

# STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

## RIVERVIEW

JANUARY 2008

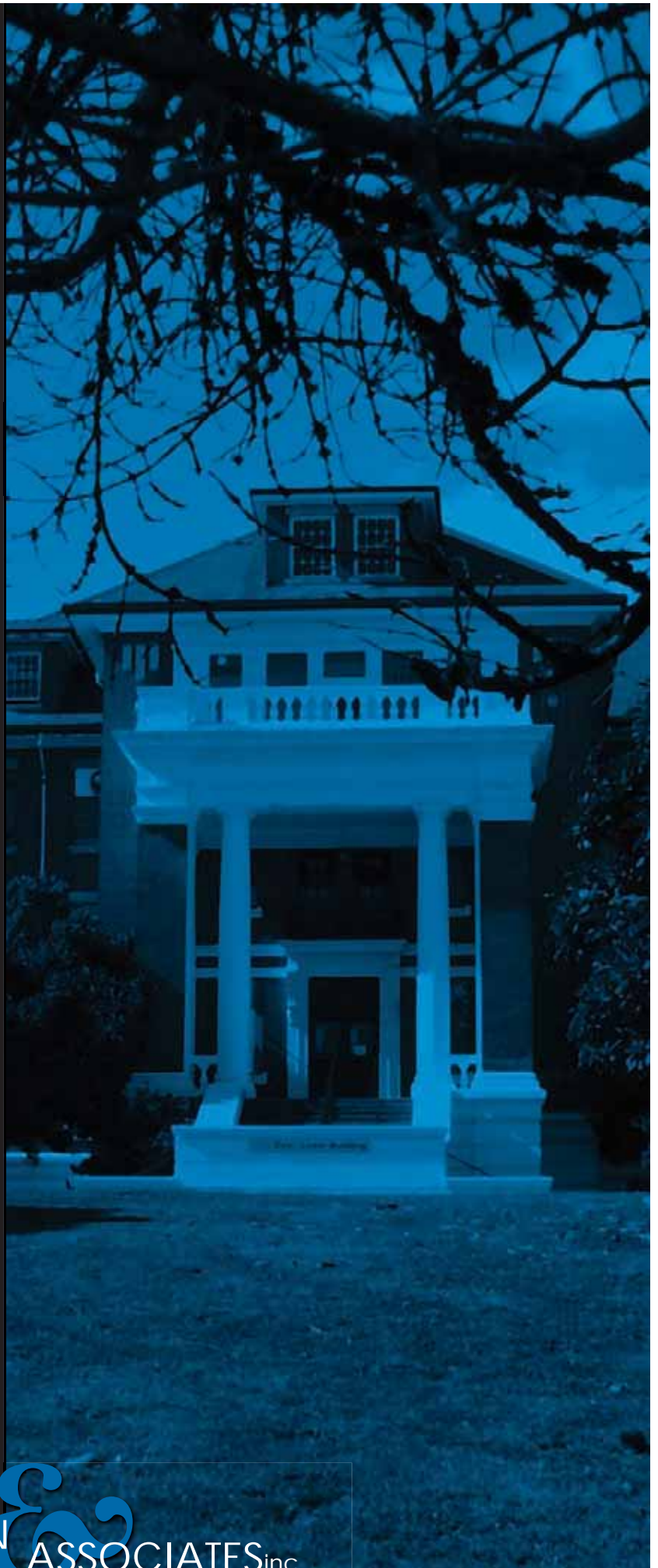
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# Table of Contents

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE	1
<i>Description of Historic Place</i>	1
<i>Heritage Value of Historic Place</i>	2
<i>Character Defining Elements</i>	4
RIVERVIEW CHRONOLOGY	5
RESEARCH SOURCES	14



# STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Aerial, Oct 1930  
[Western Canada Airlines]



## DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC PLACE

Riverview is the site of a provincially-owned psychiatric hospital, located on an east-sloping site bordered to the east by Lougheed Highway. The 98.75-hectare site is comprised of the uphill portion of a 405-hectare site that first housed the Hospital for the Mind at Mount Coquitlam. There are numerous buildings on the site, including several massive masonry wards, hospital structures, housing, service buildings and an active cemetery. Access roads are arranged in a linear manner that follows the natural topographic contours, and there are long, open vistas to the east across the Coquitlam River. Associated with the site and the buildings are thousands of mature trees and plantings, including many notably rare and large specimen trees. Natural meadows, ravines and watercourses provide an ecological connection to Colony Farm to the east and Riverview Forest to the west. Riverview is a legacy of over a century of therapeutic care, and remains a working hospital and a sanctuary for patients.

