

COLUMBIA CEMETERY



Heritage Register – Site

- 1) **Historical Name:** Columbia Cemetery
- 2) **Common Name(s):** Happy Valley Cemetery, Sunnyside
- 3) **Location:** Happy Valley
- 4) **Date of Construction:** 1899

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Description:

The Columbia Cemetery occupies five acres of land in Happy Valley at the eastern edge of Rossland. Most of the gravesites are in the northern half of the cemetery and its hilly landscape is marked with many cement cribs and tombstones. The current access is from Highway 3B, through Mountain View Cemetery, to the southern portion of the cemetery.

Heritage Value:

The Columbia Cemetery is the only public cemetery in Rossland. Although closed to further burials since 1985, it has been,

and will continue to be, a place where family and interested people come to visit and stay in touch with the past.

The Columbia Cemetery is the final resting place of over 1000 Rossland citizens who died between the years of 1896 and 1945. Some of the family names on tombstones are common to people living in Rossland today. The tombstone engravings are tangible reminders of the love, devotion, respect, and loss felt by Rosslanders, over the years, for their family members and loved ones.

Aspects of Rossland's historical social fabric are reflected in blocks or parts of blocks that are identified with various fraternal organizations by special monuments—Knights of Pythias, Fraternal Order of Eagles and Independent Order of Oddfellows.

The original design of the cemetery and the layout of the plots within the blocks have been adhered to since the creation of the cemetery in 1899. The hilly terrain has determined which plots have actually been used for burial sites. The setting of the Columbia Cemetery, surrounded by pasture land and wooded areas, and the maintenance of the cemetery provided by the city, create a peaceful ambience which is enjoyed by walkers, bikers and hikers as well as visitors today.

Character Defining Elements:

- Rural, pastoral setting.
- Orderly layout of grave sites.
- Tombstones.
- Monuments of fraternal organizations.
- Cribbing around many grave sites.
- Remaining wire fencing marking north and east boundaries.

HISTORY

Rossland, with a population of close to 7,000 people, was incorporated on March 18, 1897. The inaugural meeting of the first council was held on April 10th. One of the first items of business for the council was to respond to correspondence from William R. Beatty, one of Rossland's undertakers, asking council to select a suitable site for a cemetery. This request was referred to the Board

of Works Committee, which was made up of three council members. On May 4th, the city council minutes note Alderman Raymer, speaking on behalf of the committee and on the cemetery question, "...suggesting that the City either buy the present one or establish and maintain one of its own." The minutes go on to note that, "The Mayor approved of the suggestion." It is interesting to note the use of the words, "the present one," as research shows that there were two cemeteries in use at this time—Laurel Hill and Sunnyside. Laurel Hill Cemetery was within the municipal boundaries in 1897 but Sunnyside wasn't so, perhaps, that explains the word choice. The cemetery question/topic never appears again in the 1897 council minutes.

City councils were elected annually in Rossland's early years. In May 1898 the cemetery topic was again brought forward. "Alderman Ross Thompson gave notice that at the next regular meeting he would introduce a By-law to procure ground for a cemetery." At the June 7 council meeting, the minutes record that, "A By-law to accept, purchase and hold land or real property for a public cemetery and to provide for the regulation thereof, be now read a first time." The Mayor appointed a special committee, made up of Aldermen Edgren, Chute and Goodeve, to secure property for a cemetery.

