

The History of
Beechwood Cemetery
The National Cemetery of Canada

By Thomas Ritchie



Services funéraires, cimetièrre et crémation

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Owned by The Beechwood Cemetery Foundation and operated by The Beechwood Cemetery Company

Cover photo: The Beechwood National Memorial Centre (© Gordon King Photography)

Beechwood Cemetery opened in 1873, fourteen years after Queen Victoria chose Ottawa to be the capital of the Province of Canada, and six years after Ottawa became the capital of the Dominion of Canada. These events brought politicians and other leaders to Ottawa, many of whom stayed and were buried in Beechwood, making the cemetery a repository of Canadian history.

When it opened, Beechwood was located well beyond what were then Ottawa's boundaries. From 1873 on, the city council had decreed that burials were not permitted within the city limits, a ruling based on the fear that burial grounds harboured deadly diseases such as cholera, typhoid and small-pox, causing the epidemics that periodically broke out. The council also decreed the closure of Ottawa's main cemetery in Sandy Hill (actually four adjacent burial grounds, one each for the Roman Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians), and the Sandy Hill cemeteries eventually became Macdonald Park.

The relocation of a body from Sandy Hill was the subject of the second entry in Beechwood's "Record of Interments," dated August 21, 1873. Two brothers were buried that day; the first, age four, having died two days before his burial. The other had died, also at age four, two years earlier and had been buried in Sandy Hill, and was subsequently removed for burial with his brother. The early pages of Beechwood's Record of Interments frequently refer to "Removal from Sandy Hill."

The Beechwood Cemetery Company of Ottawa created Beechwood Cemetery. Its shareholders were prominent residents of the city, led by Joseph M. Currier, whose business interests included lumber and other mills, the Ottawa Daily Citizen newspaper, the Victoria foundry, as well as banking and insurance enterprises. He also served as a member of the city council, a member of the provincial legislature and a member of parliament. After his death and burial in Beechwood, Currier's house became the official residence of Canada's Prime Ministers.

Other Beechwood shareholders included Currier's business associates Robert Blackburn and Benjamin



Mrs. Jean Leydon Craig (wife of Wilfred Craig, Beechwood's Superintendent from 1912 to 1928), Miss Tillie Fee, and a canine friend in front of the original office building and residence, likely taken in the later 1910s, early 1920s.

Batson, merchant George Hay, lawyer McLeod Stewart and Dr. John Sweetland. The doctor, a native of Kingston and a graduate of Queen's University, moved to Ottawa in 1867 and became active in its affairs, serving as the sheriff of Carleton County, as the head of many civic associations and as the president of Beechwood Cemetery, where he was buried.

The cemetery is located in what was once Gloucester Township, in the area known as Junction Gore, bordered on the west by the Rideau River and on the north by the Ottawa. The lots in this area were laid out in the 1790s and extend from the surveyor's "base line" to the Rideau River. Long after the lots were established, the surveyor's base line became St. Laurent Boulevard.

