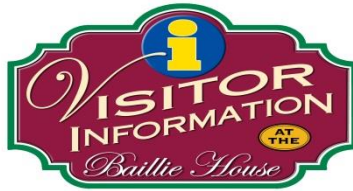


2019 YEAR END REPORT FOR THE VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE AT THE BAILLIE HOUSE

Prepared by:

Nicola Valley Heritage Society



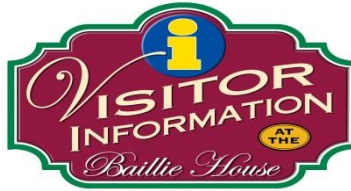


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Executive Summary

This report covers October to December of 2019 and is also a year-end report for the Merritt Visitor Information Centre at the Baillie House.

From October to December 4,308 visitors stopped at the Merritt Visitor Information at the Baillie House. This was an 8.5% increase over the number of visitors in 2018 for the same period.

The total number of visitors for 2019 was 30,780. This was an increase of 6.9% (or 1,979 visitors) for the year. This was the first year that more than 30,000 visitors stopped at the Baillie property.

Every quarter of 2019 saw increases in visitors:

First quarter	7.2%
Second quarter	13.9%
Third quarter	2.2%
Fourth quarter	8.5%

The total number of volunteer hours contributed to the Baillie property in 2019 was 4,124.

Dates and Hours of Operation

The Visitor Information Centre (VIC) was open for 6 hours each day during the months of October, November and December. We were open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm. For this 3-month period the VIC was open for a total of 366 hours.

During 2019 our winter hours (January to April, October to December) were 6 hours/day and 5 days/week (Tuesday to Saturday). From May 1st to September 30th, we were open from 10 am to 6 pm every day (including all statutory holidays). As a result, the Visitor Information Centre was open for a total of 2094 hours during 2019.

Staffing

From January 1st to April 30th, one person was working each day (with volunteers helping as necessary). May 1st to August 30th, there were at least 2 employees working every day (usually the manager plus one summer student or part-time person). Every Thursday, Friday and Saturday from May 1st to August 30th there were 3 staff members plus at least one volunteer in the VIC. These are the busiest days each week. Heritage Society volunteers were on-site every Sunday, Monday and Tuesday from noon to 2 pm to help cover lunch hours. For the remainder of the year one employee worked each day. The Visitor Information Centre at the Baillie House created over 4252 person-hours of employment during 2019 (an increase of 727 person-hours).

Staff Training and Development

The summer employees were required to complete the Tourism/Visitor Information Counsellor Training Program. They also received on-the-job training from the site manager when they began work.

Visitor Statistics for October, November & December 2019

Visitor Stats October to December 2019						
	October 2019	November 2019	December 2019	Fourth Quarter 2019	Fourth Quarter 2018	% Difference 2019 vs 2018
Visitor Parties	1099	1023	443	2635	2565	+2.7%
Visitors	1583	1672	716	4308	3971	+6.9%
Tour Buses	0	0	0	0	0	

The number of visitors to the Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House increased 8.7% in October, 8.2% in November and 8.7% in December. Tourists continue to come to downtown Merritt as a result of the closing of the BC Visitor Centre at Exit 286. Many of these visitors had stopped at our site earlier in the year and returned to the downtown when they travelled past Merritt in the later part of the year.

Visitor Statistics for 2019

	2019 JAN-DEC	2018 JAN-DEC	2017 JAN-DEC	% Difference 2019/2018
Visitor Parties	16,577	15,869	13,517	+4.5%
Visitors	30,780	28,801	23,781	+6.9%
Tour Buses	13	2	0	

Every month of 2019, except for July and August, saw an increase in the number of visitors stopping at the Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House. In July, there was a 1.9% drop in visitors and a 4.4% drop in August. This led to the largest number of visitors to the Baillie property that we have ever experienced. This was the first year that we had over 30,000 visitors stop at the Baillie property.

Many visitors came to downtown Merritt because the BC Visitor Centre closed and they were looking for a rest stop and washroom facilities. The Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House is still the number one attraction in Merritt on Trip Advisor. Some quotes from Trip Advisor reviews:

"This place has the most friendliest and welcoming staff. It is a must visit when in Merritt. Great visitors information. Thank you."

"It's inside a house that was built in 1912, full of the "old taste", filled with excellent, friendly staff / volunteers. They were very knowledgeable... We now prefer this place to the one that was shut down and would recommend friends to visit here.....

Once again, thank you to the staff / volunteers of this center!"

In 2019, visitors to Merritt stopped at our site for many reasons:

Site Facilities	43%
Maps/directions	18%
Food/beverage	9%
Attractions	8%
Shopping	8%
Adventure recreation	6%
Events	2%
Transportation	2%
Accommodation	2%
Parks	1%
Community Services	1%

The majority of the visitors were from B.C. as people continue to travel closer to home and see what their home province has to offer.

