

# Grave and Nave

## An Architecture of Cemeteries and Sanctuaries in Rural Ontario

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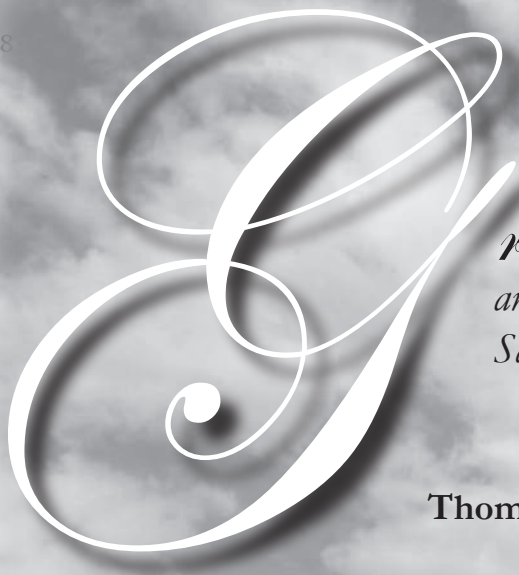
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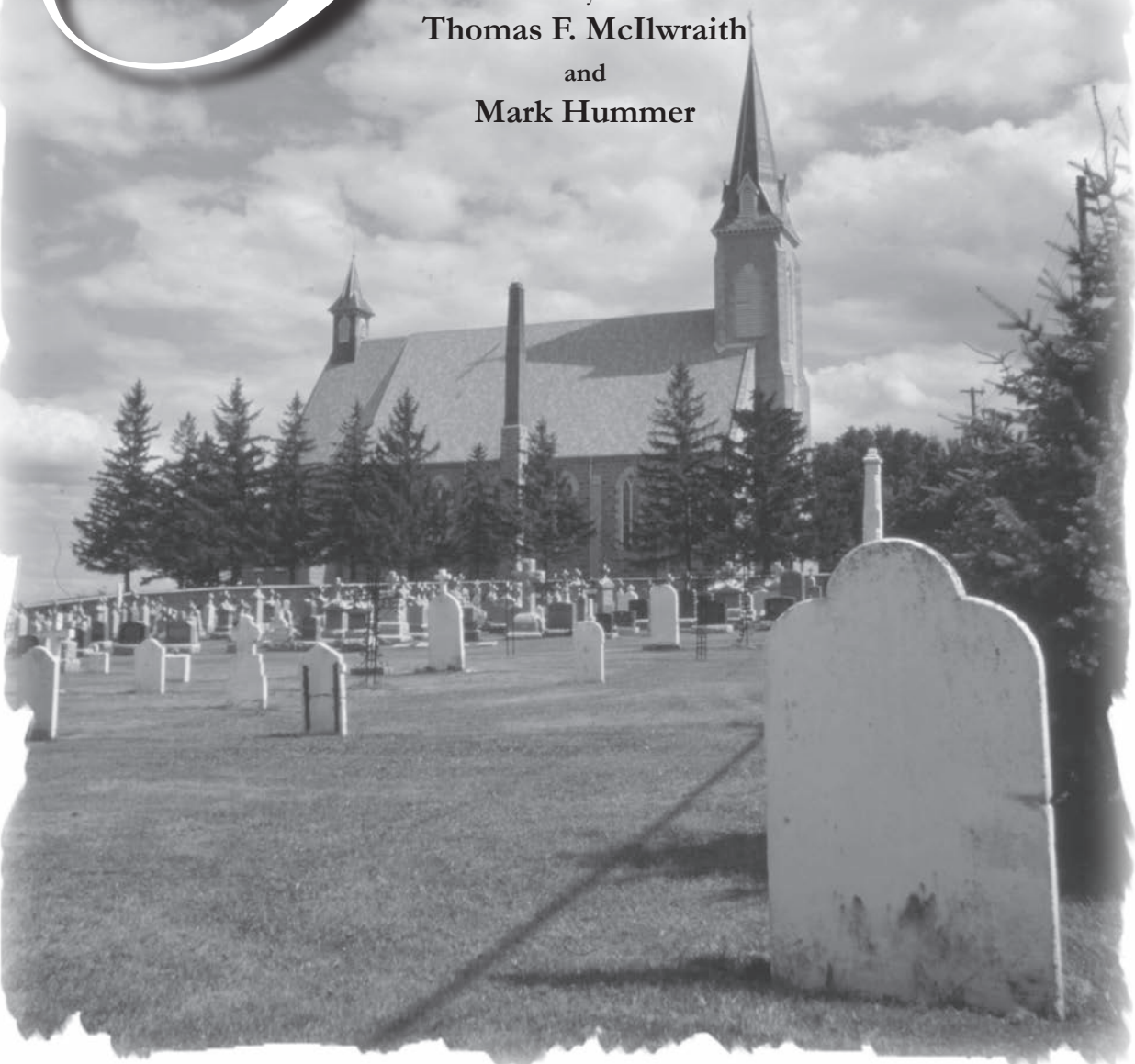
Article abstract

