



HISTORIC FAIRMONT BARRACKS NEED PROTECTION

There is a century old building in the City of Vancouver that has significant historical importance to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police members who have served in British Columbia. In 2014, the lands at the corner of 33rd Avenue and Heather Street on which Fairmont Barracks has stood became “the Heather Lands” and are now jointly owned by the Canada Lands Company (“CLC”) and the Musqueam Indian Band, Squamish Nation and Tsleil- Waututh Nation (collectively known as the “MST Nations”).

The century old two-and-a-half storey Tudor Revival historical building was designed by Vancouver architect, Samuel Maclure, in 1912 and was to serve as a private boy’s school. In 1918, the federal government purchased the building to use as a military hospital and in 1920 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police took over the property for the Force’s provincial headquarters, naming it “Fairmont Barracks.” The barracks were built to accommodate approximately 150 men and four large barns were erected on the property to stable 100 horses.

■ Fairmont Academy, a Tudor Revival-style building, was designed by Vancouver architect, Samuel Maclure, in 1912.

In 1950, Fairmont served as Sub Division Headquarters until 1970 when it was renamed “Fairmont Training Academy,” and remained a significant part of RCMP life until 2013 when E Div. Headquarters was moved to a new facility in Surrey, B.C.

Over the 93 years of RCMP occupancy, Fairmont Barracks hosted numerous divisional training courses and was the site of many significant ceremonies and presentations. In 1933, RCMP members, including mounted units, were formed to assist the Vancouver Police Department in quelling labour riots. In 1949, Fairmont was the site where the crew of the RCMP schooner *St. Roch* were honoured after the vessel’s historic voyage through the North West Passage. Canada’s flag, which was adopted in 1965, was first flown in E Div. on the flagpole situated in front of Fairmont Barracks.

Fairmont was also the location of the Officer’s Mess and NCO’s Mess; places where RCMP members, staff and family socialized while continuing to honour the Force. It is a building that has been the very foundation of the Force on the West Coast having had thousands of members living, working or training within its hallowed walls.

With the 2013 relocation of E Div. Headquarters to a new federal building in Surrey, the 21 acres of Crown Land, where Fairmont Barracks is situated, was termed “unceded” land. In 2014, this land was purchased by a consortium comprised of the MST Nations and CLC. Now, Fairmont is being identified as a “representation of an era of colonialization for First Nations where their customs and culture were suppressed by the RCMP.” The First Nations, with the support of CLC, have requested the building be demolished to make way for a new cultural centre that celebrates First Nations. The City of Vancouver is the lead and is guiding the rezoning and redevelopment of these lands.

First Nation leaders believe the demolition or removal of the building from their lands is appropriate in the spirit of reconciliation as Fairmont represents oppression and rejection



■ RCMP members ready for parade at Fairmont Barracks.

from hunting grounds as it is situated on historic trails which connected First Nation villages along the Fraser River, False Creek and beyond.

The City of Vancouver has indicated they do not want to set a precedent by destroying a historic class “A” building and, as the moving of the building would be difficult, the City has noted that “if a receiver site and use cannot be identified within the three to five-year time frame, then the building will be demolished.” Information received from the City states that research is being done to determine if the building could be moved, to what location, and/or if a façade of the building could be retained.

There is a twist to this story which has been documented by retired Supt. J.J. (Joe) Healy in “The Mystery of a Mountie Buried Under an Ocean of Stone.”

“History has it that the remains of RCMP Supt. J.J. Atherton, (0.432), are buried under the flag pole directly in front of Fairmont Barracks.” Joe Healy’s story goes on to state: “The officer’s spouse predeceased him, so he left explicit instructions with his two pals, also senior and retired RCMP officers, about his wish for a cremation followed by a burial. He had wanted for a very special, but different sort of burial. And, rather than be buried in a cemetery, he wanted his urn to be buried in a very, very different location.

The two officers complied with the last will and testament of the deceased officer – first he was cremated and then they buried him exactly as he had requested – in a deep hole dug by themselves beside his favorite and memorable place, which

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was his RCMP office. It just so happened that the specific location was under the flagpole which stands very prominently in front of Fairmont Barracks in Vancouver, B.C. And that’s where he rests peacefully even to this day.”

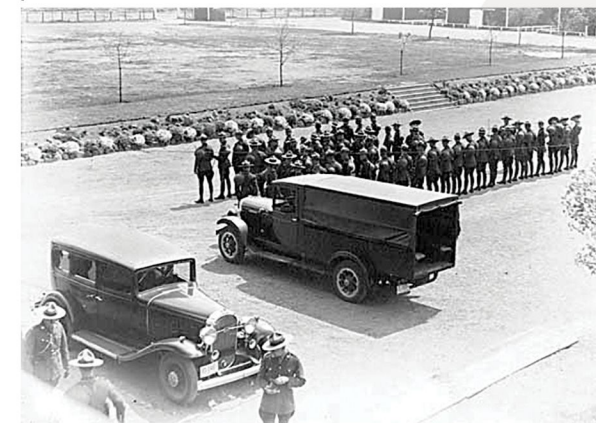
In July 2018, four RCMP veterans, Joe Healy, Don Wilson, Ric Hall and Donna Morse attended Fairmont Barracks to look at the flag pole base and surrounding area to identify the exact location where the remains of Supt. Atherton were laid to rest. One of those veterans, D/Commr. Don Wilson (Rtd.) confirmed as having witnessed the burial of Supt. Atherton’s cremated remains in 1988 but

■ Members formed up at the Fairmont Barracks in 1933 prior to heading to downtown Vancouver to assist the Vancouver Police Department with some protesters.

could not recall exactly where or what type of material the urn was made of. Unfortunately, this story may end with an “ashes to ashes and dust to dust” scenario as it pertains to Supt. Atherton’s urn. The City, MST and CLC have all been advised that remains of an RCMP officer had been buried under Fairmont’s flagpole. While there was some surprise by City and CLC officials to this, MST officials have emphatically stated they will not

be financially responsible for any preservation or upkeep of the Fairmont building or potential retrieval of any remains. E Div. Headquarters have been apprised of this matter and Vancouver Division RCMP veterans will ensure that the treatment of whatever may remain of Supt. Atherton’s urn is dealt with dignity and respect.

The years should have taught us that it is important, not only to preserve the history on which this great country of Canada was built, but how important it is to preserve the heritage of all Canadians and the Canadian symbols. As the old proverb states, “two wrongs don’t make a right.” 🍷



For more history about Fairmont Barracks see:

<http://www.rcmpveteransvancouver.com/fairmont-barracks>

Read Joe Healy’s full story at:

<http://www.rcmpgraves.com/buffalo/mountieflagpole.html>