British Columbia	56%
Alberta	21%
Europe	7%
Rest of Canada	6%
Asia/Australia	5%
U.S.	4%
Other (mainly New Zealand)	1%

The length of stay for visitors was usually one day:

Same day	79%
One night	14%
2 nights	4%
3 nights or more	3%

Throughout 2019, the staff of the Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House noted that the number of visitors from across Canada and the US has remained stable from 2018 to 2019. Most visitors to downtown Merritt are still only in town for part of a day. Many ask us where they can take their children and/or dog for a walk or have a picnic. The hiking/mountain biking trails that are close to town are a great draw.

The picnic area at the Baillie House continues to be a great attraction for visitors. It is child and dog friendly and our staff provides free coffee, tea, iced tea or lemonade to everyone that stops by. Many days there is free home-baking available also. Our staff gave many more tours of the property than in previous years. During the tour, visitors learn about the Baillie Property's history and about the history of Merritt.

Building, Grounds and Stakeholder Relations

Building: All necessary building maintenance is carried out by Heritage Society volunteers or by licensed contractors at no cost to the City of Merritt.

New Christmas light were purchased for all of the buildings in 2019.

The new back deck at the Visitor Centre has received rave reviews from locals and tourists.

The railings and stairs on the back deck of the Baillie House were also replaced in 2019.

Three raised garden beds were built on the grounds behind the Baillie House.

Grounds: The lawn and gardens on the Baillie property was completely looked after by volunteers. Yearly tree and hedge trimming was completed by volunteers as well. The Baillie property yard is heavily used by visitors and locals on a daily basis for free picnic area. Our staff receives compliments daily about the gardens. Christmas lights were put up in November for Country Christmas week. They continued to be on every night until the end of the year.

Stakeholder Relations: The Heritage Society continues to work with other local groups to promote events (Nicola Naturalists, churches, Film Society), sell products (Museum, Merritt Youth and Family Services "Taste of Merritt" geocaching book, Girl Guide cookies, poppies for the Legion), accept registrations (Community Gardens) at no cost to these groups. We assist other organizations such as Ministry of Forests (recreation sites and trails), Country Christmas (answer phone queries, parade applications) to help visitors find what Merritt has to offer.

The local senior citizen facilities regularly bring their clients to visit the Baillie property.

Ten classes of school children (over 200 children) came to visit the Baillie property for an interactive tour that included a visit with a blacksmith and with the local Spinners and Weavers.

Vendors and patrons of the Farmers' Market use our washrooms and picnic area every Saturday. In turn, the Farmers' Market vendors send tourists to the VIB so we can tell them about what Merritt and the Nicola Valley have to offer.

Our phone number and email address are widely available to potential visitors. Phone calls come from both potential visitors to Merritt and from people considering moving to Merritt. They ask about the weather, services and shopping opportunities that Merritt has to offer, the hospital facilities, events, attractions. We can mail out packages or email information such as lists of accommodations or restaurants.

Many groups drop-off posters for their events which are put in our front windows for all passersby to read (Catholic Church, United Church, Film Society, Art gallery, etc.).

Events are listed on the Merritt Calendar of Events on the Baillie House web page as well.

Every Wednesday throughout the year, the Heritage Society pays for one of our employees to post on Facebook and Twitter about events coming up on the next weekend.

During Country Christmas, the Heritage Society had free hot chocolate and coffee after the parade

About 60 people stopped by that evening

Advertising: The Visitor Information Booth was advertised in the Merritt guide, Gold Country guide, Leisure guide and Merritt Stock Car Association Calendar.

Fundraising: The volunteers at the Baillie property sell donated items all year round, hosted a Christmas bake sale, held a Mothers' Day High Tea and sold fresh strawberries. The Spring Garden Festival attracted over 350 people this year.

The “Haunted” crew held an event on the Baillie Property that was open to the public. Both were well-attended. Some sensitive guests had “experiences” that were very interesting.

Looking Ahead to 2020

The Nicola Valley Heritage Society will continue to provide a warm welcome to Merritt so that visitors to downtown Merritt will return. The Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House will again be advertised in the official Merritt guide and in the Gold Country guide. We will also purchase an ad in the program stock car racing schedule/poster.

All local products and souvenirs will continue to be available for sale. Tourists look for local products and unique items to purchase when they visit downtown Merritt. The Heritage Society staff and volunteers make many unique Merritt souvenirs such as bookmarks, seeds, postcards, note cards, pens, lighters and bumper stickers. Specific Merritt souvenirs are very rare in Merritt.