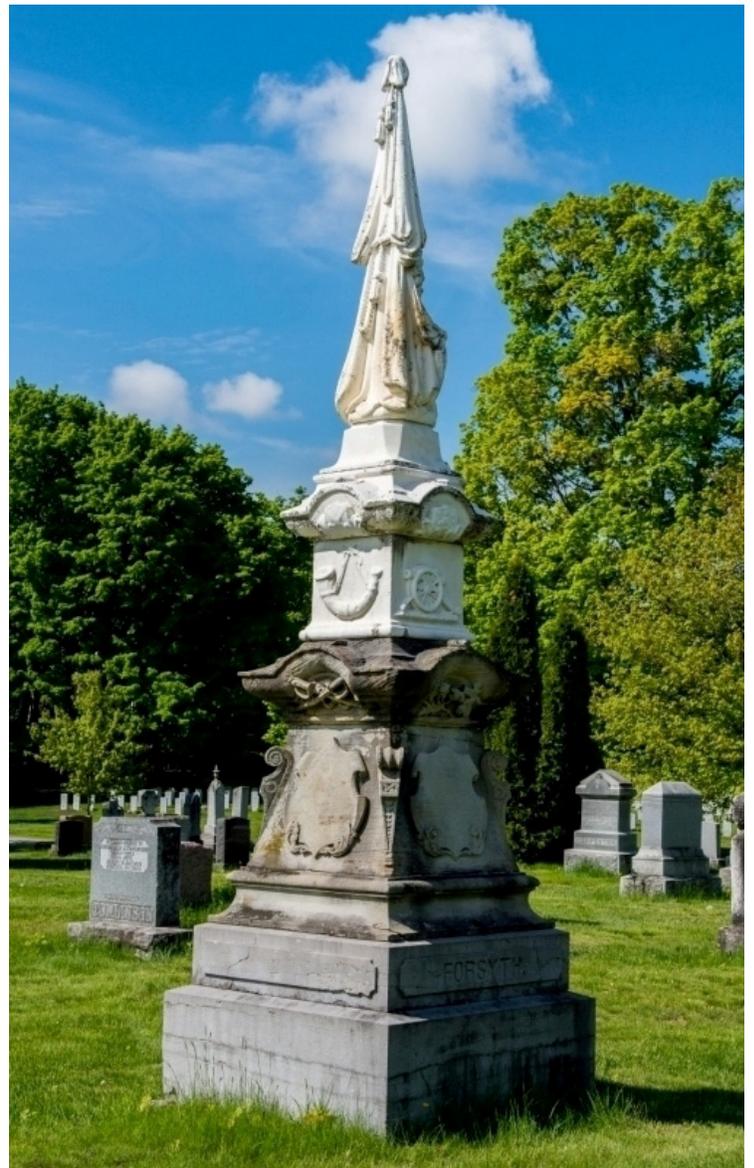
Each lot contains about 200 acres (80 hectares) of land. Three of them, and the halves of two others, were purchased by Thomas MacKay, a stone mason turned contractor who constructed the locks that join the

Rideau Canal to the Ottawa River. After their construction he stayed in the community that had taken root near the locks, called Bytown. MacKay built lumber and other mills, subdivided a part of his land to form the community of New Edinburgh, and at his house nearby (dubbed 'MacKay's Castle') he enjoyed playing his bagpipes. After his death, MacKay's castle was purchased by the government for use as the residence of the Governor-General, with the name changed to Rideau Hall.

Thomas MacKay owned the waterfront half of Lot No. 3 while Hector McPhail, also a stone mason who worked on the Rideau Canal, owned the other half, which he purchased for use as a farm. When he sold it to Joseph Currier for the new cemetery McPhail was allowed to continue to live on the property, which consisted of about 100 acres (40 hectares).

In 1886 the cemetery purchased an adjoining part of Lot No. 3 from MacKay's estate, and in 1893 purchased more land from MacKay's son-in-law, Thomas Coltrin Keefer, an eminent engineer. He was the designer of the waterworks of many cities, including Ottawa's. The graves of MacKay, McPhail and Keefer can be found in Beechwood.

The cemetery company appointed engineer Robert Surtees to transform McPhail's farm into a cemetery. Surtees arrived in Canada from England in 1856 and served as the assistant engineer of the city of Hamilton before moving to Ottawa, where he undertook landscaping and other projects, including an extension of New Edinburgh. He later served for more than two decades as Ottawa's city engineer. Surtees' engineering background suggests that Beechwood should be a rectangular grid of laneways between the graves. Instead, he provided a network of



The monument to Capt James Forsyth, who commanded the 2nd Ottawa Field Battery, is the oldest marker in the cemetery.



Library and Archives Canada

Members of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club at Beechwood in May of 1901. This picture was taken by William Topley, a prolific Ottawa photographer who also happens to be buried at Beechwood.



The Beechwood Mausoleum, built in the early 1930s by Canada Mausoleums Ltd., features stained glass windows designed by James Bloomfield of Luxfer Studios in Toronto. Three quarters of a century later, Luxfer returned to Beechwood to install the Military Chaplains memorial window in the Hall of Colours.

winding lanes that criss-crossed the property, probably following the contours of the land, which was divided into numerous irregularly-shaped burial areas.

Scottish-born architect James Mather, newly arrived in Ottawa, designed staff residences at the cemetery which are still in use today. He may also have designed the office building at the cemetery which, in 1876, replaced the cemetery's first office on Sparks Street. Other buildings on the property included a shop and a vault for the winter storage of coffins until the spring thaw allowed for grave-digging. Mather went on to become a prominent Ottawa architect, the designer of churches, schools and the residences of many leading citizens. He also served as president of Beechwood Cemetery, where he was eventually buried.

