

St. Peter's Church Hay River, Northwest Territories

Rosie Isaac Sibbiston is a grandmother who lives in Hay River. When she thinks back to the years when she was a young wife and mother, she feels peace and happiness.

Every Sunday the family went to St. Peter's Anglican Church for services. Rosie's sister Lucy often went ahead to light the fire in the wood-burning stove. Rosie herself sometimes rang the bell to call people to prayer. It was a powerful but beautiful sound that echoed through the small Dene community.

At holiday time the children helped their parents decorate the church.

The Hudson's Bay Company established a trading post at Hay River in the 1860s. The Slavey Dene, who made their living hunting, trapping, and fishing, moved here in the 1880s and built permanent log homes. Soon their leader, Chief Chiatlo, sent out a call for missionaries to provide services for the community. Both the Anglicans and the Catholics responded, but the Anglicans arrived first.

In 1893 Reverend Thomas Jabez Marsh, an Anglican priest fresh from Toronto, set about establishing a mission which eventually included a school and nursing station. Although Marsh had no architectural training, he drew the building plans himself.

St. Peter's Church is a simple gabled structure, 34 feet long and 22 feet wide, of squared logs, keyed in the corners. The



St. Peter's Anglican Church
NHS of Canada

Photo: Parks Canada/
Bergeron, J.F. Enuirofoto/
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1925 picnic outside church

Photo: Russel/NWT Archives/
N-1979-073:0324

original roofing has been replaced with asphalt shingles. A belfry was added to the porch roof in the 1920s.

The exterior of St. Peter's is unusual for church architecture. The logs were clad in galvanised metal, embossed in a pattern that resembles coursed stone.

St. Peter's is unique among northern churches in that the community furnished the interior themselves using local materials. They made wooden benches, a lectern, a pulpit with decorative brackets, and carved chairs with woven babiche rawhide. The colour scheme of robin's egg blue walls, white ceiling and coved molding, with the dark brown floor boards, adds to the charm.



Church interior

Photo: Dept of Interior/NWT
Archives/G-1989-006:0128

In the 1970s, repeated flooding forced officials to build a new town of Hay River on higher, drier ground. St. Peter's Church was boarded up. Although it has been years since people attended services here, they say the church remains in good condition. Recently leaders of the Katl'odeeche Reserve, who are responsible for the church, began considering how to restore the building and resume services. For a grandmother like Rosie Isaac Sibbiston, that time cannot come soon enough.

For additional information, follow this link:

http://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/lhn-nhs/det_E.asp?check=y&oqSID=1940&oqeName=Hay+River+Mission+Sites&oqfName=Sites+de+la+mission+Hay+River