

TOMBSTONE TALES

from Ontario Cemeteries

IN
MEMORY
OF THE MAN
WHO WAS
MURDERED
ON THE CON-
OF KEPPEL
THURSDAY
MARCH 2 1884

Harvey Medland



THE
ONTARIO
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Tombstone Tales

from Ontario Cemeteries

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by

Harvey Medland

The Ontario Historical Society



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Foreword

The Ontario Historical Society (OHS), founded in 1888 as the Pioneer Association of Ontario, has been concerned about the identification and preservation of every aspect of Ontario's history for over a century. The Society is a non-profit corporation and registered charity, serving a very large membership that comes from all age groups, all walks of life and all cultural backgrounds, interested in some aspect of Ontario's history. The OHS carries out its mandate in many ways: educational programmes for Ontarians of all ages, publications, an Honours and Awards programme, outreach to those with special needs, and a multitude of other programmes and projects.

The OHS first became concerned about the protection and maintenance of pioneer cemeteries in Ontario early in the 20th century, when it became apparent that many of them had fallen into a dilapidated state. The Society first urged its many local member societies to pressure local authorities and arouse public interest and concern about their care. When efforts for local reform failed, the OHS lobbied Queen's Park for legislation to protect cemeteries and finally, in 1927, a Cemetery Act was introduced. That first Act needed strengthening and again, after persistent lobbying by the OHS, the Act was improved and by 1932 action had been taken in over half of the counties in Ontario to preserve its pioneer graveyards.

In the intervening years the OHS, through its Honours and Awards programme, has continued to recognize and support those individuals and organizations working both locally and provincially to record, preserve and protect both burial sites and cemeteries. In addition, the OHS has offered a series of workshops in both northern and southern Ontario entitled "The Heritage of Ontario Cemeteries" bringing experts such as Harvey Medland to assist and support local participants who are interested in preserving this unique aspect of Ontario's history. The Society has published and distributed materials to assist concerned citizens in their efforts to preserve local sites, and continues to offer "Cemetery News" by Marjorie Stuart in every issue of the *OHS Bulletin* that reaches thousands of readers across Ontario. The OHS and the Ontario Genealogical Society (OGS) that has devoted years of volunteer time to the recording of all the known burial places in Ontario, have collaborated on many projects.

In 1989 when the Province of Ontario introduced a new Cemeteries Act the OHS made a presentation to the Province's Legislative Committee in an attempt

to ensure that the new Act would better preserve and protect the over 5,000 then known burial places and cemeteries.

In 1994 a company, #839374 Ontario Inc., who owned a farm in the Town of Markham, applied to the Province of Ontario to close and move a tiny pioneer cemetery located on the property. The Registrar of Cemeteries for Ontario agreed that the Clendennen Cemetery, as it was known, could indeed be moved. The OHS and the OGS appealed that decision to the Commercial Registration Appeal Tribunal on the grounds that moving the cemetery was not in the public interest. The hearing began in November of 1995 and lasted until July of 1997. The OHS created a Cemetery Defence Fund, which it still maintains, and to which individuals and organizations across North America contribute. In March of 1999 the Tribunal gave a unanimous decision, setting aside the provincial order to close and move the Clendennen cemetery, and supporting the OHS' and OGS' position that it was in the public interest for the cemetery to remain in its original location.

This was a landmark decision, not only for the heritage organizations involved, but for every Ontarian who cares about the rich history of Ontario. Burial sites and cemeteries are still being threatened and it is an ongoing challenge in communities both large and small across both northern and southern Ontario. We must never forget that they are sacred places and must be treated with dignity and respect. In addition, they have important stories to tell about the life and times, the joys and sorrows, the triumphs and disappointments of our ancestors.

Tombstone Tales from Ontario Cemeteries by Harvey Medland leads us on a journey of discovery where we, the readers, have an opportunity to learn more about and cherish our own tombstone tales in our own local communities.

Bryan Walls

President

The Ontario Historical Society

October, 2000

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Acknowledgments

Trying to cover cemeteries in a vast province such as Ontario requires help from history buffs, archivists, curators, librarians, genealogists and friends. In 1973 Arthur Gryfe and I entered the cemetery at Bathurst Inlet, Northwest Territories. We had only known one another a few days but at that moment we began to share our interest in history and gravestones. During the following years our searches took us from Newfoundland to the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea. We continue to share our research, discoveries and enthusiasm. For more than a decade we have been collecting material for *Tombstone Tales*, and it has been thoroughly enjoyable thanks to so many who have been generous with their time, knowledge and research skills. I am extremely indebted to Art as well as his wife, Doreen. To all of you I am very grateful.