The act of the provincial legislature that incorporated the Beechwood Cemetery Co. required it to sell its land in "lots, plots or parcels," but the land sold had to be used "exclusively as a cemetery or place of burial for the dead." The cemetery's duty was to ensure that "all funerals within the said cemetery are conducted in a decent and solemn manner."

Disorderly persons and those who damaged or destroyed monuments, trees or other property could be brought before a justice of the peace and, if convicted, be fined a sum between two and fifty dollars, while non-payment meant that the person "may be committed to gaol for any period not less than six days nor more than three months..." Visitors to the cemetery could not "play at any game or sport, or discharge firearms (save at a military funeral) in the said cemetery...or wilfully disturb any persons assembled for the purpose of burying any body therein." If convicted of such offences, the same fines and gaol-time applied.

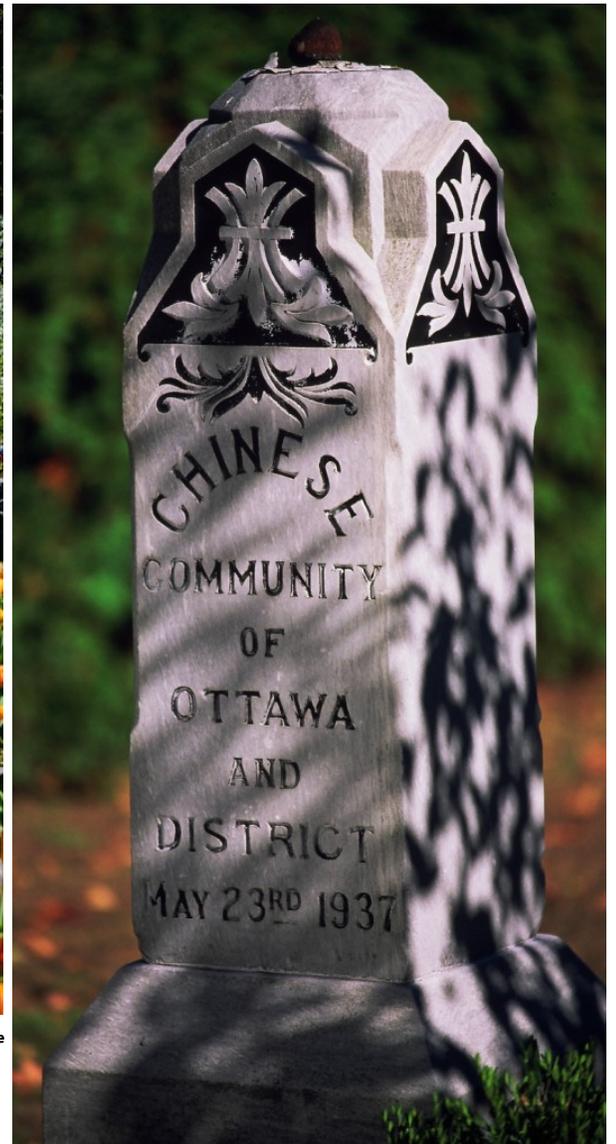
In the late 1920s an important construction project started at Beechwood: the erection of a large mausoleum which provided hundreds of burial spaces. A building of considerable architectural merit, it was built by a company separate from the cemetery, Canada Mausoleums Ltd. After a few years of operation, in a time of depression and financial difficulties, the mausoleum became the property of the cemetery. Its Gothic architecture, first introduced to Ottawa when the Parliament Buildings were



Photo above by Richard Lawrence

Above: Springtime in the Botanical Cremation Gardens.

Right: The original marker for the Chinese Cemetery of Ottawa, located in the eastern part of Beechwood.



constructed, represents a revival of certain features of ancient buildings, particularly elaborately-carved stonework depicting mythological and other creatures and the use of finely-crafted stained glass windows. Beechwood's mausoleum provides a final resting place for many important Canadians, including Father of Confederation William McDougall.

In 1962 the mausoleum took on an additional function when its lower level was made into a crematorium. Although in many societies, such as those of ancient Greece and Rome, cremation was the main means of the disposal of human remains, North American acceptance of cremation developed slowly. When Beechwood's crematorium opened there was little demand for its service, and after ten years only about one in five Beechwood burials was of cremation ashes. The ratio has now become about equal numbers of coffin and urn burials.

