



Cemetery To Mass Grave

Originally established in 1876, the Lunatic Asylum at New Westminster was British Columbia's first provincial mental health facility. Over its 127 year history the asylum buildings and grounds underwent a number of name and function changes.

In 1897 the facility was renamed The Provincial Hospital for the Insane; in 1920 it was called The Provincial Mental Hospital; and finally in 1950 it became The Woodlands School for the Mentally Handicapped. The cemetery, never officially named, was generally referred to as The Cemetery at (the name attached to the institution at that time).

CEMETERY TO BECOME A ROYAL CITY PARK

November 2, 1976

The Woodlands Park Cemetery in New Westminster will be turned into a park under plans proposed by the Queen's Park Hospital Society.

The society has already received conditional approval from the provincial consumer affairs department to convert the cemetery.

It will be adjacent to the new 300-bed Queen's Park hospital, which should be completed in about nine months.

The society must wait 90 days so objections to converting the one-acre cemetery, which has not been used for 10 years, can be filed.

The land is owned by the province and the graves are those of the people who died in government institutions.

If the gravestones made way for park benches, the society would have to maintain the land.

Gravestones give way to park seats

November, 1976

The rows of grave markers in a New Westminster cemetery will be replaced by flower beds and park benches under plans proposed by the Queens Park Hospital Society.

The society has already acquired conditional approval from the provincial consumer affairs department to turn Woodlands Park Cemetery on East Columbia into a park. It will be adjacent to the new 360-bed Queen's Park Hospital, expected to be completed within about nine months.

The Society will have to wait 90 days to consider any objections to the one-acre cemetery which has not been in use for about ten years.

The land belongs to the provincial government and graves are those of people who died in provincial institutions.

The conditions attached to the plan are that the society maintain the park, that a shrine or some monument be established to commemorate those buried in the cemetery, and that a surveyed grid is kept so any individual gravesite can be located.

"It's a progressive move and the plan should enhance the whole area" said society director Frank Butler.

A precedent was established in Victoria about 50 years ago when a cemetery near Christ Church Cathedral was modified in a similar way.

The Province of British Columbia

ORDER IN COUNCIL no.744

APPROVED AND ORDERED 3. mar. 1977 W.S.Owen (Lieutenant-Governor)

Executive Council Chamber, Victoria 3. Mar. 1977

Pursuant to the CEMETERIES act and upon the recommendation of the undersigned, the Lieutenant-Governor, by and with the advice and connect of the Executive Council, orders that:

The regulation which was approved by Order-in-Council No. 1656, dated the 11th day of July 1958, and published as B.C. reg. 98/58, as amended be further amended by adding to division 17 the following section:

17.016 The Woodlands School Provincial Cemetery which is part of lot 1, District Lot 115, Group 1, New Westminster District bounded on the N.W. by McBride Boulevard and N.E. by Queens Park Hospital, an area of 2.4 acres (approximately 600X 200 feet) is closed to further burials. It will be maintained by Queens Park Hospital as a park, and contain a shrine commemorating those who are buried therein. The Society will also hold a surveyed grid which will show the exact location of all the grave sites.

(Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs)

W.R. Bennett (Presiding Member of the Executive Council)

Woodlands cemetery part of new gardens

THE COLUMBIAN, June 11, 1977

ANNE McINTYRE

Vancouver-Burrard New Democrat MLA Rosemary Brown is only partially correct in a press release attacking Human Resources Minister Bill Vander Zalm for proposed revamping of Woodlands Hospital Cemetery.

Brown charged that the cemetery was "covered over to provide a parking lot" and the grave markers are now being used "for a barbecue patio".

She said "it is a desecration which is made even more disgraceful by the fact that the Ministry of Human Resources is justifying the act by saying it is saving money.

The concrete markers are in fact being used to build a barbecue patio, part of a new developmental playground which will be officially opened June 17 by Vander Zalm.

"They are still a part of Woodlands though," said Dr Pauline Hughes the school's executive director.

Dr. Hughes and Frank Butler, head of the Queen's Park Hospital which opens in September, assured The Columbian Thursday the cemetery was not being desecrated but will be made into a memorial gardens with a cairn in memory of those buried there.

The revamping was approved in March by a provincial order in council allowing the cemetery to be closed and preserved as a park.

A parking lot for the new extended care hospital has gone in north of the cemetery but the blacktop does not encroach on its 2.4 acres.

A sloping mound of land separating the park and the cemetery to be landscaped eventually Butler said. The memorial gardens will come after the hospital is finished but students will this month clean up the site which is currently covered with mown grass.

Hughes and Butler said the memorial gardens was a compromise for the new hospitals patients. Two levels of sun decks will allow patients to look right out over the cemetery which would have had 1800 concrete makers.

The last burial at the cemetery was in 1958 and authorities thought closing the cemetery and redesigning it would benefit recuperating patients.

