



Riverview Cemetery – Coquitlam, BC

There are places you can venture where even a sunny day won't erase the heavy sadness and feelings of melancholy. After a thorough visit to the Riverview Hospital grounds etched firmly into our day in July 2020, we endeavoured to find the cemetery as our final stop before calling it a day. After a somewhat confused search, we stumbled upon it and realized it was, literally, almost right under our feet. There are no obviously visible monuments erected at the Riverview Cemetery. Instead the markers are very humble pavers that are now nestled in the lawn, some barely legible as they've gradually deteriorated from exposure to the elements, worn by the ebb and flow of passing time.

This is a small cemetery compared to the last few we visited and the low lying pavers sit slightly sunken into the earth, thickly blanketed by grass and moss, nature and stones melded together over time. Once we realized we were at the cemetery and looked across the lawn we noticed the subtle, measured indents in the ground meticulously laid out in a simple grid pattern. This is not a lush cemetery other than beautiful oak trees which protectively edge along one side and a large red maple gracing the hallowed grounds. Even as the sun shone down on the austere pavers there was a feeling of stark sadness. There were some trinkets left on the odd grave but largely, not many visitors come here on a regular basis. On this particular warm afternoon, we were the only ones there as we carefully stepped up and down the rows of gravesites to take a closer look.

Situated in the north end of the Riverview grounds, the cemetery is truly a mystery. There is not much detail known about who is buried here and there aren't any revealing records easily available. The 3.6 acres had its first burial in

January 1958 and the last person to be buried here was in April 4, 2012. The last grave is an unmarked 'Jane Doe' who we suspect was a patient. We haven't been able to find anything about her other than her body was used for scientific research after she passed.

The small cemetery was first originally known as the Essondale Cemetery and renamed Riverview Cemetery in 1965. Most of the people buried here were once patients of the hospital, some loved ones buried alongside them and there are even some staff members resting here. In cases of deceased patients where there was no family or if the family didn't look after funeral arrangements the individuals were buried on the hospital grounds. Prior to 1958 those who were not attended to by family after death were buried in unmarked graves in the Fraser Cemetery in New Westminster until early 1920. Many of the earliest graves are creeping up on being close to a century old.

There are many reports of ghostly activity all around the Riverview grounds and buildings. The cemetery is no exception. Two local men who worked on film projects regularly said there were many unnerving experiences and most of them took place inside the dilapidated buildings. However, one of the men recalled a time when he was on a break strolling the grounds and he unknowingly ended up at the cemetery. He said he was puzzled to see a woman in old-fashioned clothing and a hat looking like she was doing some gardening. The man was confused as he believed her to be one of the actors on the set except that the outfit was all wrong. He was even more puzzled when she seemed not to pay attention to him walking by. She didn't look up, didn't notice him and as he walked back towards the abandoned buildings, he quickly glanced behind him and was surprised to see the woman had seemingly vanished.

Another man reluctantly admitted to seeing this same woman dressed in a long skirt and blouse days earlier and he, too, saw her gardening but thought this to be strange as it was pouring rain.



Inexplicably the woman didn't seem to be affected by the rain and stranger still, her clothes didn't seem to be wet. The man thought it best not to mention the incident and only admitted to it when his co-worker mentioned seeing her. The men nervously chalked it up to be yet another chilling incident on their list while working on the Riverview grounds. Needless to say, even in broad daylight neither one of the men walked past the cemetery on their breaks for the duration of the film project. Who was the mystery gardener in the cemetery?

As we moved along the rows of stones, each unembellished marker displays the deceased person's first initial, surname and the date of when they died. Most of the information about the Riverview Cemetery indicates that the first burial was around 1958 but we managed to find a marker as early as 1929. This would make sense as it corresponds with records and dates indicating the Fraser Cemetery was used into the early 1920's. As we continue our research on this elusive graveyard, we come across many sources who still appear to be reaching out to the community in an attempt to find out who was laid to rest here in hopes of finding out first names, ages and perhaps who the deceased individuals were. Was the ghostly woman in the cemetery once a patient or staff member who is still going about her routine?

We reverently took our time admiring many markers and found them to be beautiful in their hauntingly vague simplicity. Dusk edged its way in slowly as we lost track of time and finally it was time to go. The gravestones veiled by grasses, twigs and moss are shrouded in the same way that time has seemingly obscured much of the Riverview records on the individuals who now rest at this location. We hope the experience of sharing our visit and continuing our research of this historically significant site will help brush away some of the hidden and intriguing layers that still remain yet to be discovered. Only time will tell if more information is revealed. Meanwhile, rain or shine with years passing the gravestones grip the earth and hold tight to all of their untold secrets.