954.²¹

²⁰ City of Vancouver Archives. "Forty Years of Service." (November 6, 1948). *Sun.* AM-54-: 865-C-01.

²¹ Dangerfield. *History*, 24.



*The new building in April 1954. Behind it is the partially demolished 1911 building.*²²

This left Mountain View \$18,000 in debt. “This was a sizeable amount for a congregation that had experienced so many financial difficulties,” said Dangerfield. “However, the new church brought a revival of interest, and ... the church had financially, the best years in all its history. Within a period of four years the debt was completely cleared, and [a] loan repaid.”²³

Even so, the church could not over the long term reverse its declining fortunes.²⁴ In 1967, Mountain View and Windsor, both apparently no longer able to afford a full-time minister, entered into a “two-point pastoral charge” led by a board comprised of lay leaders from both churches.²⁵ That same year, Dangerfield concluded his history—while departing as Mountain View’s last full-time minister—by stating, “It seems as if Mountain View has now come to the end of an era, mostly we feel because of the lack of younger people and also due to the ever-changing population of the district in which the church is situated. ... In any case we trust that ‘the hand that guided’ in the past, will continue to guide in the days and years to come.”²⁶

²² City of Vancouver Archives: Ch P70.1. Photo enhanced by Steven Tam.

²³ Dangerfield. *History*, 25.

²⁴ Mountain View was not alone in experiencing falling membership numbers: “Between 1965 and 2000, the United Church’s national membership shrank by 38.8 per cent. Nowhere was that decline faster than in British Columbia. As Bob Stewart, the Church’s provincial archivist, later noted, United Church membership in Vancouver fell by 57 per cent in the 50 years between 1925 and 1975. Far worse, Sunday School membership plummeted from 25,000 in 1960 to under 5,000 by 1975.” Frank Rudolf Stirk (2019). *Streams in the Negev: Stories of How God is Starting to Redeem Vancouver*. Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishers, 38.

²⁵ MemoryBC: <https://www.memorybc.ca/windsor-united-church-vancouver-b-c-fonds>.

²⁶ Dangerfield. *History*, 27.



... and the “new building” sixty-seven years later.

Afterword

Fast forward thirty-one years. On July 18, 1988, Gladstone Baptist Church, which had been renting space in the Korean Baptist Church at Gladstone Street and East 32nd Avenue, worshiped for the first time in Mountain View’s building. Although Gladstone was still renting, it had the virtual use of the building since Mountain View’s congregation was aging and dwindling in number.

Jim Yoder had been Gladstone’s pastor since the church had launched in May 1979. In December 1993, the congregation called Craig O’Brien as their new pastor. His ministry began formally on March 20, 1994. On February 25, 1996, the congregation voted to change the church’s name to Cityview Baptist Church.

On June 30, 1997, after several years of negotiations, Cityview purchased the property for \$800,000. The church allowed Mountain View eighteen months’ further use of the building.

A year later, on June 28, 1998, Mountain View held its final worship service in its former home. What was left of the congregation relocated to Windsor United Church on Elgin Street, becoming Mountain View-Windsor United Church. In June 2002—almost a century after the first Methodist worship service where Mountain View’s journey began—the church disbanded.²⁷

²⁷ MemoryBC: <https://www.memorybc.ca/mountain-view-united-church-vancouver-b-c-fonds>.