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### THE OLD CHINESE CEMETERY

Only last week Kamloops City Council declared the old Chinese Cemetery a municipal heritage site. The designation is both timely and appropriate this year - the cemetery is a century old dating from the construction of the C.P.R. through Kamloops in 1885. Many Chinese labourers who died during the building of the railway were buried in the cemetery which overlooks Kamloops.

Although there were many Chinese people in the Kamloops area following the Fraser River Gold Rush it wasn't until the construction of the C.P.R. in the 1880's that thousands of Chinese, mainly from the southern province of Kwang-tung, came to B.C. The need and desire for a cemetery of their own apparently dates from this time although the exact origins of how the land along the old Hudson Bay Trail was granted are unclear.

The first mention of the cemetery was in a newspaper report in June 1887 which state: "On rambling over the heights overlooking Kamloops...one of the reporters of the Sentinel staff came upon a solitary grave. On heavier (sic) inspection our reporter discovered a headboard bearing a Chinese inscription which indicated that a body of a Celestial was buried underneath. We have often wondered where the Chinamen of Kamloops buried their dead; but this solitary grave upon the heights over which cattle tread, seems to unravel much of the mystery".

In 1892 the cemetery, two chains by two chains in extent, was officially defined when it was alienated by Dominion Patent in the name of Mr. Kwong Lung in trust for the Chinese community of Kamloops.

Hundreds of Chinese people were buried in the graveyard before the turn of the century, although the majority were exhumed before 1905 and their remains returned to their ancestral home in China. The cemetery was, in effect, until 1920, only a temporary holding place until relatives could afford to ship the remains back to China.

After 1920 the cemetery was marked by improvements - a fence, cement corner posts and ceremonial pillars - which gave the graveyard a more prominent and permanent status. No more bones could be returned to China.

The earliest existing marked graves date from 1926. By this time the Chinese Freemasons were well-established and maintained the cemetery. At the same time, the Chinese people were becoming well-integrated into the community.

The funeral of Sam Hung in 1932 was observed by hundreds of Chinese and whites in front of the Masonic Temple on Victoria Street. The funeral was intriguing, no doubt, to the white population and postcard photos were even made of this "impressive" ceremony.

Most of the burials took place between the years 1930 and 1960. Many burials took place during the 1950's and gradually filled the graveyard so that the area had to be enlarged. The last burial took place in 1976; in 1979 the cemetery was closed to further burials. The majority of those buried came from four districts in the Southern Chinese province of Kwangtung, around Canton.

The cemetery, although closed, was not forgotten. Relatives continued to recognize those buried there, honouring them with flowers and fruit. Every spring during the first week of April the cemetery is visited during the Festival of Ch'ing Ming. At this ceremony, relatives and descendants of the deceased burn incense and make symbolic offerings of food and clothing to honour their ancestors.

Not so

What is particularly unique about the Chinese Cemetery is its location based on the traditional laws of geomancy which were characteristic of Southern Chinese burials. These laws relate to the concept of Feng Shui (which literally means "wind and water") that calls for the proper placement of a dead person so that the spirit is in harmony with nature and the forces of Yin and Yang.

The graveyard itself is laid out according to these principles. The protective hills, nearby running water and northward facing graves and altars are all part of this sacred geography.

According to Feng Shui, the hills surrounding the cemetery should be smooth, tortuous watercourses (Guerin Creek) should be open to view from the site, the slope should be well-drained and surrounding mountain ranges symbolizing the "Azure Dragon" (Yang) and the "White Tiger" (Yin) should be open-ended and bounded on the north by a wide, meandering stream (the Thompson).

The Chinese Cemetery is one of the few in Canada, possibly North America, that portrays the laws of Fung Shei. By heritage designation the important historic and geographic features are recognized and preserved. The cemetery gives us an insight into a cultural tradition that was once a vital part of Chinese culture in Kamloops. The cemetery remains part of Kamloops' landscape that deserves our care and interest.