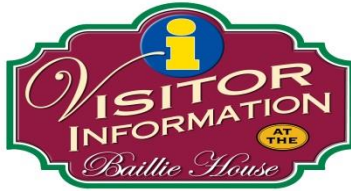


# **2020 YEAR END REPORT FOR THE VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE AT THE BAILLIE HOUSE**

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## Executive Summary

This report covers October to December of 2020 and is also a year-end report for the Merritt Visitor Information Centre at the Baillie House for 2020.

From October to December 3,207 visitors stopped at the Merritt Visitor Information at the Baillie House. This was an 25.6% decrease over the number of visitors in 2019 for the same period. Visitors were once again asked not to travel by December of 2020.

The total number of visitors for 2020 was 17,584. This was a decrease of 42.9% decrease (or 13,196 visitors) for the year. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, the Visitor Centre was closed from March 15<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup>. During that time, staff was still available to answer emails and phone messages as well as taking phone calls at home. There were 47 requests for information during that time. Packages were mailed out when requested.

For the majority of 2020, the American border has been closed to vehicle traffic and there were only a few travelers from Europe and Australia (probably due to quarantine requirements upon arrival as well as the pandemic). The vast majority of travelers were from BC with some Albertans every day. Canadians from other provinces travelled through Merritt every week as well. The majority of Albertans were here to enjoy outdoor activities (camping, fishing).

Beginning on June 1<sup>st</sup>, the Merritt Visitor Centre was fully staffed and open every day until the end of September with all Covid-19 protocols in place. This included limiting the number of visitors inside the buildings at any one time. Four summer students were hired as volunteers could not work inside the buildings due to the occupancy limits.

Watch a video of a Haunted Crew paranormal investigation at <https://youtu.be/yqZhGGMGVY>

**The total number of volunteer hours contributed to the Baillie property in 2020 was 1451.**

## 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 2020 our winter hours (January to April, October to December) were 6 hours/day and 5 days/week (Tuesday to Saturday). From June 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup>, we were open from 9 am to 5 pm every day (including all statutory holidays). As a result, the Visitor Information Centre was open for a total of 1598 hours during 2020.

The Visitor Centre at the Baillie House was closed from March 15<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup> due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This resulted in the Visitor Centre being open 24% less hours over the year. Payment in the second quarter reflected the loss of hours.

### Staffing

From January 1<sup>st</sup> to March 15<sup>th</sup>, one person was working each day (with volunteers helping as necessary). June 1<sup>st</sup> to August 30<sup>th</sup>, there were at least 3 employees working every day (usually the manager plus two summer students or a part-time person). Volunteers were not able to help inside the Visitor Centre due to the pandemic (and their ages/health concerns). WorkSafeBC limits the number of occupants inside buildings. As a result, we were only able to have one staff member inside the Visitor Centre to maximize the number of visitors that could be inside the building. The other 2 staff members each day were outside the doors, monitoring how many people were in the building at one time. Heritage Society volunteers were on-site every Tuesday and Friday through the summer. From September to the end of the year, there was one staff member on-site every day with a volunteer to help cover lunch hours. The Visitor Information Centre at the Baillie House created 3006 person-hours of employment during 2020.

### 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 2020

Visitor Stats October to December 2020						
	October 2020	November 2020	December 2020	Fourth Quarter 2020	Fourth Quarter 2019	% Difference 2020 vs 2019
Visitor Parties	954	866	400	2220	2635	-15.7%
Visitors	1501	1106	600	3207	4308	-25.6%
Tour Buses	0	0	0	0	0	

The number of visitors stopping at the Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House in the fourth quarter of 2020 was reduced by travel restrictions as the Covid-19 pandemic once again began to worsen. Travelers from out-of-province are being discouraged once again (and even travel within BC is not being promoted due to the pandemic).

## Visitor Statistics for 2020

	2020 JAN-DEC	2019 JAN-DEC	2018 JAN-DEC	% Difference 2020/2019
Visitor Parties	11,131	16,577	15,869	-32.9%
Visitors	17,584	30,780	28,801	-42.9%
Tour Buses	0	2	0	

This was the first year that every month had a decrease in the number of visitors to downtown Merritt. The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the Visitor Centre being closed from March 15<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup>. Once the Visitor Centre reopened, the number of visitors was lower and they were mainly British Columbians. Travel from other provinces and countries was discouraged. The American border has been closed for the majority of 2020. Between the pandemic and the requirements for travelers to quarantine for 2 weeks once they enter the country, there was only a very limited number of out-of-country visitors. There were more visitors from Alberta than in previous years.