## HERITAGE VALUE OF HISTORIC PLACE

The grouping of buildings, landscape features and infrastructure at Riverview forms a unique campus of mental health care unparalleled in western Canada.

### ***Value: Therapeutic Integration of Buildings and Landscape***

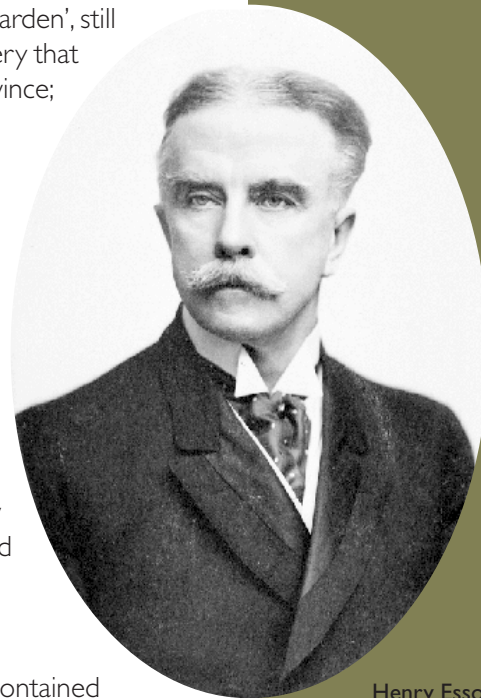
Riverview is valued as the showcase of a revolutionary therapeutic paradigm reflected in the integration of a grand designed landscape of buildings, horticultural features and therapy. In addition to its hospital function, Riverview was the site of western Canada's first true botanical garden. John Davidson, the first Provincial Botanist, and Edward Bence Stinchcombe, overseer of the grounds and works, were responsible for this vision and its execution. In 1917, some 25,000 trees and shrubs were transferred to the newly-established UBC Botanical Gardens, and an integrated landscape design for Riverview was developed, based on the English romantic tradition. The exotic tree species on the site, as well as stands of mature indigenous trees, are some of the oldest and largest in the Lower Mainland. In 1951, staff member Art Finnie, an occupational therapist and patients built a pioneer horticultural therapy garden later known as 'Finnie's Garden', still maintained to the present day. The site was also used as a nursery that supplied trees for public work projects throughout the province; some rows of nursery trees are still visible on the site.

### ***Value: Henry Esson Young and Innovations in Mental Health***

The driving force behind the establishment of the site was Dr. Henry Esson Young, Provincial Secretary and Minister of Education. Convinced of the therapeutic benefits of a natural setting in the treatment of mental illness, Young integrated highly successful occupational and recreational therapies into the design of the complex. Patients were tasked on a voluntary basis to maintain the gardens, buildings and farms, providing outdoor recreation, purpose and valuable job skills. Recognized as a model of psychiatric health care, Riverview was one of the most progressive asylums in North America, and later received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation.

### ***Value: Community***

Riverview is valued as a modern legacy of a self-sufficient, contained community with strong ties to the broader community in Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam as well as a vital part of the regional economy. In combination with Colony Farm, Riverview supplied its own vegetables, fruits, dairy and meat products for both patients and staff, had its own power plant, central steam heat system, water supply, train station, employee housing and school. At its peak year in 1956, there were over 4,300 patients and 2,200 staff. Public recreational and educational use of the site continues to this day.



Henry Esson Young





Male Chronic Building - Essondale

**Value: Architecture**

The value of Riverview also lies in its high-quality architecture, orchestrated for many decades with remarkable consistency in scale and materials, by the Provincial Department of Public Works. Several massive red-brick hospital buildings, laid out in a campus arrangement, demonstrate an early large-scale use of reinforced concrete. Structures for many different functions were added over time, designed in varied and changing styles but in a complimentary and coherent manner. Elegant detailing and high-quality construction demonstrated the province's pride in the site and concern for quality mental health care.

