

Children of Peace Burial Ground

Introduction

The oldest marked graves in the Children of Peace Burial Ground date from 1820, the year after their first meeting house was completed. Oral tradition has it that the burial ground was already in use as early as 1818. The burial ground was established on a sandy knoll on the southwest corner of Lot 7, Conc. 3. At the time the cemetery was established this land was owned by John Crone, who was not a member of the Children of Peace. However, David Terry owned the west half of Lot 6 (100 acres), was a member of the Children of Peace, and was one of the first people buried there in 1820. It is possible that the Terry family donated the land for the cemetery on Lot 6, but that a faulty survey resulted in the establishment of the cemetery on Lot 7.

This original cemetery was approximately 25 rods in size, or about 82.5 feet by 82.5 feet. Most of the existing stones in the cemetery lie within this area. The burial ground was expanded in 1878 when Jacob Lundy and his wife Hannah sold the northwest corner of Lot 6, Conc. 3 to the Trustees of the Children of Peace for \$73. These trustees were William Graham, Jacob Lundy and Amos J. Hughes. The expansion of the cemetery seems to have been motivated by the desire to establish family plots; the southern most graves are set within cornerstones marking out Doan, McArthur and Tate family plots. By this time, however, the membership of the Children of Peace had dropped precipitously, and most of the newly purchased land went unused. Nonmembers of the Children of Peace used the cemetery for some time. They placed their graves along the south east fence-line and oriented the stones east-west; the Children of Peace stones are all oriented north-south.

After the Children of Peace disbanded in 1889, the care of the cemetery was left in the hands of Absalom Willson, who also owned the now derelict Sharon Temple and Second Meeting House. With the financial assistance of various descendants such as Herbert Lundy, Mr. John Smith and James E. Kavanagh, Absalom hired workers to maintain the grounds. However, by 10 May 1912, Absalom Willson and Charles E. Lundy invited tenders for the lumber of the Second Meeting House: "This old structure containing close to 75,000 feet of timber and lumber of the very best quality has fallen into our hands and will eventually fall into decay and become useless. Sooner than have this occur we have decided to offer it for sale. It is our intention to place in the hands of the Township Treasurer a sum out of the proceeds sufficient to ensure the proper maintenance of the burying ground where lie the honoured remains of the founders and builders of this unique place of worship." It is unknown if the money was placed in the Township Treasurer's hands, but the township has never assumed responsibility for the cemetery.

The last burial in the cemetery took place in 1935, and the cemetery was officially closed. Like so many other early cemeteries in York Region, this cemetery might have quickly been forgotten had it not been for the labour of love of a few conscientious descendants. These volunteers formally organized as the Historic Sharon Burying Ground Association, a public, nonprofit corporation in 1952, with Dr. Breuls of Sharon, Chairman, Mrs. Ethel Trewhella, Secretary, and Helen Daley, Treasurer. Besides the maintenance of the cemetery grounds, the Association also took an inventory of the tombstones, prepared a map, and made a listing of the names and dates. In 1958, three cemetery trustees were appointed and registered in the Registry Office

for Deeds. About 1984, the Association was registered with Revenue Canada as a charitable organization. The Burying Ground was designated an historic site in 1993, and plaqued by the East Gwillimbury LACAC in 1993.

The present well-manicured appearance of the Burying Ground was enhanced by the gifts of two descendants. In 1927, John Smith donated the iron fence and ornamental gate on the Leslie Street side as a memorial to his parents. In 1948 Reg. MacMillan provided matching funds to enclose the other three sides.

Funeral Customs of the Children of Peace

As with all their rituals, the funerals of the Children of Peace were distinctive, a unique blend of their Quaker past with their innovative processions and musical skills.

