

## **Press Release 15 August 2017**

### **Sixth Street Cairn - St John's Presbyterian Church Congregation.**

In the interest of transparency for the lack of notice to the public and any concern/understanding that may have resulted from the removal of the cairn, we most humbly apologize. We offer the following as an explanation and outline our future plan for the site.

In 2016 the Session of St John's Presbyterian Church in Cornwall determined that the cairn at the cemetery located at the corner of Sydney and Sixth Streets had to be removed. The past winter has been particularly hard on the cairn. Action was required to ensure the safety of the public using the park to ensure children and youth are not jeopardizing their personal safety because of crumbling walls and stone despite the wrought iron fence. Over the past few years there has been major deterioration of the cement holding the headstones in place, many of the headstones were badly cracked and some of the rebar exposed. Several stones were completely broken and had fallen away. Major repairs in the 1987 has not stopped the deterioration. The fence does not prevent youngsters climbing and playing on it. Our plans were communicated to Heritage Cornwall, a committee of the city, thus exercising due diligence and careful consideration.

The general condition of the cairn was inappropriate for the proper respect for our ancestors. Consistent with the Cemeteries Act of Ontario we followed our course of action on Monday recognized this obligation.

The congregation agreed to a multiyear plan to minimize liability and to determine how to properly mark the significance of this property in

Cornwall's history. Experience has proved that a rebuild is not long term solution.

Sufficient funds were raised to deal with the immediate safety problem. On August 14<sup>th</sup> local contractors were engaged to remove the cairn. The few headstones that stayed together have been salvaged. No other headstones were found inside the cairn, just bases, cement blocks and stone rubble. The rebar in the base was sent to recycle. Topsoil has been spread and the grass seed will be spread.

The next step will be to form a committee of members to determine how best to memorialize those still buried there and mark the connection to SJPC and Cornwall's history. There is no intention to sell the land or erect a building. Once the congregation has agreed and sufficient funds raised, a replacement marker will be installed.

The Session committee used the attached background notes to determine how best to deal with the cemetery monument.

Pictures are available on request.

For further information or to input to the cemetery committee, please call SJPC at 613-932-8693 during office hours.

### **Background notes for SJPC Cemetery at Sydney and Sixth**

History of Cemetery. The lot was secured by SJPC about 1831 when Church of England prevented further burials beside Trinity Anglican on Second St West. Called the Presbyterian Burying Ground, it was used until 1889 when the Town passed a bylaw preventing further burials within the square mile. In response SJPC joined with other Protestant churches to set up Woodlawn Cemetery on the west side of

Cumberland Street. It is estimated some 600 burials occurred at the Sixth St. Cemetery. While SJPC has a record of burials conducted by Rev Urquhart and Rev MacNish during 1831-1889, it does not indicate where they buried, who else used the cemetery and who was removed to Woodlawn following closure. The cemetery lot fell into disuse and was not properly looked after. In 1928, William Haggart of New York City, the son of a member buried there, was upset enough to challenge the SJPC Trustee Board to restore it. He donated \$1000 to the cause. The Trustee Board raised additional funds from members and other prominent citizens. A survey was made and placed with the clerk, J.G. Harkness (this survey no longer in SJPC archives). All the markers were removed and the site landscaped. At the center, a concrete base 20' by 15' was surmounted by the best of the remaining stones in 3 tiers with the inscriptions face out. This cairn was dedicated 11 November 1932. Facing Sydney St. a stone bears the inscription "This monument erected by the members of St John's Presbyterian Church in memory of the Pioneers of Cornwall and Vicinity – 1932". In 1985 Fraser and Ross recorded the inscriptions on the cairn. About 1987, the cement was repaired and a wrought iron fence was erected to discourage children climbing the cairn. On the fence is a plaque inscribed "St John's Cemetery. On this site Presbyterians in Cornwall maintained an active burial ground from 1831-1889. After years of disuse the present mound of gravestones was raised in 1932 as a memorial to the faith and labours of those who lie here. This fence and plaque were erected by the congregation of St John's Church in 1889". Members of the congregation also raised funds to plant trees along Sixth and Sydney Streets.

Current Condition. The cairn has deteriorated badly due to exposure to the weather. Much of the cement between the stones has fallen away. Many of the softer stones have cracked many times due to internal

pressure from the freeze/thaw cycle. Some stones have broken, with pieces missing. Many of the inscriptions are almost illegible. Some of the rebar is exposed.

Facts Determined. During the investigation, many interesting facts have been discovered.

- All cemetery stones deteriorate in the weather. Proper preservation requires indoor storage.
- Most of the stones at Sixth St are soft local limestone or sandstone. They have suffered from surface erosion and multiple cracks from freeze/thaw cycle.
- A cemetery stone has no religious significance. It is strictly a marker locating or memorializing the burial of mortal remains.
- Including the road allowance, the property is 238' N-S by 202' E-W. The cairn is just about at the center.
- The annual cost of upkeep is \$1500, mostly for grass cutting.
- The present cairn base is 20' by 15' by 1' thick. The cairn itself is 11' high. If solid it weighs about 60 tons.
- Fraser and Ross transcribed all the names and inscriptions visible in 1985. A copy is in the Cornwall Public Library.
- Only a few of the names on the cairn relate to present day members of SJPC. The names of several of the first elders of SJPC may have been inscribed on the stones in 1932.
- The new Irish Memorial, a Celtic cross 7' high beside the Wood House Museum, cost \$8,000. The base \$4,000.
- A common double grave marker of polished granite, 48" wide by 35" high by 9" thick on a concrete base is about \$5,000 inscribed and installed.