

Past is not confined to books . . .

HISTORY, authentic history, need not be confined in its recital to the written page, to family chronicles, or to any other of the accepted media.

Many a story of significant import has been derived from the carved name on a gravestone, particularly if such a stone is found in an isolated place and without companions.

Then the question will arise as to who, when, and how. The imaginative mind will go seeking, and a host of queries will come tramping along to fill out the possible tale.

Such a grave was the lone mound on a bluff overlooking Hamilton Bay described by Melville Johnson last summer.

In this connection also, one is especially grateful for the letter of Gordon Gallagher, secretary-treasurer of St. Matthew's Cemetery Board, Aldershot, who cleared up part of the mystery of the grave, giving it an identity and a date.

THE PRESENT writer came across this grave about 40 odd years ago; I had been wandering around the old Carroll's castle grounds, then walked eastward toward Oaklands.

Suddenly there it was — a grave beside the path, only a few feet from the edge of the bluff above the bay shore. I knew it for a grave, of course, but there was no stone of any kind, no name, no date, nothing save a question mark in the mind of the on-looker.

However, some years later, after inquiries had been made, I learned that the grave was that of a member of the Watkins family.

At the date given by Mr. Gallagher, Hamilton Cemetery was still to be laid out — that came around 1840, when sections of land on York Street, designated for a cemetery, were allotted to Christ's Church Cathedral and to the Church of the Ascension — all at the southern end of the survey.

From these sections the cemetery spread northward and toward the marsh; several large family vaults were built, including the Stinson one toward the sunken garden and that of the Watkins family. Nine interments have been made in the latter, including that of Thomas C. Watkins himself, the founder of The Right House as known today. He died on Jan. 8, 1903, at the age of 85, which would make his birth-date around 1818.

The Father?

The occupant of the mystery grave across the bay, according to the stone now in St. Matthew's Cemetery, was a Thomas Watkins, who died Sept. 25, 1826, at the age of 31, making his birth date around 1795.

WAS THIS Thomas Watkins the father of Thomas C., who was a familiar figure on Hamilton streets during the

eighties and early nineties? Could be. But why buried in that particular place? Did the Watkins family, in its beginnings, ever own land elsewhere than in Hamilton?

In early days in Ontario, farm families buried their dead on their own property. Villages were still in the making and burial plots were not planned as today. But, wherever a church or meeting house had been erected, a small cemetery was usually included somewhere in the layout. And so, the countryside, even today, is studded with these small home and neighborhood cemeteries, many of them in use, probably, before either church or school would be built.

During the summer of 1933, in the afternoons, the writer, accompanied by the late John D. Johnston, also a member of The Spectator editorial staff, (along with his car, his

dog, a rug and a book) visited most of the pioneer cemeteries in the County of Wentworth, beginning with Binbrook Township, whose reeve, Niram Fletcher, not only furnished the writer with a list of such plots in his district, but also accompanied us as we moved from place to place through the township.

Sought Graves

THE SUMMER passed pleasantly: J. D. would park the car and spread his rug under a tree, settle his dog beside, and in no time at all, he would be napping, while I wandered up and down among the graves looking for items of interest.

The enterprise was like a trip backward in time, a time dealing with the early history of Hamilton and its environs.

