

THE

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# BEECHWOOD

MAGAZINE

WAY

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

**FOUNDED IN 2000**, the Beechwood Cemetery Foundation has strived to take care of the 162 acres of land with the utmost respect and creativity. Beechwood's Chief Horticulturist, Trevor Davidson, and his team are able to plant 30,000 tulips in beautiful colours, plant new trees every year and maintain the health of older trees of dozens of varieties across the cemetery.

Despite the COVID lockdowns, the Beechwood Cemetery Foundation has been able to host all 3 of signature events - The Annual Memorial Service, The Annual Historical Tour, and the Christmas Candlelight Service. All of which can be found on YouTube!

The Beechwood Cemetery Foundation continues to research and find new historical profiles of people who lived fascinating lives and share them with you, our readership. Recording history is something we take great pride in as we make efforts to explore the multiculturalism and diversity of Canada.

None of this would be possible without our amazing donors and the continued support over the past 20 years. The Beechwood Cemetery Foundation is capable of preserving history because people care and see more than just a cemetery.

Donations like yours allow:

- Events to stay free to the public;
- Maintain a bustling beehive on the roof of the office building that pollinates the growing flowers;
- Keep the grounds looking beautiful, lush and green;
- Continue to add educational historical Great Canadian Profile plaques throughout the grounds;
- Offer free tours to anyone who wants one! Including schools, retirement residences, walking groups or history buffs.

Consider donating to the Beechwood Cemetery Foundation to help make Beechwood a place for the living.

- **Facebook** (@BeechwoodCemetery, @NMCBeechwood, @cimetiereBeechwood)
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- **Instagram** (@beechwoodcemetery)
- **Youtube** (Beechwood Cemetery)

We, at Beechwood, would like to wish you a happy, healthy, and safe year.

Thank you

**Nicolas McCarthy**

*Director of Marketing, Communications and Community Outreach*



Executive Director: Andrew Roy; Editor-in-Chief: Nicolas McCarthy; Editor: Jacques Faille; Design Editor: Erika Wagner; French translation: Jean-Luc Malherbe; Contributors: Nicolas McCarthy, Dave Allston, Michael Leveille, BGen (Ret'd) Gerry Peddle, Erika Wagner.

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How to contact us: E-mail: [foundation@beechwoodottawa.ca](mailto:foundation@beechwoodottawa.ca) Phone: (613) 741-9530 Mail: 280 Beechwood Ave, Ottawa ON K1L 8A6

Visit us online to learn more about Beechwood, the National Cemetery of Canada and read back issues of at: [www.beechwoodottawa.ca](http://www.beechwoodottawa.ca)

We want your feedback on how we are doing! Contact: Erika Wagner at [foundation@beechwoodottawa.ca](mailto:foundation@beechwoodottawa.ca)

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# HOW BEECHWOOD CEMETERY NEARLY CALLED WESTBORO 'HOME'

by Dave Allston

**BEECHWOOD CEMETERY** is a picturesque cemetery that, for the past 148 years, has existed as the final resting place for over 82,000 Canadians. It is Canada's national cemetery, Canada's National Military Cemetery and was designated as a National Historic Site in 2001.

But did you know that Beechwood Cemetery originally came within a whisker of being established in Westboro instead? It's true!

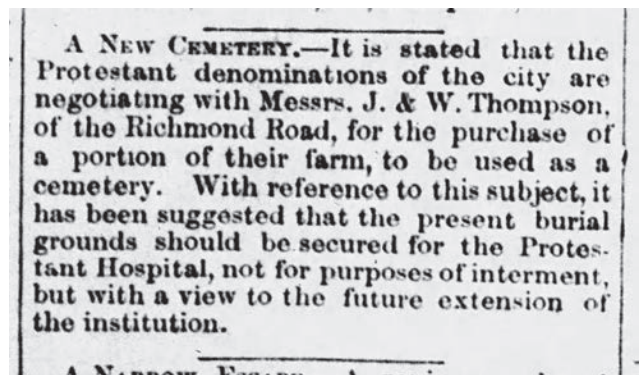
The story begins back in January 1872, when smallpox was a constant, serious threat. City council passed a bylaw setting new regulations to control the spread of the deadly disease, including banning the burial of any human remains within the city limits as of December 31. This even included the existing cemeteries in Sandy Hill. A new burial ground was required, and the old cemeteries were to be relocated (Macdonald Park today sits atop where many 19th century Ottawa residents still remain).

