



Holy Trinity Church
Thornhill

1830 - 2015

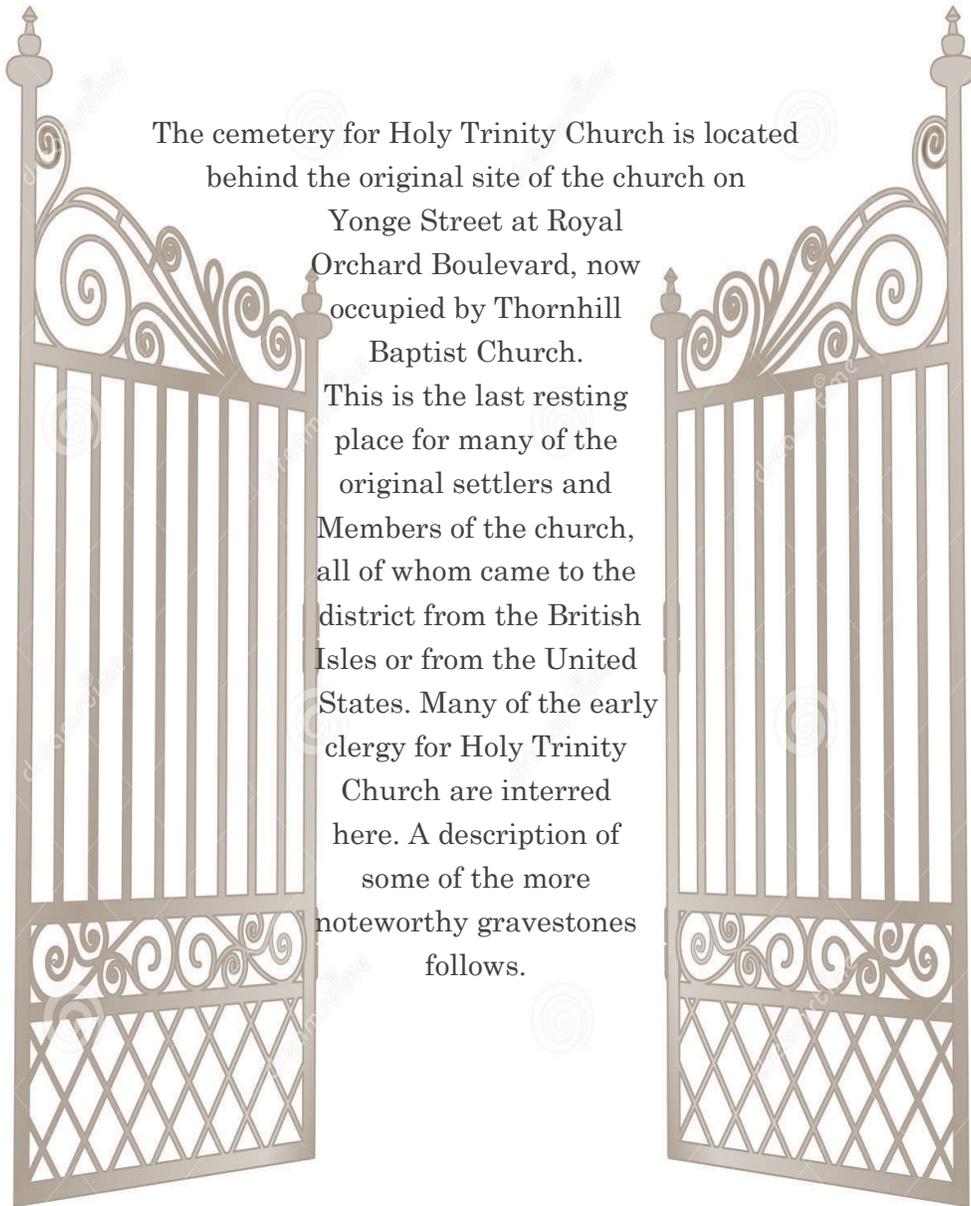
*Celebrating Our Past,
Embracing Our Future!*

"Something good is happening here!!"



HOLY TRINITY THORNHILL CEMETERY

CELEBRATING 185 YEARS



The cemetery for Holy Trinity Church is located behind the original site of the church on Yonge Street at Royal Orchard Boulevard, now occupied by Thornhill Baptist Church.

This is the last resting place for many of the original settlers and Members of the church, all of whom came to the district from the British Isles or from the United States. Many of the early clergy for Holy Trinity Church are interred here. A description of some of the more noteworthy gravestones follows.

