

# **Douglas Road Cemetery**

**Boundaries and Size**

**Disinterment**

Prepared for

**School District No. 40 (New Westminster)**

by

**A Sense of History Research Services Inc.**

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### **Douglas Road Cemetery – Size and Boundaries**

Note: this cemetery has been known by a number of names over the years with the most common being Douglas Road Cemetery, Douglas Street Cemetery, 8<sup>th</sup> Street Cemetery, and the Public Cemetery.

In the 1860s the entire block of land that now houses the school, surrounding land and its playgrounds, the Royal City Christian Centre and the subsequent Thornebridge development, and Moody Park Arena, was noted on maps of the area as “cemetery” or as “cemetery reserve”. In early 1861, City Council requested that the government conduct the appropriate surveys so that the City could begin to clear and prepare a burial site. This first clearing was accessed from Douglas Road, now called 8<sup>th</sup> Street, and was the beginning of what would become the City’s public cemetery.

The entire block remained under colonial or provincial jurisdiction for decades while the City made attempts to gain title to the land. It was not until 1914 that the City received title to the land comprising 14.85 acres and bearing the official name of Lot 2055, Group 1, New Westminster. This piece of land was bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, with the fourth boundary line being along the road that runs from 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue internally in the block. Today this is the road that divides the formal school site from the playing fields, stadium and so on.

In 1914 when the city received Lot 2055, the remainder of land of the block was held as a Government Reserve. It was later divided to allow land for the Royal City True Blue Lodge to build the Loyal Protestant Home for Children (today’s Royal City Christian Centre). Although not important to the cemetery site study, a look at the overall block today shows the original Lot 2055 as it was, the Mercer Stadium and fields site as Lot 5678, the Royal City Christian Centre land as Lot 2056 A, with the Moody Park Arena land being Lot 2056 B. Note that the original SOH report (2005) covers this in more detail including the 1949/1950 City-School Board land agreement.

In 1914 there was a minor adjustment to the north east boundary of Lot 2055. The property had included an Isolation Hospital or Pest House. This was located on the property line in the interior of the block. To allow it to continue to function with some area around it, the Government extended the property line into the block another 33 feet which was to allow some space and an appropriate allowance for a street within the block as the land at that time was intended to be subdivided for housing.

The official map and proclamation under the Land Act of the land in question notes it to be Crown Grant No. 41/338, Lot 2055, Group 1, New Westminster, dated May 23, 1914, under the Lieutenant-Governor of BC, Thomas Wilson Paterson.

Lot 2055 is referred to as the Douglas Road Cemetery but in reality the cemetery did not cover the entire piece of property. The cemetery itself ran from approximately opposite Dublin Street along 8<sup>th</sup> Street north to 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It must be remembered that in the 1860s when the city cut a road into the bush on this overall reserve and began to clear a place for a cemetery, they did not start back at the corner of “8<sup>th</sup> Avenue” (probably only a rough trail at that time) but chose a place along a very rough but important road that was heading off towards English Bay and Burrard Inlet.

A number of sources refer to the location of the original portion of the cemetery as the “Pioneer Cemetery”. This area was to be reserved as a memorial park called “Douglas Park” that would include a museum site through a cooperative effort between the City Parks Department and the Native Sons of BC, Post No. 4, New Westminster. This was to commemorate the pioneers buried

## **The Number of Interments at Douglas Road Cemetery and the Number That Might Remain**

It is important to remember that, to date, no set of records or plans exist that show the layout of the entire cemetery and therefore that give us a clear understanding of the organization of the property. Without this type of support materials we are left to interpret the cemetery layout from the available sources and interpret the available "facts" within the overall context and history to build as accurate a picture as possible. As *SOH* has continued its research of this piece of property we have noted references to unusable swampy sections, difficulty in digging into the ground, the need for drainage ditches, and the problems the City apparently had determining where the graves were in some areas.

In the 2005 report that *SOH* did for the Board of School Trustees, an attempt was made to come up with a figure that might be reasonable regarding the number of interments in the Douglas Road Cemetery site over its lifetime from the 1860s to 1919. Consideration was given to the space available along with a range of pieces of associated data. We know for instance, that the original section was mid-block with the area allotted to the Chinese closer to 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Sections for those from the jail, the asylum, indigent, etc. were between the Chinese and the Pioneer sections along 8<sup>th</sup> Street, some to the rear of the area that had the original section at its front and others deeper on the overall site.

