



A chain link fence encloses St. Peter's Catholic Church, and the nearby cemetery at Lucan where

the Donnelly family was buried. Gates to the church are locked and this warning sign is posted.

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Fence Guards Donnellys' Graves Tombstone May Have Been Moved

By ERIC FINCH
Free Press Staff Reporter
Temporarily at least, the Black Donnellys of Biddulph have at least found peace and quiet.

So have residents near the graveyard where they are buried.

But it has taken a stout wire fence, padlocks, and a profusion of warning signs to do it.

And the famed Donnelly grave marker may have been removed to ensure this quietude.

For years the Donnellys — old Jim, his wife, Johannah, their sons Thomas and John, and a niece, Bridget — lay in the St. Patrick's Churchyard under a forbidding stone that told of their deaths on Feb. 4, 1880, with one grim word "Murdered."

The nearby village of Lucan and residents of the Roman Line where the Donnelly clan lived, preferred to forget the blazing feud between the Donnellys and their neighbors that culminated in the mass murder.

But in the past few years, the publication of story and song on the Donnellys has made the feud and the deaths probably Western Ontario's most widely known incident of folk history.

Unfortunately it also re-

sulted in a flood of curiosity and sensation seekers which has ended with the closing of the graveyard to all except relatives who wish to visit graves.

Yesterday an unidentified caller to CFPL-Radio's Open Line program complained that the Donnelly grave marker had been removed from the cemetery by "the parish priest."

Rev. F. J. Bricklin, rector of St. Patrick's, would neither confirm nor deny that the stone has been moved.

He referred inquires to London lawyer F. G. Carter, legal representative for the Diocese of London.

Mr. Carter said he was not aware that the marker had been moved although he knew there was an intention to remove it from the cemetery.

The rules of the cemetery allow the removal of any marker that is attracting undesirable attention, and under this rule an application was made to and has been approved by the minister of health, Mr. Carter said.

"If it has been removed, I am not aware of it but I suspected something would happen soon along those lines," he said.

Father Bricklin was reluctant to talk about the depredations of curious visitors that

has resulted in the locking of the church and cemetery.

He would say only that the enclosing of the graveyard was ordered by the late Bishop John C. Cody and the order was continued by Most Rev. G. Emmett Carter, Bishop of London.

Lawyer Carter said the order was given after a succession of serious desecrations of the church and churchyard ranging from defacing of the Donnelly monument and other markers to invasion of the church itself.

Some trespassers in the church even climbed to the organ loft to play the organ. Others tried to carry away souvenirs from the church.

Residents of the area referred to such undesirable visitors as those who strewed empty beer bottles around the cemetery and held "hootenannies in the graveyard at midnight."

It was reported that Father Bricklin himself was badly handled by some visitors when he protested their rude attitude.

Mr. Carter said that the grave marker was attracting as many as 1,400 visitors a

week to the St. Patrick churchyard.

Father Bricklin agreed that the Donnelly marker is a remnant of Western Ontario history of vast interest to thousands.

"But if they'd stop writing stories and folk songs about it we could have some peace of mind."



These signs are posted near the driveway to the church rectory.