

Public Engagement with Historical Burying Grounds in Halifax, Nova Scotia

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Abstract

This thesis examines public engagement with three historical burying grounds in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Old Burying Ground, the Poor House burying ground, and St. Peter's Cemetery. The research question was inspired by a significant event in 1958 where the Downtown Merchants Association proposed to turn the Old Burying Ground into a parking lot (McGuire 1990). This was met by serious opposition from the public, even with the promise by the Merchants Association to provide a suitable monument on the site to acknowledge its history and significance. This is important because it does not appear that the other cemeteries received the same opposition as they underwent transformations in the twentieth century, such as the construction of a library and the paving of a parking lot. Through the use of newspaper articles from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modern news coverage, social media comments and news article comments, I provide a timeline of events related to the sites. Through this timeline, I explore notable themes and similarities of how people have expressed opinions and interests in the burying grounds from the nineteenth century to present. The results of this research suggests that the reasons for maintaining and memorializing the Old Burying Ground in comparison to its neighbours is related to the level of preservation the site holds and its military associations, but also the larger ideas of power that dominate the site.

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Introduction

Burial grounds can often give a glimpse into the status of the deceased through the treatment of the burial ground itself, typically through marked and unmarked graves. Halifax has a long history of failing to properly memorialize those who perished and were not fortunate enough to receive a marked burial. With the founding of Halifax in 1749 came the establishment of the town cemetery, the Old Burying Ground, which was located just outside of the southern wall near the palisades of the south gate (Collins 1975). During the later part of the eighteenth century, two more cemeteries were established across from the Old Burying Ground. The first cemetery was associated with the Poor House, which was constructed in the spring of 1760 (Marble 1993), and the other was adjacent to St. Peter's, the first Roman Catholic Church in Halifax. Figure 1.1 displays a map with the locations of the three cemeteries marked.

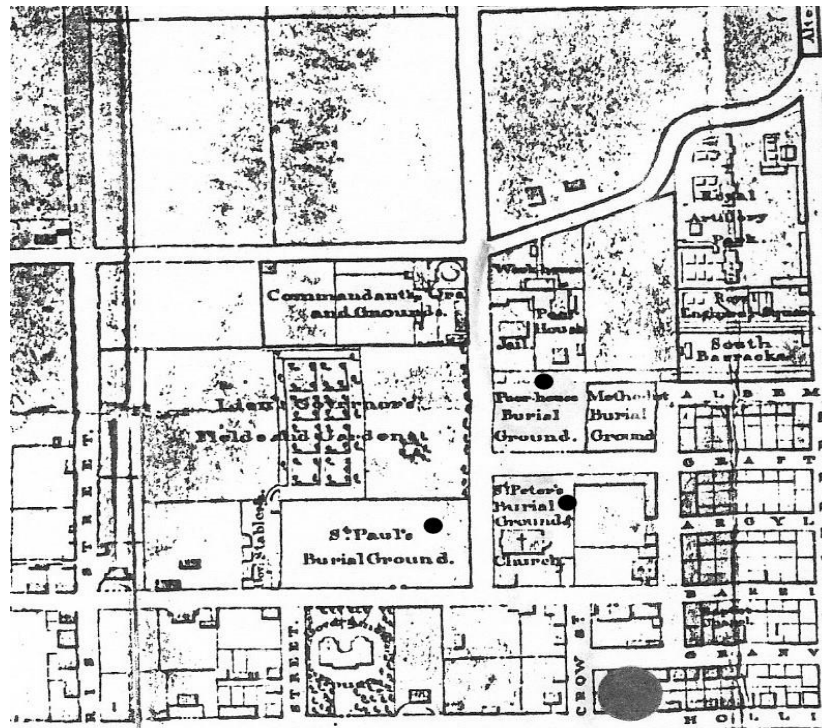


Figure 1.1: Map displaying the three burying grounds in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1831. Each of the cemeteries is indicated by a black dot. SOURCE: The National Archives, WO55 2594 L BP704.

In 1958, the Downtown Merchants Association wanted to solve the issue of parking in the downtown Halifax area and proposed to make the Old Burying Ground a parking lot (McGuire 1990). This was met with serious opposition despite a proposal to mark the site with a suitable monument to recognize its importance. In the end, the Downtown Merchants Association did not get the parking lot they hoped for (McGuire 1990). The Poor House burying ground and St. Peter's cemetery also faced the threat of urban development, with a library built on the Poor House burying ground in 1949 and St. Peter's cemetery paved over to become a parking lot some time during the mid 1900s. The transformation of these two sites did not appear to spur the same level of protest from the citizens as the proposal to pave over the Old Burying Ground.

The purpose of this thesis is to establish the reasons that contributed to memorializing and maintaining the Old Burying Ground and how the poor house cemetery and St. Peter's cemetery, located just across the street, have failed to be properly memorialized. I have created a timeline of events related to each site and analyzed the ways in which the public has engaged with the sites throughout these events. The use of archival material in the form of newspaper articles was the main source of the early part of this timeline, ranging in dates from the 1860s to the late 1950s. I used Google and social media, specifically Facebook, to gather other news articles that have been published in the last 8-10 years to further add to the timeline of events. A narrative analysis of comments made by the public on Facebook posts or news articles was also conducted to further supplement the information coming from the timeline. By doing this, I seek to answer the question of what aspects of the Old Burying Ground (the history, the monuments, the social prominence) inspires the type of reactions that contributed to its memorialization.

Anthropological studies in the past have used functionalism to interpret funeral rituals and gradually this shifted from a functionalist stance to focus more on the relationship between funerary ritual and social structure (Parker Pearson 1999, 22-23). There is a lot of value for these studies in the subfield of archaeology because they provide important contextual information regarding the symbolism of funerary practices (Parker Pearson 1999, 23). Studying the disposal of the dead creates a useful source of data that allows archaeologists to “directly identify or to indirectly draw inferences about past attitudes and practices related to death, as well as about daily life in the past” (Arnold and Jeske 2014, 327-328). For this thesis, it was important to use mortuary archaeology as a framework to analyze the modern data material. More specifically, digital public mortuary archaeology, which is a relatively new subfield that includes a wide range of online data that the public actively engages with (Williams and Atkin 2015).

We begin with a historical background (Chapter 1) of the three burying grounds in downtown Halifax to provide the reader with context of where the sites are located and to gain a sense of what their transformations were over time. The archival data analysis (Chapter 2) highlights the newspaper findings for each burying ground and a subsequent content analysis. This is followed by the modern news articles and social media comments (Chapter 3) and the narrative analysis of each, with comparisons to what was noteworthy in the archival material to see general shifts that have taken place in public perception over time. A discussion of public memory, public archaeology and tourism in Halifax (Chapter 4) is used to further understand how these all contribute to the memorialization or lack thereof for the three sites. This chapter also provides some more discussion surrounding the data analysis.

1. Historical Background

In the early summer of 1749, Halifax was founded by Edward Cornwallis, with the arrival of 2,500 settlers to the area. It was important to establish an area to bury the dead and the Old Burying Ground was designated as the town cemetery, located just outside the southern wall near the palisades of the south gate (Collins 1975). Originally an acre of land was laid out for the cemetery, but in 1762 this area was expanded to 2.25 acres (Old Burying Ground Foundation 2011). Although there is a wide variety of individuals buried in the Old Burying Ground, there is much more emphasis in the historical records placed on those who were involved with the military. St. Paul's Church was responsible for recording the burials conducted by its priests and for the maintenance of the grounds, but they were unable to charge any fees for the burials because the church did not own the land. Once the land was granted to the church in 1793, they were able to begin charging burial fees (Old Burying Ground Foundation 2011). The Old Burying Ground was closed in August 1844. Between the time it had been established until its closure, approximately 12,000 burials took place there (Old Burying Ground Foundation 2011).

