

# Owen Sound's Greenwood Cemetery

## “A Land for the Living”

Terri Jackson

*The Comet* Owen Sound, Ontario May 6th, 1858:

Council: The Clerk read a petition relative to the opening out of West Street from Patterson Street to Frost Street; an account for W.C. Boyd, for lumber and team of same; a note from Mr. Spragge, of the Crown Land Dept. relative to Patents for the cemetery, and Lots 11 & 12, west side of Poulett Street.

The Cemeteries: On Saturday last Mr. Rankin, P.L.S. submitted to the council a very neat Plan for the laying out of the cemetery, which for the present will occupy about 5 acres, which he proposes to divide into 27 blocks, and each block to contain 64 lots, each lot 8 feet square, making a total of about 2,000 lots, exclusive of space for vaults, which he proposes laying off against the Ravine, up to which place the block extends; there are also several triangles and other smaller blocks, as well as a circle, which is about the middle of the blocks, he proposes to erect a receptacle for the dead, and wherein service for the purpose will be performed.

The receptacle will be approached by a gravel road 20 ft. wide, which will go around the circle, to give carriages an opportunity of turning, and it will also extend to the Ravine. No other carriage road will be permitted, this being similar to other cemeteries. The Plan was referred to the Committee on Public Property, and if a favorable Report is prepared, it will come-up for adoption at the next meeting. Some few, but important alterations were suggested, which will receive the attention of the Committee.



**Greenwood Cemetery Postcard, no date**

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***The Comet Owen Sound, Ontario June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1858.***

Council: By-law for regulation of cemetery read a first time and first seven clauses passed in Committee of the whole and adopted in Council, appointing for Trustees: Messieurs Kennedy W.A., Stephens H., McPherson J., Chisholm D., Christie J., Miller ?

A Grave Speculation: The following is a scale of charges for the new cemetery, including the price of the conveyance, and which will have to be paid by purchasers exclusive of Registry fees.

8' X 8' \$3.

8' X 16' \$5.

16' X 16' \$8.

Vaults \$12.

So that if 4 persons make an arrangement that one shall purchase for the whole, they will obtain a plot 8' X 8' for \$2. ea. The Council were somewhat puzzled to find a suitable name for the new cemetery. Mr. Scott suggested that it should be called Mount Pleasant, in as much as it overlooked the delightful valley of Saskatchewan, but Mr. Stephens concluded that it should be named "The People's Cemetery," because it was purchased with their money; and this most delightful name was adopted, there was a slight discussion as to whether or not people in the country should not pay more than the Townspeople on account of the latter having to find the needful to purchase the plot, but this opposed by Mr. Miller, on the ground that there was a reserve in the Union Street ground that the country people should have a right to use the cemetery, consequently they ought not to pay more than the residents for the new one, and this now was acted upon. There are to be 5 Trustees appointed by the Council to govern it, 3 of whom will form a quorum, and to be removed at the pleasure of the Council. Only seven clauses of the by-law for its regulation were gone through in a Committee of the Council, the remainder will be taken up at their next meeting.

**Background:**

Charles Rankin P.L.S., in his original plan for a cemetery, proposed that Town Council purchase 4-5 acres from Mr. Samuel Flowers. Town Council had approval to borrow up to \$4,000 to make this purchase.

**Today:**

Greenwood Cemetery in Owen Sound is one of the most picturesque cemeteries in all of Ontario. Its 19<sup>th</sup> century layout includes the oldest home in Owen Sound, dated to the

1840s, a 1905 red brick burial chapel, as well as a mausoleum dated to 1927 with Indiana limestone on the outside and Italian marble on the inside.



**Greenwood Cemetery, Owen Sound**

Greenwood Cemetery's Seven Bends Road Trail leads through a wooded valley connecting the burial chapel, mausoleum and neighbourhoods to the north, eventually leading to 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East. In the earliest of days, this roadway was used to bring funeral processions into the cemetery. Leading north and exiting at 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East, a second trail, Nine Bends, connects a wooded valley also used in the earliest of days to bring funeral processions into the cemetery.