When the crematorium was installed, a part of the mausoleum's main level became a columbarium where cinerary urns rather than coffins were stored. The need

for additional storage space led to the development of burial grounds specifically designed as urn gardens, laid out as landscaped settings of burial areas integrated with gardens, shrubberies, lawns, pathways and arbours. The most recent of such areas, the Botanical Cremation Gardens opposite the cemetery's reception centre, present a spring display of tulips, later replaced by other flowers. The area's beauty attracts many visitors. An urn in these gardens contains the ashes of Tommy Douglas, a premier of Saskatchewan and a leader in Canadian politics. Other Beechwood garden areas, such as the Hosta Gardens and the Rockeries, located where stone quarries may have operated years ago, attract visitors to Beechwood.

The natural forest areas on the northern edges of Beechwood's property provide a contrast to the carefully cultivated lawns and gardens. When in recent years an ice storm brought down many trees, wood from them was salvaged and used for furnishing of the expanded reception centre. A marshy area near the property's southern edge has been set aside as a study



The window, titled 'Hope in a Broken World,' was donated by the Canadian Military Chaplains Association. The window illustrates the history of those chaplains called to the service of God and Canada.

area with a classroom to enable school children to observe plant and animal life as found in nature. Called the Macoun Marsh Project, it was named in honour of botanist John Macoun who came to Canada in 1850, later joining Canada's first scientific agency, the Geological Survey of Canada. His studies, which took him across the country, revealed much of the nature of Canada's plant and animal life. Macoun, who is buried at Beechwood, has been named "Canada's greatest

exploring botanist."

Unlike cemeteries such as Sandy Hill, Beechwood has been, from its beginning, non-denominational, an attractive feature for many Ottawa groups and societies. The burial of the first person of Chinese origin in 1903 led in the 1920s to the establishment of a burial place for members of the Chinese community, an area given its distinctive character by the construction in recent years of a Pagoda of Remembrance. In another development of the 1920s, one of Ottawa's Lutheran churches obtained a burial plot for members of its congregation.

Other groups with burial areas in Beechwood include the Home for Friendless Women, the Union Mission for Men, the Protestant Home for the Aged and the Protestant Orphans' Home. A monument bearing a symbol made up of the linked letters FLT, standing for Friendship, Love and Truth, marks the burial plot of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. A nearby monument identifies the Masonic Burial Plot. This monument, an interesting example of symbolism, shows tools of the mason's craft: an ancient mason's level, a square and a compass to scribe circles.

In 1977, attempts were made by some Beechwood shareholders to have unused land sold for a housing project, an action strongly opposed by others. The result was a decade of litigation, the defeat of the proposed land sale and the eventual change in the cemetery's status from that of a private company to its operation as a not-for-profit charitable organization.

The Beechwood Cemetery Foundation was created in 2000 for the purpose of safeguarding the cemetery's future and increasing public awareness of the cemetery and the important events of Canadian history associated with persons buried within it. Today, the Foundation hosts over a dozen annual events at the cemetery.

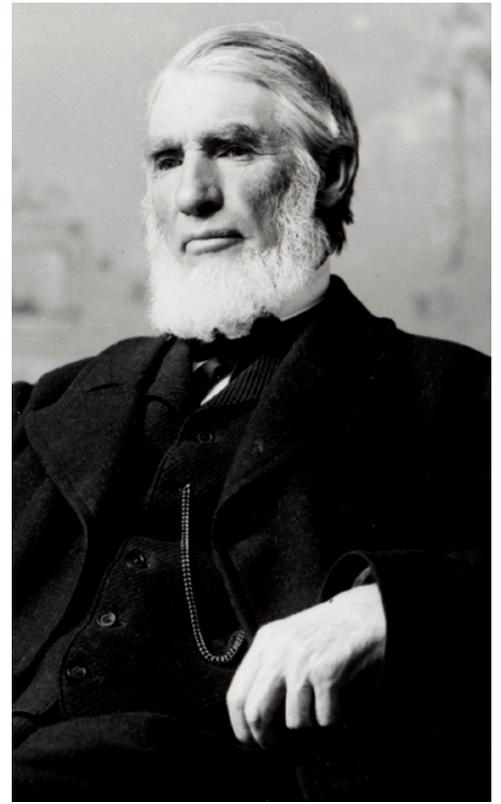
The recently-constructed Beechwood National Memorial Centre serves as a monument to the



General Andrew George Latta McNaughton



Sir Sandford Fleming



Lumber baron John Rudolphus Booth

varied heritages of those whose graves are in Beechwood, and also serves as a gathering place for those of any religious persuasion wishing to conduct a funeral or memorial service in a place considered sacred.

