

An Illustrated History of St. James' Cemetery

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In 1832, the town of muddy York was little more than a large village, with a population of just over 9,000 souls. Almost all the population lived within a 10 minute walk of the shore of Lake Ontario - over those famous muddy roads. Within a dozen years, in 1844, the population had grown to over 18,000 and had incorporated as the City of Toronto. The original St. James cemetery, adjacent to the Cathedral at King and Church streets in downtown Toronto, originally granted in 1797, was becoming too crowded, and the decision was taken to open the 'new' St. James Cemetery.

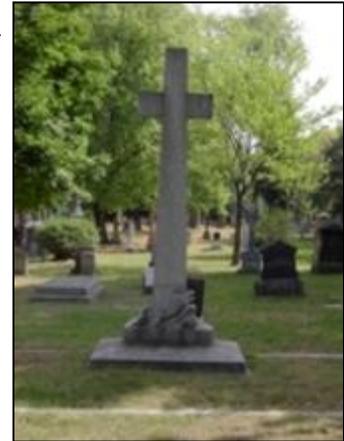
With considerable foresight, the Church administration examined the options, and decided to open a much larger cemetery, far outside the boundaries of the town. They looked as far to the north as the famous Ravine, which was the natural boundary. Since it was a couple of miles beyond most of the homes and shops, surrounded by family farms, acres of silent sky and the Don River, the Church selected a large plot on the hill overlooking the Ravine to be its Cemetery, and opened the operation in 1844.

St. James Cemetery and Crematorium is now the oldest continually operating cemetery in the City of Toronto.

Passed every day by thousands of commuters and residents, St. James' beautiful setting can almost let it be passed unnoticed. The 'end of the town' is now the major intersection of Parliament and Bloor - right at the edge of the business district. Along the Parliament Street side, there is a long high fence of stone and wrought iron. On Bloor, only a short stretch shows before the beginning of the Viaduct bridge.

Any one of the apartment buildings that border the cemetery could contain more people than were in the entire City of Toronto at its founding, and yet many who pass every day are completely unaware that within that fence lie some of Toronto's and indeed Canada's most famous citizens, as well as one of the busiest Crematoriums in Ontario.

Now, after almost 160 years, St. James is being completely modernized, and prepared for the next 100 years. Here among some of the oldest and most famous personages of Ontario, a 140 year old Chapel serves the families of St. James as a consecrated place for services, as well as housing Ontario's second busiest Crematorium in the ground level.



Along with a full review of management and procedures, a complete overhaul and renovation of the Chapel has taken place under the supervision of Dave Balfour, an independent business consultant.

The Chapel of St. James'-The-Less was opened on the site in 1861, only 17 years after the opening of the Cemetery. Designed by F.W. Cumberland, the Chapel has been a Toronto landmark ever since. Cumberland had a long and distinguished career as an Architect and Engineer. As well as the Chapel of St. James-The-Less, he designed St. James' Cathedral itself, the Toronto Post Office building, University College, Osgoode Hall, and his own home, which is now a centre for international students at the U of T. Cumberland was so well known that on his death special trains had to be chartered to bring mourners to Toronto. Cumberland is buried in St. James' Cemetery and his grave is marked with a stone he designed himself.

In 1948, the Crematorium was added. Open to the outdoors at the rear of the Chapel, the crematorium is a natural extension of the services offered in the Chapel. Over the years, St. James' Crematorium has become the second busiest crematorium in Ontario, with over 73,000 cremations performed since it opened.

In the intervening 55 years, techniques and consumer expectations have changed, and St. James has kept up with demands. They offer a range of products, including urns and accessories, and have developed an extensive service

for out-of-town and even out-of-country shipments. Over the years, the continued operation of the crematorium has contributed to the darkening of the wood and exterior of the Chapel building.

One of the first projects was the complete shutdown of the crematorium, while the entire lower level of the chapel was emptied, cleaned, and renovated to make delivery and service much more convenient. At the same time, the chapel itself was temporarily closed, all the hangings and furniture removed, and the entire interior restored to its original glory, along with necessary repairs and maintenance to the exterior of the building. Even the stained glass windows were completely removed and cleaned by specialists before re-installation.



