

# Pioneer remains reinterred in solemn service

A service was held yesterday (Wednesday, October 25) at the site of the Acton pioneer cemetery, with Rev Canon Mark Tiller and Father Bob Bulbrook officiating to reinter human remains found near the site of the new Acton Agricultural Society building.

Archaeological work done in Prospect Park, Acton in April of this year resulted in the location of human remains near the limit of the original pioneer cemetery in the park. The work was done in conjunction with site investigations required as part of the development of the Acton Agricultural Society facility. Overseen by Fisher Archaeological Consulting of Hamilton, the interment of the human remains brings closure to the investigation in a proper manner.

"There were over 260 recorded burials in this Pioneer Cemetery," says Mayor Rick Bonnette "and we see that with the new development of the Acton Indoor Soccer facility, we have the opportunity to properly mark the limit of the cem-

etry and lay the remains of those that were disturbed to rest."

The remains are comprised of bone fragments of varying sizes from two different individuals. "Although we don't know the names of these individuals," said Terry Alyman Director of Recreation and Parks "it is important to lay them to rest. It also meets the requirements of the Cemeteries Act by having a recorded location and a fence to protect the area from further disturbances."

The bone fragments do provide some telling evidence; at least one of the remains is female, and another an older adult based on the size and condition of the bones found. Another bone exhibits a healed fracture known as a "boxer's break" on a hand, giving a glimpse into some of the stories these early residents can share.

The service was attended by Mayor Bonnette, and Ward 1 Councillors Somerville, Hurst and O'Leary. Bob MacKinnon of the Shoemaker Family Chapel

donated the funeral services and bagpiper Tracy Porter led the procession back to Knox Presbyterian Church following the interment.

## Established 1843

The Cemetery is located at the east end of Prospect Park, north of Knox Presbyterian Church. It was established around 1843, although burials were probably done on the property as early as 1830. It was turned over to the municipality around 1934. Tombstones were later collected and placed in the cairn that was constructed on the site.

Acton's Early Days says for the first 10 or 15 years of settlement in what is now Acton, the settlers who died "were laid to rest" in a consecrated spot in a clearing of the homestead. But as the years passed a common burial ground was sought.

People in the 1800s thought a graveyard should be associated with a church. Churchyards were generally enlarged to "make a fitting resting place for the residents of the community who died.

"Hardly had the lot been



**PIONEER REMAINS BURIED:** In a child's cloth covered white casket with the skirl of bagpipes from Tracy Porter, bone fragments from two early Acton residents that were uncovered during work on the new Acton Agricultural Society building in Prospect Park were re-interred during a ceremony at Acton's Pioneer Cemetery on Wednesday morning. - Frances Niblock photo

secured for the erection of a Scotch kirk in Acton, in 1843, when it was decided to secure a lot in the rear for a graveyard," Acton's Early Days relates. Among the first to be interred there was the Rev. Zenas Adams, one of the town's founders, and a Methodist preacher.

## All filled up

In the course of time the original graveyard was filled up and an addition became necessary. Two men, John Speight and Alexander Grant, purchased the additional property and

they were to be recouped from the sale of family plots and graves. However, before they were fully compensated agitation for a completely new cemetery began in another location.

Eventually, after a lengthy debate about the location, the present Fairview Cemetery was opened and the old graveyard closed with further burials prohibited in 1886.

It should be remembered that the first "Scotch kirk" was situated further north on Main St. than the present

Knox Presbyterian Church. The present church was not erected until 1895, 111 years ago, on the site of what was known as the "Adams Block," one of the first business places in Acton when it was called Adamsville.

The Adams Block was destroyed by fire in the fall of 1870 and the lot was vacant for over 20 years before Knox was built.

## Main St.

It should also be known that Main St. as the name infers was the principal place of business in Acton's early days. All the business in the village was transacted on Main St; businesses along Main St. included two taverns, three or four blacksmith shops, a woollen mill, two tanneries as well as the first school and the Presbyterian Church with the graveyard behind it.

After Fairview Cemetery was opened the old graveyard lay neglected until 1933 when a committee headed by Nelson Moore gathered all the weathered headstones and had them built into a permanent cairn in the centre of the old graveyard. It is recorded that the first burial there was a Phineas Adams. The earliest settler recorded was a Catharine Anderson.

Acton's Early Days notes that as well as village notables, among the burials were James Gardiner killed in the Big Mill and Catharine Keith who was found dead in a snowstorm. Alexander McArthur was killed at a barn raising and the latest burial was Peter McDonald, who died in 1886. Then there was John McGill, who was shot in Wyoming, and James, Mary Louise and William Allan McLennan, who succumbed to diphtheria in an epidemic of that dread disease.

"Bitty" Widow McNabb was lost in the woods and found dead; Marjory McPherson had the longest span of life, 1783-1881. Both are interred there. John Plewes was the first grist miller, Robert Swan the first Postmaster and Charles Shanks a teacher, all of them interred in the old graveyard.

When Fairview Cemetery was opened some families purchased plots and had the remains of loved ones removed from the old graveyard and reinterred in Fairview. However, not all the hundreds of remains were reinterred so it's not surprising archaeological work would discover gravesites on the site of where the new agricultural society building is being constructed.

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