At the time, the churches were responsible for managing cemeteries. The Catholic churches of Ottawa acquired land right away on Montreal Road for their new cemetery (Notre Dame), and began to exhume and move bodies by mid-June of 1872. One gory story from the era told of the accidental opening of an old casket to discover a body that had clearly been buried alive.

The Protestant churches of Ottawa took much longer to make their decision. A Cemetery Committee was formed and an extensive search conducted. On April 22, 1872, the committee announced that the Thomson farm on Richmond Road (which is today's Churchill Avenue to Fraser Avenue in Westboro) had been selected, and negotiations had begun towards its purchase.

The Thomsons were among the west end's first settlers, arriving in 1818. They established one of Carleton County's top farms, and built the gorgeous Maplelawn house (Keg Manor). But by the 1870s, financial difficulties led the family to begin offering portions of the farm for sale.

At the time, the farm was isolated. The area had a handful of houses by the river for workers at Skead's Mills, a few shops, a small school and All Saints Church on Richmond Road. It was a far distance from the city center, an estimated six miles from the eastern boundary of the city.



An article discussing the progress of the cemetery decision in The Ottawa Times on May 18, 1872.

Photo courtesy of The Ottawa Times.





When news of the proposed cemetery location initially broke, there was some public outcry, but the decision appeared to be all but final through the summer and early fall of 1872. Arrangements had even been made with the manager of the Canada Central Railway (which took the route of the Parkway through Westboro) to establish a station at the cemetery and run funeral trains for \$10 round trip (argued as being far cheaper than hiring a series of carriages and cabs from the city).

By mid-October, the deadline for burials within the city was drawing near (it would later be extended by a year), and the Thomson farm purchase had not been made. It appears the committee, largely made up of representatives of the “Upper Town” congregations (the western part of the city), was trying to quietly push through the Thomson farm purchase.

Public attention was called to the pending purchase, with accusations of deception, and even speculation implications, levied against the committee members.

For much of October, the topic raged in the local papers and amongst the citizenry of Ottawa.

By chance, the late-October meeting of Protestant congregations, where the Thomson farm purchase would be ratified, was poorly attended, and the chair decided to put off the formal approval for a week.

As the Protestant congregation leaders discussed their options internally, residents of the city voiced their opinions through the two city newspapers, and to their churches. Naturally, those living in the east end were not at all in favour of a site way out at Richmond Road.

The Ottawa Citizen agreed that the Thomson farm was too far out, and instead suggested the Hinton farm (today’s Hintonburg) or the Williams Farm (today’s Old Ottawa South). The Ottawa Times, meanwhile, supported the Thomson farm selection, arguing that citizens should be “gratified” to have the cemetery at a “respectable distance from them,” as “a person does not drive to the graveyard in or after a hearse every day.”

Though it was argued that the soil and property was ideal for cemetery purposes, there was little else positive about the Thomson farm. It was expensive (offered at \$150/ac), relatively wide-open, exposed to cold north and west winds and subject to snow blown from the river, and far from the city. Furthermore, it was noted by medical officials that not only would the wind from the cemetery prove harmful to the city, but drainage from the area flowed naturally into the river, just upstream from where the new water works system was to draw the city water supply. On top of this, the moving of the dead from the existing cemetery in Sandy Hill would have meant transporting the exhumed bodies a great distance through the city.

Interestingly, the committee had initially preferred the Bayne Farm (today’s Civic Hospital area) for the cemetery,

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It was agreed that if the cemetery was placed out in future-Westboro, it would simply be inaccessible for a large segment of the population.

and though at the time there were 75 open acres available, Bayne was only willing to sell 15 of them. The committee also took interest in the Cowley farm (today's Hampton-Iona area) while travelling past to look at Thomson's farm, but it was even more expensive (\$175/ac).

The most poignant argument made was the need to have the cemetery situated "within easy reach of the poorest among us." It was agreed that if the cemetery was placed out in future-Westboro, it would simply be inaccessible for a large segment of the population.

The debate within the Protestant churches raged, with the argument threatening to divide the 11 churches, not only to have two cemeteries, but tear apart the Ottawa congregations entirely.