At the same time, a study and reorganization of the methods and procedures used in the Offices has been completed. Processes have been revised and streamlined, and Stone Orchard's new software adopted to maintain the records and streamline the Sales process. Images of fragile old documents have been scanned to make access fast and easy while allowing the original documents to be safely stored.

Physical changes involved the welcome installation of plumbing in the crematorium as well as new wiring, and the installation of a permanent high speed link for computer systems. The operators in the crematorium can now access the records directly, and enter their own information - a huge savings in time and convenience for staff, and better service for the funeral homes and private clients of the crematorium.



On a low rise just in front of the cemetery entrance, the Chapel of St. James-The-Less continues to be a vital part of the services offered by the Cemetery. With its front porch and entrance framed by a huge Beech tree, the Chapel offers a dignified and warm place for family and community services. The Beech tree was planted by the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) on the occasion of his Royal Tour. He was present to open the Bloor Viaduct, also known as the Prince Edward Viaduct, connecting the East end of Toronto with the older core. Since the Viaduct lies adjacent to the Cemetery, it was a logical place to commemorate the Prince's visit with a planting.

Immediately behind the Chapel, and almost adjacent to the entrance to the Crematorium is one of the markers I personally find most interesting and touching. Here among the rich and famous of the cemetery, stands a memorial to one Mr. Alderdice, who came from Ireland to be the first Porter of Upper Canada College. His monument was erected by the students in his memory in 1849, after long years of service - a truly touching sentiment to someone who must have deeply effected his charges in all his long years.

In contrast to this simple memorial, are many representing Toronto's, Ontario's and even Canada's more illustrious citizens.

Close by the intersection of Parliament and Bloor is the large family Mausoleum of the Austin family - founded by James Austin, the original president of Consumer's Gas, and a founder of the Dominion Bank in 1871. Family members were originally interred here, with faithful servants of the family interred in the fenced grounds surrounding the mausoleum. The vault is still in use by family members today.

Not too far from the front of the Austin Mausoleum is a very large monument erected by the St. George Society - a benevolent society who provided an area of land for the interment of the destitute. The area is still supported by the society and in use today, for cremation interments.

Among Toronto's early engineers and builders were the Mulock and Cawthra families, intertwined by marriage, and whose names are preserved in streets and neighbourhoods as far distant as Newmarket. The two families have plots next to each other in St. James, and even monuments to individuals who shared both names. There is also a large underground family mausoleum, which is still in use.



Looming over one of the roads in St. James is the family Mausoleum of the Gooderham family, founders of one of the oldest distillers in Canada. Again, close by and above are the mausoleum and plots of the Worts family, with whom they were entwined by bonds of marriage and business. The Worts monument is graced by a stone angel in mourning - itself recently declared an historical art object in itself, and a treasure of Canada.

The entrance to the Worts Mausoleum is a simple huge slab of stone, hinged to open like a door, and secured by the largest iron lock we have ever seen. It would appear at a passing glance to be a flat marker, but close by are three inconspicuous weathered copper 'stacks' which provide ventilation to the underground vault. The original site of the Gooderham and Worts distillery is actually familiar to millions of moviegoers, as it has become a favourite site for representing Victorian England, or early North American industrial areas. The distillery continued operations into the 1990's, and was saved from the destruction of urban renewal in the 1960's. It is now one of Toronto's most popular sites rented for the making of films.

Egerton Ryerson is probably one of the most familiar names from the 19th century to all Canadians. Most Canadians are familiar with the Ryerson Institute, now Ryerson University. But few know that Ryerson himself had very little to do with it. The Institute happened to be founded after WW II, on the site of Ryerson's achievements. Ryerson Institute was originally founded to help ex-servicemen and women re-enter civilian life, and used the buildings then out-grown by Ryerson's own legacy.

Ryerson's own achievements were much wider than this one institution. As a Methodist, Ryerson was deeply opposed to the Anglican-dominated system in Upper Canada in the 1800's. He fought long and hard for public education as opposed to the Church schools of his time. As such, he founded the Upper Canada Academy in Cobourg, a direct alternative to Upper Canada College run by the Anglican Church. Upper Canada Academy became a University in 1841, with Ryerson as it's first principal, and was later renamed Victoria College, and evolved into the University of Toronto.