**Value: Ecology**

Riverview is an important ecological matrix, positioned between the Coquitlam River, Colony Farm and Riverview Forest, and harbours natural wildlife trails, salmon runs, and remnant meadows. With the site's sloping natural topography and unparalleled views to and from the site, Riverview is an ecological oasis preserved in a rapidly growing urban region.



Crease Clinic, current condition



Boys' Industrial School

## CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

Key elements that define the heritage character of Riverview include its:

- continuous use as a psychiatric hospital, represented by a unique collection of buildings, landscape and infrastructure developed over a century as a mental health care facility;
- outstanding collection of architecture that supported a self-sufficient mental health care community, including massive masonry structures grouped around a lawn setting, and many other institutional, recreational, service and residential buildings located throughout the site;
- elements of historic infrastructure, including early road alignments and access roads;
- associated landscaping, including a collection of significant heritage trees, Finnie's Garden with associated fishpond, dry rock retaining walls built by patients, and remnants of a provincial nursery;
- ecological features such as natural meadows, watercourses, wildlife trails, salmon spawning areas and ravines.



# RIVERVIEW CHRONOLOGY



East Lawn Building, current condition

The Royal Engineers lay out Pitt River Road, the second road in British Columbia, through the forest to the northeast of the Coquitlam River, in order to link up to farms and settlements along the Fraser River. A private firm is contracted to construct the road.

**1878** The Provincial Lunatic Asylum opens at New Westminster after three years of planning and construction. It is expected to be as self-sufficient as possible, and the institution establishes its own flower beds, gardens, a small farm, and repair shops. The Asylum was located adjacent to the B.C. Penitentiary so that the prison staff could provide assistance in times of emergency. New Westminster was chosen as the location for two reasons: to compensate it for the loss of status as the province's capital, and the availability of a suitably large, government-owned plot of land. It is joked in Victoria that the proximity of the facilities to criminal activity would save the expense of transporting prisoners and lunatics to Vancouver Island.

**1886** There are now 65 patients in residence. The garden produces 20,000 pounds of vegetables, mostly through patient labour. The Hospitals for the Insane Act is passed, and the Provincial Asylum is renamed '*The Public Hospital for the Insane*'.

**1901** Edward Pohlman, an investor, buys the land known as Cranberry Bog for speculative development on the supposition that Coquitlam would become a major port for the Vancouver area. When the CPR line by-passed Coquitlam, Pohlman was eager to divest.



**1904** The Provincial Asylum has been filled beyond its capacity, and 405 hectares of land, known as Colony Farm, is acquired from Pohlman by the Provincial Government as the site of a new institution. This land is at Mount Coquitlam, at the junction of the Fraser and Coquitlam Rivers, and is accessible by rail and steamboat. In exchange, Pohlman received land with intact first growth forest. As the site develops, a station is opened on the railway, and a road is built to a landing on the river. The low-lying portions (approximately half the site) are composed of rich alluvial soil ideal for farming, considered by many to be the best agricultural land in the province. Edward "Ed" Bence Stinchcombe becomes overseer of the grounds & works, and becomes responsible for most of the early plantings.

Approximately 101 hectares are upland and heavily covered with timber; this is now the site of Riverview. The Hospital's annual report states "it would be wise policy for the Government to lay out plans for the erection of a complete modern hospital for the insane on that property, and convert the present institution into an idiot and chronic asylum...the uses to which Colony Farm should be put at once are the production of all necessary vegetables for the Hospital, fodder for the horses and hogs, all dairy products by the maintenance of a large dairy herd and the supply of fuel for the bakery and for the boilers in summer. By so doing a vast saving can be effected in the general economy of the institution, as well as much healthy and pleasant occupation secured to the patients."

**1905** Clearing begins at the *Colony Farm* site. Dr. Charles E. Doherty is promoted to Medical Superintendent, and clearing begins both at Colony Farm and at the upland site for the new hospital. The first buildings are erected at this time. Much of the labour of clearing the site is undertaken by patients. Money has not yet been allocated for permanent buildings on the site, and overcrowding at the Provincial Asylum is severe.

**1906** Dr. Henry Esson Young (1862-1939) is appointed as Minister of Education and Provincial Secretary, posts that he holds until 1917. Seven hectares have been cleared by the patients at Colony Farm.