This booklet has been prepared in Celebration of the 185th Anniversary of Holy Trinity Church, Thornhill and its associated Cemetery.

John Willson (1739-1829)

Rebecca Willson (nee Thixton) (1743-1804)

John and Rebecca Willson are the earliest colonists buried in Holy Trinity Cemetery, having come to British North America from New Jersey in 1783. They had supported the British during the American Revolution (1775 - 1783) and were driven out of the United States in the aftermath of the war, facing confiscation of their lands for remaining loyal to the Crown. They moved to New



Brunswick in the spring of 1783 as part of a mass emigration of loyalists. John's nephew, John Arnold (1769-1855), son of his sister Mary, came to New Brunswick in the same fleet, possibly with other members of the Arnold family.

When land settlements in Upper Canada were offered to United Empire Loyalists after the colony's establishment in 1791, the Willsons and Arnold(s) decided to relocate. John and Rebecca settled just west of York (Toronto), where John held the lease of the first "King's Mill" on St. John's Creek, now respectively known as the Old Mill and Humber River. In 1799, the couple moved north to a farm property at the corner of present-day Yonge Street and Steeles Avenue. Rebecca Willson died in 1804 and was originally buried on the family farm.

In 1802 the Willson's nephew, John Arnold, had married Elizabeth Miles, the daughter of Abner Miles (c. 1752-1806). Abner Miles had come to Upper Canada from Genessee, New

York in 1794; Miles first settled in York, but eventually moved north to Markham in 1803. Until 1806, John and Elizabeth lived in a home at the corner of Yonge and John Streets in Thornhill, until they moved to Abner's former property in Richmond Hill, which Elizabeth had inherited at his death. Elizabeth Arnold played the organ at Trinity Church (as it was then named) on Sundays for several years after its construction in 1830. In 1860, John and Elizabeth's son, Robert Arnold, built a large home on Yonge Street now known as the Arnold House; the home is now a heritage site situated at the corner of Spring Gate Boulevard and Springfield Way in Thornhill.

Despite his advanced age, like many local residents (see Langstaff and Moodie entries), John Willson served as an officer in the War of 1812. With his son and nephew, John Arnold, who also served in the 1st York Militia, he was taken prisoner following the siege of York in April 1813 and held at Fort York.

John Willson died in 1829 at the age of 90, and was interred at East Gwillimbury. In 1940, the remains of the Willsons were relocated to Holy Trinity Cemetery.

William & Susannah Parsons (nee Thorne)

1785-1862; d. 1884

Benjamin & Anna Maria Thorne (nee Wilcocks)

1796-1848; d. 1881

Due to their business developments in the area in the 1820s-1840s, William Parsons and Benjamin Thorne are considered to be the founders of Thornhill, although settlement began in the community from the mid-1790s. Born respectively in 1785 and 1796 in Dorchester, England, William and Benjamin were



brothers-in-law, William having married Benjamin's half-sister Susannah. The three parties immigrated to Upper Canada in 1820 with the men seeking property acquisition and business ventures. Almost immediately, both purchased

land on the east side of Yonge Street across from the present Holy Trinity Cemetery. Together they established a store in this area, operated by Parsons, which would become a focal point of the village. Thorne subsequently leased and later purchased the grist mill and tannery that was already in operation. The brothers-in-law developed an import-export business; Thorne managed flour production, while Parsons began a company that handled the exporting of flour and importing of groceries, dry goods, and metals to and from England. This form of business partnership was typical among importer-exporters in Upper Canada during the 1820s-1840s.

Thorne subsequently purchased other mills in the area, as well as a store in York. He employed family members in his businesses, amassing significant wealth by the early 1840s. Wheat was Upper Canada's primary staple product in this period. Exporters benefitted from the British Corn Laws, which offered trade preferences to colonial products. Like most wheat-related businesses, Thorne's enterprises suffered greatly after the Corn Laws were repealed by the British government of Sir Robert Peel in 1846. With excesses of flour he was unable to sell, he borrowed substantially from the Bank of Upper Canada in an effort to rejuvenate his businesses. When the British markets collapsed in 1848, these loans were recalled. Unable to pay his debts, Thorne's assets were liquidated, and, like so many of his

contemporaries, he faced financial ruin. Apparently unable to cope with this failure after a lifetime of success, Benjamin Thorne shot himself outside his home on July 1, 1848. He died the following day.

Benjamin Thorne and William Parsons were actively involved in the local Thornhill community. Both helped establish Trinity Church in 1830. Together, they established the village's first post office with Parson serving as postmaster. During his career, Thorne was very involved with colonial banking and held several banking positions.

