

IN A WOOD OPEN IN ALL DIRECTIONS

Perth's Burying Grounds

Lamenting the state of burials at the nascent Perth Military Settlement, on September 11, 1817, Abbé Pierre-Jacques de La Mothe (1762-1847), the first resident minister at Perth, wrote to Monsignor Joseph-Octave Plessis (1763-1825), Bishop of Quebec.

*At Perth the faithful and infidels, Protestants and Catholics, circumcised and uncircumcised are buried one beside the other by their respective ministers or by other persons who, without being such, perform the functions of them, in a wood open in all directions”.*¹

The Old Burying Ground

Although those early burials described by Abbé La Mothe took place at the site later known as the ‘Old Burying Ground’ or ‘Craig Street Cemetery’, it was not until the July 1819 visit of Colonel Francis Cockburn (1780-1868), Assistant Deputy Quartermaster General for Upper Canada, that Presbyterian minister Reverend William Bell (1780-1857) “*obtained from him a grant of four acres, in the village, for a burying ground*”.² Bell noted in his diary that,

*Being a deep bed of dry sand, it formed the best burial place I ever met with. The Colonel told me to take charge of the whole till a clergyman of the Church of England came, when we could divide it between us”.*³

Church of England priest Reverend Michael Harris (1795–1856) arrived at Perth three months later but division of the property was not immediately achieved. Having the land cleared occupied 1820 and, in 1821, it was “*determined to have it enclosed*”. To that end Bell,

*... opened a subscription and raised about £10, afterwards increased by Mr. Jackson's exertions, [and] a contract was made with Peter Kerr, for about £20, to fence it with boards and cedar posts”.*⁴

Although the property was only set aside as a cemetery in July 1819, and not fully developed until 1821, graves already marked the site. While most of it remained a patch of unclaimed bush, with its nearest neighbor being Benjamin Delisle's (c1780-c1860) whiskey still on the banks of the Tay River, it had been the settlement's de facto cemetery since 1816.

¹ AAQ, 320 CN, 1: 36. La Mothe to Plessis, 11 September 1817 – « Aujourd'hui fidèles et infidèles, Protestants et Catholiques, circoncis et incirconcis sont enterres côté-a-côté par leurs Ministres Respectifs ou autres personnes qui sans l'être en font les fonctions dans un bois ouvert de tous côtés. »

² William Bell diary, summer 1819.

³ Ibid.

⁴ William Bell diary, summer 1821.

The earliest recorded date for an interment is that of Duncan McNaughton on February 10, 1817⁵. Born in Scotland in 1792, McNaughton and his wife emigrated in 1816, arrived at Quebec City via the ship *Fame* on September 18th, and drew a location ticket for Drummond Township C-6/L-25(SW) on November 15th. Although only 24 years of age, McNaughton did not survive his first winter in Canada.

The earliest date on a memorial in the cemetery is for George Gray who died, a month after McNaughton, on March 11, 1817. Born in 1755, Gray and his family had emigrated from Banffshire, Scotland, via the ship *Eliza*. They arrived at Quebec City on August 3, 1815, and reached the Perth Military Settlement in 1816 where they were located on Bathurst Township C-2/L-4.⁶ Like McNaughton, Gray failed to survive his first winter in the new world and left his widow, Isabella Leslie (1772-1844), with eight children aged four to 20 years.

That there were other burials dating from the first days of the settlement, that went unrecorded or for which records are missing, is indicated by another Bell diary entry. In August of 1817 he wrote,

... an Irishman called and requested me to read the funeral service at the internment of a relative which I, of course, declined to do. A Roman Catholic a few days before had made a similar request. I after this altered my plan and attended funerals when requested, giving an advice to the attendants at the grave, to improve time and prepare for death. This I found was quite satisfactory to all denominations.⁷

The image of Calvinist William Bell preaching at the graveside of a Roman Catholic may be hard to imagine but that he did so, in an ad hoc and unconsecrated burying ground, was no doubt one reason for Abbé La Mothe's shock at "*Protestants and Catholics ... buried one beside the other ...*"

Over the course of 1822 a series of inter-denominational meetings among Presbyterian William Bell, Anglican Michael Harris, and Catholic Father John Hugh MacDonald (1782-1879)⁸ arranged partition of the cemetery property. In the face of some "*opposition and discontent*" from some members of Bell's own congregation, the cemetery was divided into three parts; the south half bordering Brock Street, was set aside for Presbyterians; the middle quarter for the Anglicans, and the south quarter bordering Craig Street for Roman Catholics. Patents (deeds) for the property were not issued until 1834. In 1835 the Catholics constructed a fence around their portion.

⁵ Records of Reverend William Bell's First Presbyterian Church.

⁶ See *A Dictionary of Scottish Emigrants To Canada Before Confederation, Volume-1*, by Donald Whyte (1986).

⁷ *William Bell Diary*, August 1817, via *A Man Austere, William Bell Parson & Pioneer* by Isabel Skelton (1947). Bell's hectoring lectures detailing the shortcomings of the deceased that he claimed had led to their death, was not found as 'satisfactory' by their surviving relatives as they were to Bell himself. His lengthy harangues made him many enemies.

