

THE  
**BEECHWOOD** WAY  
MAGAZINE



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# Death at Rideau Hall and the Rideau Hall Burial Plot at Beechwood Cemetery

By Nicolas McCarthy,

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RIDEAU HALL is the official residence of the Governor General of Canada and has been since it was leased by the Crown in 1864 for \$4000 a year from the MacKay Family.

The site of Rideau Hall and the original structure were chosen and built by stonemason Thomas McKay, who immigrated from Perth, Scotland, to Montreal, Lower Canada, in 1817 and later became the main contractor involved in the construction of the Rideau Canal. Following the completion of the canal, McKay built mills at Rideau Falls, making him the founder of New Edinburgh, the original settlement of Ottawa. With his newly acquired wealth, McKay purchased the 100-acre site overlooking both the Ottawa and Rideau Rivers and built a stone villa where he and his family lived until 1855 and became the root of the present-day Rideau Hall. Locals referred to the structure as McKay's Castle.

Even before the building became a royal residence, the hall received noted visitors, including three Governors General of the Province of Canada: Lord Sydenham, the Earl of Elgin and Sir Edmund Head. It was said that the watercolours of Barrack Hill (now Parliament Hill) painted by the latter governor's wife, Lady Head, while she was visiting Rideau Hall, had influenced Queen Victoria to choose Bytown (now Ottawa) as the national capital. Also, on September 2, 1860, the day after he laid the cornerstone of the parliament buildings, Prince Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII), drove through the grounds of Rideau Hall as part of his tour of the region.

MacKay was instrumental in the development of Beechwood Cemetery and was eventually interred at a family mausoleum in Section 62 alongside his family. The Mausoleum has long since been demolished (for reasons unknown) and only large gray tablets/stones remain with the name MACKAY-KEEFER in large metal letters.

Since that time, death has been an occasional visitor at Rideau Hall and Beechwood has continued to provide burial space for the official residence. In December 1877, Captain John Perry Ward visited the Dufferin Family (Governor General Frederick Temple Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, Lord Dufferin) where he had a serious toboggan accident on January 8, 1878. Although, he initially recovered from his injuries, he relapsed and died on March 12, 1878, and was buried in Section 50, Lot 41, early March 14th, 1878, with no one present at his funeral.

By the 1880s, Rideau Hall purchased a large burial plot in Section 37, Lot 90 S.E. This plot became known as the Official Government House Plot. Main members of the Rideau Hall staff would be buried within.

- Sarah Bowles passed away on October 17, 1884, and became the first staff member to be interred at the Government Plot. She died at the age of 31 of typhoid fever. She served the Lansdown household and came with them to Canada.
- Thomas Taylor, a young footman, was accidentally shot and killed on April 18, 1896. The Aberdeen (Gordon) family took care of all the costs associated with his funeral and burial.
- Clara Elizabeth Tillbrook, a housekeeper, passed away on September 29, 1900, at the age of 46 and was interred beside Sarah Bowles.
- Ernest Eeles, English-born Groom of the Chamber, died of fever/pneumonia at the age of 28 in 1905.
- John W. Turner, a footman, drowned while bathing in the Ottawa River on July 23, 1910. His headstone indicates that he was 21.





- Charles Plant, who was employed at Government House died, at the age of 42 on November 25, 1915. No cause of death was listed.
- Albert Parker, another employee of Government House, died at the age of 35 on October 15, 1916.
- Patricia Simmons, an English-born housemaid, died on October 17, 1947, in hospital and was buried at the Government House plot. She marks the last overseas-born staff member to be interred here.

Most of those who passed away at Rideau Hall were in fact buried at the Government House plot; a few notable figures were buried elsewhere in the cemetery.

### **Sir Cecil Spring-Rice** **February 27, 1859–February 14, 1918.**

On a visit to his wife's relatives, the Cavendish family (Governor General Victor Christian William Cavendish), Sir Cecil Spring-Rice suffered a fatal heart attack and died on Valentine's Day 1918. He was buried in Section 22, Lot 15W beneath a tall grey granite Irish/Celtic cross.

He was a British diplomat who served as British Ambassador to the United States from 1912 to 1918. In this role, he was responsible for leading British efforts to end American neutrality during the First World War. He is best known as the author of the poem "I Vow To Thee, My Country." He was also a close friend of US President Theodore Roosevelt and served as best man at his second wedding. Before the United States, he also served as ambassador to Sweden and Iran. He had stopped off in Ottawa for a visit after his retirement. The plot is still owned by the Cavendish family (The Duke of Devonshire).

### **Richard Bourke Osborne** **1887 – January 28, 1927**

Richard Bourke Osborne was the Secretary to His Excellency, the Right Honourable Viscount Willingdon. He died of pneumonia at the age of 40 on January 28, 1927. He was suffering from pericarditis as well. After his private funeral at Rideau Hall, he was then interred at Beechwood on January 31, 1927, in Section 24, Lot 4 S.W. Osborne's wife, Violet Osborne, was the niece of Lord Willingdon and remained at Rideau Hall as a Lady-in-waiting to Her Excellency Lady Willingdon.

### **The Right Honourable Ramon Hnatyshyn** **March 16, 1934 – December 18, 2002**

The Right Honourable Ramon John Hnatyshyn was a Canadian lawyer and statesman who served as Governor General of Canada, the 24th since Canadian Confederation.

