

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

DATE: 2017 August 28

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

FILE: 1650 01
Reference: Interpretive Plaques

SUBJECT: REMEMBERING WORKING PEOPLE: “PLAQUES AROUND THE PROVINCE” PROJECT.

PURPOSE: To seek Council approval for the installation of two commemorative plaques under the BC Labour Heritage Centre’s “Plaques Around the Province” project.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council be requested to approve the installation of two commemorative plaques for the BC Labour Heritage Centre’s “Plaques Around the Province” project as outlined in Section 2.0 of this report.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to the Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission for their information.

REPORT

1.0 BACKGROUND

On 21 November 2016, Council approved a Community Heritage Commission project initiative to nominate and fund two plaques under the BC Labour Heritage Centre’s Remembering Working People: “Plaques Around the Province” project. This project was initiated in 2015 to identify significant people, places or events that demonstrate the contributions of working people to the history of British Columbia. The BC Labour Heritage Centre expressed their support for both nominations in Burnaby put forth by the Community Heritage Commission earlier this year, and have worked with staff to produce the final plaque designs.

The plaque project would increase the public awareness of the history of working people in Burnaby by highlighting two often overlooked historic events that occurred in the City: the Barnet Lumber Company Mill Workers Strike in 1931 and the Japanese Workmen Railway Disaster near Lost Creek in 1909. This report provides an update on the status of the nominations as well as details of the plaque designs for the information of the Community Heritage Commission and Council.

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2.0 BURNABY COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUES

Burnaby's Community Heritage Commission supported the nomination to the "Plaques Around the Province" project to include two significant sites. This section outlines the design and proposed locations for these markers.

Plaque Design

The plaques measure 18" x 29" and are individually crafted and cast in bronze by a union foundry, Ornamental Bronze Limited. The layout and design of the two plaques (*Attachment 1*) are based on a standard template supplied by the BC Labour Heritage Centre with input from staff on the textual and graphic content. The Barnet Lumber Company Mill Workers Strike plaque will incorporate the logo of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, who led the strike. For the plaque commemorating the Japanese Workmen Railway Disaster, staff reached out to the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre for additional comments and community support for the project with a recommendation to incorporate Japanese characters or "kanji" on the plaque that translate to "Spirit of the Railway".

Location

Site visits were conducted to identify the most appropriate location for the plaques. The main criteria for these locations included good accessibility and exposure to the public, and connection and proximity to the event being commemorated.

The plaque commemorating the Barnet Lumber Company Mill Workers Strike will be located near the site of the original mill at the entrance to an unnamed trail/pathway which traverses Barnet Marine Park at the east end of the swimming beach. It will be mounted on a large natural stone and visible to park visitors walking west along the trail and near the concrete ruins of the former Barnet Lumber Company (*Attachment 2*).

The plaque for the Japanese Workmen Railway Disaster will be located along the Brunette-Fraser Greenway, and within the boundaries of the City's Brunette River Conservation Area to the immediate east of Lost Creek. It will be securely mounted on a metal stand where passersby can also catch a glimpse of the railway tracks above the embankment to the north (*Attachment 3*).

3.0 CONCLUSION

The Remembering Working People: "Plaques Around the Province" project is a unique collaboration between the BC Labour Heritage Centre and the Community Heritage Commission to acknowledge and raise awareness of two significant historic events in Burnaby involving working people. The two plaques will add considerable interest to two popular and well-used park trails in Barnet Marine Park and the Brunette River Conservation Area, and supplement the City's existing heritage interpretation plaque program.

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With the concurrence of the Community Heritage Commission and Council, staff will work cooperatively with the BC Labour Heritage Centre to install the plaques at the approved locations.


Lou Pelletier, Director
PLANNING AND BUILDING

HL:sa
Attachments (3)

Copied to: City Manager
Director Engineering
Director Finance
Director, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
City Clerk

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Barnet Lumber Company Mill Workers Strike 1931

In September 1931, some 360 workers at Barnet Lumber Co., led by the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, went on strike to protest wage reductions. Four cuts in the previous two months, the last being 20 per cent, drove wages as low as 19 cents an hour. The action was sparked by a larger strike at Fraser Mills in Coquitlam, another instance of workers' resistance to the stark conditions of the depression years. In response to the walkout, the mill's U.S. owners locked the workers out and shut down operations. Picketing continued for several weeks amidst intervention by Provincial Police and infantry, but Barnet Lumber never re-opened and eventually fell into tax default. Formerly known as the North Pacific Lumber Company, the sawmill was originally one of the largest lumber producers in the British Empire, employing Japanese, Chinese and East Indian labourers. Many of the men affected by the 1931 lockout remained unemployed until World War 2.

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Great Northern Railway Disaster, 1909

In the early hours of November 29, 1909, a Great Northern train transporting 43 railway labourers to carry out track repairs plunged into this ravine (Lost Creek). Twenty three men, mostly of Japanese descent, were killed in the crash, illuminating the dangerous conditions faced by early railway workers. Unlike the crew members, the Japanese workers had been crowded into a boxcar and could not jump to safety. Rescue efforts were hampered by darkness, the steep banks of the ravine and the torrent of water from Lost Creek. A coroner's inquest revealed that the accident was caused by the storm and unsafe track design, and recommended that a night track-walker be employed during severe rainstorms.

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Barnet Lumber Company Mill Workers' Strike, 1931
Proposed Plaque Location

Attachment 2



