

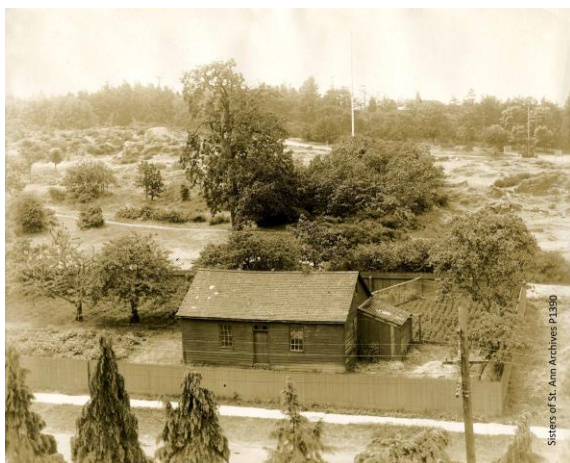
The First Schoolhouse

From 1858 to 1861, the four Sisters of St. Ann and their companion Marie Mainville lived in a rustic cabin. The structure was not in particularly good shape, but housing in Fort Victoria in 1858 was at a premium due to the huge influx of people headed for the Fraser River gold rush. Bishop Demers, who brought the Sisters to Victoria, had purchased the cabin and property in 1855 from Hudson's Bay Company employee Leon Morel.

Morel, one of many French Canadians who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company in Western Canada, was sent to Fort Vancouver in 1840, where he served as a middleman (trader). He also served as a Voltigeur (a volunteer who aided in enforcing justice) on Vancouver Island. In 1850, Morel was sent to Fort Victoria. Two years later he purchased land from the Hudson's Bay Company that had a rough log cabin on it, perfect for his wife Adelaide and family. Morel later sold the property before finally departing for Oregon.

After the Sisters of St. Ann moved in, they built an addition and operated St. Ann's Convent School in the small cabin. In August 1859, Bishop Demers transferred the ownership of the property to the Sisters. The Pioneer Convent cabin, now known as St. Ann's Schoolhouse, has been moved twice—to the rear of St. Ann's Academy in 1966 and then to its present site at the Royal BC Museum in 1974.

No traces can be seen of the nailed-up canvas cloth on which the Sisters glued wallpaper in the 1860s, or the wall that once divided the room into two separate spaces. But these four strong walls remain. For more than 150 years this has been a place for learning. The schoolhouse is still used as a classroom today, to share the BC story with both schoolchildren and adults.



St. Ann's Schoolhouse in approximately 1932
SSA Archives P1390

How to Build a Hudson's Bay Company Log Cabin

St. Ann's Schoolhouse was made with post-on-sill log construction. Many of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) cabins were made in this way, a method common to French Canadian log buildings.

Here are the building steps:

1. Start with a horizontal sill or base for the frame.
2. Anchor slotted vertical posts into this base, using a mortise joint (a rectangular cavity).
3. Square off the logs and notch the ends with an axe.
4. Drop these notched logs down between the posts to form uprights.
5. Top these uprights with another mortised upper sill. This creates a rigid frame.
6. Add siding and presto: A HBC-style log cabin!