

Musings by Mufty

April 2021

Sometimes, having limited mobility brings its own rewards. Photo Friday this week was at Riverlot56 in northeast St. Albert, a wonderful acreage of trees and fields, great for hiking and birdwatching. I set off bravely down the trail after everyone else headed away and realized it was a bit too strenuous for me, SO....

I remembered that right next door on the map was marked St. Albert Cemetery. I popped back to my car and turned in at the next driveway off Poundmaker Road. Sure enough! A sign signified St. Albert Cemetery. A wide-open space under blue prairie skies welcomed me with a small portion of the grounds having four columbariums; places for remains of cremations. Otherwise just a wide-open space. I felt disappointed. Visually it was stark empty place.

I love cemeteries. When I was little, I went with my grandfather, holding bunches of sweet peas and baby's breath to visit my grandmother's grave in a lovely little graveyard in Windsor Nova Scotia, hearing happy stories of his wife, the grandmother I never met. In Montreal my parents were buried in the old Mount Royal Cemetery, (begun in 1852) where there are stunning stone angels and statues atop big granite monuments. In Toronto, where I spent many family visits, I would wander through Mount Pleasant cemetery (originated in 1876) where they have big beautiful gravestones under lovely oaks and maple trees. Glen Gould and Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King are buried there with monuments to match their fame. There are great granite gravestones marking rows and rows of graves. I would prowl about making wonderful pictures of moss-covered stone, many with early dates, many new babies and many mothers dying in childbirth. Just a week previously on Photo Friday, we had photographed the graves in St. Albert Catholic cemetery at the top of Mission Hill (built in 1861) with fascinating tombstones marking births and deaths of priests and nuns as well as local residents.

Here in the St. Albert Cemetery, there didn't seem to be much to photograph. A few stones level with the ground. I settled in my car to read and wait for the other photographers to gather after their shoot. I was quite by myself until a white St. Albert truck pulled up ahead of my car and a worker got out, took some tools out of the back of the truck and headed off to the edge of the Cemetery. When she

came back, I decided to ask her what she was doing. She told me she was setting gopher traps as they are doing great damage to the cemetery. Then she asked if I knew about the Aboriginal Cemetery in the corner over there, pointing to a corner of the graveyard. It was the final resting place for the children from the Residential School just over the fence in the Poundmaker Lodge property. She said there was a large boulder and a cairn.

I found the boulder in the corner of the property and beside it, a large four-sided cairn. On each side of the cairn were lists of names, addresses, dates of death and age. Wonderful names that told of indigenous heritage and Inuit background.

I photographed some of the names and dates. Reporting this find to a writer friend of mine later that afternoon, she dug up a fascinating history of the graves. From 1946 to 1966 the patients who died at the Camsell Hospital were buried with the children from the Residential School in a graveyard known as "The Old Indian Cemetery." It was federal land. The children from the Residential School cared for the graves. When the school closed in 1966 the graves became overgrown and uncared for. Then a grass fire happened one spring and the markers were all destroyed. There were hardly any records of who was buried there.

The big rock was researched to learn that it was two and a half billion years old and had been transported uphill on a glacier from Great Slave Lake and left near St. Albert when the glacier receded.

And so, by being unable to walk the lovely trails of Riverlot56, I fell upon a fascinating other subject. Photography continues to widen my knowledge and experiences.