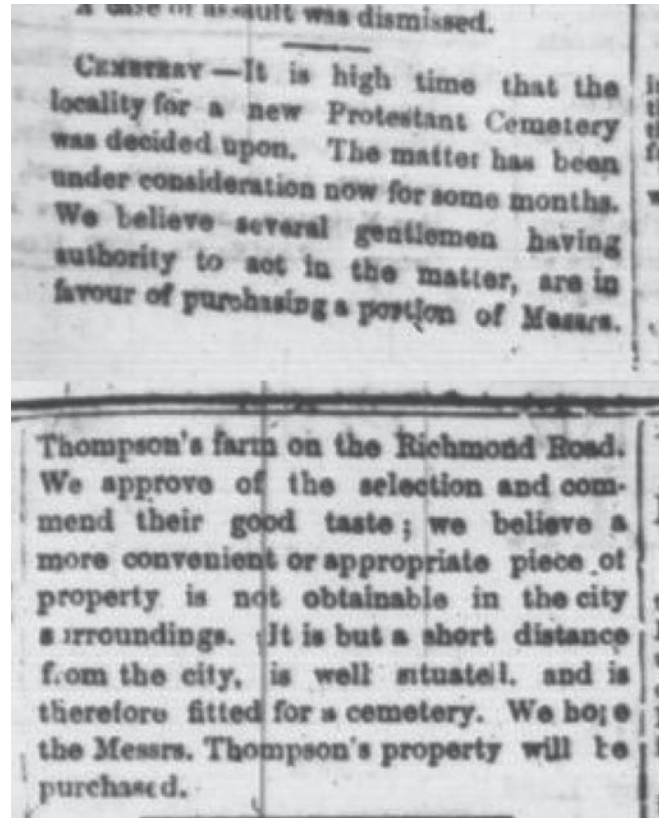
By mid-November, the Protestants had narrowed the conversation down to two options: the Thomson farm and the McPhail farm near New Edinburgh.

The McPhail farm had many advantages, including cost (just \$80/ac) and proximity to the new Notre Dame Cemetery. It was also more scenic and it contained 30 acres of "finely timbered land" — that alone was worth \$4,000. Most importantly, it was far more convenient to the city.

The Protestant leaders agreed that a decision needed to be made "harmoniously and unanimously." Several congregations, which originally supported the Westboro location, felt more concerned about the division amongst the Protestants, and thus were willing to change their votes to support the majority.

The McPhail farm purchase was approved on November 12, 1872. At the Protestant meeting the week after,

An article about the potential purchase of land of Richmond Road for a new cemetery in The Ottawa Daily Citizen on April 22, 1872. Photo courtesy of The Ottawa Citizen.



Rev. Pollard suggested the cemetery be known and designated as “Beechwood Cemetery” (which was accepted by a vote, over the alternate name of “Rockcliffe”). An Act was drawn up for the company, which stated that single graves would cost no more than \$5 (\$2.50 for children), and that Beechwood would be non-sectarian, open to all.

Immediately, the selection of the McPhail property was applauded for its “secluded position...its beautiful shrubbery and heavy wooded covering, together with its romantic appearance, render the selection more pleasing than any other within a reasonable distance of the city,” so stated a writer to the *Ottawa Citizen*.

The new cemetery was a vast improvement over the old Sandy Hill cemetery, which the *Ottawa Citizen* called “exceedingly repulsive.” It was integral for Canada’s capital city to have an impressive resting place, for Beechwood to be “a place of resort for all classes of our citizens – where they and their children and friends, dead and living, may meet amid the most beautiful gifts of nature. God’s Acre should be made as lovely as any park or garden – not a glaring, repulsive aggregation of stones and palings. Nature has given us in ‘Beechwood’ nearly all the attributes of a Mount Auburn. It is for us to go on and do the rest with taste and judgment.” The first interments would occur on August 21, 1873.

The loss of the cemetery sale must have deflated the Thomsons. Despite attempts to sell lots and parcel-sized pieces of their farm, they found little interest in their remote real estate. Within just a couple of years, they defaulted on their mortgage, and lost the farm to foreclosure, ending their significant 60-year presence on Richmond Road. Though we still have Maplelawn to remember them by, it is incredible to consider the area between Churchill and Fraser might today instead be the home of Beechwood Cemetery! It truly nearly was!



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# MACOUN MARSH UPDATE

by Michael Leveille

Founder of [www.biodiversitymatter.org](http://www.biodiversitymatter.org)  
and science teacher at St-Laurent Academy



**THE MACOUN MARSH** continues to be an inspiration to all those who visit. The seasonal changes are rich with life and colour. The end of winter is by far the most dramatic change of the year. From March to May the climate transforms from a white wonderland to a lush green forest. Baby animals start emerging from their nests or dens and butterflies are again on the wing.