The funerals of the Children of Peace took place in their meeting houses (not the Temple), and no doubt, like their other worship services, followed the broad outlines of Quaker practice. The Quaker Meeting for Worship was marked by a lengthy period of silence during which members turned inwards, searching for the leadings of the Inner Light of God within their soul. Any member who felt the calling would simply stand and spontaneously preach. At a funeral, spontaneous eulogies and prayers of this sort would break the silence. The Meeting would also delegate some member to prepare a memorial of the life of the deceased. Many of these memorials were collected and published as an inspiration to other members of the Society of Friends.

Similarly, the worship services of the Children of Peace were held in silence. They differed from the Quaker norm in that they began and ended with hymns written by David Willson, their leader, especially for that occasion. Willson would also write memorials in verse to the deceased. These memorials and the hymns were often published in broadsheet form. They all follow the same pattern: a memorial in verse, usually written in the first person as if the dead were speaking from beyond the grave, a funeral hymn, a prayer, and a hymn for the grave side. A sample of one of these memorials is provided, and a list of surviving memorials at the Sharon Temple is appended. Willson also frequently wrote the epitaphs for the tombstones. Mrs. Trewehella records that the coffin was carried to the distant cemetery on a funeral bier carried by four bearers. This bier is now on display at the Temple. The procession to the cemetery resembled the processions the Children of Peace had to their worship services in the Temple, and to other villages. At the head of the procession was the banner which now hangs on display in the Temple. Behind the banner came the choir of young women, the "virgins," who normally stood and sang around the ark which stands in the centre of the Temple. Behind the choir came the band which played from the musician's gallery on the Temple's second floor. This was followed by the rest of the congregation, ranked by age.

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The group would process to the cemetery, where the band took up its position on a specially constructed bandstand in the northwest corner. As the body was interred, the choir would sing the “hymn for the grave” written by Willson for the occasion. During the summer months, the congregation would process to the cemetery on Sunday afternoons for memorial services.

A short description of David Wilson’s own funeral, the largest ever held in Sharon, was recorded in the diary of Amos Hughes and is probably typical of the funerals of the Children of Peace. Hughes records only the “programmed” part of the service: after reading the 23rd Psalm (“The Lord is my shepherd”), a hymn from Willson’s largest book, Impressions of the Mind was sung. At a later point, a second hymn called “Preparations for Death” was sung, followed by a memorial and prayer by Abraham Doan. At the graveside, a final hymn, “A Call From the Tomb” was sung.

It is unknown where the majority of the tombstones came from. They are generally larger than the markers typical of a Quaker cemetery. It was not until the 1850s that the Reid brothers established a marble works in Sharon. Many of the Children of Peace tombstones bear their mark. Their business was later taken over by another member of the group, Charles McArthur.

Tombstone Transcriptions (Summer 1994)

Transcribed by Jeanine Avigdor, Anne Corkett Howes and Albert Schrauwers

The first cemetery transcription was prepared by Dr. Breuls for the cemetery association in 1954. A second transcription by Robert Vernon was published in East Gwillimbury in the Nineteenth Century by Gladys M. Rolling in 1967. This transcription provided names, dates and genealogical information, but was not an exact transcription of the tombstones. None of the poetry was recorded, nor was a map or description of the placement of the stones provided. Several typographical errors also crept in. For this reason, the present transcription was begun. This effort has unfortunately been marred by the poor condition of many of the stones. In the following transcription, numbers in bold refer to the survey map (attached). Transcriber’s notes are in square brackets []. These notes include information no longer legible, but derived from another source, including previous transcriptions if available. Every effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. It should be noted, however, that not all fonts could be matched. As a result, this transcription consistently utilizes Times font supplemented with italics, and CAPITAL LETTERS.

A number of discrepancies were noted between this transcription and that provided in Rolling. Listed below are those stones which can no longer be identified. It is sad that in the space of 27 years 15 stones have been lost or are no longer legible. Also listed below are the 8 individuals who are not listed in the Vernon transcription.