⁸ Father Patrick Sweeny had replaced La Mothe in 1819 and MacDonald took over the parish in 1822.

No Methodist or Baptist clergymen were party to parceling-out the Craig Street Cemetery and no official set-aside was made for those denominations, although their dead were accommodated in the Protestant sections. Abbe La Mothe's mention of the "*circumcised and uncircumcised, buried one beside the other*" might suggest that the Old Burying Ground also accommodated Jews, but there is no evidence of any Jewish burials.

Under management of the respective denominational elders or wardens, for half a century the Old Burying Ground on Craig Street was the principal cemetery serving the people of Perth. From mid century however the property was becoming crowded, and lack of maintenance saw conditions deteriorate. In May of 1866 Perth Town Council called a public meeting to consider the state of affairs.

The necessity of providing a suitable place for the burial of the dead, had lately become so pressing, that measures for the accomplishment of the step could not longer be delayed – the ground at present used, being literally choked up with graves and all new interments having to be made at the expense of old graves and the relics of by-gone friends and others, whose bones should rest in peace.

The meeting was "*unanimous in regard to the want of such a place*" and passed a resolution that a committee "*look round for a proper locality*". The inter-denominational committee tasked with the job was composed of – Henry Dowsley Shaw (1833-1886) and William R. F. Berford (1801-1871), Church of England; Alexander Morris (1826-1889) MPP and Arthur Meighen (1824-1874), Presbyterian; James Thompson (1812-1912) and James Allan (1842-1931), Free Presbyterian Church; Thomas Cairns (1828-1896) and Thomas Jamieson (1828-1917), Methodist; Robert F. Kellock (1806-1883) and Henry S. Leckie (1822-1895), Baptist; Rev. John H. McDonagh (1849-1899) and John Doran (1826-1892), Roman Catholic.

The committee could not, however, agree on a site for a new cemetery and there were differences of opinion over whether the project should be a public venture undertaken by the municipality, or if a private company should be formed. Meanwhile conditions at the Old Burying Ground continued to deteriorate. The following year (1867) a letter to the editor of the *Perth Courier* lamented that the state of the burying ground was,

*... apt to make a person feel ashamed of the neglect with which the descendants of 'the old Scotch settlers' treat the bones of their worthy ancestors. Something ought to be done towards getting up a decent cemetery ...*⁹

Something was finally done when, in 1872, the Perth Cemetery Company was formed to create Elmwood Cemetery, a new burying ground in Drummond Township on the northern outskirts of the town. However, with attention re-directed to the development and beautification of Elmwood, the Old Burying Ground continued to go down hill. In 1874 another *Courier* correspondent observed that,

⁹ *Perth Courier*, July 12, 1867.

*For years the burial place of the dead had been a crying disgrace to Perth. At only a short distance from the Court House and other public buildings, the dead were huddled together in narrow and constantly contracting limits. There is much in this circumstance to lacerate the feelings of friends and make them regard with horror the place where reposed the dear remains of the departed.*¹⁰

From the late 1860s the Old Burying Ground had been running out of space and, in 1874, overcrowding, neglect and poor management of the cemetery, prompted the local Board of Health to urge that Town Council close all cemeteries within town limits. In a letter to the *Perth Expositor*, Dr. Robert C. Howden (1835-1897)¹¹, writing on behalf of his fellow board members, Dr. John D. Kellock (1835-1898)¹² and Dr. Henry C. Rugg (1838-1924)¹³, said that Perth's cemeteries threaten to, *"bring upon the community disease and its concomitants sorrow, bereavement and death"* and that *"from signs that are unmistakable, our country will, ere long, be devastated by Asiatic Cholera"*.¹⁴



This warning was seen by many who wished to be buried, in their turn, in family plots at the Old Burying Ground, as exaggerated and perhaps entirely fabricated in the interest of promoting the new Elmwood Cemetery Company. Town Councillor Arthur J. Matheson (1842-1913) thought the Doctors' petition was *"impertinent and baseless, and betrayed a large share of ignorance. They could point to no case of one disease or death resulting from interments in the ground for 50 years"*.¹⁵

A proposed by-law to entirely 'prohibit' future burials failed but was replaced by a compromise by-law 'regulating' burials.¹⁶ For the Old Burying Ground, however, it had the same effect. As the by-law confined future burials to the limits of existing cemeteries, and the Old Burying Ground was already beyond full, interments there were reduced to one or two annually. There were only 38 burials after 1900, including the final burial, that of Elizabeth H. Moulton-Gillespie (1879-1956).

¹⁰ *Perth Courier*, May 1, 1874.

¹¹ Practiced medicine at Wilson and later Foster Streets 1864-1892.

¹² Practiced medicine at Perth 1862-1898.

¹³ In addition to practicing medicine, 1870-1880, at 105 Gore St. East, Dr. Rugg operated H. C. Rugg and Company, dealers in drugs, patent medicines, chemical, books and stationary, at 47 Foster Street 1875-1889.

