

Heritage Value

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church is valued as a community landmark; for its contribution to the group of heritage properties on Edgewater Street; for its age and association with the history of religious and community life of Mahone Bay; and, as a good example of Gothic Revival architecture.

Built in 1869, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church was the first church to be located in the commanding position on the main road from the east at the head of Mahone Bay harbour. Within two decades it was joined by the Anglican and Presbyterian churches. With St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in the middle, these churches are collectively well-recognized and known as Mahone Bay's "Three Churches." Their prominence and visibility enabled mariners to line up the three steeples for direction. Together with five other historic places, including the "Old Burying Ground at Mush-a-Mush" (now Bayview Cemetery) on Edgewater Street, the three churches comprise a significant representation of Mahone Bay's history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the early years of settlement starting in 1754, the foreign Protestants worshipped in nearby communities, local halls or in homes. In 1833, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists and Presbyterians built the Union and Harmony Church near the Old Burying Ground with trustees from all four denominations, with Peter Strum as the Lutheran trustee. The growing population in the late 1800's led to construction of individual churches. By 1864, the Lutherans had formally organized as a congregation and in 1866 voted unanimously to call Rev. W.W. Bowers and also to build their own church. St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church was ready by 1869 and was reported to be the site of the first decorated Christmas tree in any church in the province. The earliest ministers spoke German. In 1876, the Reverend J.A. Scheffer was the first English speaking minister and ministered in both languages.

In 1903 the church was widened, retaining its original structural features, and renovated in a simpler version of Gothic Revival style with almost no embellishment. The pointed window arches were replaced with rounded arches. The original slender, graceful spire was retained. Sunday school additions were made at the rear in 1965 and 1970. For the past 140 years, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church has played a continuous role in community and religious life. The congregation is active in worship and social outreach and collaborates with other Mahone Bay churches in ecumenical services and projects such as the food bank. It has a strong music program and is also one of the venues for the "Music at the Three Churches" series each summer.

Character-Defining Elements

Character-defining elements of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church relate to its function as a place of worship, contribution to the grouping of heritage properties, and simple Gothic Revival architecture and include:

- Location within a group of eight heritage properties at the head of the harbour
- Arched transoms over main entrance in the front steeple tower and over the side entrance to church hall
- Central main entry flanked on each side by two tall, slender double-pane arched windows stepped down in height to fit under the roof line
- simple label moldings over all doors and windows
- Slender steeple topped with cross atop bell tower with arched openings
- Simple scheme of white paint with black on label moldings
- Set of three triple-pane arched windows on each side
- Interior elements including posts in the side aisles which are structural components of the original exterior walls; and original woodwork on ceiling and pews