COVID has been difficult for all teachers including outdoor educators like myself. It feels like forever since I brought a group to the marsh to observe wildlife. I have been fortunate to have found a way to engage young minds in the world of nature. Creating virtual tours for Youtube has been a welcome challenge and the students seem to enjoy the experiences. The videos show me as their guide as we explore under rocks or keep an eye on the sky for birds of prey.

Every virtual trip is different. One highlight for me was when I witnessed some wild turkeys leaping into the air and grabbing berries from a circle of ornamental fruit trees. These birds are very comical to watch and I am glad I was able to record their antics into one of my videos. The early winter is also a time when Bohemian waxwings make their way through our region. If you are lucky, you can witness hundreds of these birds in flight.

I look forward to spring and summer. Every year is completely different and while many of the players are the same, the interactions between species are always entertaining.



# NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY OF THE CANADIAN FORCES

## A 20-year retrospective

by Brigadier General Gerry Peddle (Retired),  
*Chair of the Beechwood Board of Directors*

**20 YEARS HAVE GONE BY** since then Governor General Adrienne Clarkson officially opened the National Military Cemetery of the Canadian Forces at Beechwood (June 28, 2001). Defence Minister Art Eggleton and Chief of Defence Staff General Maurice Baril participated in the ceremony held on a beautiful, sunny Ottawa morning. It featured all the tradition military ceremonial including a 21 gun salute, a full GGFG Ceremonial Guard parading in scarlet tunics and a fly-past by CF-18 fighter jets in lost-man formation.

However, the creation of the National Military Cemetery of the Canadian Forces was not an overnight decision and took several years of planning, dialogue and conversations. A conversation with historian Jack Granatstein, who at that time was the head of the Canadian War Museum, set some planning in motion. With speculation that the new Canadian War Museum would be built at the Rockcliffe Air Base, Robert (Bob) White, then a member of the Beechwood Board, requested an introductory meeting between the two organizations to discuss possible partnership opportunities including creating a link to the Field of Honour (Section 27), which has over 1,200 graves including the graves of Second World War Generals Charles Foulkes and Henry Crerar. At that meeting, Beechwood also learned that DND wished to create a National Military Cemetery, here in Ottawa.

As CDS at the time, General Baril was personally committed to creating a National Military Cemetery as he believed that DND had the responsibility of providing a dignified final resting place for Canadian Forces members, particularly those killed in the line of duty, and that responsibility was not currently being met.

With the initiative and guidance of Bob White, Beechwood jumped at the opportunity to connect with DND and to offer insights and help. Bob then began a long and detailed process of conversation, consultation and detailed planning with Commodore Glen Davidson, a senior officer in DND, who, in their first meeting explained that the Rockcliffe property had been transferred to Lands Canada and that General Baril's vision might, unfortunately, have been put on hold.

Following that first meeting, several conversations and meetings were held to develop a plan that would allow General Baril's dream to become a reality. Both Beechwood and DND knew that a partnership, similar to those already existing in







the Veterans Section or the Commonwealth War Graves section or the newly established cultural community sections, would be necessary. Since Beechwood had plenty of available land that could meet the needs, an offer was made by the Beechwood Board to provide about 5 acres of land for the exclusive use as Canada's National Cemetery. A key step, before moving forward was to get approval from General Baril who, upon touring the proposed site, remarked:

*"We have been offered the high ground of the Cemetery, in sight of our Parliament, next to veterans of previous wars and among the thousands of Canadians buried in Beechwood. This is exactly what we want."*

Over the next weeks and months, many meetings were held between Beechwood and DND (primarily with Bob White, Commodore Davidson and Tim Graham, the then General Manager of Beechwood) to reach agreement on details. It was subsequently agreed that the land would be granted to the Canadian Forces provided that they would fund the landscape development and allow Beechwood to charge a reasonable rate for each burial. Beechwood prepared a three-page letter, which was signed by then Chair, Dr. David Roger, a veteran of WW2, and addressed to General Baril, which provided an outline of how the arrangement might work. The final paragraph stated:

**"The Board makes this proposal in a spirit of public service, and with the interests of our Nation, our Canadian heritage and our Canadian Armed Forces in mind. We trust that it will be received in the same spirit, and that we may look forward to working together to realize this most important and worthy objective."**

With a bit more work on all sides and Treasury Board approval, the agreement was finalized and formalized in a joint Memorandum of Understanding. Inspired by Commonwealth Cemeteries around the world, it was decided to have uniform headstones and ordered plantings. Generals would lie next to privates and rank would carry no privilege. There would be a central monument on the highest point of the land. The site of the monument and flags would offer a striking visual and symbolic link to the established Veterans Section in Beechwood, thus connecting the heritage of the past and the Canadian Forces of today and the future.