*SOH* determined previously that there was the potential for about 6000 spaces but that with the landscape being what it was, the number of burials was most likely significantly lower than that number. This is a confusing and complicated piece of land to study. We note comments in 1918 that much of the cemetery was considered full but we also note that the descriptions of the Chinese end of the cemetery show it to have been somewhat haphazard in use. Comments on the layout of the pioneer section, from a written piece from 1937 and the memories of people who remembered the location, seem to show it to not be a regular, row upon row, plan. However, a plan of two other sections portrays a portion of the cemetery laid out in a typical orderly Victorian cemetery design.

*SOH* carries out many research cases each year assisting people who are working on family histories, and in doing so we often track down individuals who were interred in Douglas Road Cemetery. This has given us a hands on understanding for this site when there is not really that much, as yet, to go on. The cemetery started in the 1860s and it continued to be a "public cemetery" throughout its operating life. Starting in 1869/70 and proceeding through to 1883, new cemeteries with distinct affiliations began in Sapperton as a direct response to wanting more control over how all aspects of their graveyards were handled. These grounds were for the Church of England, the Masonic Order, the Independent Order of Oddfellows, and the Catholic Church. These separate cemeteries offered new places to bury the dead. However, people could continue to be interred at Douglas Road if they so wished, and many took advantage of that option. The City opened its own new section, adjacent to the above mentioned sites, in 1912/13, and this was also available to community members.

In the early 1900s the Chinese community obtained exclusive use of about two acres at the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In 1908, a delegation from the City and representatives from the Asylum, viewed the overall cemetery in terms of grave space and added two distinct newly-laid out sections to the burial ground. Slightly down 8<sup>th</sup> Street from the Chinese section, an area of two acres called the "Public Cemetery Grounds" was to be established to hold individuals from the community, the indigent, those with no identification, and so on. A bit further down the street another two-acre site was set aside as the "Asylum Grounds" to be used for several other groups of people whose remains were not claimed for burial elsewhere. This included the Provincial Hospital for the Insane, the Hospital at Essondale, the Provincial Jail, and so on. Some accounts

- 1916 The City was seeking a grant of the land adjoining Lot 2055 (the remainder of the overall block) and offered, in return for the grant, to convey to the Government about 4 ½ acres of the cemetery property to continue to be used for burials for the Mental Hospital, Provincial Jail, and other Provincial institutions.
- 1918 The Cemetery was still being used and Council complained that the Provincial Government was continuing to send bodies to the cemetery for burial. There was great concern regarding the cemetery, the lack of available space for burials and the potential need for more graves due to the influenza epidemic. The city had received complaints regarding water on the site. When a grave was dug at some times of the year it quickly filled with water. Ditches had been dug to drain this water off towards 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This was viewed by Council, its Health Committee and some in the community, as a menace to the town, especially with the fears surrounding the epidemic. The City decided to close the Douglas Road Cemetery to any further interments. A notice was made that any "free" burials would have to use the new city cemetery in Sapperton. The last burials in Douglas Road Cemetery occurred in early 1919.
- 1928 There were discussions with the City, its Parks Department and the Native Sons of BC (Post No.4, New Westminster) regarding marking a portion of the "old Douglas Road Cemetery" with a monument and setting aside this portion as a memorial park.
- 1929 Further discussions referred to a park and a possibly a garden in this original pioneer section of the cemetery that dated back to the 1860s, and its location was described as "just north of the City Barns." Note: this plan would later also include the possibility of a museum but all the ideas were cancelled due to World War II and were not brought back after the war.
- 1939 There were many discussions about the overall block and plans to subdivide the land for housing in a similar manner to that planned in 1919 for men returning from World War I. The City Solicitor commented " ... we also understand that a portion of this property embraces land which was formerly used by the City for burial purposes and such being the case, provision would have to be made to cover this aspect." The military requested the lease of the same City property for use as a military camp. This was approved and the construction of huts began almost immediately. The main area of this camp was towards the 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue end encompassing the former Chinese portion of the cemetery and extending along 8<sup>th</sup> Street as well as back into the overall block.
- 1946 A series of meetings was held that focussed on the need for new schools, and the overall block 8<sup>th</sup> Street to 6<sup>th</sup> Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, not including the site of the Loyal Protestant Home. In all the newspaper accounts about the discussions, and in the Provincial Education annual reports for the entire period of time, there are no references to the fact that the property had been a cemetery.

