

Fernwood Walking Tour

Overview of the Tour:

This walking tour highlights remarkable heritage homes and sites of historic interest in Fernwood. The route is circular and can be walked in an hour at a leisurely pace, with suggestions (in italics) for side-trips to nearby heritage locations. The tour is in two parts, allowing for a shorter excursion by completing only one of the parts. The route uses some footpaths and requires minor adjustments for travel by automobile. Dates of construction of houses (in brackets) are generally approximate as buildings often evolved over several years.

To Start:

From downtown Victoria follow the route of the old streetcar line up Caledonia Avenue, past Cook Street, to Chambers Street. Turn left on Chambers and then immediately right on Gladstone Avenue. Vehicles may be parked in the Victoria High School lots to the right. Walk through the courtyard adjacent the Belfry Theatre towards Fernwood Road to begin the tour.

Part One: Fernwood

1. Fernwood Village:

(Fernwood at Gladstone) The meeting place of the Spring Ridge and Fernwood neighbourhoods, and terminus of the former street-car line from James Bay, this corner has been the village centre since the building of Emmanuel Baptist Church (chapel 1887) and Thomas Hooper-designed sanctuary (1892), now housing the Belfry Theatre. For many years this village served the surrounding neighbourhood with a bank, market, bakery, pharmacy and other shops. Heritage buildings at this intersection include the former Rennie & Taylor Bakery (1905) at 1284-94 Gladstone, a painted sign still visible on the brick; and 1301 Gladstone, the Parfitt Building (1910). The five English Parfitt Brothers were respected building contractors who lived in the neighbourhood and built many fine residential, commercial and institutional buildings in Victoria including the Armoury and Christ Church Cathedral. The Fernwood Community Assn. building at 1923 Fernwood was originally the home of Fred Parfitt. The later storefront for decades housed the Fernwood Pharmacy, as tiles in the entrance indicate. Behind these buildings was the Parfitt construction yard. A brick factory at Fernwood & Vining supplied materials for several notable brick homes on this tour.

2. Turn right on Fernwood Road:

At Vining is an unusual Art-Deco Mission-style apartment block on the site of the original brick-yard. On the right is Victoria High School, 1260 Grant Street (1912-14), built on the site of gravel pits and designed by architect C. Elwood Watkins, an associate of Thomas Hooper. At Grant is 1809, T.B. Pearson's House (1888). At the corner of Balmoral, 1702, dry-goods merchant E.E. Wescott's house (1903-6), illustrated on the cover, is an outstanding residence, possibly designed by Thomas Hooper, combining Edwardian symmetry and Queen Anne flare to take full advantage of the corner location. The house features a central tower linking identical gables, a wrap-around verandah, and elaborate stained glass and roof details. The neighbouring 1706, was built at the same time, but is far less elaborate. Many large heritage homes are located on the southern end of Fernwood as far as Yates Street, a worth-while side trip. Also on Yates at Camosun is the 1892 Firehall, now the Boys & Girls Club, and across Yates, the site of the wooden Colonial School (1853), marked "A" on map. Walking further to Fort Street and down to Cook Street leads to a concentration of heritage buildings, including 1156 Fort, "Wentworth Villa" (1862), one of the oldest standing houses in Victoria and one of the city's few houses in Gothic Revival style.

3. Turn left up Balmoral Avenue to Stanley Avenue:

On the corner, 1702, originally the home of salesman George Hull (1904), features a Palladian window, interesting shinglework, unusual squares above windows and Gothic quatrefoils. Other homes of note on this block include 1711, 1715, 1719, 1726 (1906).