¹⁴ *Perth Expositor*, April 1874.

¹⁵ *Perth Courier*, June 12, 1874.

¹⁶ The by-law required that burials within the limits of Perth were confined to the existing cemeteries. All graves had to be four feet deep from ground level to the top of the casket. No bodies could be removed between May 1st and September 1st and could only be removed between the hours of nine in the morning and six in the evening. In no case could bodies be removed when death had resulted from an infectious disease. Church Wardens and Trustees were required to ensure a 4 ½ foot fence separated the burying ground and any public street or private property.

In the 1890s the Presbyterians began charging a fee of \$2.00 for each burial with *“the amount realized set apart for current repairs to the grounds and fences of the cemetery”*.¹⁷ With so few burials taking place, however, that plan did nothing to finance maintenance. Through the early years of the 1900s the local Horticultural Society did what it could to maintain the burying ground but thereafter its condition was again cause for critical comment.

In 1947 the Perth and District Pioneer Cemeteries Association was formed to maintain the Old Burying Ground. By 1960, however, the group could no longer attract sufficient community volunteers and informed council that under Provincial Regulations *“where a cemetery owner cannot be identified or cannot maintain it, the council of the local municipality in which the cemetery is situated shall be charged with the duty of maintaining it and ... shall for the purposes of the Act be deemed to be the owner of the cemetery”*.¹⁸

As ‘owner’ of the cemetery, in 1966 the Town of Perth organized a ‘Committee to Restore the Old Burying Ground’¹⁹, composed of representatives of the clergy, Town Council, the Perth Cemetery Company (owners of Elmwood Cemetery) and citizens. Over the next few years volunteer teams from the Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian churches, the Boy Scouts, Rotary Club and Lions Club made significant improvements by cutting brush and bringing in fill to landscape the grounds sufficiently to allow the use of power mowers. Maintenance was not sustained, however.

Twenty years later, with the cemetery yet again described as *“derelict to the point of desecration”*²⁰, a major restoration program was undertaken by the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committees (LACAC). Financed from Provincial grants and municipal funds and managed by the Old Burying Ground Management Committee, composed of representatives of Council, St. Andrews, St. James, St. Johns Churches, and the LACAC, the multi-year project created the cemetery we see today. Day to day maintenance is carried out by the municipality.



Over much of its active life the Old Burying Ground also served the surrounding Townships. In all, there are more than 1,300 graves, among them the final resting place of men and women prominent in the history of Perth, including -- Alexander Fraser (1789-1872), hero of the Battle of Stoney Creek and local magistrate; John Graham Haggart (1836-1913), MP and

¹⁷ *Perth Courier*, May 10, 1895.

¹⁸ *Perth Courier*, June 16, 1960.

¹⁹ *Perth Courier*, March 28, 1966.

²⁰ *Perth Courier*, June 3, 1987.

Minister of Railways & Canals; Reverend Michael Harris (1795-1856), first Anglican clergyman; Robert Lyon (1812-1833), victim of the 'Last Fatal Duel'; Senator Roderick Matheson (1793-1873); Dr. Alexander Thom (1775-1845), Perth's first doctor. Also, among these luminaries, lies William Beare (1826-1851), executed by hanging at Perth on May 17, 1851, for the axe murder of William Barry²¹.

Other leading citizens originally interred in the Old Burying Ground were moved to Elmwood Cemetery, including Reverend William Bell (1780-1857), the man who played such a leading role in establishing the cemetery.²²

St. Bridget's Chapel Churchyard

Abbé La Mothe and his successor Father Patrick Sweeney, who served the settlement up to 1822, were missionary priests and *"did not keep parish records"*.²³ Catholic record-keeping only began with the arrival of Father John MacDonald (1782-1879), parish priest 1823-1837. MacDonald's register records four interments, between 1824 and 1827, as *"buried in the Catholic Church Yard of Perth"*. In those years the only Catholic *"churchyard"* at Perth was that of St. Bridget's Chapel.²⁴

In January 1817, six months before Reverend William Bell arrived at the new settlement, and two and one-half years before Bell secured Colonel Francis Cockburn's official approval for a burying ground on Craig Street, Abbé La Mothe was granted a one-acre 'town lot' on the northwest corner of Beckwith and Harvey Streets as the site for a Roman Catholic Chapel.

The Abbé, a native of Gascony, France, was the former Chaplin of the de Watteville Regiment of Foot, a Swiss corps that had served with the British Army in both the Peninsular War and the American War of 1812. He was the first Catholic Priest to serve the Perth Military Settlement, appointed *"missionary to the colonists of the Rideau River"*²⁵ in November 1816 by the Bishop of Quebec, Joseph-Octave Plessis.

At a time and place when every resource was dedicated to physical survival, construction of the Abbé's chapel took time and was only achieved thanks to fundraising efforts by Perth merchant and distiller Benjamin Delisle among his contacts in Montreal. St. Bridget's was not completed until the summer of 1820, after Bishop Plessis had transferred La Mothe to Kingston in 1819.