From these references it is clear that there was a certain amount of action concerning the cemetery site. In some places there is great awareness and in others a total lack of recognition of the site. *SOH* is not trying to "create" the history of the old cemetery during these years, but either some activity was taking place to remove some of the remains, or it was being totally ignored.

There are many graves in Fraser Cemetery that carry the register notation such as "unknown" or "Grave in this plot – no particulars". These should not be simply considered to be an unknown individual located, for instance, in the river or in the bush. Because of the numbers of these, we consider them, after considerable study, to be remains that were moved but for whom accurate records were not initially available.

While some undertakers may have received permission for the removal of remains, other people, wanting to move the remains to another location, would simply have carried out the work. Members of the undertaking profession note that this type of activity was usually done quietly without much in the way of public observation or interest. To date, the only comments directed to us are from those who claim to have been involved rather than anyone who was living in the area and might have witnessed people working on the site.

A local example of formal exhumation/disinterment of remains concerns the old Dufferin Street Cemetery which was formally closed in 1908 after a very short period of operation in the early 1860s. The Church of England asked to close the cemetery and remove the remains to their new Sapperton cemetery. The Church records show this being completed and at least one marker was moved and can be found in Fraser Cemetery (Church of England Section). We are not able to find other records showing us re-interment or where the remains were placed.

All of the preceding information is to set the scene for the Douglas Road Cemetery and its boundaries and in particular, the burials that might still remain. There is really no way to accurately determine how many burials might remain in the area without a full survey and some archaeological work. We have reviewed our resources and files and have compared the basic results and suggestions with the Golder information on the site and on this matter we are in agreement.

In looking at the overall site again we can identify areas that should be examined using the techniques used previously by the Golder group. By further identifying areas that may not have been dug too deeply we can add a few places to examine.

Unless the new school were to be constructed solely on the footprint of the old one and other areas that were built on with deep excavations, it will require a broader survey around the school site to determine whether there are other sites of potential graves. It is logical, as suggested by Golder, to actually dig on a selection of sites (that would be left to archaeological experts to determine after discussion) to accurately determine what is being noticed in the EM and GPR surveys. With such information in hand, the School District would be in a much better position to make any decisions.

