

Village of Cumberland
Statement of Significance

Cumberland Municipal Cemetery

4441 Memorial Way, Cumberland B.C.
Established 1895



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Cumberland Cemetery - 4441 Memorial Way, Cumberland B.C.



Description of Historic Place

The Cumberland Municipal Cemetery is a 4-hectare cemetery and public open space located at 4441 Memorial Way, approximately 2.5 kilometres east of the Village of Cumberland townsite and just east of the Inland Island Highway. The cemetery, divided into two main sections, contains elements such as graves and grave markers, entry gates and a carved log sign. The Cemetery has heritage designation through Village of Cumberland Heritage Designation Bylaw # 882, 2007.

The cemetery, once highly visible, was located on the original Cumberland Road between Courtenay and Cumberland until 1997 when the Inland Island Highway was constructed.

Heritage Values

The Cumberland Cemetery has historical, cultural, social, spiritual and aesthetic value, particularly for its past use as a pioneer cemetery and its ongoing use today. The cemetery is valued as an enduring record of the people of Cumberland and the surrounding region, their contribution to the growth and character of the community and their role in the industrial development of Cumberland.

Established in 1895, the Cumberland Cemetery is considered to be an essential and unique feature of Cumberland, valued as the resting place for generations of Cumberland's citizens. It represents a tangible link between those living and those buried, and to the community's past through its natural landscape features, physical layout, and built elements such as grave markers and monuments. Today, it retains a connection to early families that still remain in Cumberland and the surrounding area.

Constructed on a portion of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway land grant owned by Robert Dunsmuir's Canadian Collieries Dunsmuir Ltd., the cemetery is important for being representative of the role that the coal mining company played in the area. Its connection and importance to the mining community is found in its original design and layout of family burial grounds and grave sites by Union colliery surveyor Frank Smith. In addition to citizens of Cumberland, the cemetery became the final resting place for many Union Bay, Bevan and #8 Mine townsite residents, communities established by, and associated with, the colliery.

Located within a forest setting of Douglas Fir and Western Hemlock, the physical landscape of the cemetery represents the larger landscape of the region, with gently sloping topography and natural vegetation cover of moss and Kinnikinnick overlaying glacial till. New planting includes *Robinia pseudoacacia* in rows along the roadway.

The original layout of the cemetery reflects the spiritual, social and political norms of the time, as well as the diversity of Cumberland's population. Historically, two separate cemeteries with different entrances for Catholics and Protestants existed. The two were combined in 1983 and now use a common entranceway. Japanese Canadians and Chinese Canadians had separate cemeteries altogether.

The development of the cemetery over 120 years also reflects the economic, cultural and spiritual changes in Cumberland's history seen in new cemetery regulations, headstone marker styles that include formal upright obelisks, ground level plaques and Canadian War Grave markers, and materials that range from wood, to polished granite, to concrete. The more recent rustic, hand-carved identity sign gives the cemetery a distinct sense of place. The transfer of ownership of the cemetery from the Colliery Employees Medical Fund to the Village of Cumberland in 1954 reflects economic change in the community as coal mining diminished, as well as the change in the roles of public and private institutions in the mid-20th century.

The Cumberland Cemetery is significant for its connection to many well-known citizens of, and events related to, Cumberland. To name just a few, the cemetery hosts the grave sites of renowned local labour leaders and activists Joe Naylor and Ginger Goodwin. Goodwin's shooting in 1918 led to strikes and riots across the country. Thomas Banks, Cumberland's undertaker, importantly compiled a list of those buried in the cemetery with their cause of deaths from 1908 until 1955. The cemetery is also associated with the Spanish Civil War, with volunteer soldiers buried here, and Miners' Row recalling workers in the early industrial history of the area.

The cemetery is a reminder of the victims of mine disasters such as the significant explosions in 1901 and 1922, with burials undertaken by different fraternal organizations and societies associated with the mineworkers. Unmarked graves may be those of miners who lost their lives in the mines or in other places.

The cemetery is valued for its ongoing use and utility as an active community cemetery, offering full burials, cremation lots and niches in a columbaria wall, with new and innovative approaches such as the inclusion of green burials. It is considered a spiritual and sacred place, with a sense of connectivity and belonging: a permanent feature in Cumberland's landscape that conveys respect toward the dead.