Elizabeth (mother)

Thomas and John Maxwell (sons/brothers) (d. 1832)

Elizabeth Maxwell and her sons Thomas and John are among the known cholera victims laid to rest in Holy Trinity Cemetery. In the first half of the nineteenth century, epidemics of cholera occurred worldwide, with serious outbreaks occurring in 1832, 1834, 1849, 1852, 1854, 1866. Knowledge of disease transmission and prevention was virtually nonexistent, resulting in widespread public fear of cholera. Most people in this era believed diseases were spread by “miasma” – environmental vapours emitted from water sources and vegetation. Although some physicians theorized cholera was caused by contaminated water and poor sanitation, the theory was generally not accepted by the wider medical community. Knowledge and understanding of the bacterium *Vibrio cholera* was not widely available until the late 1880s.

Once cholera entered a household, it was not uncommon for entire families to die of the disease in a short period of time. The Maxwells died in the same week (July 27,

31, and August 2), suggesting they fell ill in quick succession. Although fever sheds were established to treat patients in York during the 1832 cholera epidemic, many colonial families would have had no access to these, and no one to care for them once they became ill. The Rev. Isaac Fiddler, who was the first 'interim' rector at Trinity Church for a few months in 1831, wrote that he conducted six services in two days as cholera victims were to be buried quickly upon death. In fact, "two of these victims died of great suddenness. Both were seated at the supper table with their family, and were cheerful and in good health, yet both were interred before dawn."

The Rev. George Mortimer (1784-1844)

The Rev. George Mortimer was Holy Trinity's first permanent incumbent. Born in London, England in 1784 to a lower middle-class family, George and his brother Thomas were educated at Cambridge, both opting to enter ministry. This decision likely reflected both an attempt to advance their social position through a profession, and exposure to evangelical values in their youth. Though Thomas became a prominent clergyman and author in London, while in England, George never advanced beyond a curacy. An illness at age three had left him disabled, and ill health throughout his life seems to have hindered career advancement.



Concerned about his children's future given his poor financial situation and the limited occupational prospects in

England, in 1831 Mortimer decided to emigrate at the age of 47. With advice received from clergy contacts in England, the United States, and the British North American colonies, he opted to go to Upper Canada, despite having no firm promise of a clergy post. Sailing in June 1832, Mortimer left his wife and daughters in Britain until he found secure employment, initially bringing only his sons to assist him. By the fall of 1832, Lieutenant Governor John Colborne had arranged for Mortimer to be Incumbent at Trinity Church, Thornhill, which was established two years earlier and previously served by itinerant preachers.

With a realistic view of lay provisions and mission stipends, Colborne told Mortimer his remuneration might include £40-50 annually from the Trinity parishioners, housing, and possibly £100 from stipends provided by the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Mortimer's initial accommodation was poor, but with a parsonage promised to be built by the time his wife and daughters arrived in the summer, he was content. His hopes for his sons were already being realized, as he was able to purchase land for them; Archdeacon Rev. John Strachan had also volunteered to mentor his son Arthur who was living in York.

Mortimer became frustrated, however, when his clergy income and housing proved inadequate for his family of 5-8 persons. To supplement his clerical earnings, he purchased a few acres of land in Thornhill to farm. Like many such investments undertaken in the context of Upper Canada's unstable economy, Mortimer lost money on the endeavour. By the time his family arrived in 1833, no proper house had been built for him, and he described the family's situation as "sadly cramped together in a wooden frame house, consisting of only four poorly constructed rooms, [that are] peculiarly hot and oppressive in summer and unusually cold in winter." Four years later, a home was completed, but only after Mortimer threatened to leave the parish.

During his incumbency, George Mortimer initiated several community projects in Thornhill. Particularly noteworthy was his work with physician Dr. Lucius O'Brien to begin a temperance society to curb problems associated with excessive drinking in the village. Social consumption of alcohol formed a fundamental part of masculine professional culture in the 1830s and 1840s; O'Brien himself had realized his own social and professional life was causing him to have a problem with drink. In 1843, Mortimer founded Thornhill's first library, the "Library of Useful Knowledge", to improve and promote literacy and culture in the village.