The Old Burying Ground underwent different stages of restoration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Following its closure in 1844, the cemetery fell into a period of neglect. The early nineteenth century became a time of concern for the use of burial grounds, as they began to be associated with the possibility of spreading diseases. Cemeteries were often located in the middle of towns and were poorly kept due to the over-crowdedness from the increase in population (McGuire 1990, 2). In the United States, this led to the idea of a rural cemetery movement, which was started by Dr. John Bigelow in Boston with the creation of the Mount Auburn Cemetery in 1831 (McGuire 1990, 4). The rural cemetery movement called for the

opening of new cemeteries which would be located outside of the town and they would be regarded as an area that was more associated with peaceful qualities, rather than the unsanitary nature that was associated with the older graveyards (McGuire 1990, 5). It is possible that as this rural cemetery movement spread, it reached Halifax as Camp Hill cemetery was opened in 1844 to replace the Old Burying Ground and it appeared to follow some of the aspects introduced by the movement, notably that it was located much further out of the city's main area (McGuire 1990, 4). The rural cemetery movement likely served as inspiration to renovate the Old Burying Ground. In 1860, the stone wall surrounding the cemetery was removed and replaced with a lower wall and an iron fence. Figure 1.2 displays a painting of what the stone wall surrounding the Old Burying Ground looked like. The entrance of the cemetery was moved to Barrington Street and there were new pathways laid out (Old Burying Ground Foundation 2011). Another significant change was the decision to put the Welsford-Parker Monument, a memorial for two Nova Scotian soldiers who died in the Crimean War in 1855, at the front entrance of the cemetery (Old Burying Ground Foundation 2011).



Figure 1.2: A watercolor painting completed by Alexander Mercer in September 1840 of the corner of Barrington and Spring Garden. The Old Burying Ground is seen to the left, with the stone wall surrounding it. SOURCE: *Halifax in Watercolour*, Glenn Devanney, 2014.

The cemetery went another 120 years before any more restorations were completed. By this time, the site was in a serious state of deterioration, having been neglected and vandalised over the years. Work began in 1984 and lasted until 2000, with the repairs predominantly focusing on the headstones, the monument and the fence surrounding the cemetery (The Old Burying Ground Foundation 2011). During this time, the cemetery also received three different designations: Municipal Heritage site (1986), Provincial Heritage Property (1988), and a National Historic site (1991) (Old Burying Ground Foundation 2011). This is the first cemetery in Canada that has received designations such as these, which were important for securing the future of the site (Old Burying Ground 2011). The purpose of the Provincial and Municipal Heritage designations is to “provide for the identification, designation, preservation, conservation, protection and rehabilitation of buildings, public-building interiors, structures, streetscapes, cultural landscapes, areas and districts of historic, architectural or cultural value, in both urban and rural areas, and to encourage their continued use” (Heritage Property Act R.S., 1989, c. 199, s. 1). The Old Burying Ground was designated a National Historic site because “it constitutes a unique concentration of gravestone art and it bears silent witness to the complex cultural traditions of early British North America” (Canada’s Historic Places 1991).

Poor House Burying Ground

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, poor houses were introduced in Nova Scotia following the Elizabethan Poor Laws established in Europe (Thompson 2017). The Poor Laws expressed a certain philosophy of life towards the poor, especially the poor who were considered able-bodied (Senior Scribes 1996, 14). Halifax saw the construction of three different poor houses to manage the lowest class members of society. The first was established on Spring

Garden Road in the spring of 1760 (Marble 1993), the second in 1869 on the corner of South and Robie Street, and the third in 1886 on top of the ruins of the second poor house, which burnt down in 1882 (Simpson 2011). In her analysis of poor houses in Ireland, Linda Lynch argues that the purpose of the poor house was not only to manage the poor, but to also enforce a sense of social divide between the poor and the working members of society (2014, 196). The middle and upper-class saw the poor as failures unable to contribute to society and this failure followed them in their death, as they often did not receive a proper burial and were kept separate from other cemeteries. “The burial of the pauper was a reflection of perceived social worthlessness, earthly failure, and profound anonymity” (Lynch 2014, 197). These ideas were also evident in colonial Halifax. Families could often not afford to ensure that their family member would have a decent funeral and there was usually a sense of shame that was associated with a pauper’s death and burial (Simpson 2011, 74). In cases where the body was left unclaimed by family members, the body would simply be buried in an unmarked grave (Simpson 2011).

The land used for the poor house on Spring Garden Road had a burying ground adjacent to it for people that died in the poor house or the jail, but also for strangers who were not from Nova Scotia (Simpson 2011, 100). There is no record of an exact date that burials began to take place within the poor house burying ground, but it may have been used as early as 1780 or 1781 (Simpson 2011, 100). Allan Marble (2006, 217) estimates there are around 4,500 burials at this site. The poor house was in use until sometime in the late 1860s, after which the buildings were demolished and the property was divided into lots of lands to be auctioned off (Simpson 2011, 53). There were many propositions over time of new uses for the burial ground, such as to be

used as a pasture for cattle, the site for a court house, to have an engine house built on it, for a new high school, and also for a cricket ground (Simpson 2011, 104-105).

By 1883, the site of the Spring Garden Road poor house burying ground had become the location for a public park, known as Grafton Park (Halifax Regional Municipality 2013). In 1949, the city of Halifax petitioned the province to allow the construction of a public library to be a memorial for the soldiers who perished in the First and Second World Wars (Halifax Regional Municipality 2013). The request was granted and the legislation for the use of the land was changed to grant the allowance for the public library to be built (Halifax Regional Municipality 2013). The legislation was changed to read,

Notwithstanding the restrictions set out in Letter Patent bearing the date the 31st day of October, A.D. 1882, granted by Her Majesty the Queen in the right of the Province of Nova Scotia, to the City, and recorded in the Registry of deeds for the County of Halifax on the 29th day of May, A.D. 1884, whereby the lands now comprising Grafton Park are required to be held for the use and enjoyment of the citizens of Halifax as a Public Square or Garden forever and for no other purposes whatsoever, the City may erect upon said lands in a location North-west of the southeastern margin of the existing diagonal walk across the said Park, a Public library for use by the citizens of the city (Halifax Regional Municipality 2013, 8).

Within this revised legislation, the land is only to ever be used for a park or a library and those conditions are still in effect today. If the property were to be used for another purpose, it “would result in forfeiture to the Province” (Halifax Regional Municipality 2013, 8). With the construction and opening of the new public library on Spring Garden Road, the Memorial Library has not been used since 2014. Since the land is considered urban space, it is “still required for municipal needs” (Halifax Regional Municipality 2013, 3). One of the ideas put forward was to convert the land back to a public park, but that would not meet the requirements of the Heritage Advisory Committee to warrant the site a heritage designation (Halifax Regional

Municipality 2013, 3). The reason for this is because the building is needed to give the property the necessary 50 points to warrant the heritage designation (Halifax Regional Municipality 2013, 3). The building had previously achieved a score of 59 due to its architectural features and historical significance (Halifax Regional Municipality 2013, 10).

The other option was to petition the province to lift the conditions that are currently in place that designate the land as being used only as a park or public library, which would result in a different use for the building, allowing it to still meet the requirements for a heritage designation, but appropriate protection and conditions would need to be put in place for the grounds and open space (Halifax Regional Municipality 2013). The Halifax Regional Council (2017, 4) requested a staff report regarding the Memorial Library that would make recommendations to do with: a formal withdrawal of the approval to return the land to the province, to change the legislation surrounding the use of the land, explore other options to make use of the building by the Halifax Regional Municipality or other public uses, and if no appropriate use is found then the demolition of the building should take place as it was approved by the council in 2013. Figure 1.3 displays an image of the Memorial Library.



Figure 1.3: An image of the Halifax Memorial Library from Grafton Park, 1951. SOURCE: Edward A. Bollinger, <http://www2.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca/archives/living-memorial/history.php>, accessed April 11, 2020.

St. Peter's Cemetery

The first Catholic relief act was passed by Nova Scotia legislature in 1783, two years after Irish Catholics petitioned to repeal the anti-Catholic laws created in 1758 (Murphy 1984, 31). Following this, there was also approval granted for the Catholics to build their own chapel in 1784 (Fingard, Guildford and Sutherland 1999, 32). A gentleman named William Meany arranged to purchase a plot of land in the south end of Halifax for the site of the chapel (Hanington 1984, 51-52). A small wooden frame chapel was erected on this land on July 19th, 1784 and named after Saint Peter (Hanington 1984, 52). A burial ground was developed on land next to the church and was used for the burials of Roman Catholics between 1784 and 1843 (Genealogical Association of Nova Scotia 2017). In 1820, a new church was under construction, a movement that had been brought on by the arrival of Father Edmund Burke from Quebec (Collins 1975). Between 1801 and 1816 the congregation in Halifax increased in size, with the population of Catholics in Nova Scotia reported to be 8,500 (Murphy 1984, 31). With the increase in size of the congregation and Dr. Burke being ordained a bishop, he planned for the construction of a cathedral, which would replace the previous wooden church of St. Peter's (Hanington 1984, 72). The cathedral was built from cut ironstone between 1820 and 1829 and would become for almost half a century "the most commanding structure in all of Halifax" (Hanington 1984, 72). Figure 1.4 displays a painting of the church in 1840.