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:

"I love this place! Aside from visitor information like maps and brochures, the passionate staff are super helpful about what to see and do in Merritt and in the surrounding area. I could hang out in the backyard for hours in the summer. Make sure you go on one of the tours of the house in the summer. Added bonus of some really cool collectables which are for sale. Well done!"

"My boyfriend and I have been to this visitor center several times and each time we have been greeted by friendly staff. This visitor center has a lovely garden where we sit and eat lunch in the sun. They offer a free beverage; a glass of lemonade, a tea or a coffee. What I love is the ice cream. This centre also sells great little souvenirs and has a great selection of maps."

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

In 2020, visitors to Merritt stopped at our site for many reasons:

Site Facilities	53%
Maps/directions	15%
Shopping	9%
Attractions	7%
Adventure recreation	7%
Food/beverage	5%
Accommodation	2%
Transportation	1%
Parks	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	74%
Alberta	20%
Rest of Canada	5%
Other	1%

The length of stay for visitors was usually one day:

Same day	79%
One night	15%
2 nights	4%
3 nights or more	2%

This year saw a huge change in the number of visitors and their origin. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, travel was restricted within Canada and within BC. British Columbians were encouraged to explore in their own backyard. It seemed that camping, hiking, fishing and other outdoor activities were of greater interest to travelers as they stayed away from large centers and explored our lakes, hiking and biking trails. There were a few visitors from outside of Canada (mainly Australians). The vast majority were from BC with several Albertans every day. There was also an increase in travelers from eastern Canada. Most only stayed in town for part of a day but many went camping at a lake within an hour of Merritt. Despite the high use of cellphones, we still get many requests for maps and visitor guides. The maps on phones are very small and tourists still prefer a paper copy.

### **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.

The Visitor Centre and the barn were both painted in the spring of 2020. A new furnace was installed in the Visitor Centre in September. The cost for these 2 items was \$10,587.69. Half of the painting costs came from a BC Legacy Fund grant. The remainder of the painting cost and the cost of the furnace were paid for by fundraising at the Baillie property.

A new Windows 10 computer was purchased for use in the Visitor Centre.

**Grounds:** The lawn and gardens on the Baillie property were 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 left on all year round in 2020.

A large number of new tulips (250) were planted in the Baillie House flower beds in the fall of 2020.

**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, poppies for the Legion), at no cost to these groups. We assist other organizations such as Ministry of Forests (recreation sites and trails) get the word out about all of our local trails and recreation sites.

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

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 VIC 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.

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

**Advertising:** The Visitor Information Centre purchased an ad on a giant television at Boston Pizza. It is a 40 second video about the Visitor Information Centre and urges visitors to come to downtown Merritt.

**Fundraising:** The volunteers at the Baillie property sell donated items all year round. A paranormal group that has done many investigations at the Baillie property came again this summer. A video of their experience is on youtube.com at <https://youtu.be/yqZhcGMGViy> ...very spooky!

## **Looking Ahead to 2021**

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. 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 will apply for a grant from Heritage BC to help to paint the remaining 2 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 2020:**

	<b><u>2020</u></b>	<b><u>2019</u></b>	<b><u>how long closed</u></b>
Princeton	12,014	18,305	2 ½ months
Kamloops	closed since Feb.	10,622	
Penticton	3,561	29,824	2 ½ months
Kelowna	19,186	67,851	3 ½ months
Hope	15,017	80,793	3 ½ months
Peachland	4,354	17,768	2 ½ months
Summerland	2,351	8,117	2 ½ months
Keremeos	2,000	9,458	3 months

## **Visitors per day in July and August:**

2015	98
2016	111
2017	129
2018	168
2019	180
2020	120

**2020 COSTS TO OPERATE THE MERRITT VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE ON THE BAILLIE PROPERTY****INCOME:**