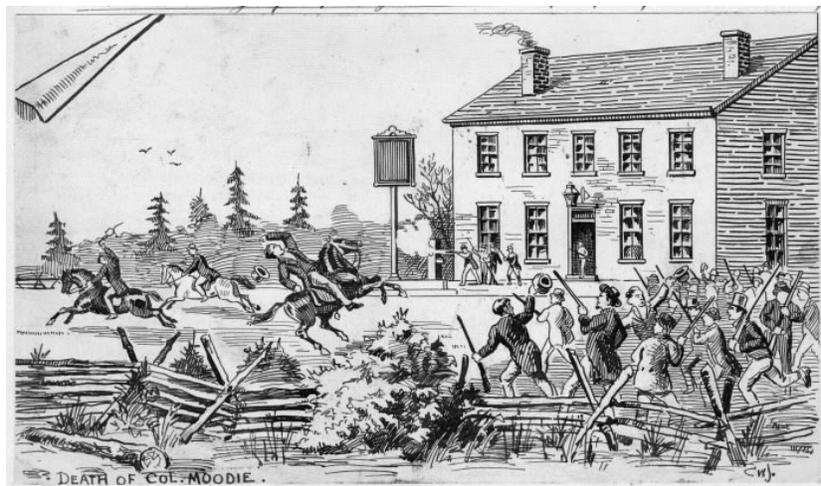
Having suffered ill health for several years, Mortimer died tragically in 1844 after being thrown from his carriage en route to Toronto. Yet, by this time his hopes for his children had been realized: His two sons were well settled, one having entered ministry, and the other serving as president of the Toronto Stock Exchange.

Colonel Robert Moodie (d. December 4, 1837)

@ native of Scotland, Col. Robert Moodie was an officer of the British army. In active duty from 1795-1820, he served first in the Napoleonic Wars and later in Canada, during the War of 1812 where he participated in the Battles of Fort Erie (1812), Sackett's Harbor (1813), and Lundy's Lane (1814). Moodie entered inactive service on half-pay in 1820, and retired from the military in 1834. The following year, he settled at Richmond Hill, in a home on Yonge St. near Elgin Mills Road.

By late 1837, Upper Canada was experiencing considerable political strife. A group of radical reformers was

deeply angered by the leadership of the Tories who governed the colony. Toronto Tories were particularly influential and controlling; several members of this elite group had long-standing United Empire Loyalist roots in the colony, and formed alliances when their control of policies and culture were threatened. The non-responsible structure of government, whereby the Executive Council (cabinet) was appointed, rather than chosen from the elected majority in the Legislative Assembly, allowed this so-called “Family Compact” to dominate Upper Canada’s political and economic systems through patronage, managing affairs to suit their own interests. Resisting this system, radical leaders such as William Lyon Mackenzie and Dr. John Rolph desired American-style democracy and greater economic equality in the colony, and were supported by farmers and merchants from regions just outside the city. The reform vision was wholly at odds with the British elite values of the Compact Tories, and tensions between the two groups had increased during the 1830s. They reached a climax with the outbreak of the Upper Canadian Rebellion on December 4, 1837.



That afternoon, a military associate of Col. Robert Moodie's was drinking in a Yonge Street tavern near Moodie's home. He spotted a group of approximately 75 armed men heading south towards Toronto, and soon left for Moodie's home, telling tavern-owner William Crew to alert local "loyalists" to meet at Moodie's, which was considered a "headquarters" loyal to British values and colonial administration. After some discussion at the home, Crew set out on horseback for Toronto to warn Lieutenant-Governor Sir Francis Bond Head of the advancing rebels. By 6:00 p.m. Moodie's group got word that Crew had been taken prisoner. With three other men, Robert Moodie set off for the city. His group was stopped by the rebels outside Montgomery's Tavern (Yonge Street, north of Eglinton Avenue), and a skirmish ensued during which Robert Moodie was shot twice in the side. Taken prisoner, he died inside the tavern a short while later. He is known as the first casualty of the 1837 Rebellion. During his funeral in Holy Trinity Cemetery, many attendees carried weapons for fear the rebels would return and disrupt the service.

Dr. Lewis Garibaldi Langstaff (1859-1917)
Josephine Langstaff (nee Chadwick) (1885-1921)

Dr. Lewis Garibaldi Langstaff (known as "Garibaldi") was born in 1859 in Langstaff, Ontario, an area now part of Richmond Hill at the corner of Highway 7 and Yonge Street. It was originally known as Langstaff Corners, after his paternal grandparents whose home was located there in the early nineteenth century. His grandfather, John Langstaff (1774-1865), immigrated to Richmond Hill from New Jersey in 1808. His grandmother, Lucy Miles (1781-1844), was another

daughter of Abner Miles (see Willson entry). John worked as a teacher in the area before serving in the York militia during the War of 1812. After the war, he combined farm work with operation of a store and smithy. He and Lucy had 8 children, including Garibaldi's father, John Langstaff (1819-1867), and his uncle, physician Dr. James Langstaff (1825-1889).