A room of the building is dedicated to Canada's military heritage and Beechwood's long association with the military. Dubbed the Hall of Colours, the room's large stained glass window depicts the war experiences of the Canadian military with particular attention to the role of padres of the forces. The Hall also features a black granite plinth and the laid-up standards and the colours of Canada's Military Regiments.

The founding of Ottawa was the result of a military project, the Rideau Canal, constructed after the War of 1812-14 in fear of another US invasion. Intended in such an event to provide secure passage from Kingston to Montreal, the canal was guarded by garrison and militia troops who were called to action when Canada was invaded by the Fenians. Veterans of the Fenian Raids and other conflicts were buried in Beechwood, including Sir Donald A. Macdonald who joined the militia in 1863, survived the Fenian Raid of 1866, the Red River conflict of 1870, the Northwest Rebellion of 1885, and served in WWI as the militia's Quartermaster-General. Another member of the militia, Charles F. Winter, took part in the Nile campaign of 1882, was later wounded in the Northwest Rebellion but recovered to see service in

the Boer War and in WWI served as a Brigadier-General. His grave is in Beechwood, as are those of two soldiers killed in the Northwest Rebellion and brought to Beechwood for burial, William Osgoode and John Rogers.

A military cemetery was established at Beechwood in 1918 by the Soldiers Aid Commission. Additional burial areas were later opened, one of which contains the graves of many pilots, student pilots and other aircrew killed in the aircraft crashes from flying schools in the Ottawa area. A large military section was opened in 2001, and in combination with the earlier military areas, forms the National Military Cemetery.

Prominent WWII military leaders are buried in Beechwood, including Generals Andrew McNaughton, Charles Foulkes and Henry G. Crerar. Air Commodore John E. Fauquier, a commercial pilot before joining the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1939, also has a grave in Beechwood. He became one of WWIIs most highly decorated airmen, leading a Bomber Command "Pathfinder" squadron against targets that included the German rocket development centre. This action delayed the introduction of Germany's V-1 and V-2 weapons.

Before Ottawa became a capital city its thriving industry, the milling of lumber, provided work for thousands and created a number of lumber barons. The graves of two of them, John Rudolphus Booth and Philip Nairn Thompson, are marked by Beechwood's

loftiest monuments. The new industry of government brought experts in many fields to Ottawa: legislators to pass laws and judges, justices and lawyers concerned with their application. Other government agencies and departments were concerned with such matters as canals and railroads and the fostering of industries and agriculture.

A number of political leaders who came to Ottawa stayed in the city after their careers had ended, and were buried in Beechwood. These include Sir Robert Laird Borden, a leader in Canada's legal profession before entering politics, who served as Prime Minister during the difficult years of WWI. Four provincial premiers, Louis H. Davies, Andrew G. Blair, William S. Fielding and Edgar N. Rhodes, came to Ottawa to serve in the federal government, with Davies also serving as a judge of the Supreme Court.

The government's interest in canals and railways brought engineers to Ottawa, particularly to plan the construction of the Canadian Pacific railway, a condition of British Columbia's joining Canada. Many of the most eminent engineers of the time, including Sir Sandford Fleming, Thomas Coltrin Keefer and Collingwood Schreiber came to Ottawa, stayed, and were buried in Beechwood.

In 1871 the transfer to Ottawa of Canada's first scientific agency, the Geological Survey of Canada, brought not only geologists but scientists of many disciplines to Ottawa. The Survey had been established by the Province of Canada to explore and map an

already vast area, much greater when the Province became the Dominion, with its vast tract of Rupert's Land, largely unexplored. Although the Survey's main interest was the discovery of those ores and minerals on which industry was based, its scope was much broader, as expressed by its name in the decade 1879-89, "The Geological and Natural History Survey of Canada." Each summer teams set out from Ottawa to explore and map; their work was usually carried out in the wilderness, travelling by foot and canoe. In his explorations of Labrador in 1894-95, Albert Low travelled an estimated 8,000 miles (13,000 km) by foot and canoe. He discovered Labrador's iron ore deposits, and later explored Ellesmere and Southampton Islands of the Arctic using a Newfoundland sealing ship. The results of that survey were published in his book "The Cruise of the Neptune" (1906).