For nearly three decades St. Bridget's Chapel served a parish encompassing all of present-day Lanark County (also originally known as St. Bridget's Parish). From at least 1822, and almost certainly from as early as 1816, Catholics, like their Protestant neighbors, buried their dead at the Old Burying Ground on Craig Street. However, between 1824 and 1827 Father John MacDonald also recorded those four interments *"in the Catholic Church Yard of Perth"*.

²¹ The murder took place at Adamston, Renfrew County.

²² The removal of bodies from the Old Burying Ground for re-interment elsewhere has left the Craig Street Cemetery records confusing and inaccurate at best.

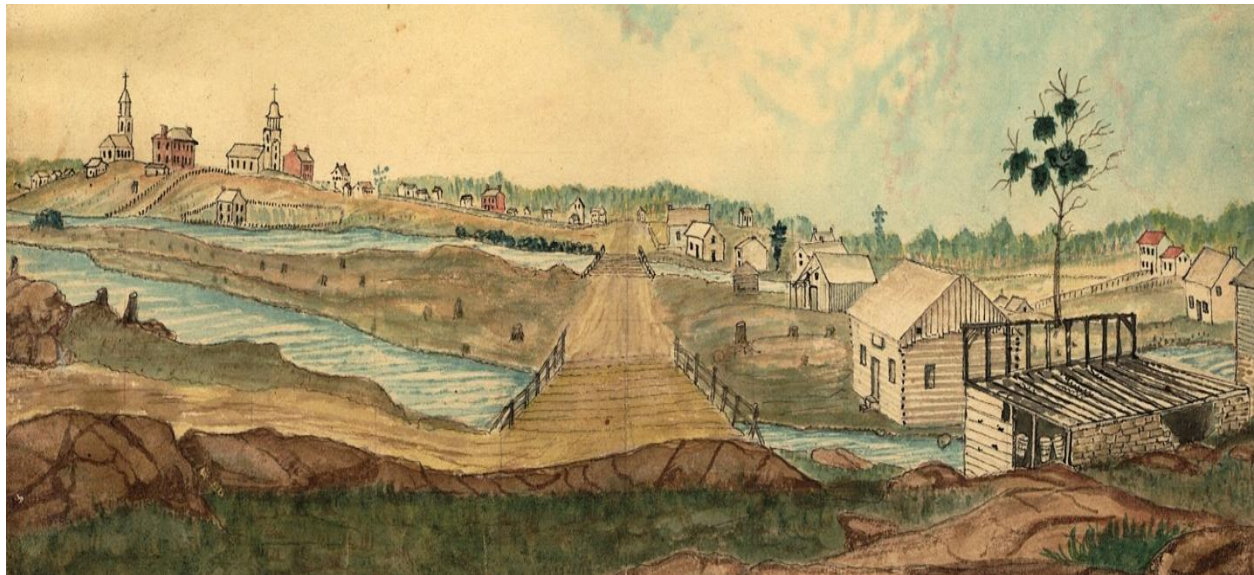
²³ *175 Years of Faith: The Story Of The Parish of St. John The Baptist, Perth, (1823-1998)*, Parish History Committee (1998).

²⁴ Not to be confused with St. Bridget's R. C. Church and cemetery at Stanleyville.

²⁵ *"... missionnaire des colons de la rivière Rideau"* – Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec pour 1928-1929.

Michael Harty, husband of Catherine Byrne, May 2, 1824
Rebecca Nevil Conner, spouse Michael Conner, June 15, 1825
Samuel McEachern, 33, husband of Ann McDonnell, September 26, 1825
Mary Kennedy, 9, daughter of Peter Kennedy and Peggy Quigley, 20 March 20, 1827.²⁶

All other interments in MacDonald's register are recorded as "*in the Catholic burial ground*" or simply "*at Perth*" (Craig Street), so why would he also conduct a handful of burials in St. Bridget's churchyard? The most likely explanation is that he did not. Before coming to Perth, MacDonald had been Parish Priest at St. Raphael's, Glengarry County, for eight years -- perhaps he wrote "*churchyard*" in his Perth register simply out of habit (i.e., in error).



This watercolor of Perth, dated August 1828, shows St. Bridget's Chapel on the 'sandhill', extreme left, with St. James Anglican Church to its right, and the red brick Summit House standing between them.²⁷

While the 1824-1827 "*churchyard*" burials may not have actually been at St. Bridget's, what of earlier burials by La Mothe and Sweeney? The circumstantial evidence of Abbé La Mothe's complaint about interment of "*the faithful and infidels, Protestants and Catholics ... in a wood open in all directions*" suggests he and Sweeney also conducted burials at the Craig Street site. However, considering La Mothe's disgust with conditions at Craig Street, that he and Sweeney might have also conducted burials at St. Bridget's, even before the chapel was complete, remains a possibility.