**1907** Esson Young is also appointed as Provincial Secretary and Minister of Education and is given responsibility for the health portfolio. He places the resources of the provincial government behind this new hospital site, and links the concept to the development of the provincial university. At the time, there are three sites being considered for the campus, which is expected to have a large agricultural component; the North Shore (dependent on a bridge being constructed), Point Grey (where it was eventually established), and Mary Hill in Coquitlam.

**1908** Esson Young approves the funds for the building of the '*Hospital For The Mind at Mount Coquitlam*' on the uplands site of Colony Farm. An architectural competition is held among B.C. architects to design a new mental health facility for 1,800 patients. It calls for the building, in stages, of a number of structures, each specialized as to function: an administration building; an acute building; a sick and infirm building; an epilepsy building; a pair of chronic buildings; and adequate living quarters for nurses. Franklin B. Ware, State Architect of New York, is appointed adjudicator, and his selection



Dr. Charles E. Doherty

committee chooses prominent architect J.C.M Keith's plan, which also received the highest commendation from the New York State Lunacy Commission. The buildings are to be reinforced concrete throughout, faced with red brick and laid out in the 'corridor-pavilion style,' with a central administration building with twin domed towers that reflect the symmetrical division of the site into male and female halves arranged around a surrounding horseshoe. Keith did not remain involved during construction. For unknown reasons, but likely due to the size and experience of his offices in Vancouver and Victoria, H.S. Griffith is retained to prepare the working drawings and specifications. It is decided that the massive *Male Chronic Building* should be constructed first. Designed to be built of reinforced concrete, it is one of the earliest large-scale applications of this construction technique in BC; this technology was just becoming locally available. In the same year, the University of British Columbia (UBC) is founded by an act of the provincial legislature. Over the next several years, three sites for the campus will be considered: Mary Hill in Coquitlam; the North Shore; and Point Grey. As the university is considered primarily agricultural in nature, land will be required for fields.

**1909** Clearing of the site continues. Some sixty-five patients are now housed in a temporary building, 9 metres by 18 metres and two storeys high. Approximately 32 hectares are now cleared and levelled. Construction begins on the agricultural buildings at Colony Farm.

**1910** Some 203 hectares are now cleared, and low-lying lands are dyked. At this time the property is still known as Mount Coquitlam; the name is later changed to Essondale, due to the confusion with the delivery of freight for the hospital and the town of Coquitlam. The first sod is turned for the construction of the Farm Cottages. The major buildings at Colony Farm are constructed in 1910 and 1911.

G.K. MacLean is hired as the engineer and landscape architect for the grounds, as well as for the Point Grey campus for U.B.C., the site of which has now been chosen with the assistance of Esson Young. It is recognized that appropriate grounds will have to be landscaped and developed for the Hospital. MacLean reports at the time "...it will be advisable to start with the land immediately adjacent to the Main Building. While the locality does not lend itself to formality in any large degree, it would be suitable that the ground between the Main Building and the railway track should be laid out in formal design... It is recognized that there exists in British Columbia, a certain prejudice, more or less vague, against formal work in gardens. This prejudice, among those who share it, may perhaps be traced to the fact that there are but few examples of really good formal work to be found in the Province. The immense possibilities of formal work carried out with a due measure of knowledge and care are practically unlimited."

**1911** Esson Young hires John Davidson as Provincial Botanist. Davidson is given three main areas of responsibility to; survey the native flora of British Columbia; collect native specimens for a botanical garden; and create an outdoor museum of native botanical specimens, preparatory to the founding of a Department of Botany at the new University.

Davidson gives shape to the vision of a provincial botanical garden at Essondale. The Royal gardens at Kew in London are one of the inspirations for the layout of

the grounds. Davidson solicits specimens from schools throughout the province, as well as from surveyors working in outlying districts. The patients work on a voluntary basis in the garden, in clearing the land, in the planting of trees, and in the maintenance of the grounds. At the same time, agricultural crops continue to be grown on the site, allowing for a high degree of self-sufficiency. Colony Farm, in addition to its role of providing food for the hospital, develops into the provincial experimental farm. Considered the best in Western Canada, Colony Farm produces over 700 tonnes of crops and 90,000 litres of milk this year.

