

MOUNTAIN VIEW AND ST. PATRICK'S CEMETERIES THUNDER BAY'S SLEEPING PLACES

Fort William's first cemetery consisted of a few acres of fenced-in land on the Kaministiquia River, one and one-half miles from its mouth. When this site, known as the "old town plot", was required for industry, the bodies were removed and taken to the newly-opened Mountain View Cemetery site (owned by Peter and John McKellar) which was located seven miles from the mouth of the Kaministiquia River.¹ On November 5, 1901, Fort William town Council passed By-law 280 which enabled them to acquire lands for a public cemetery. They purchased Mountain View from Peter and John McKellar on November 12, 1901, for the nominal sum of \$48.00.² The town now owned the cemetery and a committee of Council was appointed to take charge of the cemetery and all affairs connected with it.³

The oldest known grave that was transferred to Mountain View dated back to 1831. Many other transferred graves from the 19th Century may be found at Mountain View, but most inscriptions are worn down and difficult to read.⁴

Council decided to designate their new purchase as "The Fort William Public Cemetery". According to "Facts and Fancies" in the Daily Times-Journal of November 6, 1901, the people would approve of the town taking over the cemetery but its name would pose a problem. The author felt that "public" would imply a Potter's Field (an unmarked area set for indigent burials) and, "There would be no sentiment in a letter written to parents that their son was laid to rest in a 'public cemetery'. It savours too much of being buried by the authorities and not by friends".⁵

The new rules and regulations of By-law 280 were enacted and it was thereafter made unlawful to bury any body within the town limits. The Corporation of the Town of Fort William was now in charge of burials and burial grounds. No other cemeteries were to exist within the boundaries of the town.⁶

Unfortunately, information on the early cemetery years is scarce as all the records were lost in the town hall fire of 1903. A fireproof vault was built at the cemetery in 1904 and, from then on, records have been safely stored there with duplicates kept at City Hall.

Along the west side of Mountain View Cemetery, as it was popularly known, lay St. Patrick's Cemetery, which was operated by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Fort William. They had purchased the land in 1899, also from John McKellar.⁷

¹ Thunder Bay Historical Society, Papers of 1916, p.10.

² Land titles and Registry Office, Instrument #638, November 12, 1901. Agreement between Peter McKellar (Executor for John McKellar who died on February 3, 1900) and the Corporation of the Town of Fort William.

³ Daily times-Journal, Fort William, November 6, 1901.

⁴ Chronicle-Journal, Thunder Bay, 81/04/11, article by Bruce Langer.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Daily Times-Journal, Fort William, March 28, 1967.

⁷ Land Titles and Registry Office, Instrument #600, May 5, 1899. Agreement between John McKellar and Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of the Diocese of Peterborough for \$25.00.



Family Plot of Pioneer, John McKellar, In Mountain View Cemetery

The church experienced financial difficulties in operating their cemetery and, in 1905, requested funds from Council in order to maintain it. Council provided money for caretaking and improving St. Patrick's Cemetery for 1905 and continued this grant in other years at the request of the Diocese.⁸

In May, 1917, a street car connection between the City of Fort William and Mountain View Cemetery was constructed. The City already had the supplies on hand and the cost of construction was kept to wages for labour. According to the Daily Times-Journal on May 21, the line would be well patronized as over 100 people had travelled to the cemetery on foot the previous day. James Murphy offered the use of his lot adjoining to the southwest of the cemetery as a park. His lot ran to the Kaministiquia River and included a "beautiful little lake with an island in the centre that would make an ideal spot for picnic parties."⁹ Murphy's Park, as it was known, was accessible by river and the new street railway. Clearly, in 1917, citizens were interested in the cemetery area as a place of passive recreation as well as a place for interment of the departed.

Later in May 1917, the Board of Park Management informed Council that they were ready to assume responsibility for the care of Mountain View Cemetery whenever Council was prepared to transfer the same. Council gladly handed the task over to the Board on May 22, 1917.¹⁰

The Board of Park Management commenced taking care of the cemetery, although a new by-law giving them legal and official authority was to come later. The Board felt this by-law was essential for the proper administration of the cemetery. In 1917, they began discussing this issue with a special Council committee. After two years with no results, they sent a communication to Council on March 14, 1919, stating that "The Board would be pleased to be advised on what is the Council's pleasure with reference to the cemetery, as it is not desirable that the indefinite and uncertain position of affairs should be continued".¹¹

⁸ Cemetery and Parks Minute Book 1904-05. February 21, 1905, and June 21, 1905.

⁹ Daily Times-Journal, Fort William, May 19 and 21, 1917.

¹⁰ Fort William City Council May 22, 1917, motion by Barabe and seconded by MacDonald and Board of Park Management May 11/17.

¹¹ Parks Board March 14, 1919.

Council finally approved By-law 1885 for the administration of the cemetery by the Parks Board on April 16, 1919.

Starting in May and June that year, cemetery matters of concern were brought before the Board of Park Management. These included such things as permission to erect monuments and cornerstones, tenders and sketches for fixing the vault, prices for care of graves, caretaker's wages and so on.