St. Bridget's served local Catholics until 1849 when St. John the Baptist Parish Church was completed on Wilson Street. The chapel then sat unused and derelict until it burned in August 1860²⁸ The land upon which it had stood was sold sometime prior to 1872.

²⁶ See [https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2600852/saint-bridget-s-catholic-church-cemetery-\(defunct\)](https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2600852/saint-bridget-s-catholic-church-cemetery-(defunct))

²⁷ Painting by Corporal Thomas Burrowes (1796-1866), Archives of Ontario, C1000022.

²⁸ The target of arsonists. See <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/st-bridgets-chapel.pdf> elsewhere on this website.

If bodies were exhumed and moved from St. Bridget's there are no known records. The Miller index²⁹ of burials at the Craig Street site includes Father MacDonald's 1824-1827 burials of Harty, Conner, McEachern and Kennedy. That index was apparently prepared from Father MacDonald's register and Miller, therefore, seems to have interpreted "*churchyard*" to mean the Craig Street Cemetery. But it could also be interpreted to suggest those four bodies were moved from St. Bridget's to Craig Street.

However unlikely that it ever accommodated a cemetery, Father MacDonald's confusing records and the lack any Catholic records from 1816-1822 could even mean some graves remain at the St. Bridget's site.

Old Wesleyan Methodist Burying Ground

When it was divided among the Anglicans, Catholics, and Presbyterians in 1821, Methodists of the early Perth settlement were excluded from a share of the Old Burying Ground on Craig Street.

In comparison to the other denominations, Methodists were few in number during the earliest years of the settlement, but as early as 1817 saddlebag preacher William Brown (1795-1857) held a service at the home of Joshua Adams (1780-1863)³⁰. When their first resident preacher, Reverend John Griggs Peale (1779-1822), arrived 1821, the group was large enough to support construction of a 'Preaching House' on the west side of Gore Street between Craig and Brock Streets, where Asbury Methodist Church stands today. In 1823 the Methodists of Perth were granted a quarterly meeting by the district Elder and in 1825 the church claimed a membership of 300.

During Perth's first two decades Methodists seem to have buried their dead in the Anglican section of the Old Burying Ground on Craig Street. It was not until 1843 that a plot of land on Robinson Street was deeded for their own burying ground. The first trustees were Joshua Adams, Thomas Poole (1796-1888), Elisha Drew (1806-1896), Josias Richey (1795-1875), George Kerr (1814-1889), James Flintoff and William McGrath.



Lots were laid out in 16' X 16' blocks, "*leaving a reserve for strangers*"³¹, and subscribers paid in advance for their plots to defray the cost of fencing the property against wandering livestock. Interments began in April 1845 with the burial of Anne Darte-Drew (1811-1845), wife of Elisha Drew, on the 11th, and of Mary James (1800-1845), wife of Thomas James (1793-1872), on the 19th. By 1855 there were nearly 30 graves and by the mid 20th century the cemetery accommodated at least 210 burials.

²⁹ *The Pioneer Cemetery, Craig Street, Perth Ontario, Burials 1821-1936*, Indexed by J. R. Ernest Miller (1994).

³⁰ This was an interesting location for a Methodist service as the Joshua Adams home included an adjoining tavern, probably the first established in the village.

³¹ *The Old Methodist Burying Ground, An early History and Recording*, by James M. Neelin and Michael R. Neelin (1978).

From 1873, when Elmwood Cemetery opened, increasing numbers of Methodists chose to be buried at the new cemetery and some remains and gravestones also seem to have been moved to Elmwood. Because the Methodist cemetery still had plenty of room, however, it was not impacted by the municipal by-law of 1874 and burials continued there for another six decades. The last interment was apparently that of James Percival Kerr (1874-1946). The cemetery has been inactive since 1951.

In 1925, when the congregations of Asbury Methodist and Knox Presbyterian churches merged, stewardship of the Old Methodist Burying Ground passed to St. Paul's United Church.

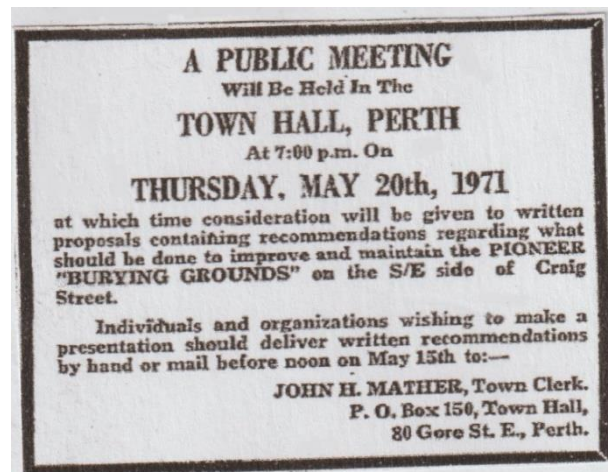
Regrettably, the Methodist Burying Ground has been repeatedly and extensively vandalized. Most of the hundred-odd surviving gravestones have been broken, overturned, or displaced from their bases. Others have eroded to illegibility. However, unlike the Anglican, Catholic, and Presbyterian Churches who abandoned their burying grounds on Craig Street, the United Church continues to oversee the Methodist cemetery. In 1989, it received a facelift, including new fencing on two sides and some general landscaping. Church volunteers periodically perform basic grass and brush cutting but maintenance is minimal and the church has not undertaken restoration of the smashed memorials.

