

Etched In History

A taphophile is someone interested in cemeteries. There are members of the Granite Creek Preservation Society who definitely fall within this definition. They are the volunteer recruits fighting a slow and silent battle fending off nature as she tries to reclaim a plot of land at the top of a hill. As moss and lichen encroach on the headstones at the Granite Creek Cemetery, they do their best to keep it back.

Many of those interred at the cemetery have no loved ones to tend to their graves. Years of neglect have meant many headstones are no longer legible. Some graves have sunk over time leaving gaping holes in the ground. Volunteers from the Granite Creek Preservation Society spend countless hours filling the sunken graves and painstakingly cleaning the grave markers at the cemetery.

Since there isn't a source of water at the graveyard, water must be brought in together with buckets, soft brushes, toothbrushes, sponges, towels, kneelers and, one secret weapon, – orange peelers. Each headstone is viewed as a sacred piece of history which must be treated with a delicate hand.

Mild dish detergent is mixed with warm water and applied to the stone. Soft brushes wipe away the bulk of the lichen and toothbrushes get into the smaller crevices. Headstones that are extremely dirty often require the use of a plastic orange peeler. These nifty, little devices allow the volunteer to get into the tiniest of places without causing damage to the stone. Depending on the condition, it takes between one to two hours to clean one headstone. Once the moss is removed, the grave marker is rinsed with clean water and dried with a soft towel. The transformation is quite amazing and well-worth the effort.

Other volunteers remove fallen trees or trees threatening to fall on graves. Every fall, gas trimmers are used to remove tall grass and weeds. Every spring and occasionally throughout the year, graves are swept of debris, and garbage left at the cemetery is removed. During winter months, old newspapers are scanned for obituaries from the area. Any that indicate a burial at the Granite Creek Cemetery are recorded and later the death records are checked at the Vancouver Library. If a new name is found, it is added to the list of those interred at the cemetery. An up-to-date list is mounted on a tree inside the graveyard. Every headstone has been photographed and recorded online at the “Canadian Gravemarker Gallery” and “Find A Grave”. These free websites allow genealogists to locate loved ones lost in time.

The names of those interred at the Granite Creek Cemetery have been etched in history and the Granite Creek Preservation Society, as stewards of the site, have made it their mission to care and preserve that history for future generations.

If you would like to join the Granite Creek Preservation Society, meetings are held on the third Thursday of every month at 1:00 at the Princeton Museum. To learn more about Granite Creek and the Society you can visit their website: www.granitecreekbc.ca. The archive section of the website houses photographs, newspaper articles, obituaries, letters and more that all relate to Granite Creek.