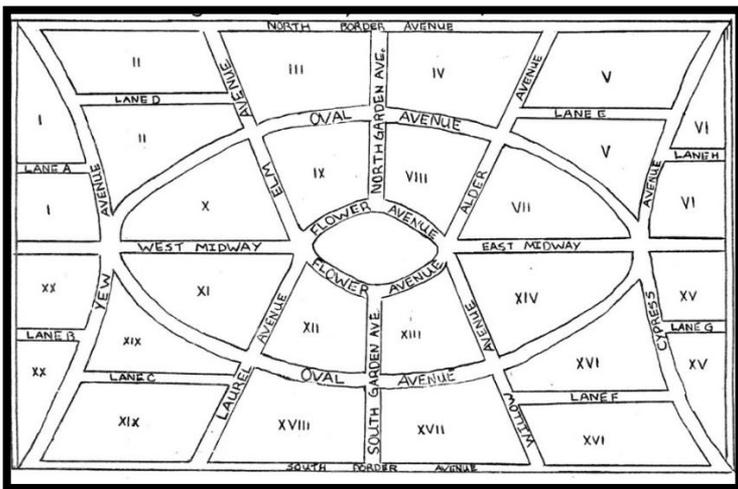
Just how hard and long this committee looked for a site is not known nor are the reasons for not buying the Laurel Hill Cemetery and continuing to use it. The council minutes of that year point to only one serious consideration; the land to the east of the city owned by the Nelson and Fort Sheppard Railway. Correspondence with the railway's president, D. C. Corbin, and its agent, John Dean, was mentioned in the minutes on several occasions. The reference was not just for a cemetery but park land too, specifically for ball fields. At the July 26 meeting of council, we read,

The clerk be instructed to write Mr. Corbin and ask him to give us an agreement in writing that should we purchase the land for a cemetery, as per his letter of July 12, 1898, that he will deed to the City the necessary land for an extension of Columbia Avenue to the said Cemetery.

In August 1898, the city engineer was instructed to survey the ground selected by the special committee for a cemetery and park.

Negotiations must have been successful because at the December 13, 1898 meeting of city council, the city engineer, Henry Smith, submitted plans and blueprints of the proposed city park and the Columbia Avenue extension to be called Park Street. Council also passed the first reading of its Cemetery By-law, authorizing purchase of real property for a public cemetery and park. Second and third readings of the by-law occurred at the December 20th meeting but the final reading and adoption of the by-law were left to the new council at the January 17, 1899 meeting.

In October 1899, council instructed the city engineer to submit a plan for the plotting of the whole cemetery. A small portion was to be surveyed and plotted and the plan registered so that the city could sell burial plots. The actual purchase went before the voters on November 7, 1899; authority for the City to borrow \$5000 on debentures to purchase 80 acres of land for park and cemetery purposes, and for financing, cleaning, plotting and improving the land. The by-law for the regulation of the Columbia Cemetery was passed by the new council of 1900.



Design of Columbia Cemetery by Henry Smith, 1899

The plan for Columbia Cemetery can be seen in the above diagram. It reflects the design elements popular for cemeteries with a garden-like layout of labelled walkways, separating blocks of burial plots. The design provided descriptors for grave site location and the paths reduced the foot traffic across grave sites, encouraging respect for the dead and enhancing the air of tranquility for visitors.

By looking at the burial permits for Columbia Cemetery, we know that the small portion surveyed and plotted by Smith was Blocks 3, 4 and 8 in 1899. These blocks were close to the original entrance to Columbia Cemetery at the north end of Elm Avenue. Surveying and plotting of other blocks followed with Block 5 apparently being used initially in July 1900. Eventually only eighth of the original blocks in Columbia Cemetery were ever surveyed and plotted—Blocks 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 14.

The numbering for plots within those eight blocks may seem somewhat confusing when looking at the actual layout of Columbia Cemetery, because one can't really see a pattern for the numbering. This is because the original survey did not reflect the hilly terrain of the cemetery and the waterways that run through it. These natural elements account for the omission of plot numbers in some blocks but the pattern, constant throughout the cemetery, emerges when you take this into consideration.

It is interesting to note that Henry Smith's original design of Columbia Cemetery was adhered to throughout its use, with only one exception. That part of Oval Avenue, which separated Block 5 from Block 7, was used to create additional plots sometime around 1910 and was probably due to the city running out of available plots in Block 5. The plots created are registered as being in Block 7.

Vestiges of the original garden-like setting are visible today with large evergreens and lilacs, clumps of hardy daylilies and bulbs blooming in their season.