Elmwood Cemetery

With the Old Burying Ground on Craig Street full to overflowing, Town of Perth regulations prohibiting any possible expansion or the creation of a new cemetery within the bounds of the municipality, and no agreement among the churches for a joint cemetery, a public meeting was called at Town Hall for the evening of January 19, 1872, to form the Perth Cemetery Company.

By the following week 255 shares had been subscribed and, on March 27, 1872, the Perth Cemetery Company was registered, operated by a volunteer board of trustees composed of interment rights holders.³²

Originally conceived as an exclusively Protestant enterprise, the election of its first board was based on church representation – for Knox Presbyterian, Sheriff James Thompson (1812-1912) and James Allan; for St. Andrews Presbyterian, John Semple Hart (1833-1917) and Edward George Malloch (1842-1915); for St. James Anglican, Henry Dowsley Shaw (1833-1886) and John William Douglas (1840-1915); and for First Baptist Church – Henry S. Leckie (1823-1895). Malloch became the first President and Thompson the first Secretary-Treasurer. No Methodist was named to the original board because the Old Methodist Burying Ground was still in operation, although many Methodists (and Baptists) became shareholders by purchasing interment rights.



³² Under the provisions of the Consolidated Statutes of Upper Canada, Section 787 (1856).

That summer the company purchased 50 acres of land at Drummond Township C-3/L-2(N-E) from Oliver and Marie Cromwell for the sum of \$2,400. Due to subsequent expansion of the town, today the cemetery is located at 165 Dufferin Road, in the north corner of the Town of Perth with a portion of the property in Drummond North Emsley Township. It covers approximately 46 acres, of which about half is developed.

*"The new "God's Acre was named 'Elmwood Cemetery' by the Directors"*³³ and, on November 1, 1872, about 150 share holders gathered at the site to select their plots. A week later, on November 8, 1872, the first interment took place, that of John Warren (1809-1872). In the spring of 1873,

*... on fine Sabbath afternoons, the new cemetery is thronged with visitors, to most of whom it is yet a novelty ... The Directors wish visitors to keep, as far as possible, on the avenues, and not to cross the lots at risk of breaking or injuring the hedging which lot-holders have procured and set out at considerable expense and trouble. It must also be distinctly understood that all dogs must be left at home, as they will not be allowed in the cemetery. About 600 trees of all kinds peculiar to Canadian woods, have been planted along with avenues and the front fence.*³⁴

The citizens of Perth were encouraged to contribute surplus perennial flowers and other plants or shrubs from their gardens for planting at the cemetery by its caretaker.



On October 10, 1873, at the invitation of the Elmwood directors, the Anglican Bishop of Ontario, Reverend John Travers (1825-1901)³⁵, conducted a service *"for the purpose of consecrating that portion of the land as a place where the bodies of the dead might rest in peace, and be preserved from all indignities"*.³⁶

³³ *Perth Courier*, November 8, 1872.

³⁴ *Perth Courier*, May 16, 1873.

³⁵ Bishop of Ontario 1861-1901.

³⁶ *Perth Courier*, October 17, 1873.

Opening of the new cemetery in the spring of 1873 prompted “removals from the old burying ground to the new, by wholesale ... together with many of the handsomest monuments and tombstones”.³⁷ This rush of exhumations at the Craig Street and Methodist cemeteries was likely prompted by concerns that the old cemeteries might not been maintained, or by the purchase of family plots in the ‘new’ cemetery.

Within a decade of its inception, Elmwood Cemetery became the “*prettiest cemetery in Eastern Ontario*” and was the source of considerable community pride. During its lifetime, however, it did not always live up to its billing. By the turn of the 20th century standards had begun to slip.

*At one time Perth could boast of having the prettiest cemetery in Eastern Ontario. Elmwood was the boast; it is the boast no longer, for the once beautiful grounds have been overrun with brush and grass and weeds, and the graves and monuments have been allowed to become dilapidated ... The cemetery and lot-owners are responsible for the present condition of Elmwood, and on the former, in the eyes of the public, the chief blame lies”.*³⁸

The criticism stung and within weeks the *Perth Courier* reported that remedial work was underway,

*The cemetery company are doing good work, but they will make a mistake if they stop now. Let them make a thorough job of it while they are at it. The Courier hopes that by next summer it will be again what it was once, a place of natural beauty”.*³⁹ *To keep it properly takes money. Some suggest that a subscription to be taken up, the proceeds of which are to be used for beautifying purposes”.*⁴⁰

As was too often the case at the Old Burying Grounds on Craig and Robinson Streets, vandalism was also a problem at Elmwood.

