CALVARY CEMETERY

Heritage Register – Site

1) **Historical Name:** Calvary Cemetery
2) **Common Name:** Catholic Cemetery, Mount Calvary Cemetery
3) **Location:** at the south end of Esling Drive
4) **Date of Construction:** 1896

Statement of Significance

Description:

Calvary Cemetery is located in Lower Rossland on a 10-acre parcel of land accessed from the southern end of Esling Drive, part of the old Wagon Road to Trail. A sign on the gated entrance identifies this as the Sacred Heart Parish cemetery.

Heritage Value:

Calvary Cemetery is valued as a heritage site because it has been used as the final resting place for members of the Sacred Heart Parish since its consecration in 1896. Many gravesites are marked by upright monuments of granite or marble. Tombstone inscriptions

are visible and tangible reminders of the love, devotion, respect and loss felt by Rosslanders over the years for their family members and loved ones. Some family names on the Calvary monuments are proof of multi-generational family connections with the community and parish.

The Cemetery is owned by the Nelson Dioceses and the Parish maintains documentation associated with burials and sites of burials. Stewardship of the site is expected, into perpetuity, by members of the Parish and those of the Catholic faith. This is a commitment of those living to care for the sacred sites and memories of those who have died. Calvary Cemetery remains open for cremated remains only. The city of Rossland provides ground maintenance each year.

Character Defining Elements:
- Monuments.
- Stone or cement cribbing for some.

HISTORY

Calvary Cemetery is the oldest cemetery in Rossland. According to the June 20, 1896 issue of the *Rossland Miner,* the first burial occurred when the body of Mary Reddin, "was put in its last resting place in the cemetery on the Trail Wagon Road." Apparently, she died giving birth to daughter Annie May. Mary Reddin's tombstone includes the name of this daughter who died only two months after her mother.

A subsequent item in the *Rossland Miner* newspaper, December 10, 1896 issue, says:

> *James McBride was interred in the Catholic Cemetery at 10 o'clock last Monday. The funeral ceremony was performed by Father Lemay and attended by three hundred members of the Rossland Miners' Union.*

Father Lemay arrived in Rossland in 1895 as the first, full-time parish priest and is credited with many accomplishments. He led the campaign for the construction of the first Catholic Church located on Davis Street, two blocks above the location of the present-day Miners' Union Hall. It is significant to realize that the church was

consecrated in December of that same year with seating for 300 people. Thanks to his lobbying efforts, two Sisters of the St. Joseph Nursing Order came to Rossland in July of 1896. They established Rossland's first hospital on Columbia Avenue with beds for 12 patients. A short six months later, again with Father Lemay's active participation and undoubtedly the support of the whole community, a new three-storey hospital called Mater Misericordiae was constructed on Hospital Hill. It had room for more patients, a chapel and living quarters for the nursing Sisters. This hospital served Rossland for the next 80 plus years.
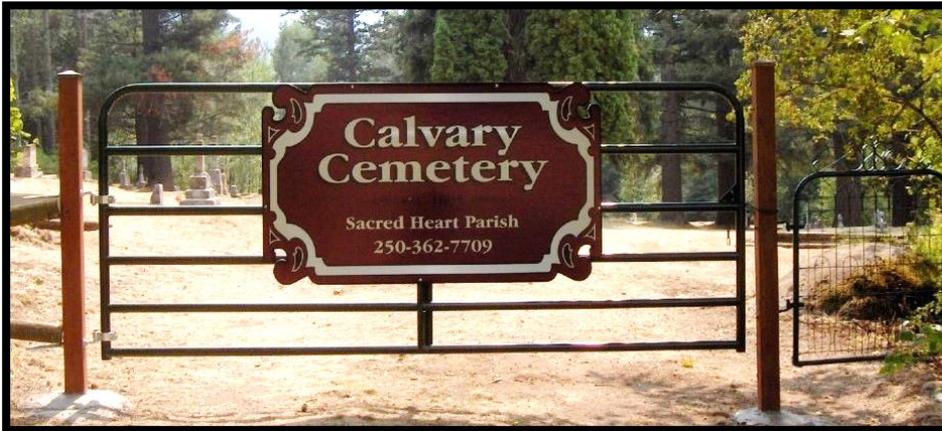
Father Lemay's untimely death in 1897 at the age of 52, following an unsuccessful operation, was a huge loss not only for the Catholic community but for the whole community of Rossland. He befriended everyone and worked on behalf of all the needy and was much admired. His tombstone is in Calvary Cemetery.

The purchase of the land for Calvary Cemetery apparently happened after it was first used as a place for burials. This is a similar situation to Columbia Cemetery where burials took place prior to the outright purchase of the land. Obviously intentions were honored, in both cases, by the Nelson and Fort Sheppard Railway Company who owned the lands. The *Rossland Miner* in its November 18, 1897 issue contained the following article titled "*The Catholic Cemetery*":

> *The purchase of the land for the Catholic Cemetery has been closed. It is located on the road to Trail, about half a mile from the Miner office, and is beautifully situated on a slope. There are ten acres, and it is all soil – no rock. The intention is to lay off the ground with winding walks, plats for families and single graves, also to level off the small hillocks and bring in water for irrigation, plant shrubbery and make the place otherwise attractive. The Miners' Union, it is expected, will take two of the ten acres, and other organizations will also purchase plats. Subscriptions to the purchase price are now due and payable to the treasurer, C. O'Brien Reddin.*

There are 159 burial sites identified by either monuments and/or cement cribbing around the grave plots. However, many gravesites are not visible to today's visitor because 407 people are actually known to have been buried in Calvary. It is interesting to note that some monuments include the names of more than one of a family and thus, mark a family plot larger in size than that of one individual.

The eastern fence of the cemetery no longer exists. Previously, it marked the separation of the unbaptized and suicides from the major part of the consecrated burial grounds. Signage erected in 2017 includes a map of burial sites and a list of the people buried in the Calvary Cemetery.

Calvary Cemetery entrance sign

Calvary Cemetery Burial List and plot map