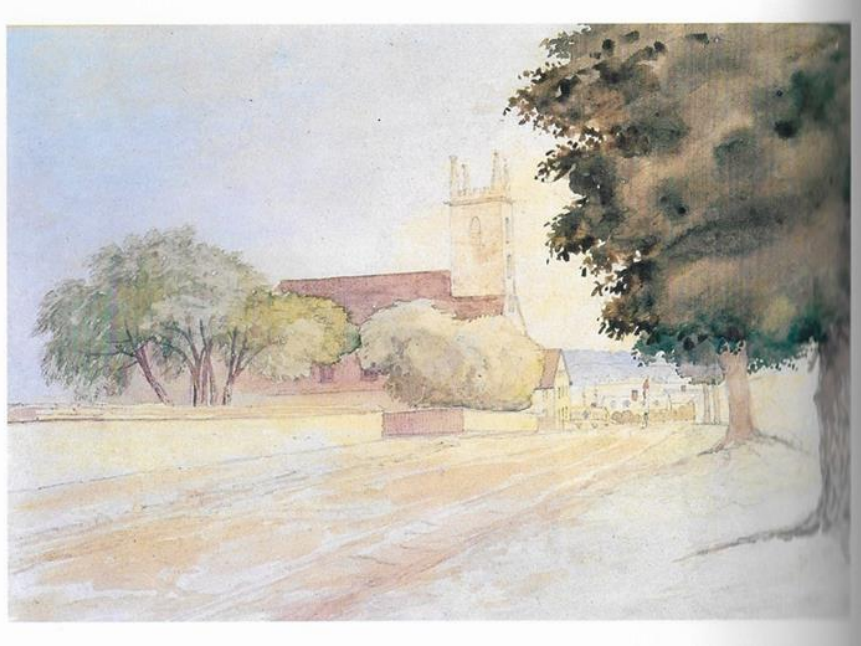


Figure 1.4: A watercolor painting completed by Alexander Mercer in 1840 of Spring Garden Road, with St. Mary's Cathedral in the distance. SOURCE: *Halifax in Watercolour*, Glenn Devanney, 2014.

The cathedral replaced the previous wooden church of St. Peter's and in 1829 when the new church began to be used, the previous one was dismantled and taken across the harbour to Dartmouth. In 1833, the church was renamed St. Mary's Cathedral (Canada's Historic Places 1984). As for the cemetery, it is uncertain how many burials took place due to incomplete records, but estimates are around 3,000 burials (Genealogical Association of Nova Scotia 2017). A range of nationalities were buried here, including Irish, Scottish, German and English immigrant families, as well as members of the Mi'kmaq community (Robertson 2012). The graves of these individuals were often marked with a simple wooden board or cross, which would gradually deteriorate over time. With such temporary markers, the locations of many of the graves are unmarked, leaving no record or memory of the individuals interred within. Following the closure of the cemetery in 1843, there appear to be no public records of what happened to the burial ground regarding upkeep or neglect.

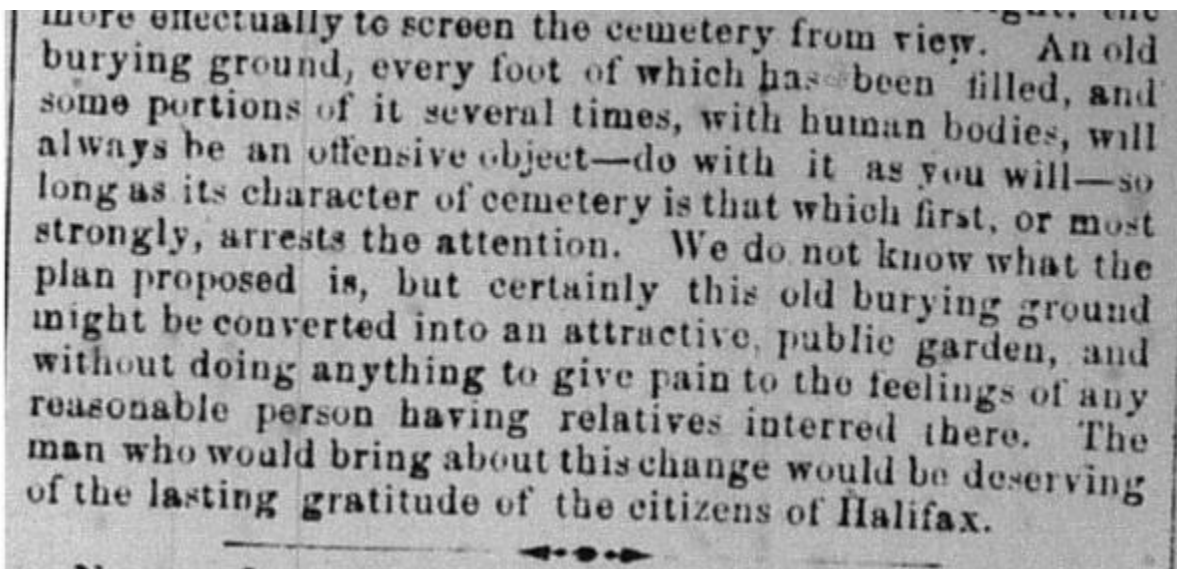
2. Archival Material and Data Analysis

To begin collecting data for the archival material, I spent time at the Nova Scotia Archives looking through the card catalogues. The burying grounds had closed by 1844 and this was key for gathering newspapers that discussed the sites after this time. The purpose of looking for newspapers after the burial ground closures was to better see the public engagement that occurred when the cemeteries were no longer being actively used. I collected 17 sources to view on microfilm. In order to collect the most useful data, a process of elimination was used by going through each of the films. If an article did not give any particular insight as to the public's perceptions of the spaces, it was discarded from my final collection. This ultimately meant that there was still quite a substantial body of data left to draw inferences from, with 10 sources being used for the data analysis.

Very early on it was evident that the Old Burying Ground was discussed the most. Noticing this further aided in gradually taking note of the various themes in each article and what was valued in the way the burying grounds were discussed. Some pieces had a popular history nature to them, with the writer providing a specific description of the site and romanticizing the historical significance of them. The Old Burying Ground had been discussed in articles regarding the work being done to improve its condition, the significance of those who were buried there and most significantly, the public outrage of a proposal to pave over the burying ground in 1958.

The Old Burying Ground often had those in positions of power playing an active role in gathering the public to either work together to fix up the inside of the cemetery or to hold meetings to raise the necessary funds to make improvements to the fence and overall appearance of the cemetery. An example of this is seen in the *Acadian Recorder* on April 14, 1860. The

mayor called a public meeting to discuss the potential for putting a new fence around the cemetery.¹ Those in attendance consisted of many gentlemen that had expressed an interest in having a new fence put up and it was decided that a committee would be created in order to collect the funds to carry put the project.² There were also comments made in this piece about the overall appearance of the cemetery. The comments expressed that if the cemetery were to remain in the state that it was currently in that they might as well keep the old stone wall surrounding it and add another foot to it.³ This commentary gives some perspective into what is valued in the appearance of the cemetery and is a shift away from the usual emphasis on those who are buried there. There is still an element of how important it is to have the right people involved to ensure the necessary actions take place and an underlying sense of praise for the individual who would effectively bring about those changes. Figure 2.1 displays the end of the commentary in this piece.



more effectually to screen the cemetery from view. An old burying ground, every foot of which has been filled, and some portions of it several times, with human bodies, will always be an offensive object—do with it as you will—so long as its character of cemetery is that which first, or most strongly, arrests the attention. We do not know what the plan proposed is, but certainly this old burying ground might be converted into an attractive, public garden, and without doing anything to give pain to the feelings of any reasonable person having relatives interred there. The man who would bring about this change would be deserving of the lasting gratitude of the citizens of Halifax.

Figure 2.1: Commentary from an individual writing about the Old Burying Ground. SOURCE: Acadian Recorder, April 14, 1860. Nova Scotia Archives (NSA) microfilm 23414.

