

DIGGING IN OUR CEMETERIES

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Nestled in Cabbagetown, between Bloor and Winchester, are two cemeteries dating back to the mid 1800s. Both of these were created in a park style which had found favour in Britain at the time. The idea was to create a setting where people could wander through a treed environment of winding paths and visit with their deceased family members in an inviting green space. When both of these cemeteries were opened, they were on the outskirts of the city on property previously owned by the Scadding family.

The Anglican burial ground in Toronto was St. James Cemetery. It is the oldest operating cemetery in the city. Its first location was on the grounds of St. James Cathedral. In 1844, St. James Cemetery was relocated to Parliament and Bloor streets and was officially opened in July. The layout of the cemetery had been designed by John Howard in the park style. In 1861, the Chapel of St. James the Less was opened. The architects, Cumberland and Storm also designed the cathedral. The majority of the bodies were moved from the King Street location and re-interred in the new location. However, to this day, there are a number of bodies still buried in the grounds of St. James Cathedral. Many of the original tombstones adorn the walls of the cathedral. One very poignant stone is that of John Ridout who was killed in the last duel to be fought in the Town of York.

St. James is the final resting place of many of the founding fathers of the Town of York. The names Baldwin, Ridout, Scadding, Boulton, and Jarvis can be found on the vaults and stones in the cemetery.

On Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings, a number of the Toronto OGS can be found diligently working at transcribing all of the stones in the cemetery. Great delight is taken when a stone thought to be illegible is finally deciphered.

The Necropolis Cemetery on Winchester east of Parliament Street is the second non-sectarian cemetery in Toronto. It is very aptly named, as necropolis is a Greek word meaning city of the dead. The first non-sectarian cemetery was York General Burying Ground, commonly known as Potter's Field. Potter's Field, located at the north-west corner of Yonge and Bloor, was closed in the 1850s and the bodies moved to other cemeteries. A total of 984 were removed to the Necropolis and a plaque in the cemetery designates it as "The Resting Place of Pioneers".

In 1850, \$16,000 was raised to purchase 18 acres of land from the Scadding family for the purpose of opening the second non-sectarian cemetery. It was officially opened in 1858. In 1872, Henry Langley was commissioned to build the chapel, port-cochere and superintendent's lodge for the cemetery. These were built in the Gothic Revival style of architecture, popular in Ontario churches at the time. Over the course of his career, Langley was the architect for over 170 churches in Ontario. He was the architect for the pinnacles, porches and spire on St. James Cathedral. Langley is buried in the Necropolis Cemetery in an unmarked grave.

Like St. James, the Necropolis is the final resting place for many of Toronto's well known citizens. The bodies of Samuel Lount and Peter Matthews, the only individuals hanged for their participation in the ill-fated 1837 Rebellion, were removed from Potter's Field and re-interred in the Necropolis. William Lyon Mackenzie, the leader of the rebellion is buried with his family. Thornton Blackburn, an escaped slave from Virginia, whose freedom trial was the impetus for the underground railway into Canada, has his final resting place next to Matt Cohen and George Brown. George Brown, Father of Confederation, rests there while his murderer once lay in the Don Jail graveyard just

across the Don River. Others of significance to name a few are Joseph Bloore, Ned Hanlan, John Ross Robertson, Joseph Burr Tyrell, William Holmes Howland, and Corporal Ainsworth Dyer.

Volunteers at the Royal Ontario Museum provide ROMwalk tours of both of these cemeteries. Take advantage of these walks to enjoy our history.

Sources:

ROMwalk

http://www.rom.on.ca/programs/rom_travel/index.php

Hancocks, Elizabeth. *Potter's Field Cemetery 1826 – 1855, Otherwise Called The Stranger's Burying Ground*. Agincourt, ON: Generation Press; 1983

Irwin, Jane. *Old Canadian Cemeteries, Places of Memory*. Toronto: Firefly Books, 2007

Toronto Necropolis and Crematorium TRN-014. Toronto: OGS, Toronto Branch.

Potter's Field Cemetery (Burial Register only) TRN-004. Toronto: OGS, Toronto Branch.

Available: <http://www.torontofamilyhistory.org>