The cornerstone of the *Male Chronic Building* is laid, inscribed with the names of His Honour Thomas Paterson, Lieutenant-Governor; the Hon. Thomas Taylor, Minister of Works, the Hon. Henry Esson Young, Provincial Secretary, Dr. Charles E. Doherty, Superintendent, and H.S. Griffith, Architect. "That mystic rock, the cornerstone, which we all like to know is well and truly laid is to the right side of the entrance. It was laid on the 25th November, 1911." [Coquitlam Star, May 8, 1912, p.8].

**1912** An architectural competition is held for the new University of British Columbia; it has been decided that the campus will be established at the Point Grey site, although construction is delayed until the 1920s by the outbreak of World War One. H.S. Griffith prepares plans for the *Female Chronic Building* but construction never begins. Construction of the Mount Coquitlam train station, to cost \$8,000, is announced in May.

**1913** The branch hospital at Mt. Coquitlam is officially renamed in January as Essondale. The *Male Chronic Building* opens on April 1st, and 340 patients are transferred from New Westminster.

**1914** There are now 520 patients in the *Male Chronic Building*. Plant specimens from all of the province's climatic regions begin to arrive in large quantities, and most are successfully germinated, transplanted and raised. Six hundred native species of plants have now been established at Essondale. The *Essondale Botanical Garden* takes on a life of its own, separate from the hospital activities. Research is undertaken in the areas of hybridization and horticultural practice. Trees grown in the nursery are used to landscape other sites, such as highways and the grounds of the B.C. Legislature. War with Germany breaks out in August.

**1916** The collection of specimen plants at Essondale, some 25,000 in number, is transferred to the U.B.C. Point Grey campus as the basis for its permanent botanical garden.

**1917** After the botanical gardens are moved, Jack Renton is hired as head gardener for Colony Farm. He takes charge of landscaping the Essondale grounds, and what remains on the site today is largely the result of his work. Renton had previously worked landscaping gardens for Welsh and Scottish castles and estates, and had trained at Kew Gardens. He imports trees from all over the temperate world, using extensive grafting to propagate. Renton designs new grounds for each of the buildings at Essondale, so that the whole ensemble, when mature, will resemble an old country estate.

**1918** The first of seventeen employee cottages is built. The "Great War" ends with Armistice in Europe on November 11.



1919 Work commences on the Subnormal Boys' School, later known as the *Boys' Industrial School*.

1921 "At Essondale five cottages for employees have been completed and are very comfortable indeed... A great deal of time has been given by Mr. Fitzgerald and Mr. Lonsdale, as well as other members of our mechanical staff, to construction-work in connection with the Subnormal Boys' School. A very great amount of work has been accomplished during the year and the buildings are now within a few months of being ready for occupation. Much work, however, still remains to be done before the grounds are graded and in shape to compare favourably with the buildings erected." (Superintendent's Report, 1921)

1922 The *Boys' Industrial School* for juvenile delinquents is opened to the north of the Riverview site.

1924 The *Acute Psychopathic Unit*, now known as *Centre Lawn*, opens on November 1st. The nursery supplies trees for planting on streets and public lands throughout B.C.

1927 The Fire Hall, one of the first in the area, is built on the Hospital grounds. Essondale is a self-sufficient community complete with a school for children of staff living on the hospital grounds.

1928 Five more cottages are built for medical staff and their families.

1929 Plans are prepared for the first section of the '*Veterans' Block*', to be used for veterans of World War One, mainly shell-shock victims. Construction was delayed due to the Depression, and took from 1930 to 1934.

Edward Bence Stinchcombe dies on September 9, and is succeeded by Jack Renton, who trained at Kew Gardens in London.

1930 The *Female Chronic Building*, now known as *East Lawn*, opens. Nurse's training school opened. Patient cost at this time: 98 cents per day.

1932 Essondale begins to serve a teaching function, graduating psychiatric nurses until 1973.

1934 The Veteran's Block opens.

1935 The Provincial Home for the Aged Act is passed. Five cottages originally built for the Boys Industrial School are upgraded and handed over to the Home for the Aged on May 14, 1936.

