



Street Stories

Bannister Drive

GPS: [49.157727,-122.294466](https://www.google.com/maps/place/49.157727,-122.294466)

The next time you watch a film in a local cinema, remember Fred Bannister – the man who brought movies to Mission.

Born in Keighley, Yorkshire in England in 1875, Bannister came to Toronto in 1903, where he worked selling pianos. In 1905, he sold screen legend Mary Pickford her first piano!

In 1912, he brought his wife and children to Mission. A talented pianist and organist, Bannister organized Mission's first brass band and, by 1923, the local paper described him as "one of the best known musicians in the province as well as being one of the best organists on the Pacific Coast."



Mr. Bannister standing in front of the first Victory Theatre in the fall of 1915 . On the left are broadsides advertising the showing of the classic film "Birth of a Nation" – D.W. Griffith's stirring and controversial epic about the American Civil War, starring Lillian Gish.

Mission Community Archives General Photograph Collection

Meanwhile, Bannister set about establishing Mission's first cinema. Upon his arrival, he opened Victor Theatre on Main Street in October of 1912, featuring silent films shown by a hand-cranked projector .The cinema seated about 150 and charged 15 cents a show (10 cents for kids). Upstairs served as the living quarters for the Bannister family. In honor of First World War allied forces, he changed the name to Victory Theatre.

By 1927, Bannister had sold the cinema and built a larger Victory #2, on the corner of James and Main streets, which seated 650 people. It opened on July 21, 1927 and the first movies featured were: *The Quarter Back* starring Richard Dix and Esther Ralston and the Lupino Lane comedy: *Howdy Duke*. Other memorable shows that played in the cinema were *The Maltese Falcon*, *Down Mexico Way*, and *Captain Blood*. Saturday matinees were also shown, featuring such stars as Gene Autry and John Wayne.

Bannister accompanied the silent films with music from a piano and later an organ positioned beneath the screen, while his son Sam worked the projector and daughter Dolly worked as a cashier. April 1st, 1930 marked a new era when Bannister introduced "talking pictures" at the theatre with the *Taming of the Shrew* starring Canadian born actress Mary Pickford.

The Victory theatres also featured local and touring stage production, as well as local talent contests. According to Gordon Bannister, Fred's grandson, business was a huge success. "Everything was booming," he says. "Prior to the widespread use of television, a lot of people went to theatre."

Fred Bannister eventually sold his cinema to Odeon Theatres in 1945 and moved to West Vancouver. This pioneer theatre operator and talented musician of Mission City died in 1953.

Street Stories is provided by the Mission Community Archives, which is operated by the Mission Historical Society.

By David Buss; edited with additions by Val Billesberger