The central monument was inspired by the design of the First World War Passchendaele memorial in Flanders. Commodore Davidson authored the inscription, which was approved by General Baril, and which reads as follows:

**TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF CANADA'S ARMED FORCES WHO HAVE  
SERVED THEIR NATION WITH DISTINCTION IN WAR AND IN PEACE**

Over the same period, Beechwood Management directed all of the business aspects relating to getting the National Military Cemetery up and running at Beechwood. The actual construction of the new five-acre section in accordance with the agreed upon landscape design was a major challenge since it involved eliminating a road that had previously been built and moving a great deal of earth.

Other functions included contracting for the central monument, surveying the land for plots, setting specifications for the individual monuments and ensuring that Beechwood had the required staff in place to meet DND's needs. On DND's side, there were also numerous tasks to be completed including finalizing the funding authorization through Treasury Board, writing appropriate policies and procedures and developing the communications program. Many individuals played a significant role in getting this cemetery off the ground.

On October 19, 2000, Treasury Board approved the establishment of the National Military Cemetery at Beechwood and authorized funding based upon the estimates that had been developed earlier in the year. The formal Memorandum of Understanding between DND and Beechwood, which is a very simple five-page document, was signed at National Defence Headquarters on March 2, 2001. Three days later the Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Art Eggleton, formally announced the creation of the National Military Cemetery.

A lot has developed in the last 20 years, including the unveiling the Tri-Service Monument on June 28, 2004. Inscribed on each side is a poem representing each branch of the Canadian Forces: *The Naval Hymn* for the Navy, *In Flanders Fields* for the Army and *When I Think of Famous Men* for the Air Force.

A further key development took place on September 13th, 2007, with the formal establishment of the National Military Cemetery. This connected all the military sections in Beechwood including the Last Post Fund Section (19), the Commonwealth War Graves Section (29) and the Veteran's Field of Honour (27).

As Beechwood Cemetery grew both as the National Military Cemetery and the National Cemetery of Canada, the Beechwood National Memorial Centre was created. Officially opened in April 2008 by the Governor General Michaëlle Jean, the nine-sided Sacred Space, within the Beechwood National Memorial Centre is considered to be unique in the world. The Department of National Defence heavily supported the development of this centre with a cheque presented by the Defence Staff General. This cheque was also considered advance payments for future interments of those killed on duty. This support augmented the MOU and helped Beechwood create the Hall of Colours that exclusively serves the memorial needs of Canadian Forces Units.





Over the course of the last 20 years, the National Military Cemetery has become a focal point for commemorations in Ottawa.

The retired Colours of Canada's Army, Navy and Air Force are mounted at ceiling level. Following tradition, these Colours will remain honourably suspended and untouched until, with the passing of time, they completely disintegrate. The Hall features a beautiful memorial stained-glass window, called "Hope in a Broken World," which was donated by the Canadian Military Chaplains' Association.

When Beechwood began upgrading its maintenance facilities in the 2010's, it also helped build the Memorial Cross Building, which provides office and training space for the National Military Cemetery Staff and Honour Guards who provide services at each military funeral service and burial. We will share more about this greater history in a future article.

Over the course of the last 20 years, the National Military Cemetery has become a focal point for commemorations in Ottawa. Beechwood holds the second largest Remembrance Day Ceremony in Ottawa, with thousands of people standing together in a solemn act of remembrance. Beechwood also hosts the Canadian Tulip Festival's Veterans Day, which is directly connected to honouring the Liberation of the Netherlands. It hosts No Stone Left Alone, which brings school children into the cemetery to place poppies on headstones ahead of November 11. It also hosts smaller more intimate events such as Dutch Liberation Day, ANZAC Day, Soldier of Suicide Memorial Ceremony and many others during the calendar year to honour the service of Canadians and our allies or moments in our shared history.

More importantly, the National Military Cemetery has become hallowed ground in Canada for military burials for all Canadian Armed Forces Members, Veterans and their families. Over the years the cemetery has grown from a couple of dozen headstones, to nearly 9000 headstones.

