

## Attachment 4 - Statement of Significance



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### Statement of Significance

#### McCall's Funeral Home – 1400 Vancouver Street

##### Description

McCall's Funeral Home is an exemplary design of the West Coast Modern style in Victoria by the locally famed architect John Di Castri. Built in 1955, the striking chapel with its sloping roof and angular wall geometry is located on the corner of Johnson and Vancouver Streets in the Harris Green neighbourhood of Victoria. The 1961 addition significantly extended the footprint of the chapel while seamlessly adding administration space to it. The significance of the historic place is limited to the footprint of the original chapel.

##### Heritage Value

The value of McCall's Funeral Home is found in its' achievement in concept and design, its' association with a notable architect, and its' location in the perimeter neighbourhood of Harris Green.

Through its architectural expression, the McCall Funeral Home is a dramatic illustration of the cultural exchange developing within Victoria during the post war years and became an instant landmark. Its' construction provides a strong, local example of the West Coast Modern style. This is exemplified in part with the low lying ground level form of both the chapel and addition. The sloped roof assembly of the chapel with its deep eaves incorporates a two-way pitch that, when viewed from the interior, guides the eye to the frontal service area. The exposed timber structure merges design and function into singular elements requiring a high degree of material quality and finish. The intentional glazing within the angular concrete block wall assemblies directs the natural light in the interior space creating an important, purposeful illumination. The form of the addition, incorporating projecting wall panels, concrete block masonry, and an angular canopy over the front entrance, is a nod to the design of the original chapel. This style, attributed in large to the designs of Frank Lloyd Wright, was creatively explored and developed by Victoria's own John Di Castri.

Born in Victoria on July 26, 1924, John A. Di Castri, at the age of 18, gained his early experience articling with Henry Whittaker, the Chief Architect of the BC Department of Public Works. After a brief period working in the office of Birley Wade and Stockdill, he left Victoria to study at the University of Oklahoma under Bruce Goff, a student of Frank Lloyd Wright. Following his return to Victoria and a brief stint working with Frank W. Nichols, John would start his own practise in 1952. A pioneer in this new style, John would exploit the use of geometric shapes and complex eccentric forms in his works. He was very interested with developing his own brand of modernism; his own interpretation of Wright's style. He would go on to work for 50 years in Victoria designing numerous unique structures across the city including the Balantyne's Florist and Royal Trust buildings and the entrance addition to the Royal BC Museum.

The location of the funeral home in the Harris Green neighbourhood of Victoria conveniently placed it in the developing, commercial border of the city, close to the many grand churches and cathedrals. This location connected the building and its function to the original city and its historically significant places of worship while being itself an architectural cornerstone of a new neighbourhood through its innovative design and intentional expression.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The key elements that define the heritage character of the McCall Funeral Home and support its heritage values are:

- modernist design with complex, geometrical, angular massing
- low-sloped, double pitched roof with large overhanging eaves
- exposed timber roof structure with metal tie rod supports
- expressive concrete block wall assemblies punctuated with linear glazing
- projecting foyer with intersecting concrete walls
- natural lighting to the interior through the wall and clerestory glazing
- metal and concrete sign stand
- association with one of Victoria's most well-known architects
- prominent location on the corner of Johnson and Vancouver streets in the Harris Green neighbourhood