Cultural landscapes are architectural creations, which is to say that all mankind's scratchings on the earth surface have a style as well as a substance. In this essay we explore the design of Christian church sites and burying grounds established throughout rural Ontario and dating from the early nineteenth century. The liturgical significance of having graves and church aisles facing east appears to have been widely understood and appreciated, but applying these rules on the land frequently failed to occur. In a field study of 150 cemeteries and more than 200 church buildings we find that burials hold to the rule of eastness much more than did churches. We discuss possible reasons for this inconsistency in landscape design.



*Grave and Nave:  
an Architecture of Cemeteries and  
Sanctuaries in Rural Ontario*

by  
**Thomas F. McIlwraith**  
and  
**Mark Hummer**



In Halton Region, on the Guelph Line road north of Highway 401, stands a handsome, eye-catching, tiny country church: St John's Anglican, Nassagaweya. Built in 1871, it is a limestone sanctuary standing square to the road, on the eastward side; the narthex door opens within steps of the graveled shoulder. Persons entering face away from the road into a simple nave, their eyes drawn straight along the central aisle to the slightly-raised chancel at the easterly end. Outside in the cemetery regular echelons of headstones signify burial plots row upon row. To scan the inscriptions one stands at the back of the site and looks westerly to the fronts of the markers, many of them flat marble slabs bearing dates from the middle of the nineteenth century. (Figure 1) This looks thoroughly orderly and unremarkable.

But the St John's setting is intensely remarkable. The burial layout is skewed diagonally to the church building, to the boundary of the site, and to the perpendicular country roads on which it corners. Pace out a triangle: a wall of the building, a line of grave markers, and the road-side. The site breaks into many triangles, a shape decidedly uncharacteristic of Ontario's rural geometry. Far from being some Euclidian oddity,

we argue that this layout has deep symbolic meaning in the cultural history of Ontario and the wider world. St John's is a stressed landscape. Nave and grave are in conflict, their relative alignments betraying tension between spiritual and temporal principles in a society looking for order on the land that many early occupants saw as a frightening wilderness in need of subjugation.

We have deliberately used the words 'eastward' and 'easterly' in preference to 'east.' That choice takes us straight to the heart of the conflict. For Christianity, the direction 'east' holds special significance. The nativity star stood in the east; the Magi came from the east. Sanctuaries face east, and burials are with the feet to the east, allowing the incumbent to rise

### *Abstract:*

*Cultural landscapes are architectural creations, which is to say that all mankind's scratchings on the earth surface have a style as well as a substance. In this essay we explore the design of Christian church sites and burying grounds established throughout rural Ontario and dating from the early nineteenth century. The liturgical significance of having graves and church aisles facing east appears to have been widely understood and appreciated, but applying these rules on the land frequently failed to occur. In a field study of 150 cemeteries and more than 200 church buildings we find that burials hold to the rule of eastness much more than did churches. We discuss possible reasons for this inconsistency in landscape design.*

