

The Burial Registers of St. Peter's/St. Mary's Halifax, Nova Scotia Prologue

St. Peter's Chapel was constructed in colonial Halifax on the site currently occupied by the Sanctuary of St. Mary's Basilica a year after passage of the 1783 Nova Scotia Catholic Relief Act. This legislation confirmed land titles held by Roman Catholics and repealed penalties against Roman Catholic priests. A burial ground was consecrated on property adjacent to that Chapel, and from 1784 to 1843 Roman Catholics were buried there.

Burial records for the Church are incomplete. Surviving burial registers detail interments of 2,578 men, women and children. When one considers the years for which no records exist, a conservative estimate places the population of this relatively small burying ground at more than 3,000 persons. Within the boundaries of this cemetery today are the former St. Mary's Girls' School and parking lots adjacent to the Cathedral Basilica.

Presumably burials commenced soon after St. Peter's Chapel was opened in 1784. Aside from Baptism, Marriage and Burial records on loose pages spanning the last five months of 1800, no records of those early years have survived. Formal burial records began with the arrival of Edmund Burke, Vicar Apostolic, in 1801. He recorded the earliest documented interment, the wife of a senior French royal colonial official:

The fourth of October Eighteen Hundred and One, I the undersigned, on the testimony of the Trustees & the Book of Receipts & Expenses delivered a Certificate of the Death of Mme. de Longueville which happened on the sixth of Sept, 1797, to her husband, M. de Longueville from Guadeloupe.

Surviving Sacramental Registers run consecutively from October of 1801 until February 1803. Burial registers recommence in January 1816 and are complete until early February 1842. Committals continued on the site until the opening of Holy Cross Cemetery on Halifax's South Park St. in the late summer of 1843. Regrettably, records for St. Peter's/St. Mary's burying ground during these final months have not survived. From existing data one is able, nonetheless, to construct with considerable reliability the known population of this early burial ground:

650 children, 5 years or younger,
238, almost 10% of the total known burials, infants 12 months or younger;
257 British soldiers or their dependants;
17 noted as “coloured”;
12 born in England;
10 from Scotland;
8 natives of Germany;
4 recorded as “Mic Mac” or “Indian”;
The Russian Ambassador to the United States, Baron de Tuyll, was buried there in April of 1826.

Nine hundred and seven persons buried in the cemetery were natives of Ireland.

Among them were 31 passengers from the ship *Cumberland*, 46 days out of Waterford, who died of typhus within one month of arriving in Halifax in July 1827 and were buried on the site.

Additionally, 138 persons recorded in parish Burial Registers had been residents of the nearby Poors’ Asylum at the time of their deaths.

Reflecting the increasing maturity of the colony, 619 individuals buried in the cemetery were described as being “of this town,” implying they had been born in Halifax.

In transcribing these burial registers, care has been taken to balance clarity with accuracy. As such, the transcriptions retain the original grammar and spelling; however, in the interest of clarity, abbreviations were expanded. For example, W^m was transcribed as William. Finally, deviating from the original format in order to facilitate digital searching, the information has been arranged in columns

The format in the burial registers consists of a name and date written in the margin, with a more detailed description of the deceased recorded beside it. A typical entry reads as follows:

1842 (at the top of the page)

Feb 7
Patrick Maher

I the undersigned buried Patrick Maher aged
62 years a seafaring man by profession and a
native of the County Kilkenny Ireland
J. Loughman

In the case of married women, priests frequently used maiden names in recording burials. To simplify retrieval of information, married women have been listed under their married names, followed by maiden names. Below is an example of a married woman's record in the Registers:

1842
Jan 30
Louisa McGrath

I the undersigned buried Louisa
McGrath aged 25 years wife of
John Longard and a native of this
place

J. Loughman PP

In the digital transcription, this entry has been recorded as Longard, nee McGrath, Louisa.

Please note that spelling was not standardized in this time period. As such, surnames were often spelled according to the interpretation of the scribe, producing such variations as "Daily" "Daly" or "Daley" even within members of the same family.

It is hoped that users will find this transcription of the St. Peter's/St. Mary's burial registers to be a valuable tool in their genealogical and historical research.

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