4. Turn right on Grant Street:

On Stanley at Grant there was originally a small lake, known as Harris Pond, also an early water source for Victoria. Heritage homes on this block include 1421, Aaron Parfitt's house (1912); 1425 & 1429 (1914 & 1911), homes in the popular Arts & Crafts style; 1433 (1908); 1438, marine engineer J.A. Heritage's residence (1901); and some earlier houses including 1448, the Hodson Roper house (1898), in an eclectic Italianate style; and 1460, the Goodson House (early 1890's). Arriving at Belmont Av. a side-trip up nearby Begbie Street leads to the site of "Fernwood Manor" (1860-1969), "B" on map, now occupied by a large apartment block of the same name, at 1573-75 Begbie. Descending Begbie, 1458 is another impressive Queen Anne-style home, designed and lived in by architect A.C. Ewart (1892), now painted its original colours.

5. Turn left on Belmont

6. Turn left on Vining to Stanley

7. Turn right on Stanley Avenue:

Addresses of note: 1834, bricklayer William Whittington's house (1891); 1915(1907), 1925(1911).

8. Turn right on Gladstone Avenue:

Heritage homes include: 1427, William Lyall's house (1897), a Queen Anne-style cross-gabled cottage with elaborate brackets and saw-toothed shingles in the gables; and 1460, contractor Thomas Matthew's house (1892), a Victorian Queen Anne with turned columns and spindles, half-timbering and saw-tooth shingling. James Parfitt built and lived in 1446.

9. Turn left on Belmont Avenue:

On the corner note 1924-26, impressive "Oak Villa", merchant Alfred Wescott's home (1891). This Eclectic Queen Anne-style residence has a two-storey, diagonal, pedimented corner bay, an arched Palladian window and many multi-paned Queen Anne windows. Down the block 2024 (1907) is a massive Craftsman-style house, a style popular into the 1920's.

10. Turn left on Pembroke Street:

Originally called South Road, the street marks the divi-ding line between the estates of early property owners Benjamin Pearse and Roderick Finlayson. Included on the heritage registry: 1461, teacher Earle Clarke's English Arts and Crafts-style house (1911) with half-timbering and leaded windows; 1449, carpenter J.H. Adams's Italianate home (1891) with 'catalogue' ornamentation and a two-storey bay balanced by an offset entrance porch and; 1439, teamster Oliver Johnson's Queen Anne-style cottage (1898); 1417, bricklayer and stonemason William Heatherbell's house (1892), with sandstone lintels, quoined corners and decorative corbelled stringcourses to demonstrate his craft. The timbered porch is a later addition. Other homes of note: 1400, Capt. Henry Parson's Classical Revival-style house (1894) built by John Terry, a bricklayer; and 1347, Capt. Mark Pike's modest Victorian cottage (1891) with symmetrical bay windows. Of interest is 1342, an 1890's home with a huge modern heritage-style addition. On the corner is 2103 Fernwood, the Italianate-style Hutchinson Hodgson home (1892). The rear attachment may be an original cottage, listed on Sayward Lane in 1889. A side-trip north to the top of Fernwood Road includes: 2221 Fernwood, the Thors-teinson-Anderson house (1890), an Italianate cottage lived in by some of the neighbourhood's many Icelandic families; across the street, Fernwood Village's only original commercial enterprise, an auto garage from early in the century; 2663 Fernwood (at Kings) is Fred Parfitt's imposing home (1912); at Cedar Hill Road is western Canada's first Jewish Cemetery (1860).

Part Two: Spring Ridge

11. Continue down Pembroke Street:

Crossing Fernwood Road

enter the historic Spring Ridge neighbourhood through Gower Park, near the original springs. This important older area has not been well preserved. Even the terrain itself was greatly altered by the digging of gravel pits. One can only guess at the original nature of what Gov. Douglas called "the Fountain Ridge" by observing the few remaining large native trees on Balmoral Road above Chambers Street. Unlike the rest of hilly Fernwood, much of this land was levelled for construction of Vic High on the site of abandoned gravel pits. The original public spring for Victoria, long ago diverted into the storm sewer system, is completely obscured. At 1286, Howell house (1890) is a modest carpenter-version of the Italian Villa-style introduced by architects Wright & Saunders, and popular in the 1860s. A Sunday School which developed into Belmont United Church was started here.