*Some busy body has been fooling with the new sun dial in Elmwood Cemetery and has put it out of gear. Anyone caught touching the dial will be prosecuted”.*⁴¹

*\$25 Reward will be paid by Mrs. George W. Rogers, Victoria Street, for such information as will lead to the conviction of the party, or parties, who tampered with, broke, brass pins and removed the handles from the doors of the McLaren-Stewart Vault at Elmwood Cemetery.*⁴²

³⁷ *Perth Courier*, November 8, 1872.

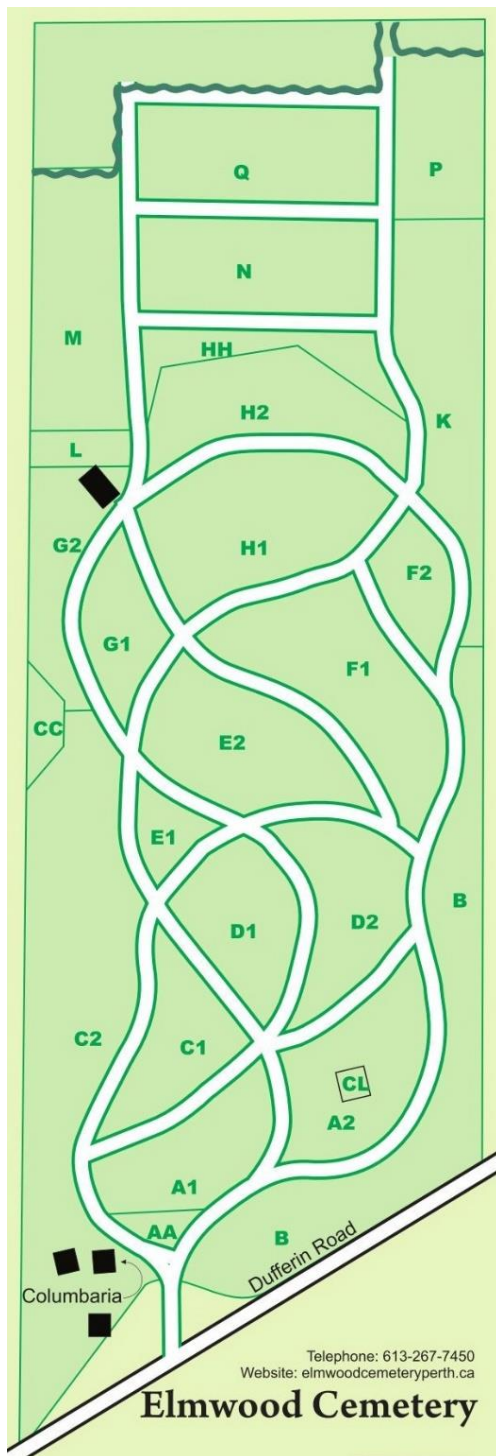
³⁸ *Perth Courier*, August 12, 1904.

³⁹ *Perth Courier*, September 10, 1904.

⁴⁰ *Perth Courier*, July 5, 1907.

⁴¹ *Perth Courier*, July 30, 1909.

⁴² *Perth Courier*, August 24, 1924.



Over the years, beyond memorials to the deceased, there have been many structures or other installations built within Elmwood Cemetery. Some have survived and some have not.

The front gate of today was built in 1907, but replaced a gate built in 1872.⁴³ In the early years the gates and fencing were in constant need of repair because hitching posts for up to 25 horses were an integrated part of the installation.

Edward G. Malloch (1942-1915) constructed a 10 X 10 foot mausoleum on the family plot in 1875. Over the years it fell into disrepair, however, and was torn down in the 1950s, the bodies it contained buried in the plot where it stood.

Built in 1897 at a cost of \$1,385, the vault to the left of the front gate served not only Elmwood for winter storage of caskets, but also provided space for nearby rural cemeteries. Its interior has been modified several times. Although not so often called for today, the vault is still in occasional use for storage of bodies awaiting spring burial.

Major improvements were undertaken in 1909. Hedges were removed and replaced by grass, benches painted, many trees cut down and stumps uprooted, the avenues graded and ditched, and an extensive tile drainage system installed.

In 1913 John A. Stewart (1867-1922) built the Stewart-McLaren mausoleum. Located just inside the front gates it contains the bodies of the Stewart-Cameron family, including Perth's Whiskey King, John A. McLaren (1831-1901).⁴⁴

The cemetery office with meeting room was built on the property in 1984. Columbaria were installed in 2008 and 2020.

⁴³ Stone for the 1872 gate pillars was locally quarried but stone for the 1907 pillars was brought all the way from Montreal at a cost of \$600.

⁴⁴ John A. McLaren was the illegitimate son of Elizabeth Alexander (1801-1877) who later married John Cameron (1788-1870). John A. Stewart was the son of their daughter (McLaren's half-sister) Barbara Cameron (1842-1906). Stewart, himself, does not rest in the mausoleum, he is buried in Plot A2-95.