City of Merritt – Tourism	\$48,115.98	
Income from sale of local products	\$23,493.80	
Income from Garage Sale	\$16,500.00	
Summer student Grant	\$16,352.00	
Grant for Painting Project	\$ 3,246.00	
Walmart Community Grant	\$ 1,000.00	
Donation Box	<u>\$ 900.00</u>	
TOTAL INCOME		\$109,607.78**

**EXPENSES:****WAGES AND BENEFITS**

Manager's Salary	\$24,395.50	
MERC (CPP, EI, WCB)	<u>\$ 1,830.04</u>	
Total Expense for Manager	\$26,225.54	\$ 26,225.54
Summer students, part-time help	\$42,636.67	
MERC	<u>\$ 2,521.36</u>	
Total Part-time Employee Expense	\$45,158.03	\$ 45,158.03

**2020 PROJECTS COMPLETED**

Painting Project	\$ 6,573.00	
Visitor Centre Furnace	\$ 4,014.69	
Windows 10 Computer	<u>\$ 565.13</u>	
Total Cost of Projects	\$ 11,152.82	\$ 11,152.82

**OVERHEAD AND OTHER IN-KIND EXPENSES:**

Site Maintenance: General repairs	\$ 1,251.55
Office Supplies	\$ 650.00
Postage	\$ 60.49
Telephone + internet	\$ 1,385.16
Advertising	\$ 886.99
Training	\$ 700.00
Insurance	\$ 1,783.00
Janitorial Supplies	\$ 700.00
Covid-19 Supplies	\$ 992.66
Groceries	\$ 1,031.32
Garden	\$ 815.71
Cost to purchase items for resale	\$ 5,419.07
Heating	\$ 2,450.00
Hydro	\$ 1,050.00
Security	\$ 1,114.73

Uniforms	\$ 414.18	
Signage	\$ 348.67	
Miscellaneous	<u>\$ 2,389.63</u>	
Total Overhead	\$ 27,826.50	\$ 27,826.50
 TOTAL EXPENSES		 \$110,362.89
 Net Income (Loss)		 (\$ 755.11)*

**VALUE OF VOLUNTEER HOURS**

1451 hours @ \$20.00/hour \$ 29,020.00

Reduced number of volunteer hours due to COVID-19. Elderly volunteers were not able to help in the Visitor Centre due to WorkSafe BC limits on number of visitors inside the building at one time. A few still helped out in yard work and sorting for sales of vintage items and garage sale items.

\*Costs of painting project and new furnace were covered by funds raised in 2020 and previous years.

\*\*All fundraising activities such as Mothers' Day Tea and Strawberry Sales, Garden Festival had to be cancelled this year due to COVID-19 rules.



### PROPOSED BUDGET FOR 2021

#### INCOME

City of Merritt payments	\$52,133.20	
In-kind Donations from NVHS	\$13,016.80*	
Grant for Summer student's wages	\$ 8,800.00	
Grant for Painting Project	\$ 9,500.00	
Income from Garage Sale	\$10,000.00	
Income from sale of local products	<u>\$20,000.00</u>	
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>		<b>\$113,450.00</b>

#### EXPENSES

Wages for Manager	\$25,000.00	
Wages for summer students	\$18,200.00**	
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	\$ 150.00	
Telephone & Internet	\$ 1,500.00	
Advertising	\$ 1,000.00	
Training, uniforms	\$ 1,000.00	
Insurance	\$ 1,900.00	
Janitorial supplies	\$ 900.00	
Groceries	\$ 1,800.00	
Cost to purchase items for sale	\$10,000.00	
Security	\$ 1,200.00	
Heating/cooling	\$ 3,500.00	
Hydro	<u>\$ 1,300.00</u>	
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>		<b>\$113,450.00</b>

#### VALUE OF VOLUNTEER TIME

2200 Volunteer Hours @ \$20.00/hour	<b>\$ 44,000.00</b>
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Volunteers will continue to help tourists in the Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House, 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. Due to Covid-19 distancing requirements it is impossible to have volunteers in the Visitor Centre (limit of 4 people including staff and volunteers), so we have reduced the expected number of volunteer hours.

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

\*\*Minimum wage in BC will be increasing from \$14.60 to \$15.20 in June of 2021. We must pay above minimum wage to get any applicants.

\*\*\*Site repairs include repainting the remaining 2 buildings on the site (money to come from reserves and from grant)