In 1923, when the Catholic cemetery required assistance from the City. The Parks Board agreed to undertake to improve the cemetery. Mr. Gray's salary was raised from \$100 to \$125 per month in view of the extra work involved in looking after St. Pat's.¹²



**Mr. George Gray, Burial Site
Superintendent of
MountainView Cemetery
1914 - 1942**

Unfortunately, the Board of Park Management also encountered some financial problems when in 1924 Council declined to give them the usual grant of \$1750, giving \$1000 instead. The Board members explained that they would be forced to drop the supervision and upkeep of the cemetery unless given an adequate amount of funding. "The members of the Parks Board claim they cannot possibly keep the grounds in shape for less than the amount previously allowed for the purpose and prefer to turn the job back to the City after the end of this month, rather than accept the responsibility of the cemetery reverting to the condition it was in before they took it over years ago."¹³

The Board members were also quick to point out that they had not been receiving any interest from the Perpetual Maintenance Fund. According to By-law 1885, a Board of Trustees was to be responsible for the investment of the Perpetual Maintenance Fund and for the collection of the interest. The Board should have been receiving some of this money for yearly maintenance. City Council, interested in the Board of Park Management's continued upkeep of the cemetery, amended the by-law in June 1924, allowing 50% of the interest from the Perpetual

¹² Board April 13, 1923, May 11, 1923, June 8, 1923.

¹³ Daily Times-Journal, Wednesday, May 28, 1924.

Maintenance Fund to be available to the Parks Board for annual maintenance. The other 50% was to be reinvested.¹⁴ The Board was satisfied and continued to maintain the cemetery.

In November, 1927, the Parks Board purchased 41.6 acres from the Canadian National Railways. This land was located to the north of Broadway Avenue, across from the original cemetery site. It was to be developed for cemetery purposes since the lots at Mountain View were almost sold out.¹⁵

The Parks Board continued to operate and maintain Fort William's expanding public cemetery, as well as providing assistance to the Catholic cemetery as required. Many new by-laws were enacted from the 1920's through to the 1960's, dealing mostly with new rules and regulations and increased fee schedules.

Mountain View Cemetery, which had once been in the quiet countryside, was slowly being surrounded by industry, housing and highways. The cemetery itself was also growing. In 1962, there was talk of the possibility of building a chapel and public shelter at Mountain View. Originally, this task was planned as a "civic do-it-yourself project", with a minimal cost of \$5,000. By the time construction began in 1966, the contract was worth \$20,000.¹⁶

As well as being a year of construction, 1966 was a year of destruction. The cemetery superintendent's house on Broadway Avenue was removed to make way for the new Thunder Bay Expressway. Originally, the superintendent had lived in a house on the cemetery grounds. This house was then moved west on Broadway and its modern replacement was demolished in 1966.¹⁷

St. Patrick's Cemetery was also running out of space for future use. The clergy had purchased some land beside their cemetery but it was zoned residential. Mr. Thompson, City Planner, in his report on this issue, said "Society in this enlightened age does not have the superstitious apprehension of a bygone era toward a graveyard. Its quietness and beauty in landscaping is not without passive refreshment but the fact remains the residents in close vicinity will continuously witness sorrow of interments and subsequent visits of bereaved relatives and friends".¹⁸

He expressed the opinion that a buffer zone was needed between the cemetery and nearby residential area. St. Patrick's Cemetery could not expand onto this property as it was to remain a buffer.

Plots were set aside in the north section of Mountain View for Roman Catholic burials, due to the shortage of lots at St. Patrick's. The City of Thunder Bay also purchased an additional six acres of land south of the two cemeteries in 1971. This was cleared and developed by the Parks and Recreation Department.¹⁹

¹⁴ Board June 13, 1924, November 14, 1924, January 30, 1925. By-law 3010 to amend 1885.

¹⁵ Fort William Board of Park Management. November 17, 1927.

¹⁶ Daily Times-Journal March 3, 1962, March 9, 1966, By-law 21-66.

¹⁷ Times-News, September 24, 1976.

¹⁸ Daily Times-Journal, May 30, 1970.

¹⁹ Daily Times-Journal, August 20, 1971 – purchased six acres from Ontario Hydro for \$450 an acre.

The inevitable finally occurred in January of 1972, when the Roman Catholic Diocese informed the City that they could no longer support full-time staff for the upkeep of their cemetery without the revenue from the sale of new plots.

They requested a meeting to discuss the merger of the operation of their cemetery with Mountain View.²⁰

It was decided that such a merger was feasible for several reasons. The two cemeteries were adjacent to one another and, therefore, staff and equipment would be readily available for maintenance. The Perpetual Maintenance Fund from the Parish would be transferred to the City funds and help to offset additional operating costs. The amalgamated cemeteries would be operated as a common burial ground, reducing the segregation and changing the images of the two cemeteries. Finally, capital improvements required by both parties would service the entire community.²¹

At a Council meeting on April 25, 1972, the resolution for the takeover of St. Patrick's was confirmed. The documents were sent to the Ontario Government for their approval in 1973. The transactions were completed early in 1974 and the City now officially operated two public cemeteries.²² The Parks and Recreation Department maintained the grounds of St. Patrick's Cemetery while the legal transactions were being concluded.

In 2003, a joint effort of the CWGC, DVA and the City resulted in the restoration of 266 war graves, complete with new headstones. At the same time, Cemetery staff took the initiative to restore a World War I vintage Germany artillery piece to showcase the military area.

²⁰ Letter from F. St. James, Rector of St. Patrick's Cemetery to Rob McCormack, Director of Parks and Recreation, January 13, 1972.

²¹ Letter from W.E. Mokomela, Assistant City Co-ordinator – Operations, to Mr. E.C. Reid, City Co-ordinator, April 11, 1972.

²² By-law 157-1974, amended By-law 136-1977.