

# Recognizing historic burials and the NWSS site

**Memorial Plaque Wording Discussion**

**Submitted by Trustee Maya Russell -- October 12, 2022**

**Memorialization Advisory Committee, New Westminster Schools**

**(with corrected spelling re: T̓silhqot'in Nation)**

# First plaque commemorating burials at NWSS

- ▶ New Westminster Schools, in consultation with this committee, has committed to creating and installing a first memorialization plaque, inside the current New Westminster Secondary School opened in 2021.
- ▶ When the full memorialization park is restored, funding will be pursued to create and install multiple memorialization elements so that residents and visitors to the memorialization park can explore each theme and topic in more depth.
- ▶ This plaque is intended to ensure that those entering the school can read the story of this site's burials and the location of NWSS. We hope this plaque will be an entry point to explore the future memorialization park and connect it to the school.

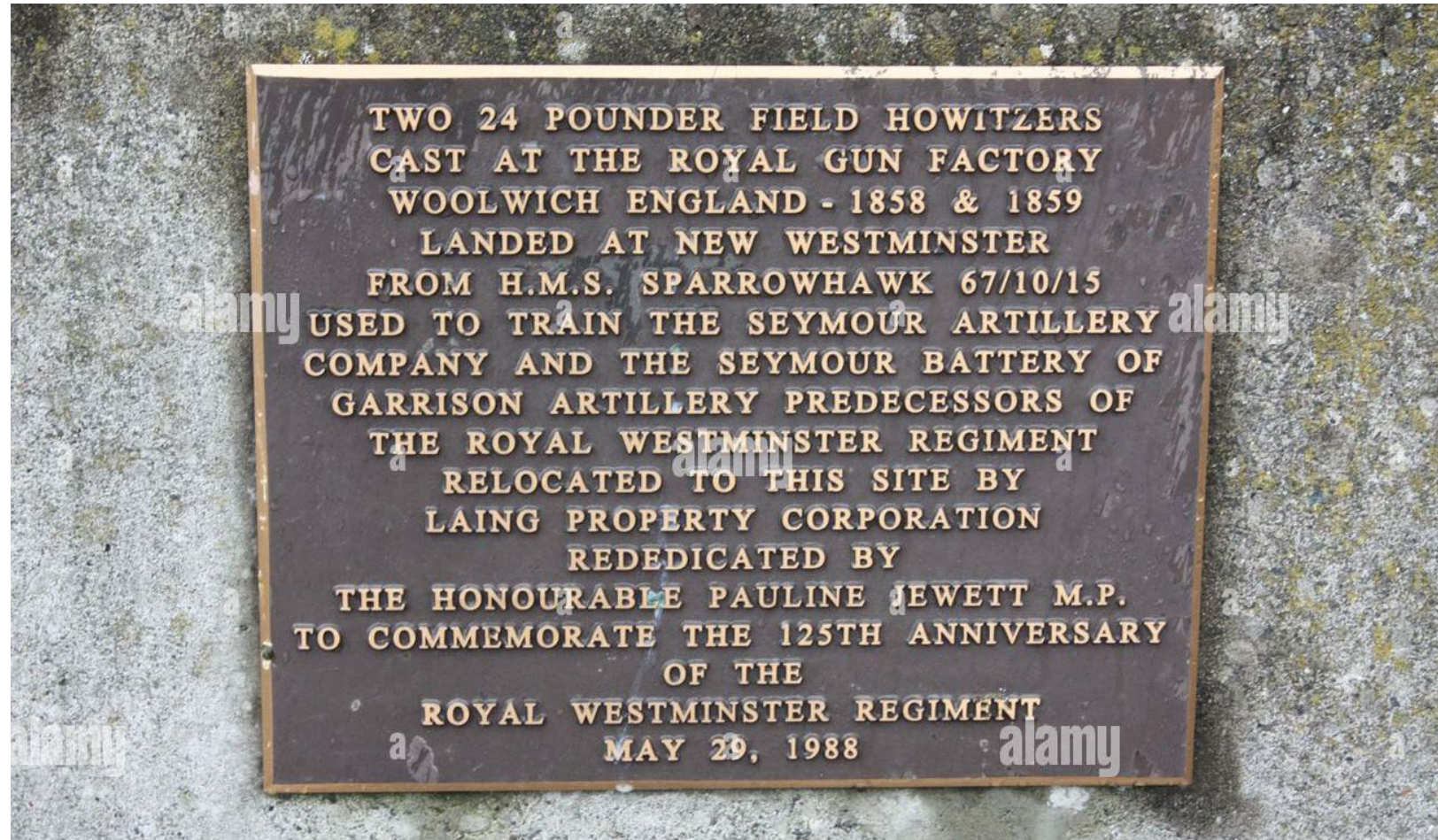
## Example - Africville, NS

For over a century African Canadians settled here, developing an independent community centred around church and family. As part of the urban renewal projects of the 1960s, officials introduced a plan to level the community and relocate its residents. The community mobilized and even though no buildings were saved, Africville became a symbol of the ongoing struggle by African Canadians to defend their culture and their rights. Seaview Park, created on the site as a memorial to Africville, speaks to the enduring significance of community.



This plaque text describing the historical significance of the subject was approved by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 2001.

## Example - Royal Westminster Regiment 125<sup>th</sup>



71 words

*Very draft text*

- ▶ This school is located on the unceded, unsurrendered land of hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ and halq̓eméylem-speaking peoples.
- ▶ To the West of this school are cemeteries from New Westminster's settler history dating to 1861.
- ▶ These include the New Westminster Public Cemetery, Douglas Road Cemetery, Potter's Field, Chinese Cemetery and New Chinese Cemetery.
- ▶ As separate-faith cemeteries were established at Fraser Cemetery, marginalized communities were left using the older sites. Those included Indigenous people from the Qayqayt First Nation and other Indigenous communities, the large Chinese community, the Japanese community, and the Sikh community for cremations. Other people who were incarcerated, poor, or otherwise not allowed to be buried at Fraserview were buried on the site by the City of New Westminster, Isolation Hospitals, the Provincial Hospital for the Insane and other institutions.
- ▶ These graves were not valued by City leaders. Grave markers were neglected, and were removed before WWII, when the Department of National Defense dug up the grounds to build a barracks. The site was then sold to School District 40, and the former New Westminster Secondary School was built there in 1949.
- ▶ In the early 2000's with plans underway to build a new high school, a community debate began about the burials. This debate surfaced many of the same sentiments from decades ago reflecting stigma, racism and exclusionary attitudes toward those buried.
- ▶ After advocacy from organizations representing those connected to the site, School District 40 made the decision to build the school at this current location, which does not contain any burials.
- ▶ This advocacy included the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government. T̓silhqot̓'in War Nits'il̓'in ?Ahan's remains are believed to be buried at the main entrance to the previous school. The area holds tremendous spiritual, cultural and historical importance to the T̓silhqot̓'in Nation.
- ▶ The official opening of this school on October 14th, 2021 on this new location marks our decision as a community to acknowledge and respect the varied and diverse histories of our past.
- ▶ Together in this place we can uncover truths, restore dignity, practise respect and reconciliation, and celebrate resilience.

(336 words)