Over the years, other structures that no longer exist were built within the cemetery grounds -- a house for the caretaker, a chapel, a well and pump-house, and several tool and equipment storage sheds.

Elmwood remained a primarily Protestant cemetery until the mid-20th century, but today accommodates those of all faiths or none-at-all. About 10,000 have been interred there over the past 140 years, including many who have featured prominently in the community's history. Among them are,

Reverend William Bell (1780-1857), Perth's first Presbyterian minister (moved from the Old Burying Ground); David Hogg Jr. (1842-1929), undertaker, furniture manufacturer; Lieutenant Alexander W. Kippen (1857-1885), killed at the Battle of Batoche during the Northwest Resistance; Judge John Glass Malloch (1806-1873), Perth's first judge; the Marks Brothers, Thomas (1832-1904) and Robert W. (1855-1931), musical theatre stars; Peter McLaren (18931-1919), lumber baron and Canadian Senator; Arthur Meighen (1825-1874), merchant, Town Councillor; Lieutenant Andrew Playfair (1789-1868), War of 1812 Veteran (Canadian Regiment of Fencible Infantry), MLA; John Alexander Stewart (1867-1922), entrepreneur, MP, Cabinet Minister; George Walker Sr. (1838-1874) and George Walker Jr. (1845-1938), *Perth Courier* publishers.

There are also hundreds of burials at Elmwood of those from the other end of the socio-economic continuum. The cemetery includes a 'pauper's plot', a mass burial site of close-packed, narrow graves of approximately 300 indigent persons. From 1902, 150 of those who died as paupers at the local 'House of Industry'⁴⁵ (now Lanark Lodge) were interred at Elmwood, and it has been estimated that, between 1873 and 1902, prior to the House of Industry burials, there were another 150 indigent burials. All of these were placed in unmarked graves but in 2016 Elmwood installed a memorial marking the pauper section, engraved with as many of the names as could be identified.

St. John the Baptist Parish Cemetery

In 1866, with the Old Burying Ground on Craig Street on a path to closure, the inter-denominational committee considered establishment of new a common burial ground. Their draft proposal called for the grounds to be laid out on a uniform plan with the Catholic section set apart by a fence or hedge. However, the proposed division of the site did not meet the approval of Father James John Chisholm (1821-1878), pastor of St. John's Parish 1866-1878, and Church rules dictated that Catholics retain full management of their own cemeteries.

In 1872, the same year Elmwood was established, Father Chisholm purchased four-acres of Clergy Reserve land at Drummond Township C-1/L-4. The \$750 price paid represented part of the proceeds from the sale of the St. Bridget's Chapel property in Perth.

⁴⁵ aka – the 'Workhouse' or 'Poorhouse'.

Dates of death back to 1844 appearing on its gravestones, and others back to 1829 listed in its register, show that many Catholic families also moved the remains of their loved ones from the Old Burying Ground to the new cemetery. There is no evidence of re-interments from St. Bridget's Churchyard.

Over its first two decades, St. John's Cemetery was a rather barren spot, on the edge of town beside the railway tracks, but in 1890 Father Michael O'Donoghue (1842-1890), who succeeded Father Chisholm, undertook a large-scale improvement. He had the tract resurveyed, landscaped, and planted with trees. He also had a stone and wrought iron gate constructed, installed walks and driveways between every two widths of lots and a roadway around the perimeter. At the center of the cemetery, he placed a 27-foot-high wooden cross. Later a stone vault was erect. Additional improvements were later made under the direction of Father Charles Duffus (1849-1919), pastor at Perth 1891-1899.

In 1943, Father J. E. Trainor (1912-1991)⁴⁶ established a cemetery committee, whose members were appointed to a two-year term, to take charge of cemetery management. The first committee consisted of Father Trainor as President; with Daniel J. Hogan (1850-1924), Archie McLean, Charles Doyle (1881-1973) and Basil Sheridan (1911-1978). At the first meeting, on May 12, 1943, the price for a grave was set at \$10 plus \$7 for digging. Frank Publow (1882-1956) was employed as the first caretaker. Today the cemetery is operated by a Board of Directors.



By the beginning of the 21st century St. John The Baptist Parish Cemetery contained about 3,250 burials including those of such prominent individuals as Reverend Francis John Spence (1926-2011), Archbishop of Kingston; Dr. Andrew Dwyer (1860-1939), medical practitioner, County Coroner, Board of Education Chairman; and Charles James Foy (1867-1927), Perth Mayor, Director of the USA & Canada Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH).

⁴⁶ Curate at St. John's 1931-1949.

Outside the bounds of St. John's Parish Cemetery three members of the parish clergy were interred within St. John's The Baptist Church. The bodies of Fathers James J. Chisholm, Michael O'Donoghue, and John H. McDonagh were placed in a crypt below the church floor. Their grave markers, originally set in the floor in front of the high altar, were moved when the church was enlarged in 1895, and are currently mounted in the side walls of the church. A fourth stone in the church commemorates Father T. Davis (1845-1905) who is buried in St. John's Cemetery.

- *Ron W. Shaw (2023)*