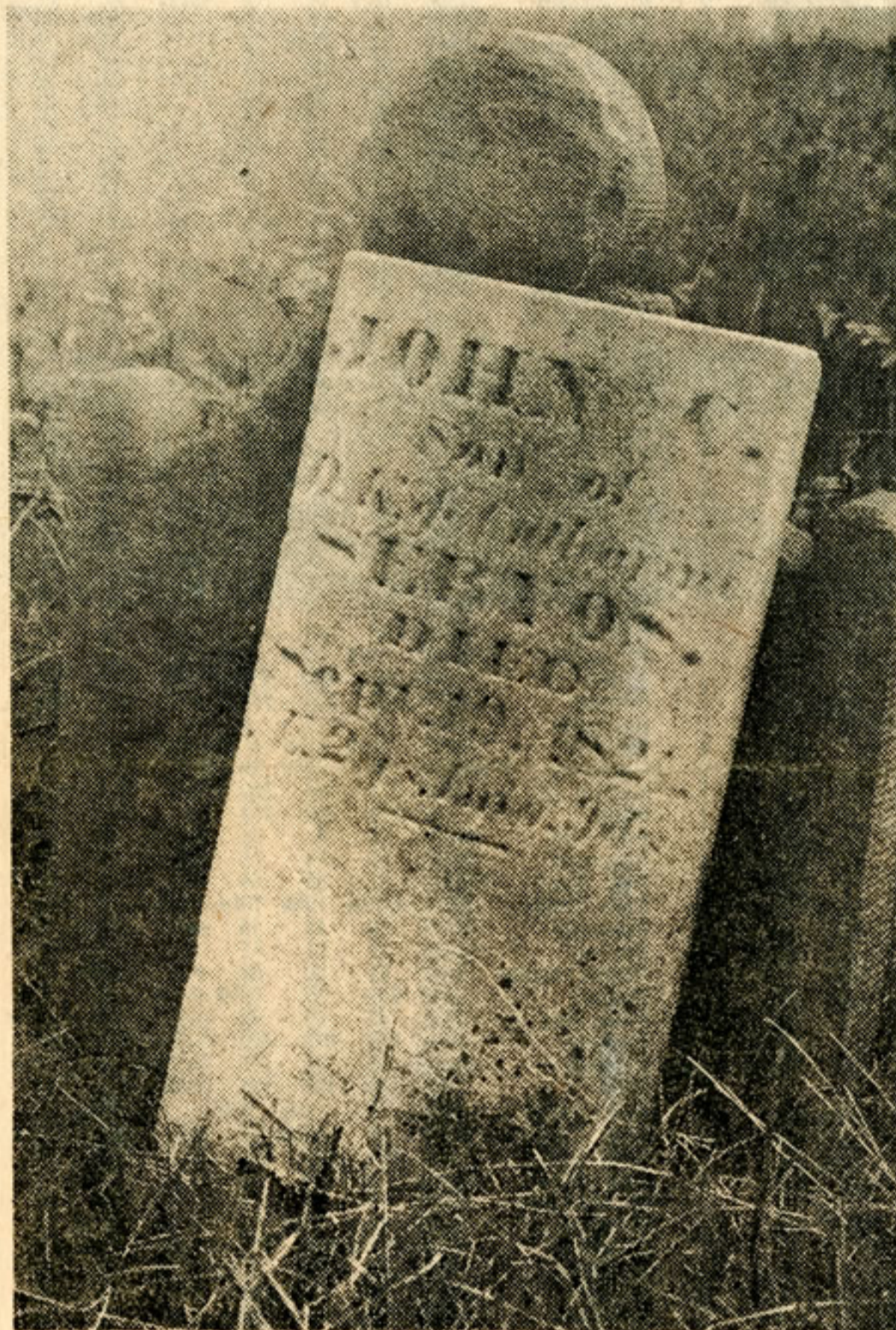
Much interesting data came to life in this way during these weeks: for instance, we were told about the first mur-

der committed in the county — in Woodburn — a family affair, and Woodburn was such a quiet little place.

Stopping to read gravestones, you sensed that early days were particularly rough on women, so many of them died, many of them probably in childbirth, for various plots would have the master of the house, with wives Nos. 1, 2 and 3, and an assortment of children belonging to the family.

There also seemed to be a dividing line between east and west — James Street being that line, for it was noticed that marriages took place between, under the mountain and on or over the mountain in the east, and the same in the west — up and down, but not so generally across, either above or below.

A SINGULAR recurrence caught attention: Perhaps it



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had to do with immigration I never found out, but again and again in these county cemeteries, in districts not adjacent to each other, would be found a lone grave in some far corner of the graveyard, with a headstone, a name and date, and from . . . "County Down, Ireland."

Nothing more.

This happened four or five times, so that I came to look for such a grave, even as I wondered about these lone adventurers from Old Ireland.

One Family

In a cemetery on Highway 53, I noted a row of graves belonging to one family, all young people, male and female, between the ages of 18 and 30, side by side. I could only conclude that either tuberculosis or an epidemic had stricken these young folk who died so close to each other in age.

THE FAMILY cemeteries on the farms were something else again. Many farms were no longer run by their original owners, and the new folk cared nothing for the small burial plot somewhere on their land.

These plots were surrounded by stone walls, but the plot itself would be overgrown with weeds and saplings and littered with broken stones and debris of various sorts. Even where the same family and its descendants occupied the farm, there seemed to be no respect or reverence shown toward their God's acre — no pride, no loyalty, only indifference. Again I wondered.

As John D. Johnstone and the writer journeyed through Wentworth that summer of 1933, I was at times deeply moved by what was encountered, at other times indignant, and at all times impressed with the truth that no man, whoever and whatever he be, means much to the people around him once he passes from the scene of daily action.

SOLOMON AND all the poets, wise men and sages, who have lived and died down through the ages, have proclaimed the futility of man's desire for remembrance.

And so, for a lone sleeper who once rested in a grave overlooking the Hamilton of yesterday and for those Irish strangers who ventured to a new land nearly a century ago the "rest is silence."

. . . gravestones are history, too