The Nicola Valley Heritage Society has secured a grant from Heritage BC to help to paint the buildings on the site. The grant will cover half of the cost of the painting. Our volunteers have raised the remainder of the money to complete the project.

Visitor number comparisons for other Visitor Centres for 2019:

Princeton	18,305
Kamloops	10,622
Penticton	29,824
Kelowna	67,851
Hope	80,793
Peachland	17,768
Summerland	8,117
Keremeos	9,458

Visitors per day in July and August:

2015	98
2016	111
2017	129
2018	168
2019	180

2019 COSTS TO OPERATE THE VISITOR INFORMATION BOOTH ON THE BAILLIE PROPERTY

INCOME:

City of Merritt – Tourism	\$51,111.00	
Income from sale of local products	\$42,915.00	
Income from Fundraising	\$ 1,814.50	
Income from Garage Sale	\$ 9,600.40	
Net income from Strawberry sale	\$ 435.00	
Donation Box	\$ 2,328.60	
Other income	<u>\$ 2,576.84</u>	
TOTAL INCOME		\$110,784.34

EXPENSES:

WAGES AND BENEFITS

Manager's Salary	\$33,954.37
MERC (CPP, EI, WCB)	<u>\$ 2,330.04</u>
Total Expense for Manager	\$36,284.41

Summer students, part-time help	\$42,970.96
MERC	<u>\$ 2,922.86</u>
Total Part-time Employee Expense	\$45,893.82

OVERHEAD AND OTHER IN-KIND EXPENSES:

Site Maintenance: General repairs	\$ 1,493.27
Office Supplies	\$ 413.81
Postage	\$ 137.66
Telephone + internet	\$ 1,384.73
Advertising	\$ 609.36
Training	\$ 700.00
Insurance	\$ 1,621.00
Janitorial Supplies	\$ 870.00
Groceries (coffee, tea, etc)	\$ 1,596.25
Cost to purchase items for resale	\$ 10,999.89
Heating	\$ 2,450.00
Hydro	\$ 1,250.00
Security	\$ 1,114.73
Garden Expenses	\$ 500.49
Uniforms	\$ 295.68
Miscellaneous	<u>\$ 2,389.63</u>
Total Overhead	\$ 27,826.50

PROJECTS COMPLETED

Visitor Centre Back Porch	\$ 9,717.56
Baillie House Back Deck Repair	\$ 590.24
Garden Boxes	<u>\$ 396.85</u>
Total cost of projects	\$ 10,704.65

TOTAL EXPENSES	\$120,709.38
Net Income (Loss)	(\$ 9,925.04)*

VALUE OF VOLUNTEER HOURS

4,124 hours @ \$20.00/hour	\$ 82,480.00
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This is an increase of 326 volunteer hours in 2019.

*Fundraised reserves were used to complete several projects/repairs in 2019.

PROPOSED BUDGET FOR 2020

INCOME

City of Merritt payments	\$52,133.20	
In-kind Donations from NVHS	\$24,066.80*	
Grant for Summer student's wages	\$ 6,800.00	
Grant for Painting Project	\$ 4,500.00	
Income from sale of local products	<u>\$40,000.00</u>	
TOTAL REVENUE		\$127,500.00

EXPENSES

Wages for Manager	\$35,000.00	
Wages for summer students	\$19,200.00**	
Wages for part-time employee	\$20,500.00**	
CPP, EI, WCB	\$ 7,000.00	
Site maintenance, repairs	\$18,000.00***	
Office supplies	\$ 500.00	
Postage	\$ 200.00	
Telephone & Internet	\$ 1,500.00	
Advertising	\$ 1,000.00	
Training, uniforms	\$ 1,000.00	
Insurance	\$ 1,700.00	
Janitorial supplies	\$ 900.00	
Groceries	\$ 1,800.00	
Cost to purchase items for sale	\$14,000.00	
Security	\$ 1,200.00	
Heating/cooling	\$ 2,700.00	
Hydro	<u>\$ 1,300.00</u>	
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$127,500.00

VALUE OF VOLUNTEER TIME

4200 Volunteer Hours @ \$20.00/hour **\$ 84,000.00**

Volunteers will continue to help tourists in the Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House, supply baking, maintain grounds and buildings, clean and set-up house for tours, etc. Many volunteers are retired tradespeople (e.g. electricians, cooks, handyman). The value of their donated expertise greatly exceeds \$20.00/hour but we feel that this is an average value for all time committed.

*In-kind donations are from fund-raising events held at the Baillie Property

**Minimum wage in BC will be increasing from \$13.85 to \$14.60 in June of 2020. We must pay above minimum wage to get any applicants.

***Site repairs includes repainting all of the buildings on the site (money to come from reserves and from grant)