The following article was published two years later, in the *Halifax Evening Express* on September 22, 1862, and focuses more on the improvements made to the Old Burying Ground. There is strong praise given to the improvements made to the cemetery over two years, but there is also a lot of discussion about its previous state of neglect. Referring to the cemetery in its previous state as “dilapidated” and an “altogether disgraceful appearance” was apparently a result of the Camp Hill Cemetery opening in 1844.⁴ People who walked by the cemetery would turn their gaze the other way and there was a sense that those in the community had “neglected their duty to the dead.”⁵ Something very important that comes out of this article is the way that the public displayed its ability to work together in order to make up for their previous neglect. The mayor decided to open the cemetery on Sundays and many citizens shared the same level of determination to improve the site.⁶ This did not last long though and it became obvious that there would have to be a higher authority take the lead to enforce the work was carried out in the Old Burying Ground.⁷

Following the restorations, there were not any other significant mentions of the cemetery throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. Moving into the twentieth century, one of the most controversial and heavily discussed topics surrounding the cemetery occurred in the spring of 1958. During this time, the newspapers extensively covered the proposal put forward by the Downtown Merchants Association to pave over the Old Burying Ground and turn it into a parking lot. The first example of the public speaking out against this proposal is seen in *The Halifax Mail Star* on April 3, 1958. Commentary was given by the rector of St. Paul’s Church, Rev. H. St. C. Hilchey, with him stating that as a parish, they would resist any plans put forward regarding a parking lot and that it was the “worst possible use for a cemetery” and it “borders on

disrespect for our ancestors.”⁸ The April 5th *Halifax Mail Star* contained a section titled “People Say”, which contained two different sets of commentary by the people of Halifax. There was a sense of agreement among the two commentaries, with both expressing their objection to the parking lot and complete shock that something like this would be proposed.⁹ This is also where we can start to see the emphasis placed on the prominent people that are buried in the Old Burying Ground. According to one of the comments,

This is a sacred plot of land in which we commemorate such gallant people as Major Welsford and Captain Parker who fell at Sebastopol; Major Eramus James Phillips, founder of Freemasonry in Canada; Edward Winslow and Benjamin Kent and scores of Loyalists; General Robert Ross, distinguished leader and many another soldier and sailor who are buried in this sacred ground.¹⁰

This comment gives a sense of why the site was memorialized; the individuals of significant social status are deemed as an important part of the identity of the cemetery. What is curious about this is that in the comment above, most of the names listed are associated with the military. This demonstrates the larger body of power that the military continued to have in the narrative of Halifax even in the 1950s. Despite the overwhelming response of people being against the parking lot, there were some comments in the paper that expressed being in favor of having the cemetery paved over.

In the *Halifax Mail Star* on April 12, 1958 there were more commentaries in the “People Say” section, with one person asking “May we ask those who object to using St. Paul’s Cemetery for a parking lot just how long they expect to stay above ground?”¹¹ This individual also brought up how it might take another 30 years, but ultimately a time would come when people would be dissatisfied with having to drive around the block to find parking and that would make this the ideal spot to use since it is the old headstones that occupy the open space.¹² A comment such as

this one is very different than the strong opposition that was fairly consistently expressed in other commentaries and by the citizens of Halifax. It is likely that people in favor of the parking lot were largely in the minority and that probably explains why the Downtown Merchants Association did not get its parking lot.

The poor house burying ground and St. Peter's cemetery had a very insignificant number of articles covering the sites for the purpose of my research. Of the articles I did find, there was one that gave some details about the two sites in the same piece, another that gave the same lack of attention to both sites, and the remaining articles had to do with St. Peter's cemetery. The first article that I refer to was in the *Acadian Recorder* on December 9, 1882. This piece was called "Recollections of Halifax" and gave an in-depth account of an individual's memories of various parts of downtown Halifax. The author gives a detailed description of what the St. Peter's Church had looked like, as well as the cemetery. They said "the burial ground in the rear was enclosed by a low rough stone wall. Quite a number of early settlers are buried in this enclosure. Many that I was acquainted with, whose names I could give, but it may not be acceptable to do so."¹³ Upon reading this, there were many questions that came to mind. Why would it be unacceptable to talk about those individuals? It was important to go back over the beginning of the article where the writer indirectly explains what this might mean. When referring to a previously published letter, there was mention of information that might not have been recollected. The writer explained, "for time, as it rolls along, buries up much that has been hidden, and to unearth some of these things would have been the effect of opening up wounds that have healed and make them bleed afresh."¹⁴ Figure 2.2 displays the section of the paper where the writer explains the previous letter. Perhaps taking this information and re-examining

what was said about the cemetery gives some inference that by speaking of the dead here could bring to some light some problems that have been forgotten over time. By not speaking of those individuals though, there is a continuation of silencing the history of the people buried within this spot.

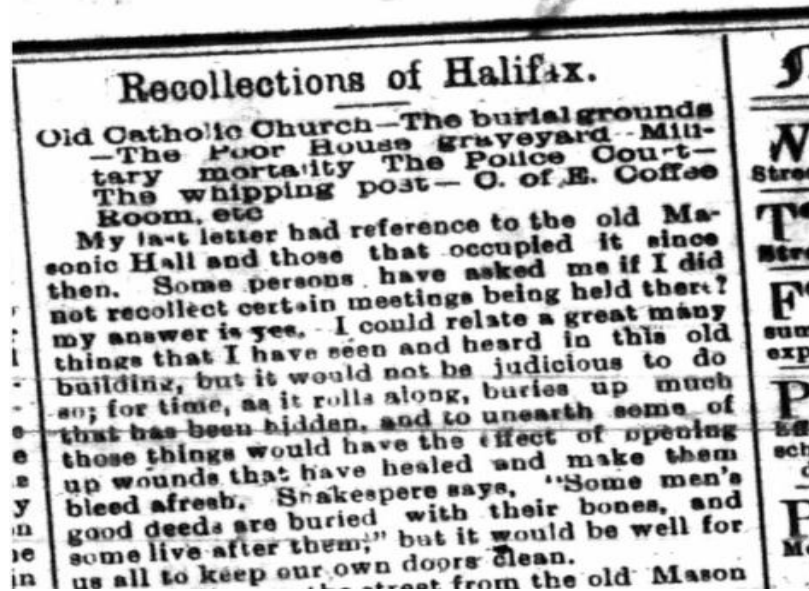


Figure 2.2: A section of the newspaper explaining a previous commentary piece. SOURCE: Acadian Recorder, December 9, 1882. NSA microfilm 5247.

There were very mixed perceptions of the poor house burying ground in the same article, discussing how there were talks happening to make modifications to the space and open it as a park. This was likely influenced by the rural cemetery movement. The individual writing the article expressed a sense of disagreement with this idea. The writer says, "I have seen it noticed in some of the city papers, recommending this enclosure to be thrown open to the public as a park, and roads to be made through it. Well, this may be in accordance with public opinion, but for myself, I have a great veneration for the dead, and do not like to see a grave disturbed..."¹⁵ There is quite obviously a sense of underlying beliefs to respect the dead and not disturb the

space, but what follows makes it an even more interesting statement: "... due respect should be paid to the resting place of the departed, even though it be a pauper's grave."¹⁶ This might imply that there are no physical markers there representing those interred on the site and that generally a pauper's grave would not have received this level of respect to not modify the sacred space.

In contrast to what is talked about in the previous paper, the *Halifax Evening Express* from September 22, 1862 contains a long write up about the Old Burying Ground as discussed earlier in this chapter and follows with information about other cemeteries in Halifax. These two sites receive very little mention, with what is now referred to as St. Mary's Cathedral Cemetery being said to have been "cared for long previous" before moving on to talk about the Holy Cross Cemetery, which replaced this early one.¹⁷ If such was case, there did not appear to be as much, if any, documentation about the work carried out there to maintain the space as there was for the Old Burying Ground, which was repeatedly in the paper for what was being improved within it. In the previous paper, there is respect given to the poor house burying ground by way of providing the opinion that the individual is opposed to a park being opened in the space. The *Halifax Evening Express* article gives a completely opposite opinion, where someone simply says, "the Poor House burial ground will probably be built upon at no distant day."¹⁸ There is no further commentary provided, but it does perhaps give a sense of what might be a shared belief that if the space is not actively being used for burials, it could instead be serving another purpose. It is fair to assume that this might also have just been offered as a general observation without representing any other perceptions of what could be done with the site.