Ultimately, Beechwood feels that the National Military Cemetery has met the goal that was set out two decades ago – to provide a dignified final resting place for Canadian Forces members.

As we reflect on the last twenty years, we also look forward to the next phases and new developments in our cemetery. It's a great comfort to know that for generations to come, the National Military Cemetery will serve all Members and Veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces. Lest We Forget.

Please note some of the quotes have been taken from Robert White's, [The History of the National Military Cemetery](#), 2011, Beechwood Cemetery Foundation. Mr. White is currently Director Emeritus of the Beechwood Board.

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# 82,000 Stories to Share

## BEECHWOOD'S OLDEST BURIAL

by Erika Wagner,  
*Program and Fundraising Coordinator*



**ONE WOULD THINK** that the question “what is your oldest person burial,” would be an easy one for the Beechwood Cemetery, the National Cemetery of Canada to answer. However, it turns out to be quite a complicated and interesting long answer.

The first place a historian would look is the Register Books. These books hold all the burial information of everyone interred in the nearly 148 years Beechwood has been open (although, Beechwood did switch to a modern digital version in the year 2000). Opening up the first old, well preserved book, turning to the very first page, the very first entry is: John Alex Craig. A four-year-old boy who is now buried in Section 24S.

If you plan on going looking for the monument, you will notice the date of death is wrong on the monument, it says 1874. Occasionally this happens, but the family decided not to fix the mistake.

While this entry was technically Beechwood's first burial, it is in fact not our oldest. Beechwood Cemetery was founded in 1873 after the closure of Sandy Hill Cemetery. The families that could afford to move from Sandy Hill moved their entire family to Beechwood. The Cemetery Directors at the time choose to enter the date of all the transfers as the day they were reinterred at Beechwood, not their original date of death. This means nowhere in our records does Beechwood have the documentation to search for our oldest grave. With 162 acres and over 82,000 markers on our grounds, Beechwood would have to individually record every monument.



Beechwood Cemetery was founded in 1873 after the closure of Sandy Hill Cemetery. The families that could afford to move from Sandy Hill moved their entire family to Beechwood.

This has always been a project Beechwood would like to do, however there are organizations who have taken on this responsibility for us. They go out, take photos of each monument and record all the information on the markers. These indexes are available for those doing historical or genealogical research.

One such organization called Canada Gen Web, has actively been indexing Beechwood's grounds. After reaching out to this organization, they responded with a link and photo. Elizabeth May born in 1808, and died in 1819, whose marker lays flat behind a larger family monument, would have remained hidden had it not been for this group. As you can see from the photo, the burial card only says the move date from Sandy hill. They didn't do the entire family all at once which is quite interesting.

I wonder if as their research continues, they will find an even older burial.

Another angle to the question "what is Beechwood's oldest burial?", is if you include the reburial of those from Barracks Hill Cemetery. In 2013, during the construction of the LRT, a very old public cemetery was uncovered. Barrack Hill Cemetery was only open from 1826 to 1845 and was located in the heart of the city, beneath what is now a parking lot off a Sparks St, close to parliament. When the cemetery closed, those that could afford to move to the new city cemetery, Sandy Hill, did so. The remains were re buried at Beechwood on October 6, 2019.

Some visitors phrase the question another way, "what is



Beechwood's oldest monument?". This opens another avenue, excluding the aforementioned people we've covered. There is debate at Beechwood about the first monument erected in the grounds. Capt. James Forsyth, who died on September 2, 1872, was buried without a monument in Sandy Hill Cemetery. A year later, upon the cemeteries' closure a monument, a tribute to the Ottawa Field Battery's commander, was unveiled on September 13, 1873. The Illustrated News described the monument by sculptor P.A. Taylor of the Ottawa Marble Works on Rideau Street as a "work of art".

In his design of the monument the sculptor provided a profile of the Captain along with military symbols including crossed swords, cannons, and a powder horn.

The Forsyth monument is listed as entry 7 in Beechwood's Register Book and was one of its earliest grave markers, if not the first.

As you can see, the question is extremely complicated. The Barracks Hill remains are technically older than Elizabeth May, however, both of those burials were done way after Beechwood's first burial of John Craig, in 1873. It also depends on how people phrase the question, are people wondering about the monument or when the oldest burial is?

You the reader can decide for yourself: is it the very first burial or one of the reburials that is the correct answer to: "what is the oldest burial at Beechwood?"