Albert Low and many others of the Geological Survey and other scientific agencies are buried in Beechwood, including Robert W. Ells who studied the geology of the Ottawa area. Also at Beechwood is Dominion Astronomer Otto J. Klotz, who established geographical reference points in the north-west. He canoed the length of the Saskatchewan and Nelson Rivers to Hudson's Bay in 1884, about 2,000 miles (3,200 km) of travel.

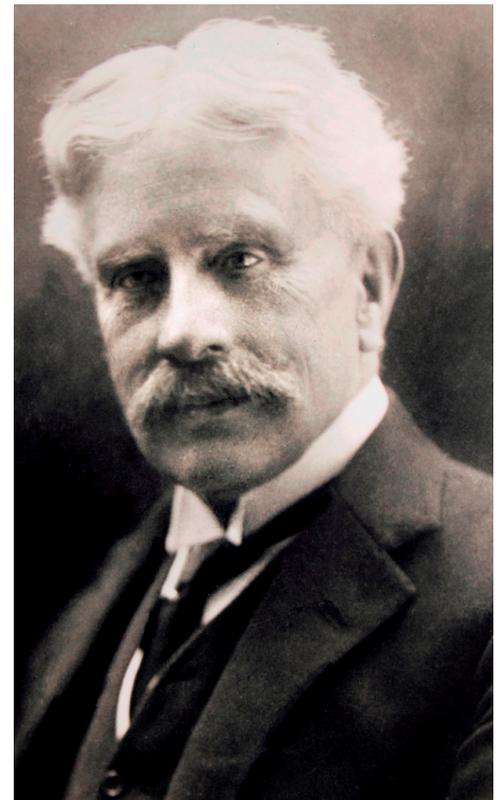
Percy Algernon Taverner of the (then) National Museum published four books on the birds of Canada. The interest of Taverner's colleague at the museum, anthropologist Diamond Jenness, in the original