One of the most significant finds regarding St. Peter's Cemetery was published in the *Halifax Mail* on September 22, 1913. This is the first article that demonstrated a combination of

fixing up the site, but also giving some indication as to those who were buried there. The old fence surrounding the cemetery had collapsed and work was underway to build a new one, but while the workers were excavating the post holes, human remains became disinterred.¹⁹ This was not something that surprised those passing by, as it was known that this had been the burying ground for St. Peter's. At this point in time, the space was being used as a children's playground²⁰, which could mean that on the site there would not have been any visible gravestones. Something worth noting is the way that the article begins to talk about those buried in the cemetery, saying such things as "The Pioneers Buried in Old St. Peter's" and "the bold petitioners who acted as a committee for their fellow Catholics."²¹ The emphasis on the individual's social status suggests that this is something worthy of reading about. It is an effective way of getting the reader's attention and giving them the information that it is not just the Old Burying Ground that has important figures buried in its grounds. The writer clearly lists a number of the settlers of Halifax, all with various roles and jobs, such as military officers, merchants and surgeons.²² They also talk of how one individual, Dr. Bartholomew Sullivan was moved from this cemetery to the Holy Cross Cemetery once it was opened.²³

The practice of exhuming the remains of those interred in St. Peter's and moving them to the new cemetery seems to have been quite common. One of the individuals moved was Bishop Edmund Burke, who died in 1820. Dr. Walsh had the remains of Bishop Burke exhumed in May 1846 and taken to the chapel located in the Holy Cross Cemetery, where a funeral was held followed by the reinterment of Bishop Burke's remains, where his final resting place was marked by a modest slab (O'Brien 1894, 140-141). This event likely inspired community members to also move their loved ones to the new cemetery. Those who remained buried at St.

Peter's had such temporary grave markers, that locations of many graves were left unmarked, leaving no record or memory of the individuals interred within. Despite people knowing of the previous church and its associated cemetery, there is mention of the diminishing memory of those who were buried there, with the writer saying, "the memory of many more of these pioneer Catholics has faded away."²⁴ If the memory of the more significant figures were fading away, that does not mean much for those who had lived a life that might not have been considered as significant.

This analysis of the early Halifax newspapers gives a sense of what was valued in order to maintain the cemeteries. With regards to the Old Burying Ground, there was much emphasis placed on maintaining the space as it was repeatedly documented in the archival record. Some of the reasons that came to light for this was a sense of duty to the dead and needing to undo the state of neglect that the cemetery fell into after Camp Hill Cemetery opened as its replacement. There was also a shared sense of commitment to ensuring that the site not be faced with the proposal to be paved over. Many community members felt that this was one of the worst ideas put forward and completely disrespected the many people whose final resting place was situated there, with a focus on those who played a significant role in establishing the city or those who were part of the military. When comparing what is documented about the Old Burying Ground to the other two sites, there is a noteworthy decrease in material. St. Peter's had some more mentions than the poor house burying ground and this gave some ideas as to why they may not have been memorialized in the same way as the Old Burying Ground. The poor house cemetery was faced with different options in the articles talking about it: construction either of a building or a public park. The empty space was likely what played a role in why the site was regarded as

not needing to be memorialized in the same way as its neighbour across the street. There was also no overwhelming sense of opposition to the space becoming Grafton Park or eventually the land for the Memorial Library. There could be records that give a sense of opposition in the same way that the Downtown Merchants Association received, but they are certainly not as readily available as the ones covering the Old Burying Ground.

St. Peter's had some interesting mentions regarding the early settlers buried there and the memory of the site. One piece gave a peculiar statement that it would not be appropriate to name the individuals known to the writer that were buried in the cemetery. In contrast to this, another piece had a couple columns worth of history regarding the more prominent individuals buried there, but even the author makes note of the fading memory of the other people that were buried there. This could be a result of failing to maintain the space, which would leave very little in terms of physical markers. Once an area becomes empty space, as we saw with the poor house burying ground, it is more apt to become used for something else. In the case of this site, it became a children's playground and eventually a parking lot. It is still unknown when this parking lot was paved, which in itself is significant that there was a decision made to do this and raises the issue of the failure to adequately protect our heritage at this time and in many other occasions. The Old Burying Ground was not faced with this because there were people in power directly involved with its maintenance, the community actively opposed any plans that did not preserve the heritage of the site, the physical markers in the space that maintained its identity as a cemetery, and the status of those buried there.

3. Modern Data and Comment Analysis

To choose the modern data sources, I started by simply searching “Halifax burying grounds” on Google to see what was coming up the most. Most of the discussion surrounding the downtown burying grounds in the last 8-10 years has been centred around the memorial library site, the location of the poor house burying ground. The other noteworthy mentions had to do with archaeological work being done at the Old Burying Ground. St. Peter’s interestingly only received three articles solely dedicated to recognizing its history. There was an interesting shift from what we could see present in the archival material; while the Old Burying Ground was still prominent in its recognition as a National Historic Site, we can now see how over time heritage has begun to be a more prominent part of the Halifax narrative. Another part of this data collection that was important for gauging the public interest and engagement with the sites was through social media and news article comments. In order to gather this data, I used the same search phrase I had on Google, but this time I conducted the search using Facebook. An important resource for collecting data was Dr. Jonathan Fowler’s “Archaeology in Acadie” Facebook page, where he has become a central voice in recognizing the importance of these historical burying grounds. This page has many individuals actively engaging with not only Dr. Fowler’s work, but also the material that he shares, which in this case were news articles covering the sites.

These comments further supplemented what was being expressed at face value in the articles by giving some insight into what the public wants. Lack of knowledge about the thousands of people buried right under their daily commute was common. There were also mixed opinions as to what should be done about these sites in the future. Some people echo what we

saw in 1958 when the Old Burying Ground was under threat of being paved over and that it did not matter what happened to these places because it is the dead. They raised the question of why we should care and by not developing these sites, we are just keeping Halifax behind in its overall development. Generally, there was a strong sense of advocating for the dead and people wanting to create the opportunity for individuals to learn more. Many agreed with the idea of putting a museum in the old memorial library building as a way to recognize these people that have been marginalized for so long. Others thought that having information panels on the site would be another way to help spread awareness and be a positive act to perhaps undo the choices of the past.

The present day coverage of The Old Burying Ground has much less happening in comparison to the level of attention it received in the archival material. One article encompasses the significance of the site, although it was a bit of an outlier in comparison to the other data collected. This piece was published in *The Coast* in June 2006, with Megan Wennberg taking a tour of the cemetery with Deborah Trask, who was part of the board of directors for the Old Burying Ground Foundation. The information that is available through the epitaphs and the gravestone art is part of what makes the cemetery such a significant site. Trask explains, “Each stone is the story of a life lived in Halifax. For some of them, these are the only records there are ever going to be, and that’s just a fact. I worry about, they’re so vulnerable” (Wennberg 2006). This mindset is different than what we saw in the earlier accounts in some ways. Before the emphasis was on repairing the cemetery and owing it to the ancestors buried there, but this mindset represents the desire to preserve the identity of those who might not have had a significant enough role in the community to have a detailed record about who they were. The

fact that there is an opportunity to protect this heritage is part of what makes the Old Burying Ground so different from the other sites and continues to factor into its memorialization.

Another article that talked about the Old Burying Ground was in the *Chronicle Herald* in October 2018. This covered the archaeological work that was being carried out by Dr. Fowler, Saint Mary's University students, and other members of the archaeology community. The project is part of a larger effort to accurately map the cemetery, working together with the Old Burying Ground Foundation to provide them with information that can be further used as a heritage resource and to aid in the protection of the site (Peddle 2018). The archaeological work was completed with the use of technology, namely the ground penetrating radar (GPR) and the EM38, which means there is no disturbance of any remains or materials below the soil. The data results for these surveys may give indications of what the team was setting out to look for, including old layouts of the cemetery, watercourses and headstones that may have been buried over time (Peddle 2018). This work was implemented into the Public Archaeology course in the fall semester of 2018, which gave students the opportunity to conduct archaeological field work, research and also engage with the public regarding what was being done. This is something that I further discuss in the next chapter. There is hope that with the work being done that there will be interest in conducting surveys on the adjacent cemetery sites in order to document what is still evident beneath the soil. If fieldwork were to be conducted on the other sites, it could aid in adding to what little documentation does exist about the cemeteries or create an historical database that does not currently exist.

For St. Peter's cemetery, there has been coverage of the site in a couple of different circumstances. The first was in *CBC News* in June 2012 regarding the potential for development

plans on the parking lot, which would potentially disturb any remains still beneath the pavement. The plans were to build a Cathedral Centre, and this brought forward an individual who questioned whether people knew what was beneath the pavement (CBC News 2012). Allen Robertson has become an advocate for the cemetery and brought up how parishioners would be interested to know about what lies beneath the parking lot (CBC News 2012). He makes an interesting point as it seems that many people are unaware of what historical significance the land holds, due in part to the failure to have a memorial on the site recognizing its previous use. The Archdiocese did give a statement to *CBC* regarding the development plans, saying, “they will comply with all regulations and they will have archaeological services in place to ensure the work is carried out properly” (CBC News 2012). It is curious whether they were aware of the cemetery and wanted to continue with the work regardless. Eight years have passed and there has been no development on the site and no other news coverage appears to exist covering any other plans or why these plans may have been cancelled. If the development was cancelled as a result of individuals such as Allen Robertson speaking up, this demonstrates a shift in the community effort to properly maintain this site in the only way that is left.