**Résumé:** *Les paysages culturels sont des créations architecturales, ce qui revient à dire que toutes les marques laissées par l'humanité sur la surface terrestre ont un style autant qu'une substance. Nous explorons dans cet article la configuration de sites d'églises et de cimetières chrétiens construits dans l'Ontario rurale à partir du début du dix-neuvième siècle. La signification liturgique de l'orientation vers l'est des tombes et des nefes latérales semble avoir été bien comprise et appréciée, mais l'application de ces règles ne s'est souvent pas concrétisée sur les sites. Notre étude de terrain de 150 cimetières et de plus de 200 églises révèle que l'orientation vers l'est des premiers est beaucoup plus fréquente que les secondes. Nous discutons des raisons probables de cette inconsistance du paysage culture ontarien.*



FIGURE 1. *St John's Anglican church (1871) and adjacent buildings stand square to the road (indicated by the electricity wires); the cemetery is diagonal. Lot 11, east side of 4th Line (Guelph Line Road), Nassaganeya Township, Halton County, 2004.*

facing the dawn on the Day of Judgment. A compass tells us that the St John's cemetery faces due east, while the sanctuary faces northeast. Yet expectation tells us that the cemetery looks wrong, and therefore maybe it is. One has only to drive the adjacent country roads and see fence lines at right-angles to one another, and barns, houses, laneways, edges of woodlots, and so many other rural elements – including other cemeteries and churches – positioned squarely to the roadsides. The visible anomaly of the St John's cemetery draws attention to the perceived correctness of the St John's sanctuary. How we wish we could have

been flies on the wall at the meeting when the parishioners laid out their cemetery, and to have seen a member – perhaps a retired land surveyor or amateur astronomer – admonish those around the table who, without a second thought, were inclined to approve a layout in which graves were square to the property lines. That would have been so easy, and, as we shall see, was frequently done.

Rural Ontario filled between the 1780s and the 1870s. It was an orderly process of scattered settlement and gradual infilling with successive waves of immigration. For Ontario's 130,000 residents of about 1820, worship frequently

was in a shed or house, or outdoors in the summer; burials often were beneath a crude cairn of fieldstones at the edge of the farm. Piety flourished but, in the absence of consecrated buildings and hallowed grounds, little showed on the landscape. That gradually changed over the next half-century. A dozen variations of Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist and other Protestant congregations vied with Anglicans and Roman Catholics for the souls of the Scots, English, and Irish scrambled across the new Ontario landscape. By the 1880s simple frame and polychromatic brick churches stood everywhere along the straight roadsides (Figure 2), and with them neat cemeteries filling with simple tombstones carefully inscribed with the names and dates of the pioneering generation by then fading. It is the architecture of these Christian sites that we have chosen to study here.

## LITURGY AND LITERATURE

Burials with the feet to the east may be traced to prehistoric sun-worshipping societies, long before the time

of Christ.<sup>1</sup> “Eastness” became deeply ingrained in Christian belief, although frequently more in theory than practice. English churches of the early medieval period routinely faced in various directions and determined the arrangement of landscape elements around them. Burials close to a church may be square to it, for example, but those farther away aligned to a boundary or a footpath instead, and none of them to the cardinal directions.<sup>2</sup> Starting late in the eleventh century, however, it became fashionable to rebuild to liturgical standards, ‘correcting’ buildings improperly aligned.<sup>3</sup> New Salisbury Cathedral (thirteenth century), for example, faces exactly east. Writing in the thirteenth century, Guillaume Durandus uses Biblical evidence to make the association of east with the return of light to a darkened world.<sup>4</sup> East was the focus, but not necessarily the compass point, nor even the rising sun. This fact bears significantly on the evidence we offer later in this paper.

In a recent, compass-based study of church alignments, Hoare and Sweet report that nearly two-thirds of English churches built between the seventh and

<sup>1</sup> Mark Hummer, “Liturgical Orientation: A Case Study in Southwestern Ontario Religious Landscapes - Rural Churches and Graveyards, 1860-1900” (unpublished MA research paper, Department of Geography, University of Toronto, 2001), 5-19. Frederick W. Burgess, *English Churchyard Memorials* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Warwick J. Rodwell, *The Archaeology of the English Church: the Study of Historic Churches and Churchyards* (London: Batsford, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Warwick J. Rodwell, “Churches in the landscape: aspects of topography and planning,” in Margaret L. Faull, ed., *Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 1-23.

