

## Baillie House



Photo: Vesta Giles

### Site Identification

**Nearest Community:**

Merritt, B.C.

**Geocache Location:**

N 50°06.763'

W 120°47.218'

**Altitude:**

596m

**Ownership:**

City of Merritt/  
Nicola Valley Heritage Society

**Accuracy:**

3 meters

**Overall Difficulty:** 1.5

**Overall Terrain:** 1.5

**Access Information and**

**Restrictions:**

Located at the corner of Voght and  
Mamette Avenue.

**Parking Advice:**

Parking at Civic Centre or on  
Mamette Avenue.

For more information or to report a  
problem with this site please contact:

Gold Country Communities Society  
PO. Box 933  
Cache Creek, BC.,  
VOK 1H0

Tel: 1-877-453-9467

email: [info@exploregoldcountry.com](mailto:info@exploregoldcountry.com)

For more site pages go to:  
[www.goldtrail.com](http://www.goldtrail.com)

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With stained glass windows catching glints of the hot Merritt sun and Victorian architecture that offers an elegant balance to the Wild West nature of the town, the Baillie House is a proud testament to the entrepreneurial pioneers who built the area's towns and cities from the ground up.

Built by Cosom A. Bigney in 1913 for his mail-order bride who was enroute from England, Bigney wanted her future home to reflect the one she had left, with romantic details that included elaborate fretwork on the vaulted gables, stained glass transoms and a decorated verandah porch.

Unfortunately, Bigney's young bride met another man while on the ship and never arrived. From that point Bigney, who never married, shared the house with his business partner, Emsley Weatherby. In the 1920's Bigney's nephew, Howard Cameron, moved in. Together the three ran a pop bottling business in the basement of the store on the corner of the lot, supplying cold, alcohol-free drinks to local coal miners. They also ran a successful feed and seed business.

Bigney died in 1933 and Weatherby died in 1935. The economy was poor and Cameron couldn't pay the taxes so the property was taken over by the city. In 1938 Melville Baillie, a blacksmith, bought the property. His wife, Pauline, and their six children moved in and suddenly the quiet house was home to the squeals and secrets of little girls, fresh baking, and the busy details of family life. Melville and his son, Mel Jr., ran a successful blacksmith shop and, as cars took over from horses, Mel Jr. shifted the business into machining and welding.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Baillie, reputed to be a notoriously bad gardener, set to work organizing her new house and planting the garden. The hollyhocks she planted in the

1940's still thrive along the side of the house, and her Manitoba Maple provides welcome shade for visitors.

Shortly after the family moved in, several members fell ill with typhoid fever. During his illness, Mel Jr. designed a hot water heating system that would spread heat evenly through the entire house. After he recovered, he installed the heater and radiators, which still heat the house today.

Mr. Baillie passed away in 1969 and his wife in 1972. Mel Jr. continued operating his machine shop, passing away in 1990.

In 1995, the City of Merritt purchased the property from Tom McDonagh, intending to move the house to make way for parking spaces. Community members rallied, arguing that there was too little green space already and that heritage buildings needed preservation. Over 1,800 people signed a petition to prevent the move and fundraising events raised money and awareness for the cause. Finally, the city acknowledged the value of heritage buildings and agreed to lease the building to the newly formed Nicola Valley Heritage Society.

After years of hard and passionate work by members of the heritage society, the Baillie House remains a green oasis in the heart of Merritt, and home to the Merritt Tourism Information Centre. While faded pink bloomers wave gently in the breeze, over 15,000 visitors enjoy the hospitality and nostalgia, and possibly spirits, of the Baillie House each year.

In 2008 BC SPIRITS, a paranormal research organization, spent a night in the house to observe paranormal activity. Footsteps upstairs, unexplained crashes, and a doorbell that randomly changes its tune from ding dong to the Westminster Chimes have been reported for years by staff and visitors. During their night in the house, BC SPIRITS recorded some anomalies, but nothing that dramatic.

Perhaps the greatest indication of the respect and affection the people of Merritt, be they flesh or spirit, have for the Baillie House is that in all of its years it has never been vandalized - no graffiti, no broken windows, no destruction of any means.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

"Baillie House: The past with a future." *Merritt Herald Community*, January 10, 2001.

Curnow, S. Email. June 6, 2012.

Douglas, B. Personal interview. April 19, 2012.

Douglas, B. (2006). "The Historic Baillie House Property." *Nicola Valley Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1&2, Fall / Winter 2006.

"Ghostbusters check out Baillie House". *The Merritt Herald*, April 16, 2008, p.13.

#### **Letterboxing Clues:**

Cache is behind a bush between parking lot and the North side of the arena building.