The other articles demonstrate a lot of overlap with mentioning not just St. Peter’s, but the neighbouring cemeteries, which have started to be referred to as Halifax’s necropolis. An opinion piece published in the *Chronicle Herald* in May 2019 talks about the various downtown cemeteries. The author talks about how there is no monument marking the burying ground beneath the parking lot beside St. Mary’s Basilica and how there are thousands of individuals buried there (DeMont 2019). St. Peter’s does not receive much more attention than that in this piece and many others. Despite the little attention it receives in individual articles and the small

mentions in overlapping ones, that does not seem to make it less valued in terms of recognizing its historical significance. Instead, it adds to the bigger picture of what needs to be done about the lack of memorialization for thousands of people.

The poor house burying ground has been a dominant topic in heritage matters since 2011. The Memorial Library was replaced by the new Public Library in 2014, leaving the old building to sit with lingering questions as to what should be done with it. This landscape has been a reoccurring issue in news articles, with many bringing forward questions about what can be done with the space since there are so many individuals buried on the property. In the last year, there was a lot of work done by heritage groups to meet with Halifax Council to designate the building and property as a municipal heritage building. *Saltwire* had a piece in December 2019, which brought in a lot of opinions from various heritage groups about how the city was handling the situation and what they would like to see happen. William Breckenridge, who is a director for the Halifax Military Heritage Preservation Society, made a few noteworthy comments, saying, “the city does not want to pay for anything and it doesn’t want to have to maintain historic buildings. It’s almost as if they are ashamed of our past. They’re pitting heritage against development” (Hayes 2019). Breckenridge makes an important point about the role the government has in these decisions. We can see that over time power plays an important part in the way each of the sites are remembered.

An important development occurred in February 2020, with Halifax Regional Council voting unanimously to give the Memorial Library and property municipal heritage designation. This is a very important action as it will give “an additional lens to inform future decisions” (Bogstie 2020). It is also important because it demonstrates that this is something happening

right now and shows that there is potential to have the St. Peter's cemetery acknowledged for its heritage value as well. There will still need to be more work done by the heritage groups moving forward as Dalhousie University has expressed interest in the building for its school of architecture, as well as municipal space and leasable commercial space (Bogstie 2020). These plans have created a bit of a divide between council members, with some willing to create a plan in order to accommodate any development, and others claiming they will not support this proposal. Matt Whitman said, "I am not going to support this property and these thousands of bodies being exhumed or dug up or altered in any way and this deserves a lot more than just a plaque" (Bogstie 2020). Mindsets like that of Whitman are important for advocating for these sites and ensuring that they are preserved and memorialized in a respectful manner.

Another article that was recently published by *CBC News* was written by Dr. Fowler. This piece prompted a lot of response from the public due to one of the ending lines in the article, asking the following questions: "What do we owe those who came before us? A quiet resting place? A monument? Nothing at all? And what care is due to their works?" (Fowler 2020). I used this as an opportunity to look for comments by readers for their opinions on the downtown burying grounds and how they should be treated. Figure 3.1 displays one of the comments on the article link on the *CBC News* Facebook page. In this image we can see that people feel that there will eventually be no choice whether we dig up the dead or have to build on top of them. Others responding to this comment agreed and gave information about other places that are either putting a lease on burial spaces or pointing out how bodies do not last for long in the ground in Canada or the United States. Comments such as these demonstrate a disconnect with the heritage aspect of burial grounds. People take a realist perspective and feel

that the only way around these matters is to eventually build on the sites. By providing more information to the public and developing archaeological management plans, there is an opportunity to work openly with the public in order to preserve the heritage of the sites.



Figure 3.1: Screenshot from CBC News Facebook page displaying comments in response to a recent news article. SOURCE: CBC News Facebook, March 2020.

Figure 3.2 displays more comments from the *CBC News* Facebook page. This time there is more variety in what is being said. One person brings up how this area is a part of Halifax history that we should hold on to, while another makes the point that money plays a significant role in how we ultimately treat the dead. This is true and echoes comments by such people as

William Breckenridge, where he mentioned how development and heritage are being pitted against one another. In order to move the remains of those interred on the property, it would cost thousands or millions of dollars, which is one of the ongoing problems with determining what to do with the old library. But there are many ideas that the public has suggested that could be taken into consideration by the Halifax Regional Council.

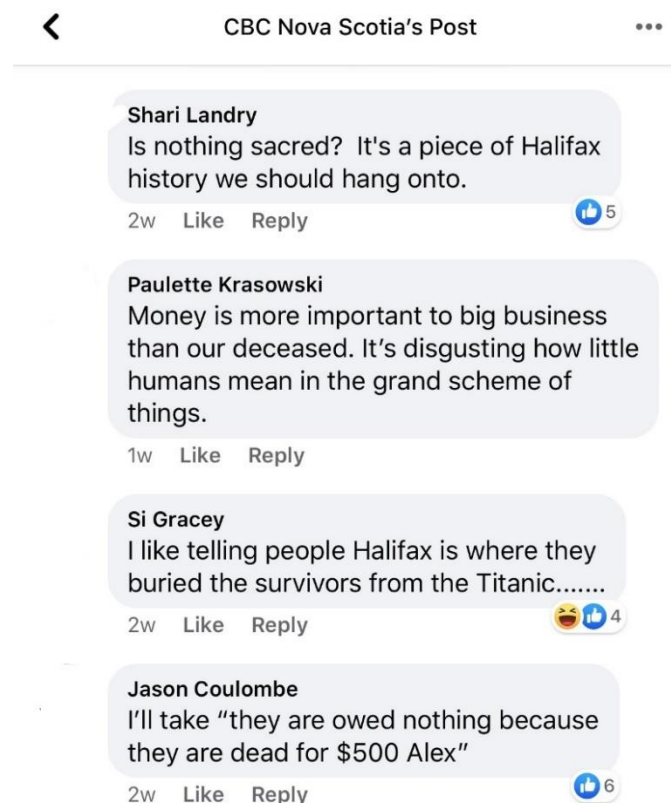


Figure 3.2: Screenshot from CBC News Facebook page displaying comments in response to a recent news article. SOURCE: CBC News Facebook, March 2020.

Figure 3.3 displays comments made on the *CBC News* article on their website. These comments again show some divide in what people think of what is owed to the dead. Two of the comments are positive, praising the sites as an interesting part of Halifax's history and wanting to have some records of the individuals that have been buried. The other comment suggested that

it was nice to have a plot of land that breaks up the chaos of the surrounding city. The final comment is vastly different, claiming that the memories of the individual are what matters and that the body is nothing once it is dead. They also claim that people do not need to go visit the site to remember someone. These comments may be true for this individual but may not apply to everyone. Visiting a cemetery for some is a necessary part of grieving or paying respects. It is a different case in terms of the poor house burying ground and St. Peter's because there are currently no physical markers in the form of headstones. A memorial could serve the same purpose and is worth considering so more people can be aware of the significance of the sites and have the ability to pay them the respect they deserve.

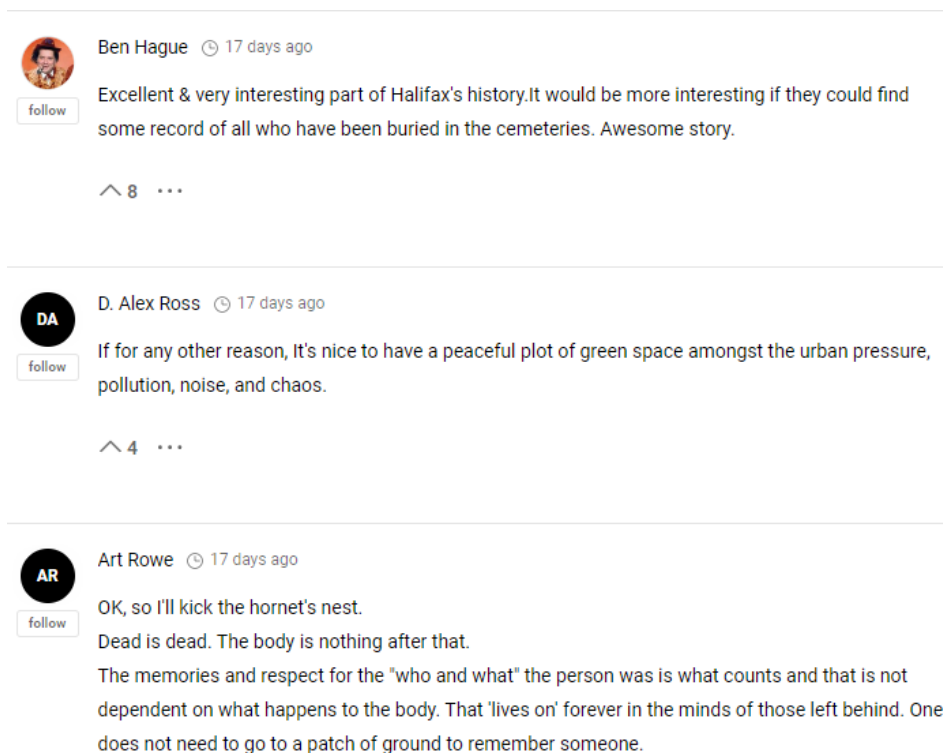


Figure 3.3: Screenshot from CBC.ca displaying comments in response to a recent news article. SOURCE: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/jonathan-fowler-halifax-burial-ground-cemetery-archeology-1.5471209>, March 2020.

