

Town's first innkeeper first burial in cemetery

By Mary Dawson
Abner Miles, Richmond Hill's first innkeeper and first storekeeper, is often credited with being the first person to be buried in Richmond Hill cemetery (in 1806 at the age of 54).



yesterdays
by mary dawson

He was indeed the first white person to be buried there — on land owned by his son, James Miles. Although the latter had intended to donate the land for the cemetery, as well as the site of the church and the two manes to the Presbyterian church, he died before the deed was signed and the congregation had to purchase the land for \$5,000.

When the first white men arrived in this area, they found that an Indian had already been buried in the pine grove which covered the site. The grave was marked with a log structure.

William Harrison in 1889 speculated that the Indian was a member of the Mississaugas, who had sold the 648,000 acres of the Home District to the whites for \$40,000 (the price of a good farm in 1889). Perhaps, said Harrison, he was on his way to the old fort at Toronto for his share of the government presents.

Dressed for burial
He also noted that the Mississaugas buried their dead warriors in hunting dress, with arms for battle or the chase, so that they were fully equipped when they reached the happy hunting grounds.

The village's early historian also recalled that the earliest white graves were marked by slabs of two-inch cedar, with the name and other pertinent data painted thereon in black paint.

A later era brought railings, when every family which could afford it surrounded its burial plot with bars and pickets. Some of these were well cared for, but others were allowed to deteriorate while wild roses ran riot over the enclosed graves.

Finally the church

authorities ordered the removal of all these railings and Harrison told of an indignant deacon rushing from a home where he had found pickets from the cemetery being used to feed a fire in a neighbor's fireplace, shouting, "Mon! Mon! robbing the dead to warm the living!"

Other records show that the culprit who was warming himself with the blazing pickets was Rev. James Dick. The indignant deacon was one of his elders, William Marsh.

The first marble headstone was erected in 1828 and marked the burial place of Raymond. The simple marble blocks and more elaborate marble shafts have been eroded by the weather and damaged by vandals as well as the years. Their original whiteness has deteriorated into a dull grey color and experts advise against any attempt at trying to bring back the original finish.

"They may well last

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