Hnatyshyn was born and educated in Saskatchewan and served in the Royal Canadian Air Cadets prior to being elected to the House of Commons in 1974. On June 4, 1979, Hnatyshyn was sworn into the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and served as a minister of the Crown in two non-successive governments until 1988.

He was appointed Governor General by Queen Elizabeth II in 1989, on the recommendation of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. He replaced Jeanne Mathilde Sauvé as viceroy and occupied the post until succeeded by Roméo LeBlanc in 1995. As the Queen's representative, Hnatyshyn proved to be a populist, reversing some exclusive policies of his predecessor, such as opening up Rideau Hall to ordinary Canadians and tourists alike, and was praised for raising the stature of Ukrainian Canadians.

He subsequently practised law and sat as Chancellor of Carleton University before dying of pancreatitis on December 18, 2002. He was buried at Beechwood Cemetery in Section 110 opposite the National Military Cemetery of the Canadian Armed Forces.

With a shared history between Beechwood Cemetery and Rideau Hall, which predates both institutions, there are surely more people than we have identified in this article.

It's a wonderful, shared history held together with ongoing events, when we welcome the Governor General and Rideau Hall back to Beechwood year after year.



# 82,000 STORIES TO SHARE – I VOW TO THEE MY COUNTRY

By Erika Wagner, Program and Fundraising Coordinator

Roger Boulton was never shy to share personal stories, many of which started with; “I was working at my desk when I received a phone call.” The fascinating story of Cecil Spring-Rice began just like this. *Vow to Thee My Country*, a hymn sung at his father’s funeral. After discovering the words had originally been penned by British born Cecil Spring-Rice, Prime sought to find out more about Spring-Rice.

One of Britain’s most senior diplomats before and during the First World War, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice was posted in Stockholm, Sweden when he wrote the poem *I Vow to Thee My Country*. In 1912, he was appointed Ambassador to the United States with the goal of influencing the government into joining the British in the war against Germany. This required working closely with the American government and resulted in him being Theodore Roosevelt’s best man upon his marriage to Edith Carrow. Suddenly in 1918, Spring-Rice was recalled to London. On his way, he stopped in Ottawa to visit his wife’s cousin, who at the time was the Duke of Devonshire, the Governor General of Canada. It was at Rideau Hall that Cecil Spring-Rice died suddenly. Due to the war there was no repatriation of the dead, therefore he was buried in Ottawa.

Having been forgotten for so many years, despite people in Britain looking for him, it wasn’t until Roger Boulton received a call in 2013 from Prime Minister's Office, that Cecil Spring-Rice was found once again. Interestingly, Roger noticed that Rideau Hall had been the ones to purchase the land for where Spring-Rice was buried. Roger described how the British celebrated finding the man who had crafted such a beautiful song and how they installed a plaque explaining his impact on the world. The unveiling occurred on Friday June 7, 2013. Involved in the ceremony were Deputy British High Commissioner Corin Robertson, MP for Ajax-Pickering and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence Chris Alexander, British High Commissioner of Canada Howard Drake, Major General (ret’d) David Fraser, Former Commander Multinational Brigade Afghanistan, along with family members of Spring-Rice and Beechwood Board of Director members.

## I vow to thee my country

*I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,  
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;  
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,  
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;  
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,  
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.*

*And there’s another country, I’ve heard of long ago,  
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;  
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;  
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;  
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,  
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.*



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# GOVERNOR GENERAL RAMON JOHN HNATYSHYN

**B**orn in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan on March 16, 1934, Hnatyshyn was sworn in as Canada's 24th Governor General on January 29, 1990. He was the first Ukrainian and the 7th Canadian-born person to fill this position. During his term in office, Rideau Hall was reopened to the public and soon became known as a tourist destination. He encouraged the expansion of tours so that all could enjoy visiting the public rooms and historic grounds. He invited all Canadians to "Come Home to Rideau Hall" to benefit from their national heritage. In 1991, he created the Governor General's Summer Concert Series, a popular annual music festival. In 1992, he reopened the historic skating rink, which is now used by members of the public on weekends and by educational institutions throughout the week. He and his wife, Gerda, were determined to develop Rideau Hall into a showcase for Canadian excellence.

The Hnatyshyn's encouragement for the arts in Canada was one of the most important accomplishments of their term. In 1992, they established the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards and the Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for Voluntarism in the Arts, to honour lifetime achievement in such fields as drama, dance, music and patronage of the arts. Several other awards and scholarships were established during the Hnatyshyn mandate including the Ramon John Hnatyshyn Cup, presented annually to the winning team of the Canadian International Dragon Boat Festival, the Flight for Freedom literacy award, the Canadian Bar Association's Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for Law and scholarships in Environmental Engineering and Science. Hnatyshyn's honours included a 1988 appointment as Queen's Counsel for Canada, and a year later, an honorary life membership with the Law Society of Saskatchewan.

In 1989, he received the St. Volodymyr Medal Award from the World Congress of Ukrainians and in 1996, he received the Mount Scopus Award from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for demonstrating broad humanitarian concern throughout his career. At the time of his death, he was senior partner with the Ottawa law firm Gowling Lafleur Henderson, where he practised advocacy, business, international and trade law. He died at the age of 68 on December 18, 2002.

As Canada's Governor General, Ray Hnatyshyn understood the vital need to champion the diversity that enriched Canadian society. He was a strong supporter of the performing arts, he was interested in environmental issues and literacy and a strong advocate of multiculturalism.