It was striking to see how over time, there has not been a great shift in the way that people regard the sites. Of course, now we can look at them in hindsight and use our understanding of things like marginalization to understand what happened to those who were of the lowest class in Halifax society. The most significant shifts in the public perceptions seems to have gone from being fixated on the Old Burying Ground in the mid-nineteenth century and preserving the memory of those significant figures in Halifax history to the overall heritage that Halifax has to offer. This is also evident in the attention that is now being paid to the poor house burying ground. In the archival sources, there was hardly mention of the cemetery, but now it is an area of much debate. As for St. Peter's, it is still fairly unmentioned on its own. With this being the year of the 200th anniversary of the construction of St. Mary's Basilica, it will be interesting if this is something that could also bring more awareness to the burying ground. Positive steps are happening in terms of recognizing the historical significance of this area, with reference to the Memorial Library gaining a heritage designation. If public engagement online could continue in other active ways, such as attending council meetings or getting in touch with those working in the heritage sector or who have a place on Halifax regional council, there might be more of a push to acknowledge this part of Halifax history. The online comments demonstrate a mix of opinions, but ultimately, they are mostly in favor of preserving the heritage rather than further destroying it. For those who are against preservation, it is mostly due to them feeling that it is more logical to build on the sites or that the dead simply do not matter.

Online comments are also a useful source to analyze through the subfield of digital public mortuary archaeology. This subfield is represented through a wide variety of online data, which can focus on graves, cemeteries, monuments, memorials, and landscapes (Williams and Atkin

2015). There is a lot of potential for this type of public engagement in the future, as the media continues to act as a dominant presence in our lives. Comments on social media regarding archaeological sites gives researchers the chance to examine what sort of interests the public have about mortuary archaeology and to track the more problematic aspects of people engaging with the material. It was evident in the social media and news comments that people at times lacked a level of sensitivity that might normally be expressed when referring to the dead. These comments were typically laced with humor or the presentation of ‘facts’ that were used to argue being logical or realistic about the future of the sites. Comments like this can “undermine attempts to afford historical and cultural context [and] respect and sensitivity to past people” (William and Atkin 2015). In terms of the poor house burying ground and St. Peter’s Cemetery, these undermining comments are noticeable because the public lacks an understanding of the history and significance of the sites. It is also challenging to create the opportunity for those who are against the idea of preserving the heritage of the sites to learn more about them, when there are currently no online resources to interact with and learn from. Right now, social media posts and news articles are the most readily accessible form of learning and becoming aware of these sites, for the general public. It is not to be expected that everyone would change their opinion regarding heritage matters if they were more informed, but it is worthwhile to monitor these interactions online to see how best to continue to reach out to the members of the public who are interested.

4. Public Archaeology, Public Memory and Tourism in Halifax

Public archaeology can be defined as “both a disciplinary practice and a theoretical position, through communication with the public, involvement of the public or the preservation and administration of archaeological resources for public benefit by voluntary or statutory organizations” (Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez 2015, 194). This is a subfield that is rapidly growing, but still requires some fine tuning regarding the broader understanding of what it entails and the limits of use that have been placed on it, such as something that is used for outreach activities (Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez 2015, 205). There are benefits to engaging with the public once archaeologists have developed a proper system and deal with areas of concern regarding the ethics of practicing public archaeology.

Public archaeology is important in regards to these sites because it promotes interest, which can inspire action. In the fall of 2018, archaeological work was conducted at the Old Burying Ground. We surveyed the landscape to create an inventory of the individuals buried there. This ultimately sparked the interests of passers by and people visiting the cemetery. As students working on the site, we were able to gather a sense of people’s interests in not just the work being done, but also the cemetery itself. The most common questions I was asked included, “How old is this cemetery?” “Is anyone from the Titanic buried here?” and “Is anyone from the Halifax Explosion buried here?” This was curious to me and it gave some indication of what parts of history people were well versed in or at least what they associated old cemeteries with, as well as the value humans’ place in connection. The sinking of the Titanic and the Halifax Explosion were two tragic events that have been well memorialized over time. People have taken those events and romanticized them in such a way that allows them to more deeply connect with

the human experience. How did those people feel in their final moments? How did their families feel? What was their story? We become so good at remembering certain histories, that we inadvertently silence others.

It is unlikely that, walking down Spring Garden Road, people are thinking of the necropolis beneath their feet. And who would know this unless you are well versed in the history of Halifax? We have become unaware of history right below us as we place a larger emphasis on more well known narratives. Far more often than not, people are exposed to lessons in history that “have not been subjected to the standards set by peer reviews, university presses, or doctoral committees” (Trouillot 1995, 20). This can be problematic for a number of reasons, but most significantly for the access and further spread of misinformation, and also the continuation of the dominant narrative. Going back to the burying grounds, there is always an overarching narrative that casts a shadow over the most important part of the cemetery: the memory of those interred there. The memorial library has become the overarching story on the site of the poor house burying ground. Recently, in February, it did help in achieving the heritage designation of the property, which will help ensure extra steps of protection and acknowledgment in future development plans. This is only one small step though. The narrative is still focused on the building and what to do with it without disturbing the remains of 4,500 individuals. In order to make larger steps, there needs to be a shift towards giving a voice to the individuals buried there.

Tours of the city offer a select number of places that tourists can visit and learn about. The tourist attractions are often the well known spots in the city: Citadel Hill, the Alexander Keith Brewery, Fairview Lawn Cemetery, the Public Gardens, and so on. As with any tour, Halifax offers its highlight reel. There is not much exposure to other parts of the city’s extensive

history. The tragic elements that tend to be touched on include Halifax's involvement with the Titanic and the recovery mission which resulted in many burials within the city, and the Halifax Explosion. These events resonate with the human experience and continue to be something people are fascinated with. These events also demonstrate the power of some historical narratives over others. Doing some research on the Discover Halifax²⁵ website, you can view the different experiences that you can have while visiting Halifax. While the website does a good job of highlighting Halifax's history, it does not list the Old Burying Ground, St. Mary's Basilica or the Memorial Library within the historical experiences. If you delve a little deeper and do a search of key words, such as 'burying grounds', it will bring up some information about the unmarked graves associated with two of the sites and some information about the Old Burying Ground. But as individual representations of what the sites have come to be associated with, they do not receive any mention. The Harbour Hopper does go by all these sites and gives a brief history of the St. Mary's Basilica and the Old Burying Ground, but there is no information provided about the original structure that was on the site of the Basilica or the cemetery beneath the parking lot. Realistically, there is only so much that can be covered in a tour that goes to many spots in the city, but it does beg the question of who decides what is covered and what is considered to be minor details?

For the St. Peter's site, it is a different situation than the other two burying grounds in that it has received significantly minor mention in the archival record and in newspapers. There are formal burial records available from 1801 on, but there are no records of the earlier years of the cemetery use (Genealogical Association of Nova Scotia 2017). The lack of records makes it challenging to give a story to those of who were buried in the cemetery in its first years of use,

but there is still an opportunity there to tell the stories of those who were interred from 1801 until the closure of the cemetery. In regard to this site, it is important to note that “any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly” (Trouillot 1995, 27). This is important to remember because although this site faced a level of injustice that the poor house burying ground also did, they both have different histories that need to be told which will ultimately lead to a different set of outcomes for both due to the types of injustices they experienced.