Most of those patients will be elderly and would not like to be reminded of death by the sight of all those markers. Huges and Butler added.

They said only one family requested their sons marker remain and this request has been honored.

As for the remaining 25 tons of concrete to the patio “would they rather we just waisted the material?” asked Hughes.

“They’ll not be forgotten or ignored. There will be a shrine with a plaque in memory of them”, she added.

Butler said he envisions a memorial similar to the one in Stanley park to the RCAF perhaps with a fountain and a bronze plaque.

COQUITLAM MOM UNNERVED

GRAVESTONES USED TO PAVE PATH

THE VANCOUVER SUN

February 20, 1986

By MIGULE MOYA

Last summer, Lucille Schneider,s nine-year-old daughter Kristal was playing in the yard of their Coquitlam home with a friend when they overturned a cement slab and discovered it was a gravestone.

“It kind of made me feel funny,” recalled Schneider. “I told them to put it back where they found it in case it was an old grave.”

Schneider found that all the slabs in her front yard pathway were gravestones — more than 100 of them.

Curiosity nagged at her for months before she called The Sun, which traced them to a former cemetery for Woodlands School for the mentally disabled.

The last burial in the cemetery was in October 1958. In 1977, the cemetery was decommissioned by a provincial cabinet order. About 1,800 gravestones were removed and the land was converted to a park with a memorial plaque.

Their removal coincided with the building of Queens Park Hospital, who's officials felt a cemetery next door was inappropriate for an extended care hospital for the elderly.

Connie Clarke, President of British Columbians for Mentally Handicapped People, called them action "appalling".

"It would seem sad those people could not have been buried near their family members in the cemeteries around their families' homes . . ." she said. "Just the fact that there was such a large cemetery and that it was thought to be easily disposable is just not right."

Frank Butler, Queens Park administrator, said the cemetery was decommissioned according to the rules. He said the hospital placed newspaper notices to publicize its intention to relatives of the dead and heard no objections.

Jo Dickey, a member of the Woodlands Parents Group when the cemetery was decommissioned said her group was not notified of the move, although she heard about it.

Dickey said she feels "very uncomfortable" with the way the hospital disposed of the gravestones.

Dale Alexander, executive director of the Simon Fraser Society for Mentally Handicapped People' said he found it appalling that Woodlands residents were buried on the site of the institution in the first place, and, "Something else could have been done rather than simply giving the headstones away and having them end up as a sidewalk. I think that is atrocious."

Dr Bluma Tischler, Woodlands medical director. said she would have heard iv there had been any objections from the families of the dead.

"My personal opinion is this is so many years ago now, and if you write a story like this it is quite a sensitive thing and it will bring up things for the parents. It is something you will have to take responsibility for."

Provincial record show the hospital received only one objection to its plans from the family of a person buried in the cemetery: it was later withdrawn.

The gravestones at Schneider's home were placed there by Don Chivers, former owner of the property and an administrator at Queens Park's sister hospital, Fellburn Hospital in Burnaby.

Chivers said he had heard the gravestones were available. "As far as I was concerned they were just slabs of cement . . . I turned them upside down so you wouldn't see the names on them."

Photo by Rob Draper

GLEN, TINA LAVASSEUR, KRISTAL SCHNEIDER

with two of the more than 100 gravestones found in the Schneider yard.

GRAVE MARKERS IN LIMBO

THE VANCOUVER Province

December 10, 1986

By SALIM JIWA

Mike Whistler is facing a grave problem.

The 28-year-old self-employed laborer has been left with 130 grave markers emblazoned with the names of dead children.

"I think someone should lay them to rest properly," he told The Province yesterday.

Whistler said he was paid \$100 by a developer in November to remove the markers, which had been used to make a path to a Coquitlam four-plex.

"He didn't tell me what they were but when I turned them over I saw the names." said Whistler.

The Saddle Street four-plex has been bedeviled by strange noises, moving beds and erratic TV's. tenants are convinced the residence is haunted by ghosts.

The sight of a groaning headless monk sent tenant Dawn Hutton fleeing into the night with her four children two days ago, vowing never to return.

Whistler was planning to build a sidewalk with the markers until he read about Hutton's frightening experience in The Province.

Now, he thinks they should be returned to the Woodlands Cemetery from which they were removed.

His younger brother, David, 25, agrees.

“They should go back to the place where they came from.”

Yesterday Hutton remained outside while her friends packed her belongings for her.

But the goulies couldn't resist a parting shot.

“I left the lights on when I went over to my mother's last night. When I came back to pick up my things, the lights were off and the children's toys were strewn down the stairs.”

Other tenants are seeking help.

“My sister is arranging for the church to become involved,” said Lucille Schneider. “She is calling in a group called the Prayer Warriors”.

Staff photo by Dick Loughram

David Whilster with the errant grave markers: ‘They should go back where they came from’