

## TEXADA'S WOODLANDS CEMETERY

According to lore, the first residents of the quiet hillside cemetery were deceased Chinese labourers who worked in the Van Anda mines after 1893. They were buried in the northern portion but no trace remains today as their bones were returned home long ago by the (Vancouver) Chinese Benevolent Society.

Over the years the cemetery became a scattered collection of gravestones and picket fences sandwiched between stumps and ferns until 1958 when Bill Young organized a Community Society committee to upgrade the site. Volunteer work parties cleared the Crown land, marked grave locations and erected a wire fence around the area.

A grand entrance gateway was constructed of kiln bricks donated by Ben and Jessie Nicholas. The iron gate and overhead sign were donated by Texada Mines and were fabricated by blacksmith John Joseph Bigras.

Families were originally responsible for digging their own graves but later local citizens lent a hand with backhoes. Burial plots were \$25 until 1977 when the Regional District took over administration and maintenance. The cemetery was expanded in 1995 and a granite columbarium with 60 urn niches was installed in 2015. Currently the PRRD is refurbishing the entire site.



Today the Texada Heritage Society receives many genealogical inquiries relating to the graveyard. Indeed, a visit to Woodlands is a journey through Texada's history. The earliest dated gravestone is that of a James Webber (1900). The most famous resident is Charlie Anderson (the "Lucky Swede") who made a fortune in the Klondike but died penniless prospecting on Texada in 1939.

The most ornate memorial is the intricately-sculpted cross on the headstone of Margaret (Minnie E.) Mellville (died 1910). It reminds us of her story - a wealthy Scottish lass who "ran off with a stable boy" to the goldfields of the Klondike then to Texada. Her passion for pounding the piano kept many a community dance hopping until the wee hours.

Woodlands today is a peaceful place shaded by the large dogwood tree planted by Edith Pook in memory of her young son. A stroll through the grounds helps one appreciate the lives of those who came before us.

Thank-you to Virginia Sigsworth for her 1995 research article.