12. Turn right on Ridge Road:

Long-time residents remember this corner as the location of a spring. 2130, Icelandic carpenter Kelly Johnson's impressive Queen Anne-style home (1891-97) is now sadly isolated between undistinguished apartment blocks.

13. Turn left on Denman Street:

The intersection of Denman and Spring marks the approximate location of Victoria's original Public Spring. In the 1860s, horse-drawn carts of the Spring Ridge Water Co. carved trails along the ridge to Chambers Street and into town. This was also the site of the Empire Brewery and Saloon (1885), which used the spring water to brew beer. A similar establishment, the Lion Brewery and Saloon (1862-1885) stood at the site of the playground off Chambers at the foot of Queens, "C" on map. According to early maps, the main spring or public well, was located between Princess & Queens, west of Spring Road, an area once known as "Grass Hill". Another spring is shown closer to Pembroke and Chambers, both outlets perhaps where willow trees now grow. A side-trip up Walnut Street takes in 1272, the LeSueur home (1898), an intact Queen Anne cottage containing original family furnishings. In the back yard is an earlier two-room cabin (1894).

14. Turn left on Spring Road:

Looking to the north, notice the early Cedar Hill Road trail. Walk south to Pembroke past houses built on the site of the original springs, later municipal gravel yards. At Pembroke, William Stevenson Park is located in a pit excavated to fill James Bay prior to the construction of the Empress Hotel, leading to the remark, "a good piece of Fernwood is downtown under the Empress."

15. Turn right on Pembroke Street:

Perched curiously on the remains of a former ridge are two very unusual brick houses: 1215, contractor Fred Adam's mansard-roofed home (1890) with a symmetrical facade with elaborate porch and twin bays, and almost flat shed-roofed dormers. Contracted to build the BC Parliament Buildings, Adams drowned in a shipwreck off Trial Island in 1895; 1211, bricklayer John Andersen's house (1890), a hip-roofed brick Queen Anne-style cottage with picturesque 'Scottish' dormers. Both houses feature imposing chimneys.

16. Turn left on Chambers Street:

Chambers, which appears on Victoria's first survey maps, was a main supply route for water, gravel and beer carts. At Gladstone stood the wooden Spring Ridge School (1887-1968), "D" on map, now a neighbourhood 'Commons'. A short detour right on Caledonia St. offers a rest in a small park of large Garry Oaks, centuries-old, surely the oldest surviving "residents" of the neighbourhood. A side-trip down Caledonia to Cook Street leads to a noteworthy church at 1112 Caledonia (1891) and a block of Italianate homes from that era. Crossing Cook, one enters the historic North Park neighbourhood. The NW corner, "E" on map, was the location of the stately home of City Hall architect, John Teague, demolished in 1966. A giant Sequoia tree marks the site.

17. Continue along Chambers Street to Yukon Street:

Walk past the Community Allotment Gardens (at North Park) and Hagaert Park (at Grant) to a short block of five Italianate homes on Yukon (1894), four of them identical, built by barber William Whittaker, who lived near-by on Balmoral Road. A side-trip to Pandora Avenue takes in the heritage-designated Christian Science Church (1919) at 1205 Chambers, built on the site of the early Women's Infirmary (1864). Four houses on the south side of Pandora facing Harris Green were moved for construction of the church.

18. Return to start, continuing up Grant Street:

The footpath through Haegart Park leads to Grant Street and a return to the starting point, crossing the Victoria High School grounds to the parking lot or Fernwood Square.

For further information consult:

The Fernwood Files, Ellis & Lillard, Orca

This Old House, City of Victoria

Landmarks, Geoffrey Castle & Barry King

[City of Victoria Archives](#)

[Hallmark Society Archives](#)

[Fernwood Community Association](#)

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