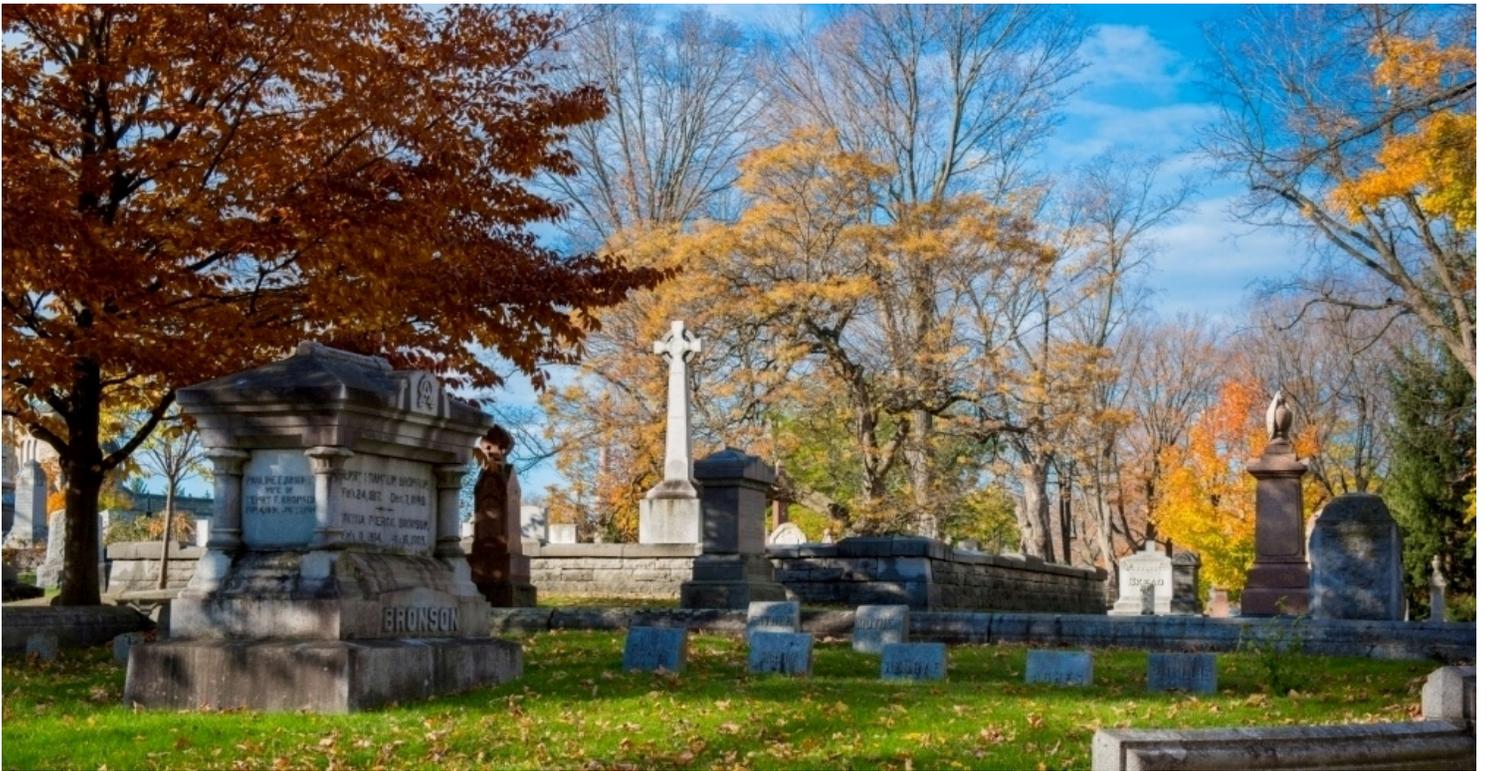
Poet Archibald Lampman



Anthropologist Dr. Diamond Jenness



Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden



Beechwood is beautiful in every season — its 160 acres are full of unique monuments, mature trees and lovely landscaping.



inhabitants of Canada led to his book, “The Indians of Canada,” issued in seven editions. Also buried in Beechwood is the National Research Council’s Gerhard Herzberg, awarded a Nobel Prize in 1971 for his work in molecular spectroscopy.

Numerous writers came to Ottawa, some with the security of a government position, such as Henry J. Morgan who entered government service at age eleven. He was the chief clerk of the Department of State when it moved to Ottawa. Many of his books are biographies of eminent Canadians of his time which provide a rich source of information to those interested in the early leaders of Canada.

Another writer of note, poet Archibald Lampman, held a government position enabling him to create his poetry. He and other poets buried in Beechwood, including Duncan Campbell Scott, Marion Osborne, William Campbell and Arthur Bourinot, inspired the Poet’s Hill Project, an area dedicated to the memory of the poets of Beechwood.

Ottawa’s scenery and the presence of distinguished subjects for portraiture attracted many artists such as Peleg Franklin Brownell whose works are represented in the National Gallery. The sculptural art of Hamilton MacCarthy is exhibited in his statue of Champlain on Nepean Point and several busts in the House of Commons. Both artists are buried in Beechwood. Also are brothers Ernest and Lionel Fosbery - Ernest a painter and etcher, Lionel a sculptor. Like Brownell, they were both art teachers. Other Beechwood artists include James Bland, Alan Beddoe and architect and

