

# Grave Concerns

Le Recoleta, Pere-Lachaise, the Great Pyramids, Westminster Abbey and the Taj Mahal all have one thing in common. They are famous burial places; homes to the graves of many famous people. They are tourist attractions and are immaculately kept up by governments and private donations.

Burial places serve many purposes other than grave sites. They remind us of our family members and friends who have gone before us and they provide a quiet place for meditation and contemplation of life. They can act as gardens, history museums, bird sanctuaries and sometimes art galleries. They provide a permanent record of our forefathers and demonstrate a personal and community respect for the dead.

When the first settlers arrived in this area, life was very difficult for them and death was a constant companion. It was important for them to establish burying grounds. Many families set aside a corner of their property to bury family members. The funeral itself was a family matter and the family made the coffin and dug the grave. With the graves close by it was only natural that the family would provide upkeep for the burial ground and keep it in a good state of repair.

As properties changed hands and relatives moved away, these small family plots fell into a state of disrepair. They became overgrown with vegetation and the headstones so carefully placed, fell over or were damaged by pollution. Thieves stole some of the marble features off some of the headstones and vandalism took its toll.

When churches were first established, burial grounds were set up on church property and small family plots were no longer used. Some churches were later destroyed or abandoned leaving the burial grounds beside them to fall into disrepair. The Kirk, at the intersection of highway 7

and Nerepis Road, is an example of a local church graveyard that deteriorated badly after the church burned to the ground.

Mount Hope Cemetery, on the other hand, is a local success story. The land for the graveyard was donated by Colonel Nase in about 1786. It is a non-denominational burial ground or cemetery run by a commission. It is well kept and is home to the community's first grave, that of Colonel Nase's 2 year old daughter Elizabeth.

Unfortunately, for every graveyard in our community that is being kept in good condition there are many more that have become abandoned, overgrown and in some instances lost.

This summer the Heritage Committee will start a program to locate and document our lost and abandoned graveyards in our community. Some work has already been done by a dedicated group of volunteers and it is hoped that the committee will be able to build on that earlier work.

Initially we will be simply trying to locate the graveyards and plot the coordinates. The committee is asking anyone who is aware of an abandoned cemetery, or burial place in Grand Bay-Westfield to provide them with this information. Once a list is complete, recording the names and locations of the individual markers can begin. After that, research can take place and information gathered. Community plans can be developed for cleanup and preservation.

Recently the Province passed a law requiring anyone locating a burial ground to notify the province and not to make any changes or alterations to the site. The Heritage committee will work with the province to coordinate efforts to preserve and protect.

This is an ambitious project and it will take time. These efforts will show that our community takes pride in its burial grounds and respects and remembers those that have gone before.

We will rely on volunteers to perform this important work. More volunteers are needed and I would ask anyone interested in helping out with this worthwhile project to contact me at 757-8380.