1936 The *Boys' Industrial School* is converted to the *Essondale Home for the Aged*, later Valleyview Hospital.

1937 The average daily population on the site is almost 4,000.



Old Highway, June 1949

**1940** The Mental Hospital Act is amended and references to “lunatic” and “insane” are deleted.

**1948** Additional Nurses’ Homes are built. Severe flooding of the Fraser River causes extensive damage to Colony Farm.

**1949** Additions are made to the old Veteran’s Block, and the *Crease Clinic of Psychological Medicine* opens on November 16. The clinic is designed to care for the earlier, and more hopeful cases, of mental illness. Veterans are transferred to a new unit at Colony Farm called Riverside. This later became the Forensic Psychiatric Unit.

**1950** On April 1 the various Provincial Mental Health activities are amalgamated as the Provincial Mental Health Services. The Male and Female Chronic buildings became West and East Lawn and the Acute Psychopathic Unit becomes Centre Lawn. The hospital itself is now known as The Provincial Mental Hospital, Essondale, B.C.

**1951** Art Finnie and a group of patients begin to build “Farm View”, a therapy garden later known as “Finnie’s Garden”. Lougheed Highway is finally completed in the Tri-Cities area.

**1955** On May 4, the *North Lawn Building* is opened as a 230 bed hospital for the care and treatment of psychiatric patients already in the hospital with tuberculosis, the treatment of which is a provincial responsibility. The bottom floor of the building is reserved as a small treatment unit for the early isolation of patients suffering from other infectious diseases.



Colony & Riverview Aerial, June 26, 1979

**1956** Peak year for Essondale. The site accommodates 4,306 patients and 2,200 staff. Over the next several years community services and new treatments cause the numbers to steadily decline.

**1959** The Home for the Aged Act is repealed, and is placed under the Mental Hospitals Act. The Admission and Infirmary Building for the Aged, called Valleyview 300, is opened on May 22.

**1965** On April 1, the new Mental Health Act is passed. The Crease Clinic of Psychological Medicine and the Provincial Mental Hospital, Essondale are combined to function as one mental health facility, known as Riverview Hospital. Valleyview continues to operate as a separate entity and administration.

**1973** The last psychiatric nursing class graduates from Riverview; training is transferred to community colleges.

**1983** West Lawn is permanently closed. Approximately 69 hectares of the upper hillside is developed as the Riverview Heights subdivision; as a result Riverview Forest is acquired by the municipality. Colony Farm ceases to operate as a working farm.

**1985** Changes in hospital operations necessitate cutbacks in the use of patient labour. The grounds are now maintained by gardening staff.

**1986** Riverview and Valleyview are amalgamated under one operational umbrella and administratively referred to as Riverview Hospital.

**1989** Valleyview 300 renamed Valleyview Pavilion.

**1990** Provincial Mental Health Initiative intends to move many mental health services to smaller, more specialized regional facilities, including the "maintenance" of a smaller specialized facility at Riverview as a centre of excellence. A new 358 bed tertiary hospital is planned for the Riverview site.



**1992** Crease Clinic closed. Riverview Horticultural Centre Society (RHCS) is founded as the Friends of the Riverview Trees.

**1993** On March 7, the RHCS hosts its first walkabout on the Riverview grounds, with about 60 people attending. Additional guided walks planned for May.

**1994** The Riverview Heritage Tree Inventory is published, with 1800 significant trees tagged and identified. The book, "The Riverview Lands, Western Canada's First Botanical Garden" is published, edited by Val Adolph & Brenda Guild Gillespie.

**1995** *Colony Farm* becomes a 243-hectare GVRD regional park. The Riverview Heritage Evaluation identifies five buildings as having provincial heritage significance and recommends preservation of the setting and landscape. A plaque is dedicated to John Davidson and a snakebark maple planted in his memory. On October 15, the Riverview Festival of Trees is held (the first "TreeFest"), hosted by the RHCS and the City of Coquitlam. In response to local public pressure, in October the provincial government establishes a Land Use Advisory Committee for Riverview with representatives from the Burke Mountain Naturalists (BMN) and RHCS.

**1996** In Spring, a public open house and forum are held to solicit feedback from the public on the value of the Riverview lands. Ray Spaxman is hired to conduct the planning process for Riverview. The public forum takes place over two days to accommodate the large number of people who wish to present. Strong sentiments are expressed for the protection of the Riverview lands and continuation of mental health care on site. In September, the Advisory Committee is suddenly placed on hold until further notice. Port Coquitlam passes a resolution calling for preservation of the Riverview lands.