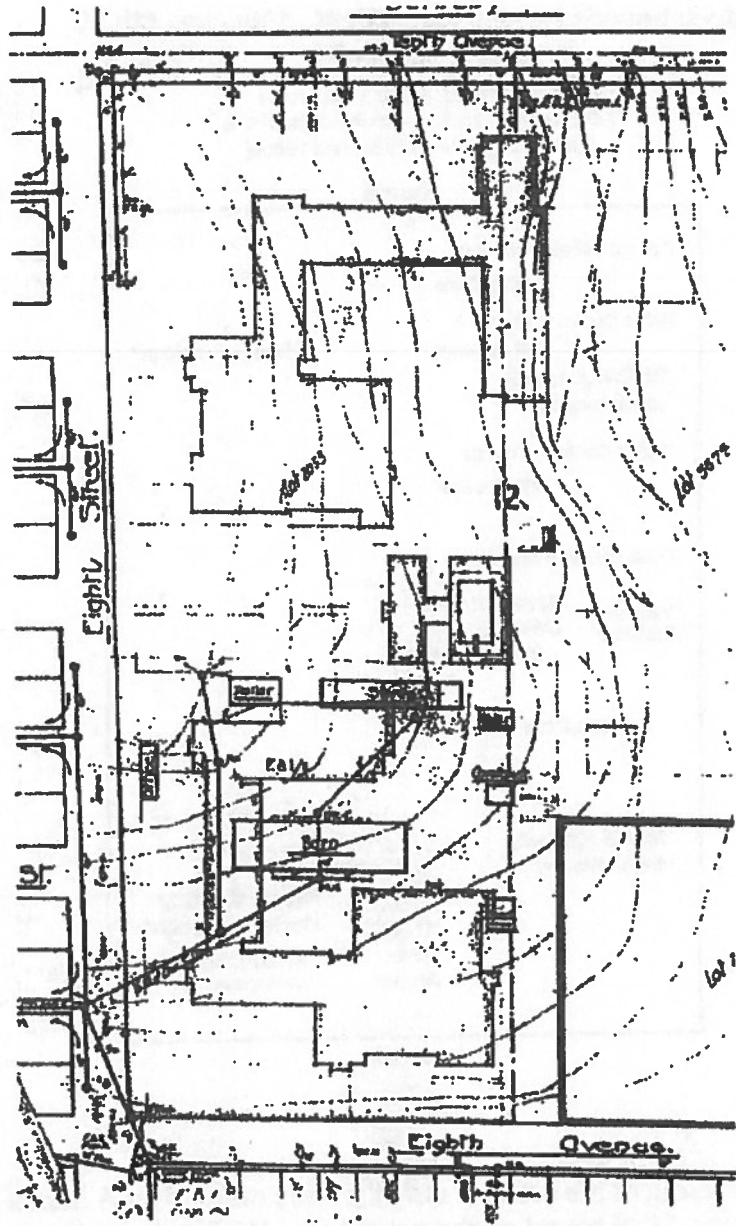
As we said in our 2005 report we would identify the area along 8<sup>th</sup> Street as a prime area for any possible remains and this appears to have been borne out by the EM and GPR surveys. We would also suggest an expansion of the search area to include the area of the Pioneer section (opposite Dublin Street) even though research seems to point to this area being cleared of remains about 60 years ago. This should also extend back into the block towards the road. Another area would be to eliminate the open area along 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue and some test spaces along the road on the interior of the block. While it is possible that the sidewalk and road close to the sidewalk may cover some graves, unless the construction plan is to dig up that area, it is probably reasonable to leave these alone.

While *SOH* still does not believe that a large number of fully intact graves will be located, it is important to identify any that are there, and then decide to leave them in situ or move them out. Whatever the number of graves might be, it would be prudent for the School District to have in

It is possible that remains will still be on the site, especially if the exhumations were not orderly or systematic. *SOH* has noted areas of the site that we recommend be checked in the same manner done recently by Golder Associates. We also suggest, as does Golder, that a series of locations identified by the EM and GPR searches be explored by an appropriately organized archaeological dig to determine the extent of any remains. It is clear that large portions of the land have been excavated to some depth, certainly the depth of a grave. The Lester Pearson building covers a major portion of the cemetery site as do the areas of the old school board office, the steam plant, the underground piping systems from this plant, the additions to the schools over the years and so on. Remains are not likely to be found there, but the areas outside of these should be checked.

It is impossible to give a number to say that this many remains might be located. The better, more responsible way to consider this is to refer to the possibility of remains being found. It is dangerous to give an estimate that is too high or too low. *SOH* still believes strongly that the number of remains on the site is not likely to be high but a systematic check of the overall site should still be carried out. Even if only a small number were to be located, it is vitally important to do things in a proper and professional manner.

A lot of the information that *SOH* has accumulated about the Douglas Road Cemetery over the years points to the exhumation of many remains, but there is no definitive cluster of papers to help define what was moved and when. Circumstantial evidence points to the removal of many but more investigation needs to be physically done to the site to be able to say the site has been properly checked. This is a difficult situation with no easy answers.



Copy from a map adapted to show the high schools and other school buildings drawn over the City Works Yard buildings. Contour lines and some landscaping is also included. Unidentified base map is from 1939 but when it was adapted to show all its present features is not known.  
[Copy prepared by A Sense of History Research Services Inc.]

