

## Cornerstone of local history

'Fernwood's living room' hosts exhibit of photos of the community from 1890 to 1959

BY CORY RUF, TIMES COLONIST AUGUST 12, 2012



Maia Anstey straightens one of the photos in an exhibition that depicts Fernwood's history on the walls of the Cornerstoen Café.

**Photograph by:** Lyle Stafford, timescolonist.com (August 2012)

Peer into the window at the Cornerstone Café and you'll find a scene that's very 2012.

P Inside the Fernwood hotspot, funky baristas jockey the whirring espresso machine, serving up ethically sourced coffee. A few seated patrons surf the Internet on laptops while casually sipping their drinks.

In spite of the shop's hip, modern vibe, reminders of the community's history aren't far away. A new photo exhibition adorning the café's walls provides a particularly intimate view into Fernwood's pre1960s past.

Fernwood 150: A Photo Legacy features 14 black-and-white stills that date from between 1890 and 1959.

Just more than half portray a scene taking place at one of Fernwood's "four corners," the intersection at Gladstone Avenue and Fernwood Road that's long been the community's social hub. (The Cornerstone Café occupies the corner storefront in the large red-brick Victorian building on the intersection's southeast side.)

"These are all places where people from Fernwood spend a lot of time," said Mila Czemerys, who curated the exhibition. "It's really important to maintain that connection to our past."

"If you look at the corners of the building, you can see which ones they are in the picture," said Holly Oaken, a café employee who lives in the neighbourhood.

She's right. Two shots, dating from the 1890s and 1920s, show Emmanuel Baptist Church, which is instantly recognizable as the building that now houses the Belfry Theatre.

There are also multiple photos of the Rennie & Taylor Bakery, which, for decades, occupied part of the complex on the northwest corner.

One of Czemerys's personal favourites dates from 1959 and shows three people standing near the doorway of what is now the Fernwood Inn. A young man leans in to kiss a woman on the cheek, while another man looks straight at the camera.

Some selections contain sights from farther afield, though only slightly.

A somewhat creepy shot from the 1890s features dour-faced, wide-eyed students at the Spring Ridge School, which stood at Gladstone and Chambers but was demolished in the 1960s.

A couple possess nascent hints of the arty, alternative spirit that would become one of Fernwood's defining cultural characteristics. For example, a shot from the 1920s shows 40-odd members of a theatre troupe posing in costume outside Victoria High School.

A communication co-ordinator for the Fernwood Neighbourhood Research Group, Czemerys pored through city archives for photos that piqued her interest.

Armed with a grant from the Victoria 150 committee, she framed prints of her selections in time to display them in the café for Fernfest, the community's annual summer fair, which took place in June.

The pictures were reinstalled for the current exhibition, which opened July 24 and runs until December.

Czemerys, who moonlights as a visual artist, said the café, which is run by Fernwood NRG, was an obvious choice of venue.

"I see it as Fernwood's living room. There are a lot of local people who spend a lot of time there, so it's the perfect place to be showing this display."

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