

Heritage Week Self Guided Tour – North Delta Cemetery

8757 Brooke Road, North Delta

Welcome to this self guided tour of the Delta Norwegian Cemetery. This cemetery is a heritage site listed on HistoricPlaces.ca. It tells part of the story of the early settlement of North Delta, and is an important place of memory, history and identity. This tour is just one way to look at the history of the cemetery and the story of the community it represents. To help you with the thought questions, there are some surveyor's flags posted near some of the some of the grave markers mentioned.

We call this the Norwegian Cemetery, but that has changed over time. When it started sometime before 1919, the cemetery was connected to the Trinity Lutheran Church community, which was primarily Norwegian. As the circle of family marriages and connections has expanded, there have been additions from other community groups. You might notice that as the headstones look more recent, that the names reflect those changes.



Activity: Try to guess the origin and meaning of different names you encounter.

Not only should we notice what is here, but what is not here. There were people from Norway that settled here, but there were also Japanese and Swedish families that settled close by.



Thought Question: Why do you think these groups are not prominent in this cemetery?

The first thing you might notice is the concrete grave coverings throughout the cemetery. Originally, this area was in the middle of the woods.

Thought Question: Why do you think the concrete coverings were needed?

The grave coverings were not only practical, there was a spiritual component to this type of marker.

Thought Question: Can you guess what the spiritual significance is? Why are cemeteries considered to be spiritual places?

Activity: Can you find names on the grave coverings? Why or why not?

Some of the names in the cemetery you might hear elsewhere. For example, Jacob Gunderson has a place on the river named after him – Gunderson Slough.

Activity: Are there street or place names that you can find on the different stones in the cemetery?

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What connection do these people have with names of some streets in Delta?

You might notice some of the markers have a language other than English. Look at the headstone for Martha A. Gordon.

Activity: Do you recognize any of the words on the stone? What is the possible meaning of mader? Are there any other words you can guess the meaning of?

Looking at the marker for Martha Gordon, one thing should stand out for us. She lived a fairly short life. She died when she was just 40 years old. It may interest you to know that at the time Martha passed away, there was a world-wide Spanish Flu epidemic from 1918 to 1920 that killed 21 million people. Of course, there were other reasons that people died, but the timing of her death and the opening of the cemetery suggests that people were very concerned about the possibility of a greater need for a cemetery. The flu was a terrible epidemic, and people were probably afraid that others would die.

Activity: What are some of the other phrases and languages on the headstones?

Sometimes, there are symbols that are used on headstones. The symbols often reflect some of the important things in people's life.

Activity: How many of these symbols can you find? Ship, Viking Ship, Snowflake, Hammock, Patullo Bridge, Hummingbird, Dove, Lighthouse, Orca, Salmon, Seagull, Star of David.

What other symbols did you find?

Activity: What does it say about the person who is memorialized by the hammock?

Where is Fiji? You can find the film "Two Men of Fiji" on YouTube.

Thought Question: What do some of the symbols represent? Why were they chosen? How do symbols give us information? Can you think of other symbols you see daily?

Some of the markers and grave covers are very small. Often, small markers that are upright represent children. Life was very hard, and medicine was not as good as it is today. These small markers remind us of the progress we have made in science and medicine.

There are many things that we can learn from cemeteries. They tell us the names of people from the past, what was important to them, their life and their struggles. Even a small cemetery like this shows some of the customs of other countries. Many of these things are told in symbols such as headstones. These markers can also lead us to think about other questions we might ask ourselves.

If you have other self-guided tour ideas, please contact us at 604-952-3837.