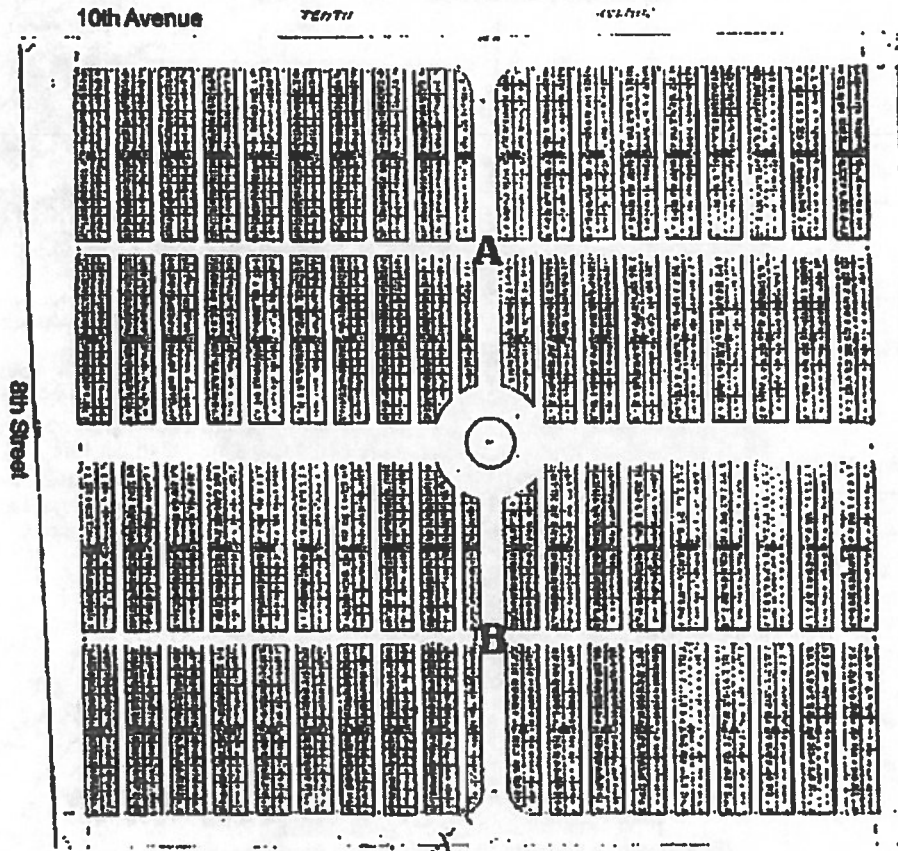
### Appendix B

--- PLAN ---

# DOUGLAS CEMETERY

*Subdivision of Part of ...*

NEW WESTMINSTER BC

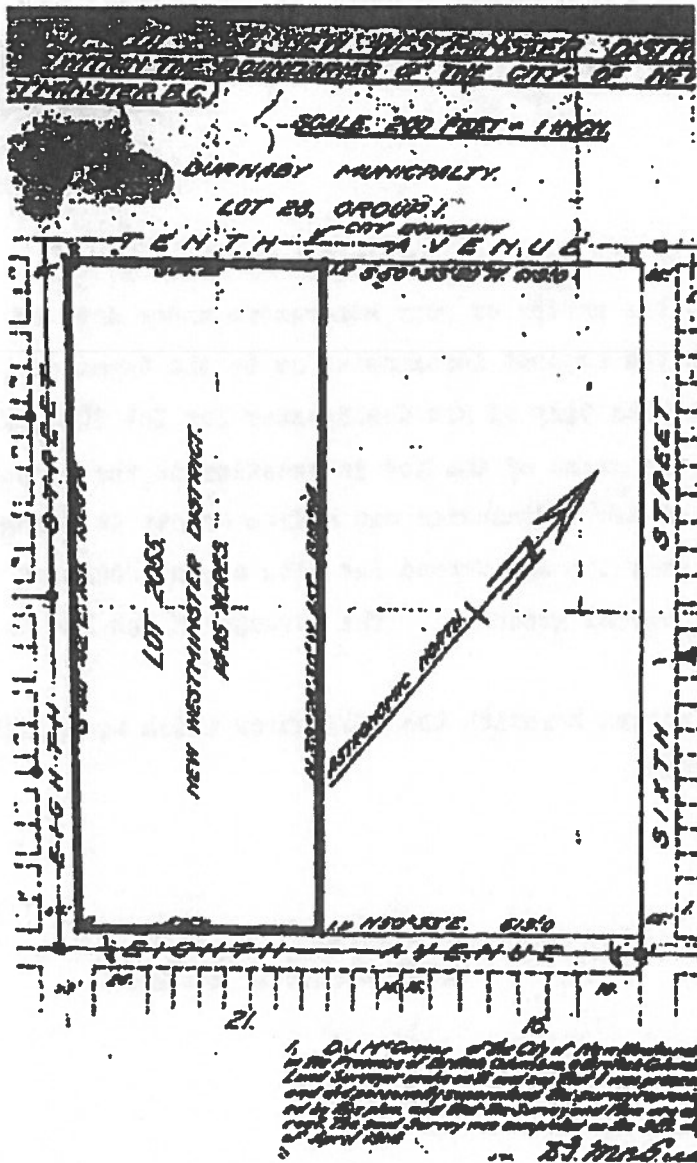


This plan of the Douglas Road Cemetery shows a portion of the overall cemetery site. While this plan is undated, it would appear to be consistent with the City's plans in conjunction with the Asylum in 1908 to open two new areas for burials. While research has not yet accurately placed this section (or sections) it appears to be near the 8<sup>th</sup> Street/10<sup>th</sup> Avenue