

Newcastle Miners Cemetery

Newcastle Miners Cemetery is a registered King County Historic Landmark. Located on 129th Avenue Southeast, just north of the entrance to Lake Boren Park, it is on a 2.02 acre parcel that has served as the final resting place for local coal miners and their families since 1878. The International Order of Odd Fellows maintained ownership of the property from 1879 to 2001 when it was donated to the City of Newcastle. The site consists of rocky non-arable land that overlooks Lake Boren. In fact, the ground is so rocky that blasting was often required to prepare a gravesite.

Exact number of burials at the Newcastle cemetery is not known but existing headstones and documentation indicate at least 190 have been laid to rest at this site. Jim Rannie, killed at the Newcastle mine at the age of 34, was the first interment on the property in 1878.

At that time, it was unheard of having Caucasians and African Americans buried in the same cemetery. Hence their gravesites are separated with Caucasians occupying the more attractive sites on the flatter part of the property and the African Americans located in the steeper, southwest corner. Many graves were marked by an oval ring of stones or a wooden marker if a headstone could not be provided. The only way we know about the African American miners is that two headstones have survived in that part of the cemetery. Reed Callaway born in 1881 and died in 1902, and Caleb Lock was born in North Carolina and died in 1902 at the age of 16.



Undated photo of grave covered in flowers and headstones in the Newcastle cemetery. The white pickets fences are long gone as are most of the stones. (Photo from Newcastle Historical Society's collection; donated by Milt Swanson)



Plot map of Newcastle Miners Cemetery. There are $12 \times 11 = 132$ plots (20 foot by 20 foot) depicted. At four graves per plot allocated, that could accommodate 528 graves.

However, the very rocky and hilly ground prevented that. This map shows 75 occupied plots and 57 empty ones. (Source: Newcastle Inventory Centennial Project booklet).

There are likely additional graves for African Americans and possibly also Chinese. It was common to ship remains back to China for a proper burial in the ancestral family plot, as soon as enough money could be gathered.

However, Pamela Wei Merrien said in 2017

that as a girl in the 1980s, she saw “gravestones with Han characters carved on them in the woods near Lake Boren. They were green with moss. There were at least half a dozen of them, some fallen over.” Traces of those markers have not been found perhaps due to vandalism, decay or vegetation overgrowth. Remaining headstones tell the story of the migration of Irish and Scots in the 1880s, Welsh, Swedes, Belgians and English, around 1900, followed by African Americans, Germans, Italians, Slavs, Finns, Croatians and Serbians. Deaths of children identify years of disease outbreaks. Frequently, the deceased speak to us through their epitaphs:

Weep not father and mother for me, for I am waiting in glory for thee.
 Death to me short warning give;
 Therefore be careful how you live;
 Prepare in time, do not delay;
 For I was quickly called away.

Sadly, many original headstones have been vandalized or removed. In addition, wooden markers and fences outlining gravesites were destroyed by two fires during the 1900s. Charcoal evidence around the base bark of one of the larger trees shows it is presumed to be from the original cemetery.

Today the lawn area is canopied by large Douglas firs. The area is rolling lawn with occasional roots protruding above the grass. Growth of these trees is an issue to the ongoing burial sites as expansion in the trunk diameter often is pushing on nearby headstones, concrete slabs and flush markers. The cemetery is closed to new burials except for relatives of those already interred. It is not open to the public except for Memorial Day and during Newcastle Days.

This document is brought to you by the Newcastle Historical Society. To learn more and become a member, contact Ray Lewis at raylewis41@comcast.net.