A popular pilgrimage destination, the cemetery has social value through the commemoration and honouring of Cumberland's mining families through its formal heritage designation. New entry gates installed in 1983 were in honour of pioneers James and Janet Whyte and their descendants, many of whom were buried in the cemetery.

Character-defining Elements

- Location of the cemetery on the original Cumberland Road within a forested setting
- Cemetery layout
- Two sections with separate entrances for Catholics and Protestants still evident and legible on the site
- New entrance established in 1983 representing the amalgamation of the two separate parts of the cemetery
- Wooden entry sign
- Grave sites of well-known Cumberland residents, such as Joe Naylor and Ginger Goodwin
- Provincial stop of interest plaque commemorating Ginger Goodwin
- Spanish Civil War memorial where volunteer soldiers were buried
- Location of community celebrations
- New tree planting and other current and future improvements

Research Resources

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BC Archives - Archival photographs of Cumberland.

Comox Valley Family History Research Group. *In Memoriam: Cumberland Cemetery, Cumberland, B.C.* Courtenay, B.C.: Comox Valley Family History Research Group, 2002.

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"Funerals Last Week." *The Cumberland News*, Wednesday April 16, 1901.

Isegor, D.E., E.G. Stephens, and D.E. Watson, *One Hundred Spirited Years: A History of Cumberland*. Seattle: Ptarmigan Press, 1988.

Village of Cumberland. "Cemetery Heritage and Preservation Plan." Memorandum dated 11 October, 2017.

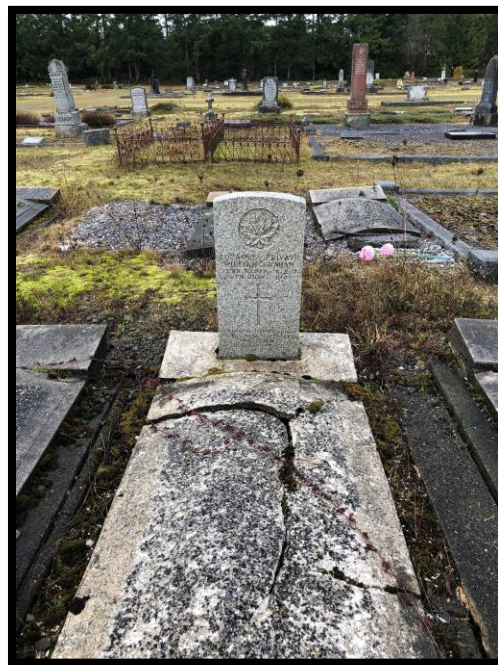
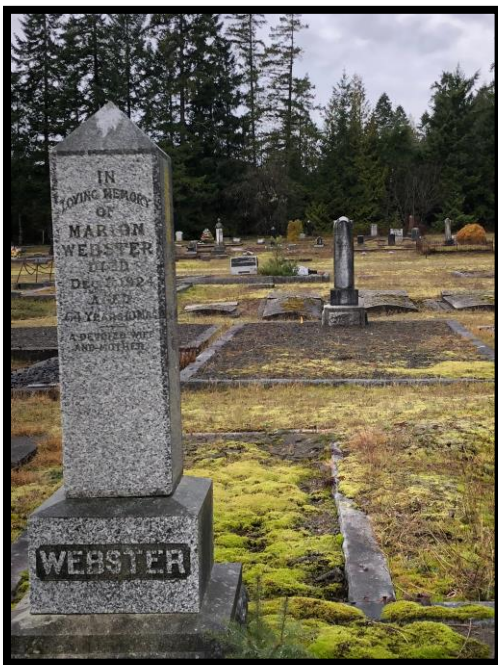
Village of Cumberland. *Village of Cumberland Cemeteries Master Plan*. Vancouver: Lees + Associates, 2014.



Preferred option for improvements to the Cumberland Municipal Cemetery reflecting the original form and layout of the cemetery. (Lees + Associates 2014)



View to the original Catholic section showing surrounding forest and native groundcover species associated with the site.



Upright headstones and burial plots in the original Protestant section.



Headstone and provincial stop of interest sign commemorating Ginger Goodwin.



Carved wood sign, new entry road and landscaping.