corner or down the block along 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

[Prepared by A Sense of History Research Services Inc.]

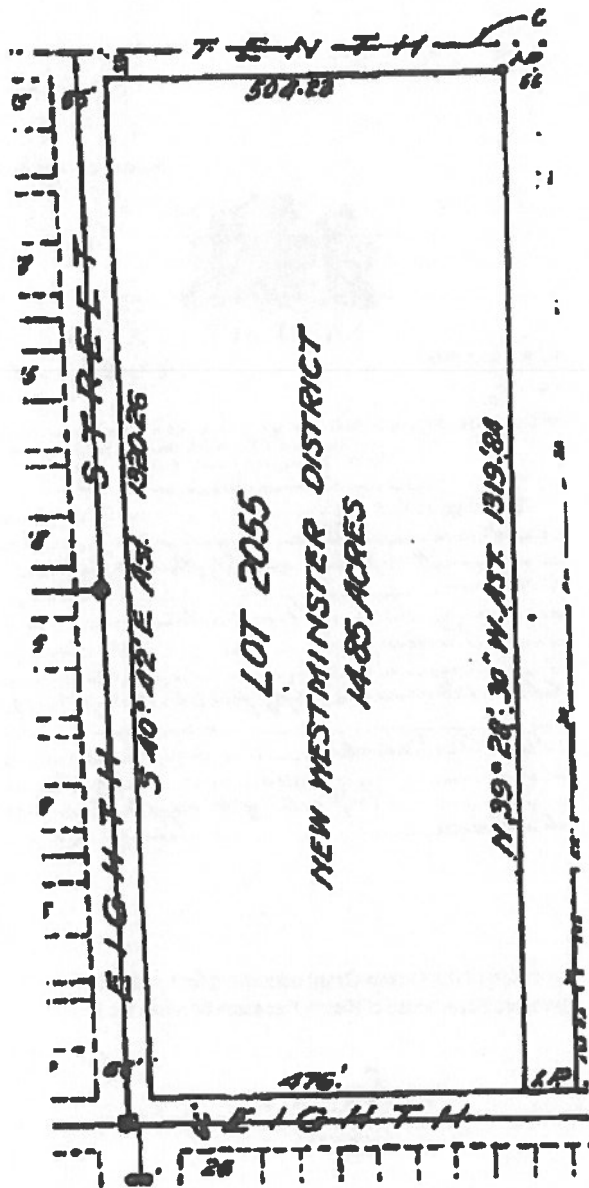
## Appendix D





A copy of a plan produced to accompany the grant of  
 Lot 2055 to the City of New Westminister In 1914  
 [Prepared by A Sense of History Research Services Inc.]

Appendix F



A portion of a plan of Lot 2055 from 1914 showing size and bearings of the property.  
 [Prepared by A Sense of History Research Services Inc.]

Appendix H