As Upper Canada's first Chief Superintendent of Education, Ryerson laid the foundation for a completely new public school system. He was the first to set standards for curriculum, teacher training and textbooks, as well as establish school boards and inspectors. As part of his program, he established the Normal School, which also contained the Department of Education, and the Museum of Natural History and Fine Arts which eventually evolved into the Royal Ontario Museum and the Toronto School of Art - now the Ontario Art College.



While Ryerson himself, as an avid opponent of Anglican institutions, is interred in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, several of his children and descendants are interred here in St. James' Cemetery - a sure sign of the era of religious tolerance that was to herald the coming of the next century after the conflicts of the 1800's. St. James' Cemetery was, of course, one of the leading indicators of this change in attitude, having always been available to the public of all denominations, and regardless of Church affiliations.

Not too far from these illustrious families stands one of the most unusual markers we have ever seen. Of solid granite, a pillar has apparently 'warped' - something we have never seen in any of the many cemeteries we visit. The shape has apparently altered over many years, and its progression has been noted, but no one has come forward with an explanation or cure.

Along the top of the hillside overlooking the Ravine are some of the most beautiful private Mausoleums to grace any cemetery in Ontario. While many cemeteries have a few mausoleums, here there are more than a casual visitor can count. Many of them are built into the very top of the hill with pathways in front, and above, on the new top of the hill are inground interments. With space at such a premium, every available small area lining hedges and



hilltops has been turned into cremation interment sites.

In one formerly neglected spot along the hilltop the cemetery has built a beautiful cremation wall as part of the retaining wall, and providing inground cremations in front of it. The whole structure is blended so well into the surroundings that the smaller mausoleums that occupy the same space all appear part of the same setting.

Very close by is another row of family Mausoleums, including another of the 'first families' of Canada. Here is the resting place of Sir Casimir Gzowski. Sir Casimir was a rebellious immigrant from Poland, who rose through his skill as an engineer and hard work to be the first Chairman of the Niagara Parks Commission, and as a result of his plans, the area has been preserved for the enjoyment of the world, and from industrial blight. He was the engineer for the Grand Trunk Railway - the longest railway in the world at its time. Sir Casimir founded Wycliffe College, now part of the University of Toronto, and consulted with William Van Horne on the building of the CPR that bound Canada together as a nation. Sir Casimir even drew up plans for, and promoted the building of the St. Lawrence Seaway - and this over a hundred years before it would actually be built!

The great grandson of Sir Casimir was a familiar voice to most Canadians for many years. Peter Gzowski of 'Morningside' fame passed away in 2002, and will probably join Sir Casimir and many of his antecedents in the family mausoleum in St. James'.

The Honourable Robert Baldwin lies nearby. One of the great opponents of the Family Compact, and a tireless campaigner for Responsible Government, Baldwin managed to bring together the reformers of French and English Canada for the first time, thereby forcing the establishment of Responsible Government in Canada. He also completely renovated the practice of Law in Canada, as Chair of the Law Society, and formally established the University of Toronto. Baldwin lies in St. James, among many members of his family and their descendants.



One of the most unusual sights we found in St. James were the 'mantel' markers. In several places in the older section of the cemetery, we saw what appeared to be low wide markers that looked like lintels from doorways, built close to the ground. On investigation, it turns out that many of these are in fact only part of the original markers. They were originally installed in family and small church cemeteries in what was then the countryside around York and early Toronto - mainly the area now south of Bloor Street. As these farms were sold and absorbed into the new city, many of the families had remains disinterred and reinterred in St. James. Due either to the deterioration of the original monuments, or perhaps just to the cost and labour of moving such large stones, in many cases only the top section was brought to the cemetery, and mounted on new foundations. The new foundations were originally inscribed, but in many cases this is no longer visible, however the elaborate 'tops' have retained all of their dignity in the new setting.



Coming full swing around the periphery of the cemetery, we arrive at the monuments of the University of Toronto, the Canadian Chiropractic College, and McMaster University Medical School. Here are the interred remains of people who donated their bodies for Medical research - cherished and honoured by the institutions who completed the interments, and by many families who come to visit regularly.