Greenwood Cemetery has become an urban park now expanding from its original 4-5 acres to some 45 acres containing 26,700+ burials. This cemetery has approximately 45-50 years of land left in which to accommodate burials for our loved ones. As recently as the summer of 2008, cemetery staff laid another section of the cemetery into burial plots. This section is Block "A" of Memorial Gardens and is located behind the maintenance building at the south end of the cemetery. Summer 2009 will bring final measurements and critiquing the plot plan before it will be open to the public, ready to service another 1,200 burials.

### **Indigent Plot:**

In every cemetery, there is a section for those families of lesser means. Strangers' Plot, Poor Grounds or perhaps Potter's Field are some of the names used for this section. At Greenwood Cemetery, this section is known as the Indigent Plot. These grounds are closed and no longer used for what they were intended.

The first recorded burial (deaths were recorded once a month) in the Indigent Plot was John Boddy age 46 years on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1860, although approximately 40 remains had been removed from Chalmer's Cemetery in the middle 1850s for reburial at Greenwood Cemetery. In 1869 a law was passed requiring births, marriages and deaths to be recorded by a provincial registrar. In 1989 another 4 remains were removed from Chalmer's and interred in the Indigent Plot.

1242 people are buried in the Indigent Plot and of those a significant number are Blacks from our community. In the earliest days of the County Town, those families who could not afford to purchase a plot had it purchased for them by the County Office. In the spring of 1916, Council addressed the need for reduced fees for families struggling to purchase a plot and under bylaw 1765 developed a separate structure: 12½ cents per square foot in sections 16 and 17 or 30 cents per square foot for section 18.

Adjacent to the Indigent Plot are the Vault Lots, primarily purchased by the wealthy families of the County Town. It is interesting to note that these Vault Lots contain many of the abolitionists and their families. Some of the heads of these families died almost 150 years ago and are nestled beside those in the Indigent Plots. The names of some of these families are as follows: Coulson, Cameron, Buchan, Doyle and Maughan.

Through research of the day books at Greenwood Cemetery, and other cemeteries, 462 burials have been located of our early Black pioneers and their loved ones. The Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA) will not allow publication of the names of those who have passed in the previous 30 years, and therefore those names are not included here. The following are buried in the Indigent Plot.

William Handy, age 96, buried June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1901  
William Handy, age 75, buried October 17, 1921  
John "Daddy" Hall, age 117, buried April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1900  
Henry<sup>1</sup> Cornish, age 5, buried May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1865  
Infant of James Henson, age 0, buried May 26, 1861  
Abraham Sheffield, age 80, buried March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1898  
Christopher Johnson, age 84, buried September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1900  
Esther Hall<sup>2</sup>, age 95, buried November 15, 1907  
William Hall, age 0, buried August 25, 1877  
Magdallene Belle Boeey, age 4, buried January 23, 1964  
Thomas Miller, age 99, buried October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1911  
Samuel Harrison, age 40, buried August 9, 1876

In the *Advertiser*, Owen Sound, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1889 a story was published of Lizzie Hall and Emily Bowie (two Black women) going to work through the Pleasure Ground (Victoria

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<sup>1</sup> As it appears, but other sources list "Henry".

<sup>2</sup> This is likely the same Esther Hall who was the 5<sup>th</sup> wife of John "Daddy" Hall. Esther Hall was white and born in Manchester, England.

Park) when they came across a dead white infant wrapped in a white cloth and covered with a piece of rotten wood. This unidentified infant is buried in the Indigent Plot also. Unfortunately for this child the transcription in the day book reads “Unknown, Child Found Dead”.

**In closing:**

A peaceful place, a land for the living, Greenwood Cemetery is an invaluable resource for genealogical information. There will never be another green space that holds as much history, some of which researchers will be able to attain. Other information is buried there with our loved ones, never to be exposed.