

OMI CEMETERY

Mission, British Columbia

INTRODUCTION



The road up to the cemetery



The cemetery gates now



The cemetery workers at the gates c1930



One of the iron crosses still in the cemetery



Irons crosses in the cemetery some time ago



Central cemetery sign

OMI stands for Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a teaching-missionary order of roman catholic priests. The cemetery is located in the Heritage Park and is owned by OMI order but is maintained by the staff of Heritage Park. This is a pioneer cemetery and is still an active cemetery with some members of the OMI order still being buried there.

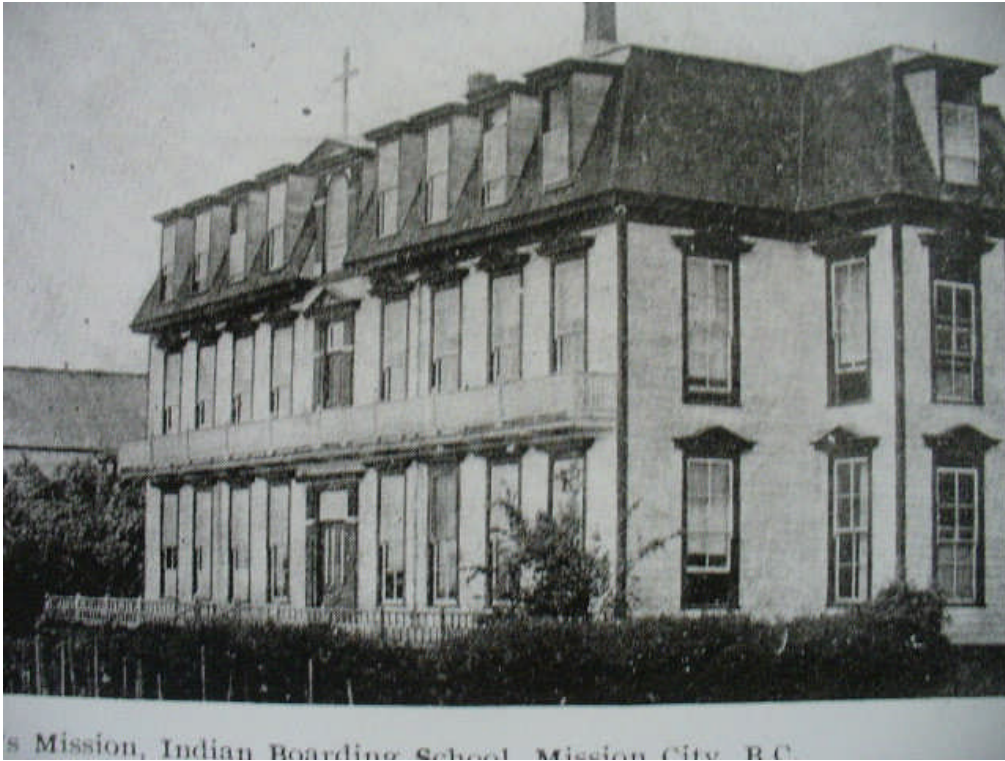
A Christian mission was established on the north bank of the Fraser River in 1861 by Father Fouquet, an oblate priest from France. The city was known as Mission City to differentiate it from St Mary's Mission. The land is New Westminster District lot 2 bought in 1861 and lot 3 in 1864 by the order. This is a beautiful location overlooking the Fraser River. The trees in the cemetery were planted in the 1800s. The cemetery is well maintained and cared for.

At St Mary's Mission, the order established a residential school for First Nations children. The school was in operation from 1862 to 1958. The first burial in the cemetery was of Father Lemure in 1870 who died in a hunting accident. Up until a few years ago there were many iron crosses in this cemetery marking the graves of First Nations people, both students at the school and others, who had died but, unfortunately, these were vandalized and almost all were removed and probably thrown into the deep ravine nearby. Because this cemetery is somewhat secluded it has been a prime target for vandals. Heritage Park hopes to have the ravine checked and to recover any crosses that are down there but this is a project for the future. The names on the iron crosses have been lost; there does not seem to be any record of them.



The dormitories from the cemetery

The mission was primarily a residential school for First Nations children. Near to the cemetery are the old foundations from the dormitories, the barn and other buildings. These have been left but be careful when walking in them. The bell is from the church. Up on the hill is the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes which was established in 1892. Many pilgrimages have been made to this grotto. The present building was opened in 1997, built on the foundations of the original. The grotto is open on very restricted hours. For these hours contact Heritage Park.



One of the school dormitories



The school "buildings" now



The bell tower and dedication marker

The dedication of the bell tower reads:

St Mary's Bell Tower
The bell was cast in 1875 by the Meneely Bell Foundry
West Troy, New York. Donated to Fraser River Heritage Park
by the Sto:lo Nation, the bell is an artifact of the school
Established on this site in 1865 by the
Oblates of Mary Immaculate.
Tower Designed and Built by
Landhaus Timberframes

And made possible by the generous donations of the following

Province of British Columbia – B.C. 2000 Community Spirit
District of Mission
Fraser Valley Regional District
Anglo American Cedar Products
Mission Heritage Association
Hopkins & Sons Roofing
Fronteir Timbercraft
KS. Carpentry

To get to the OMI Cemetery, take highway 7 (Lougheed) to Mission. At the east end of the city turn north on to Stave Lake Road, go up the hill to Fifth Avenue, turn east, go to the end of the block and turn right on to Mary Street, then almost immediately turn left into the Heritage Park parking lot. You will not be able to drive up to the gates of the cemetery which is at the eastern end of the park. Go through the park gate and walk past the bandstand, picnic area, bell tower and old foundations to the fenced in area which is the cemetery. The gate is unlocked from 0800 to 1600 on week days. If it is locked look for the park caretaker and ask to have it unlocked. Restrooms are available during the hours the park is open. There is a restaurant on the park grounds.



General views of the cemetery

Row 1 is right by the gate and runs from south to north, with row 15 at the eastern end. These rows were walked from south to north. Then there are two rows, 16 and 17, at the northern end that run east west and these were walked from east to west. These are all for members of the OMI community. This is not a big cemetery and easy to get around in. But the row and marker numbers are just a guide, new markers and/or removed markers will change the numbering. Some of the rows appear to be very short and probably have many known burials with no markers.

This recording was done with the permission of the OMI order.

The photographs were taken by Lynda Cunningham in 2005 with additional photographs by Valerie Hooper in 2007. This recording was compiled by Valerie Hooper. The historical black and white photographs are courtesy of the Mission Community Archives.

We would like to acknowledge all the help we had from the Heritage Park staff, Don Brown (manager) and David Anderson (groundskeeper).

From the Mission Community Archives staff and volunteers, in particular, Valerie Billesberger (archivist and records manager) and Donna Rash (volunteer). All the black and white photographs are used courtesy of the Mission Community Archives.

For further information about burials in this cemetery contact:

OMI
1311 The Crescent
Vancouver, BC
V6H 1T7

For further information about the park contact:

The Park Office	telephone: 604-826-0277 or 604-826-0333
Heritage Park	fax: 604-826-0333
PO Box 3341	email: mhaadmin@telus.net
7494 Mary Street	web: heritagepark-mission.ca
Mission, BC V2V 4J5	

For further information about the park and its heritage contact:

Mission Heritage Association
PO Box 3341
Mission, BC V2V 4J5

For further information about the Mission area contact:

Mission Community Archives	telephone: 604-820-2621
33215 Second Avenue	fax: 604-820-2625
Mission, BC V2V 4L1	email: mca@city.mission.bc.ca