

3 Cumberland Chinese Cemetery Cumberland, B.C. 1897



Historic Place

The Cumberland Chinese Cemetery is the 0.75 hectare parcel that features a clearing located off Union Road southwest of the Inland Island Highway-Cumberland Road interchange. The clearing features a sign, perimeter picket fencing, pavilion, and grave sites. The site has local heritage designation through the Village of Cumberland.

Values

The Cumberland Chinese Cemetery has historical, spiritual, symbolic, aesthetic and cultural value as an enduring record of its association with Chinese Canadian settlement in the area, their participation in the coal mining and railway construction industries in Cumberland and the industrial development of Vancouver Island, and for its multicultural community that included Chinese Canadian, Japanese Canadian, and African-American workers.



Created in 1897, the cemetery is historically important as evidence of Chinese Canadian settlement on central Vancouver Island, and for the significant presence of Chinese Canadians in the area, particularly in the large miners' camp outside the site of the area's original settlement of Union, later Cumberland.



The place has historical importance through the investment of Robert Dunsmuir in Cumberland coal mining, and the formation of the Union Colliery Company in 1888. It is an important enduring link to the history of Chinese Canadian employment as coal miners and railway builders under the Dunsmuir family, and as a reminder of the family's non-union labour practices that featured the prevalent use of Chinese Canadian miners and railway construction workers.

The cemetery has cultural and aesthetic value through the application of feng shui principles for siting and spatial arrangements, seen in its east-facing aspect and protection from the north by a forest of trees.

Cumberland Chinese cemetery, no date.
(courtesy of the nominator)

Spiritual value is found in the representation of the complex traditional burial practices in Chinese culture. The register of the dead, kept by Chinese Benevolent Association, included the name of each person and their home village and province in China. Graves were marked with cedar head posts, and coffins contained information on the deceased. Bodies were exhumed after seven years, and the bones cleaned and stored for eventual shipment back to their home in China.

The cemetery is valued for its association with the adjacent Japanese Cemetery that together serve to symbolize the multi-cultural, originally segregated, and sometimes racist history of the community and province.

Designated for its significance by the Village of Cumberland in 2007, the cemetery is a place of spiritual significance for the families of the people buried there, and as a place of remembrance of the coal miners and pioneer families of Cumberland

Cumberland Chinese Cemetery Chinatown.

It has particular social value as an operating cemetery today, providing an opportunity for the community's descendants to be buried next to their ancestors, and as a place for Miners Memorial Week celebrations in Cumberland for a ceremony and respectful remembrance.

Some of the former Chinese Canadian businesses and organizations are recalled through replicated false-front buildings constructed as a centennial project.

Sources

Chinese Historic Places Recognition Project nomination form, *Cumberland Chinese Cemetery*.

Village of Cumberland www.cumberland.ca, History and Coal Creek pages.

Maxwell, Judy. *Chinese Cemeteries and Gravemarkers in British Columbia: A Research Guide*. 2007.

The Corporation of the Village of Cumberland Bylaw No. 884. A Bylaw to give heritage designation to the Chinese Cemetery within the Village of Cumberland.