Stones Listed in Rollings now missing/illegible:

Chapman, Letitia, died 1866, aged 76.
Dennis, Hanna, died 1830, aged 19.
Dennis, Sarah, died Apr. 1865, wife of Enos Dennis.
Haines, Charles, June 22, 1890, aged 81.
Lepard, Leonard, died Mar. 25, 1875, aged 44.
Lundy, Sarah, died 1826.
Lundy, son of Jacob and Hanna Lundy, 1849.
Maguire, Grace Davis, born Nov. 15, 1818, died May 26, 1893, aged 74.
Morris, John W.
Reid, John, died Aug. 1, 1864, aged 66.
Sachs, Christian, died Dec. 8, 1879, aged 24.
Willson, Absalom, died 1826, age 6 weeks.
Willson, J.H., died Sept. 21, 1835, aged 1[?].
Willson, John
Willson, Mary Hughes, wife of Israel Willson, died June 8, 1876 aged 67.

Individuals not listed in Rollings:

Hannah Brammer (93), Bertha Helmer (296), Grace Lepard (165), Mary Lepard (129), George, Mary and William Tate (290), JNE Willson (13).

List of Published Memorials

Bell, Sarah Willson 1865	Hughes, Elenor 1825
Blackstone, Henry 1852	Johnson, Jacob 1854
Briggs, Edward 1862	Lepard, David 1839
Carver, Hannah 1857	Lepard, Elizabeth 1857
Doan, Jonathan Doan	Leppard, Alfaretta 1860
Doan, Mahlon 185	Leppard, Jacob Sr. 1850
Doan, Rebecca 1852	Leppard, Mary 1853
Doane, Harriet 1881	Lilly, Matthew 1847
Dunham, Mary Willson 1858	Lockhart, William 1856
Farquhar, George 1854	Lundy, Dr. D. W. 1881
Fogg, Libbie Barker 1881	Lundy, George
Galway, Martha 1862	Lundy, Jacob 1878
Gorham, Mary 1846	Lundy, Sabrey 1859
Graham, Elizabeth	McCarty, James 1856
Graham, John Herbert	McLeod, Murdick 1847
Graham, Phoebe 1868	Montgomery, Mary 1845

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Nelson, William 1851

Pegg, Elias 1856

Pride, William 1856

Reid, Martha 1843

Reid, Sarah Willson 1853

Rowan, Daniel Richard 1854

Sachs, Christian Philip

Scanlon, Ann 1858

Soules, Daniel 1852

Summerville, Jane 1846

Traviss, Alfred Edward 1861

Traviss, Rachel Brammer 1863

Williams, George 1855

Willson, John V. 1864

Willson, Mary 1848

Willson, Mary 1862

Willson, William Graham 1861

Willson, William Graham 1865

List of Manuscript Memorials

Atkinson, Susannah

Briggs, Hannah

Briggs, Henry

Briggs, Mary

Briggs, William Edward

Brown, Thomas

Cummer, Nancy

Cummer, William

Doan, Eliza Terry

Doan, Jane

Doan, John

Doan, John Sr

Doan, John Willson

Doan, Joseph

Doan, Judah

Doan, Mahlon

Doan, Rebecca

Dunham, Mary

Fidler, Robert

Haines, Martha

Haines, Susannah

Harrison, Joshua

Hill, George

Hughes, Samuel

Lepard, David

Lepard, Elizabeth

Lepard, Jacob

Lilly, Matthew

Lundy, Israel

Lundy, Judah Peter

Lundy, Rachel

Lundy, Sarah

McLeod, Donald

McLeod, Rachel

Nelson, William

Pentz, Florence

Reid, John

Reid, Sarah Willson

Reid, William Sr

Selby, Thomas

Travis, Alfred E.

Travis, Rachel

Willson, Absalom

Willson, Charles

Willson, David

Willson, Emma

Willson, Hannah Dennis

Willson, Jane

Willson, Jerusia

Willson, John H.

Willson, John V.

Willson, Mary

Willson, Roland

Willson, Sarah

Willson, William Graham