A decade ago Marjorie Stuart, a volunteer with The Ontario Historical Society, invited me to be a part of that organization's series of workshops, called "The Heritage of Ontario's Cemeteries." I soon learned that she was a reservoir of information and contacts. I also began working with Robert Leverty of The Ontario Historical Society who became another worthy advisor.

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In a work of this complexity there are bound to be errors and omissions. These are mine.

To all of you who contributed to this work in any way, thank you for sharing your time, material and expertise and for making it fun.

Harvey Medland,
Toronto, 2000

In the Beginning

In the summer of 1973 Arthur Gryfe and I entered an Inuit cemetery at Bathurst Inlet just north of the Arctic Circle. We noticed that all the crosses had the same date. In answer to our curiosity, our hosts outlined how the community was almost wiped out and why it still exists. In the influenza epidemic of 1941 all the women of the village had perished except one, “Old Mary.” She had avoided the same fate because she had been working the family trap lines. As she was returning home, friends hailed her from a distance and told her to stay away until the crisis had passed. If the hamlet was to carry on, “Old Mary” would have to give birth to more children, especially daughters. She did and today Bathurst Inlet thrives. The story of her contribution to the community’s survival fascinated us. At that time we didn’t realize it, but we had just heard our first “tombstone tale.” When we returned to Ontario, we began to search for others.

Since that time I have photographed thousands of gravestones for use in slide presentations. More recently, friends and fellow researchers encouraged me to record the stories and produce a publication. This is the result.

The term *Tombstone Tales* needs an explanation with the help of several examples. It is a collection of anecdotes about Ontario’s colourful characters and events. The essential criterion for a “tale” was that there be some clue on the gravestone to suggest a story. When a clue was discovered, it was researched to determine if the story was sufficiently entertaining to merit “tale” status. Often, we discovered an interesting person’s marker to find only the name and essential dates on the epitaph. Because there was no clue, there was no “tale.”

Other walkabouts, however, proved worthwhile. In the Hamilton Cemetery, Arthur and I came upon a plaque in memory of horse breeder George Hendrie that indicated he was “buried *in* the Louisville Cup.” Eccentric? Perhaps. A telephone call to the Ontario Jockey Club was more exciting than expected.

“I’m searching for information on George Hendrie who died in 1942.”

The reply was an incensed, “He’s not dead! I talked to him yesterday!”

The nephew of the deceased, also named George, sorted it out and Hendrie’s “tale” became a tribute to a vibrant life.

Having been enthralled for years with the survival of Ernest Shackleton and his crew in the Antarctic, we were excited to learn that one of them, Tom MacLeod, was buried in Canada. The search for his marker began in earnest. Would he have a gravestone? Where? If so, would the epitaph contain the essential clue? A British obituary provided the missing link. It contained the word, "Rideau." Could there be a connection with Kingston, Ontario? Historian Marjorie Simmons completed the pursuit in that city's Cataraqui Cemetery. She reported, "Antarctica, Scott, Shackleton, it's all there!" One of the world's most captivating survival stories qualified as a "tombstone tale."

Locating a gravestone can be a daunting task, but we have evolved a system that saves time and gasoline, and wish to share it with you. Topographical maps (scale 1:50,000) have all cemeteries marked with the letter "C" and can be a great asset. They enable you to find your desired site quickly and are equally valuable because they allow you to extend your search to other burying grounds in the immediate area. We have made many discoveries moving from "C" to "C" using a "top" map. They can be obtained at A World of Maps: 1253 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 3A3.

For the specific location of a marker, transcripts of many tombstone inscriptions are available at many Ontario libraries thanks to the work of genealogists. To search these records, you must know the name of the cemetery, county and township in which the gravestone can be found. Transcriptions may include a detailed map of the cemetery, allowing you to complete your search in minutes rather than hours. Don't hesitate to ask the local population for directions. You may have to clarify a well-intended, "Turn left at Martha's cottage," but it's worthwhile and will save you time. You may also learn more about Martha. If you arrive at a graveyard with neither map nor specific location, you may find an open office with a helpful staff. The groundskeepers can also be a valuable source.

While working on slide presentations and the manuscript, a deep admiration emerged for early Ontarians, their perseverance, and their ability to overcome anguish and physical suffering. As you read *Tombstone Tales*, I hope you too experience that sense of admiration and ultimately recognize cemeteries as a valuable, irreplaceable, provocative resource.