**1997** The Burke Mountain Naturalists hold their first Backyard Tours, taking people into the more natural areas of Riverview especially on the uphill side where they follow the pipeline pathway. The Riverview Land Use Committee Meetings suspended in June.

**1998** The Provincial government publishes a new Mental Health plan that states, "Riverview Hospital will continue to play a critical role in the mental health system in the Province of British Columbia for the foreseeable future" but indicates that Riverview Hospital will close in seven years with its 663 beds to be replaced by beds in a number of smaller facilities, one of which could be located on the Riverview grounds. BMN and RHCS encourage people to write letters to the provincial government to protest the planned closure.

**1999** At their Spring Convention, the BC Liberal Party passes the following motion:

*Whereas the remaining Riverview Lands are an irreplaceable asset for the people of British Columbia as a regional green space; and, whereas, these lands have a long history as a special sanctuary for all British Columbians, be it resolved that the BC Liberal Party encourage the government to preserve the remaining Riverview Lands as park land complementing the GVRD Park, Colony Farm, as a regional greenspace; and be it further resolved that the BC*

*Liberal Party encourage the government to preserve the Riverview site as a means of promoting economic development of the horticultural industry and tourism.*

Moved by Port Moody MLA Christy Clark and adopted. In December, the local New Democratic Party passes a resolution on Riverview calling for a completion of the Riverview Land Use Public Advisory Process and preservation of the entire hospital site as a place where the mentally ill will receive care in a restorative setting and where the 1,800 trees will continue to be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

**2000** Regional health authorities are established and patients are gradually transferred to regional facilities. An application by BCBC to sell off 32 hectares of the site is abandoned. A petition with 22,000 signatures calling for the preservation of the Riverview Lands is presented in the B.C. Legislature. In April, BMN appears as a delegation to Coquitlam Council to ask them to pass a resolution calling for the protection of the Riverview Hospital lands and encouraging the city to develop a "made in Coquitlam" solution for the future of Riverview.

**2001** In May, a new building for mental health care is proposed on the Riverview Lands. BMN and RHCS support this initiative and request that an Advisory Stewardship Committee be struck to work with BCBC on issues pertaining to grounds and tree management. BMN and RHCS also meet with MLA Christy Clark to ask her to support such an initiative.

**2002** The Riverview Stewardship Group learns in September that provincial budget cuts are making proper grounds maintenance at Riverview a formidable challenge. Present patient population of 800 is expected to shrink to 125 within three years.

**2003** The Fraser Health Authority opens *Connolly Lodge*, a residential facility for 23 patients. This is the first new building constructed at Riverview in 50 years.

**2004** Riverview celebrates its centennial. Many of Riverview's trees are now a century old.

**2005** East Lawn is closed. City of Coquitlam publishes a task force report "For the Future of Riverview". Fraser Health Authority starts construction of *Cottonwood Lodge* and a third building is in the planning stage. The British Columbia Buildings Corporation (BCBC) hires arborist Julian Dunster to update the 1994 Tree Inventory which is now available on line.

**2006** *Cottonwood Lodge*, a 24-bed specialized mental health residential facility, opens on the Riverview site in October.

**2007** RHCS continues to host Tree Tours from March to October. The 14th annual Treefest is held on September 23. In November, 2007, a new petition (with 11,000 signatures), in circulation only since late August, calling for the protection of the Riverview lands and support for the City of Coquitlam's Riverview Task Force Report, is presented to the provincial legislature by MLAs Diane Thorne and Mike Farnworth.

# RESEARCH SOURCES

## PROPERTY INFORMATION

**British Columbia Archives and Records Service (BCARS), Victoria:** The provincial archives holds the records of the Department of Public Works, and therefore has many plans and specifications relevant to the Essondale site, as well as archival photographs.

**Other Sources:** The architect and contractor of the West Lawn Building are identified in *The Week*, December 17, 1910. Detailed information on the Coquitlam Mental Hospital and Colony Farm in the *Coquitlam Star*, May 8, 1912.

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## ONLINE SOURCES

### **Riverview Hospital Map and Resources**

2008 Niall A. Williams

<http://niftyniall.googlepages.com/rvmapp>