Dr. James Langstaff studied medicine in the 1840s at Dr. John Rolph's proprietary medical school in Toronto and Guy's Hospital London (England). He was licensed by the Medical Board of Upper Canada in 1849. Initially James practiced in Unionville, but soon relocated his medical practice to Richmond Hill where he came to have a large practice. He served as a medical instructor at Rolph's school beginning in the early 1850s after its incorporation as the Toronto School of Medicine (1851). He continued practicing until his death in 1889. Through his professional work, James Langstaff established a family legacy; several members of subsequent generations also became physicians, including his son, Dr. Rolph Langstaff and his nephews Drs. Elliot and Lewis Garibaldi Langstaff.

Dr. Lewis Garibaldi Langstaff also worked as a physician in the Thornhill and Richmond Hill areas. Little is known of his early life or his medical work. The 1881 census lists Garibaldi as a medical student, and it is known that he worked as an assistant in James Langstaff's practice in the 1880s, when his

uncle was elderly and infirm. Garibaldi took over the practice for two years after James' death in 1889; although James' son Rolph inherited the business, Rolph had yet to complete his medical training. In 1891 Garibaldi is listed in the census as living in the James Langstaff home with Rolph and another cousin. It is unclear where he lived and practiced between 1892 and 1914, though it may have been either Thornhill or New York. In 1915, at age 56, he married Josephine Chadwick in Brooklyn, NY; she was 26 years his junior. The couple settled in a house where the clubhouse of the Thornhill Golf & Country Club now stands. That year, Garibaldi became a warden of Holy Trinity, a position which he held until his premature death in March 1917. At the time of his death, Josephine was pregnant with their son, and their daughter was only a year old. Sadly, Josephine died only four years later after a short illness.

In addition to the local school, park, and community centre honouring Dr. James Langstaff's work, Garibaldi and Josephine's graves serve as reminders of the extensive legacy of the Langstaff family in this area. Other members of the Langstaff family buried in Holy Trinity Cemetery include Charity (Stille) Langstaff (1819-1848), wife of Miles Langstaff (another uncle of Garibaldi) and Garibaldi's brother and sister-in-law Edwin Curry Langstaff (1861-1938) and Rose Mary Sharpe (1860-1948).



Langstaff Industrial Farm Burials

On a small rectangular plot of land toward the rear of the cemetery stand five concrete crosses marking the graves of eight men who were inmates of the Langstaff Industrial Prison Farm in the 1920s and 1930s. The farm, which opened in 1913 as an adjunct facility to ease overcrowding at Toronto's Don Jail, operated as a minimum-security men's prison for inebriates and petty criminals until it closed in 1958. The crosses now present are recently-installed replicas of the original markers.

Prior to September 2014 when the original crosses were removed, the markers were in a poor state of repair: Unlike many of the more structurally sound historic and modern monuments surrounding them, they were aged, weathered, and had deteriorated with improper past repairs. Under terms of the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002, Ontario cemeteries are required to ensure plot markers do not risk public safety. It was necessary for Holy Trinity Cemetery to take down the Langstaff crosses before they fell, potentially injuring someone. The need to establish legal ownership of the plots for this purpose led to discoveries about the burials and social circumstances surrounding their history.



Initially the men were thought to be 'prisoners' from the jail farm; however, research revealed them to be graves of

homeless, unemployed men who had been charged with “vagrancy” as a means of giving them shelter in jail. Many were elderly and had committed no crime other than being infirm, having no family support, and living on the street. Unemployment had soared after WWI and, in the interwar period, sources of welfare support and public housing in Toronto were very limited and insufficient for the numbers of men without work. Old age pension plans were introduced in Canada in 1927 by the government of William Lyon Mackenzie King, but were not implemented in Ontario until 1929 under limited terms.

When considering marker preservation and/or replacement, the Cemetery Committee was reluctant to leave the original markers laid flat as some had double-sided inscriptions and one side would have been hidden. Preservation of the crosses was important as all traces of the Langstaff Farm have disappeared under more recent development. After much research and consultation, a decision was made to create replicas of the original crosses with the same inscriptions. The only changes made on the new crosses are corrections of some death dates since archival records revealed errors on the original crosses.

NOTES

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