The Old Burying Ground is unique to its neighbours in its level of preservation, as well as its designation as a National Historic Site. This burying ground has a dominant military narrative attached to it. Two very obvious associations with this include the Welsford-Parker monument erected in 1860 and a large sign on the iron fence outside the cemetery providing detailed information about Robert Ross, who was involved in the burning of the White House in the War of 1812. These are noteworthy before you even enter the cemetery. Figure 4.1 displays the Welsford-Parker monument and part of the sign about Robert Ross.



Figure 4.1 A photograph from across the street of the Old Burying Ground, displaying the Welsford-Parker monument and the Robert Ross sign (bottom left). SOURCE: Adeena Fox, November 2017.

Walking among the stones, you further gain a sense of the garrison town that Halifax has its history rooted in. The role of the military as the majority of the ruling class in Halifax during its early period is significant in how it “carefully controls the form and content of historical recreations and tourist landscapes, legitimizing itself by projecting its own contemporary sociocultural values upon the past” (Norkunas 1993, 97). These values are exemplified again by the Welsford-Parker monument and the ceremony which took place to celebrate its unveiling. Figure 4.2 displays a photograph of the ceremony in the Old Burying Ground to unveil the new monument.



Figure 4.2: A Photograph of the proceedings at the Old Burying Ground to unveil the Welsford-Parker Monument, 1860.
SOURCE: W. Chase, Nova Scotia Archives, no.8 / neg. no.: N-9491.

The ceremony was attended by public officials, all of the Halifax and Dartmouth Volunteer Companies, and a large number of Halifax citizens.²⁶ The event started at the Grand Parade and a parade commenced with bands of music to march to the Old Burying Ground.²⁷

Once everyone arrived to the cemetery, there was a moment for prayer and prominent figures, such as the Lieutenant Governor and military officials, made speeches to the crowd.²⁸ The large turn out to celebrate the unveiling of the monument, especially the attendance of those prominent figures, demonstrates the significance of the military role in the city. This monument also acts a representation of the ties the city had with the British Empire.

There were always distinctions of social class and divide among the early citizens of Halifax. We can see this in the records by way of descriptions such as “labourers and servants, although they constituted the majority of Halifax’s civilian population, rarely appear in the record and when they do, usually it involves complaints over how the “lower orders” were addicted to criminality” (Fingard, Guildford and Sutherland 1999, 36). There is also an indication of the lack of records of lower class citizens through this reference, which could explain a bias in what records do exist by how the middle and upper classes perceived them. Those in the lower class did not get to write their own history. In the nineteenth century, the role of Halifax’s longstanding power structure continued with the upper class consisting of merchants, colonial officials and those who had a prominent role in the learned professions (Fingard, Guildford and Sutherland 1999, 52). There was a blur between the middle and upper class, which mostly had to do with certain factors of religion and kinship (Fingard, Guildford and Sutherland 1999, 52). The poor still made up the majority of the town and were largely perceived as dangerous, which ultimately meant that those in the middle to upper classes were hesitant to step away from the power structure that Halifax had long maintained (Fingard, Guildford and Sutherland 1999, 53).

As Norkunas explains, “the tension between groups with power and groups with varying but lesser degrees of power, is replayed in the many spheres in which the public enactment of identity is staged” (1993, 97). So what we are seeing in the historical record in the form of bias and even lack of record keeping, or lack of voice of the experience of the individual, is passed down through time and continues to be exemplified by the lack of awareness regarding the burying grounds and those interred there. This is further done through the tourism industry by continuing to underrepresent these parts of Halifax’s history. In her work of looking at public memory in Monterey, California, Martha Norkunas makes recommendations for the tourism industry where they become more mindful of representing the real history of the historical landscape (1993, 98). One of two suggestions she makes that could be applicable to the burying grounds include acknowledging “that power must be shared with minority populations and that prevailing perspective on the past must be radically altered” (Norkunas 1993, 99). This could be done by introducing a place where Halifax history is readily available to the public, perhaps in the form of a museum. By creating this space, people would be able to learn more about the darker parts of the city’s past. Other ways that could achieve this is by way of introducing memorials to acknowledge the individuals laid to rest in the poor house burying ground and at St. Peter’s. As emphasized by Norkunas, this cannot be done without the community moving to enact these suggestions within the larger historical and tourism landscapes (1993, 99).

Conclusion

Burial grounds are important historical resources that allow glimpses into the past. Various aspects of social status can become obvious through the treatment of the dead, which is often evident through marked and unmarked graves. The downtown burying grounds of Halifax are no exception to this and doing a further analysis of three sites in particular, we can begin to see what factors contribute to the memorialization of some sites and the lack thereof for others. The sites chosen for this research included the Old Burying Ground, the poor house burying ground and St. Peter's cemetery, all located in close proximity to one another.

I chose to analyze these three cemeteries through archival newspapers following their closures in 1843-1844 to get a better sense of how the public continued to engage with these sites when they were no longer being actively used for burials. The archival data ranged in dates from the 1860s to the late 1950s. This data created the beginning of a timeline of events relating to these cemeteries. The modern news articles and subsequent comments were chosen based on what was being discussed about the sites, such as the threat of construction, archaeological work or heritage matters. It was important to place equal value in both the archival and modern material as these both complemented one another in gaining a sense of how people have continued to engage with these sites over time and what aspects of these engagements have changed.

In the early newspapers, much of the coverage was related to the Old Burying Ground and the necessary actions needed to fix the space up. It is obvious that much of the community cares about preserving this space and the members of council are often the ones who inspire community efforts to maintain the cemetery, either through public meetings or gathering funds.

In contrast to this, the other cemeteries receive very little mention. The poor house burying ground is only talked about in a couple sources and there are varying opinions about the site, with some being opposed to using the open space for anything other than a cemetery and others believing that the site will eventually be built on. St. Peter's is talked about in an individual's recollections of what the site once looked like and in another piece from 1913 where human remains are disinterred. The article from 1913 gave indications of how important social status was due to the fact the only people that were remembered in this piece were those who had been well established in their careers and lives.

The modern news articles offered quite a shift in focus compared to the archival material. There is significant coverage of the land where the poor house burying ground is located regarding what should be done with the site since the Memorial Library had been replaced by a new library in 2014. These debates about the site began in 2011 and still continue until the present day, with there finally being heritage designation granted to the building and the property. St. Peter's is rarely in the news as its own matter, with there only being one piece in particular from 2012 that focused on development plans that were going to directly impact the parking lot which has thousands of individuals buried beneath it. Aside from this, the cemetery is mostly mentioned along with the matters of the poor house burying ground. The Old Burying Ground also receives little mention, with most of the focus being on archaeological work being conducted to further preserve the site.

Through the analysis of the newspapers and articles, I have shown the different ways the public has and continues to be engaged with these sites. By completing this analysis, I proposed that many of the reasons the Old Burying Ground has been memorialized in comparison to its

neighbours is related to the level of preservation the site holds and the military associations, but also the larger ideas of power that dominate the site. It is evident that many community members wanted to preserve the memory of those who are most well known and associated with building the Halifax that we know today. The Old Burying Ground has not gone without experiencing its own threats of destruction as we saw in the Downtown Merchants Association proposal. But what is different is that the community actively spoke out and made it more difficult for this to happen. This is something that is beginning to happen in the heritage sector regarding the unmarked cemeteries and there has already been small victories made to protect one of the sites. Moving forward, we can hope that as the public continues to advocate for these sites, we will eventually bring justice to those who quietly lie beneath their unmarked spaces.

Notes

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- ¹ *Acadian Recorder*, April 14, 1860. p.3 col 2. Nova Scotia Archives (NSA) microfilm 23414.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ *Halifax Evening Express*, September 22, 1862. p.2 col. 1 and 2. NSA microfilm 6596.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ *Halifax Mail Star*, April 3, 1958. p. 1 col 1. NSA microfilm 7471.
- ⁹ *Halifax Mail Star*, April 5, 1958. p.4 NSA microfilm 7471.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ *Halifax Mail Star*, April 12, 1958. p.4 NSA microfilm 7471.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ *Acadian Recorder*, December 9, 1882. p.2 col 4. NSA microfilm 5247.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ *Halifax Evening Express*, September 22, 1862. p. 2 NSA microfilm 6596.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ *Halifax Mail*, September 22, 1913. [from Dr. Fowler]
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ <https://discoverhalifaxns.com/>, accessed January 12, 2020.
- ²⁶ <https://novascotia.ca/archives/Halifax/archives.asp?ID=74>, accessed April 14, 2020.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid.

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