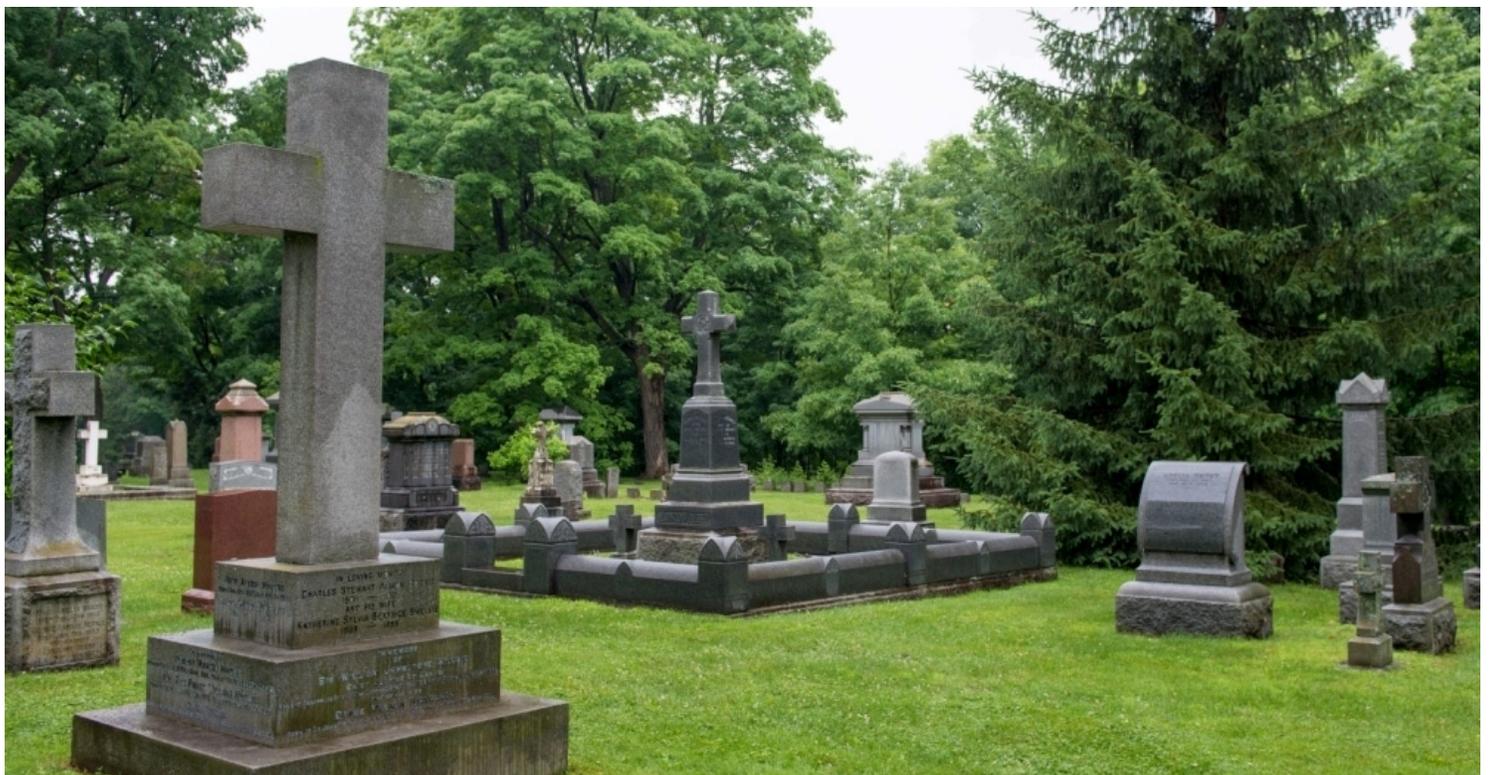
artist John W. Watts.

Ottawa's elite athletes include members of the famous Silver Seven hockey team and its successor, the Ottawa Senators. The former won the Stanley Cup in four consecutive years and the Senators won it in 1909, with Billy Gilmour, a player for five teams that won the cup. The Gilmour brothers and other hockey greats, including Darragh, Boucher, Gerard, Broadbent and Benedict, have graves in Beechwood as do leaders of the sports of football, figure skating, paddling and track and field.

The beauty of Beechwood's site and the layout of its burial areas distinguish it from most cemeteries of its time. Its original beauty has been preserved and enhanced, and it continues to follow the rule of its founding - that its funerals be "conducted in a decent and solemn manner."

Because of its location in Ottawa, Canada's capital city, Beechwood became the final resting place for many Canadians who, in various ways, have shaped the history of our country. For this and many other reasons, Bill C-17, an Act to recognize Beechwood Cemetery as the national cemetery of Canada, passed in the House of Commons in 2009 with all-party support.

Thomas Ritchie has been a Friend of Beechwood since 2005, and wrote a regular column, 'Set in Stone,' for Beechwood's quarterly newsletter, THE BEECHWOOD WAY, until his death in 2014. Mr. Ritchie was laid to rest in Beechwood cemetery and is fondly remembered for his many contributions to Beechwood.





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