

Chilkoot Trail National Historic Park  
**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church**  
Bennett Lake, British Columbia

## **HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church was erected in 1899 to plans prepared by Reverend J.A. Sinclair. It is the only standing building left in what was once a thriving town. St. Andrew's Church has been identified as a major historical resource within Chilkoot Trail National Historic Park, an international park where both American and Canadian Klondike gold rush sites are incorporated. At the time of evaluation the building was owned by the British Columbia government, but was to be transferred to Environment Canada Parks Service. See FHBRO Building Report 88-176.

### **Reasons for Designation**

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church was designated Recognized because of its historical association, its fine vernacular aesthetics, and its environmental value.

The church is related to the three themes identified for the historic interpretation of the Chilkoot Trail National Historic Park: Life on the Gold Rush Trail; Transportation on the Gold Rush Trail; and Canadian Sovereignty in the Far Northwest.

The church was initially established to directly serve the needs of gold seekers en route to the Klondike. As the only standing building left in the once-thriving community of Bennett, St. Andrew's Church provides a unique example of that town's very existence. It not only housed church services (for both Presbyterians and Anglicans), but weekly social and entertainment events, occasional political meetings, and served as a community centre.

Reverend J.A. Sinclair who is associated with the church, was one of those heroic, yet down-to-earth clergymen, who had an ability to assess the community's needs and fulfill them.

St. Andrew's Church is an excellent example of frontier aesthetics based on a combination of fashionable High Victorian Gothic design, and available materials. The church, with its weathered boards and soaring spire, fits in well with the surrounding coniferous trees and mountains. St. Andrew's Church is the paramount landmark of the region.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of St. Andrew's Church resides in its simple yet pleasing

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proportions, its design and details inspired from the High Victorian Gothic, its use of indigenous materials, its weatherproofing construction techniques, and its environmental qualities.

The church consists of a simple rectangular wood frame structure with a gable roof, and an adjoining asymmetrically placed tower. The arrangement of openings on the elevations contribute to the balanced composition of the building. The fine proportions of the church and the pattern of opening should be respected.

The church exhibits in a vernacular and rustic manner the characteristics of High Victorian Gothic, an architectural style which emphasizes verticality, complexity of outline, varied colours and textures. At St. Andrew's Church, verticality is expressed by the steeply pitched roof, the dominant tower, the pointed arch openings and the use of vertical siding for the lower section of the building and lower portion of the gable ends. Complexity is seen in the tower, with its peaked dormers, breaking but reinforcing the thrust of the steep roof, its corner pinnacles and its decorative finial. Varied texture and colour is created by the use of short lengths of slab wood set in several courses and placed in varying patterns - vertically, horizontally and diagonally. The tower has six distinct courses of wooden siding, including one in a lattice design, and basket-weave design. The overall effect is one of a rich textured surface whose shades and shadows intensify the intricate patterns.

All of the surviving materials should be carefully preserved. A regular maintenance program should be established to protect the original fabric of this important heritage structure. Any repairs done on the building should use indigenous materials, and be done in the spirit of the original design to maintain the rustic frontier aesthetics.

The functional design of St. Andrew's was simple and the local materials were eminently suitable. The exterior sheathing of split slabs (bark retained) provides an excellent waterproof covering, and when set diagonally, gives extra strength to the walls. All doors and windows were packed with oakum to reduce drafts. Four inches of dead air space was created between the inner and outer walls with building paper applied to the interior side of the outside wall. All of these construction techniques, which are a response to weatherproofing, should be maintained.

Nothing remains of the interior finish. The fine leaded windows, set in frames that were faced with rough slabs, are no longer extant.

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**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church** (Continued)

St. Andrew's Church always stood as a prominent structure in its surrounding environment, originally as the centre of a booming town, now as a landmark in a national historic park. The predominance of the church on its surrounding should not be compromised.

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