<sup>4</sup> John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb, eds., *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments: a Translation of the First Book of [Guillaume Durandus] ‘Rationale Divinorum Officiorum’* (Leeds: T.W. Green, 1843). “The dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness.” Luke 1:78-79. *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993).

twelfth centuries faced within 10° of true east.<sup>5</sup> This seemingly remarkable achievement appears to us as a sensible awareness of where east ought to be, and the authors downplay the contribution

all were possibilities, and topography or pre-existing villages may have been overvalued.<sup>6</sup> Hoare and Sweet have an inclination to look for micro-management of a landscape inhabited by people



FIGURE 2. *Williscroft Baptist church (1907) stands abandoned, square to the squared-off Ontario landscape. Lot 9, looking west along the 12th Concession Line, Elderslie Township, Bruce County, 1983.*

of the lodestone (recently introduced) in favour of astronomical observations. In explaining the one deviant in three, sunrise became the measurable variable, and its shift from season to season accounted for much of the variety. Feast days, saints' days, the solstice, or the day of breaking ground for construction:

not so inclined, but there can be no doubt of liturgical intent in the medieval world.

In North American scholarship, churches and cemeteries are often regarded as artistic artifacts or curious remnants of rapidly-changing communities. Disused churches at obscure places in Ontario, like Cardwell, Primrose, or Relessey

are admired for their aesthetics, not their placement on the ground.<sup>7</sup> In a noteworthy piece of fine art research, Peter Benes affirms that colonial New England burials faced east and headstones both east and west, but is otherwise focused entirely on the artistic aspects of these spectacular artefacts.<sup>8</sup> Folklore, too, com-

<sup>5</sup> P.G. Hoare and C.S. Sweet, "The Orientation of Medieval Churches in England," *Journal of Historical Geography* 26 (2000), 162-73. The authors sampled 183 sites.

<sup>6</sup> Hoare and Sweet, "Orientation," 168-69.

<sup>7</sup> All are in Mono Township, Dufferin County. Cardwell is now a dwelling; the others stand vacant and are rarely (if ever) used. Hummer, "Liturgical Orientation," 12-14.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Benes, *The Masks of Orthodoxy: Folk Gravestone Carving in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, 1689-*

monly is focused in the graveyard.<sup>9</sup> Europeans, for example, have understood that the safest place for burial was adjacent to the chancel wall, nearest the altar. The north side of the cemetery was reserved for “sinners” and, of interest for our research, were laid out north-and-south and marked with reversed gravestones.<sup>10</sup> So much for our assumption that gravestones were invariably lettered on the side towards the grave, but such cautionary notes in the literature are scarce.

Places like nineteenth-century Ontario, where life was rough and living close to the edge of survival precluded undivided attention to scripture. Settlers were aware of liturgically-correct alignment, and their strong sense of eastness may be a response to millennial fervor and apocalyptic threats that rose periodically. Denominational fragmentation reached a crescendo in the middle of the nineteenth century, leaving today a residue of literally thousands of sites upon which to draw evidence. These show that factors other than direction often intervened. Churches often were built on donated land, and the positioning was secondary to the prospect of simply having a building at all. Ontario’s most rigid constraint was the rectangular survey, put in place ahead of settlement, and

the importance occupants attached to arranging their structures squarely with lot lines and facing main roads reinforced its influence. Geometric order was one of the pillars of the Age of Enlightenment, and for pioneer Ontario farmers, whose sights seldom stretched beyond the horizon, that sense of order came down to positioning individual buildings. Squareness makes good sense: for log cribworks, mechanized tillage, the shortest fences, and efficiency in keeping land records. Settlement coincided with the geometric stage of the English enclosure movement, which included rectangular blocks laid out beyond immediate needs and irrespective of cardinal directions. That sounds like Ontario.

In the 1840s, just as extensive countryside church and cemetery construction was taking hold in Ontario, contending forces on how this might properly be done were surfacing in England. Neale and Webb affirm the idea of the cross in church design, and the place of east in church positioning.<sup>11</sup> They wrote at the time of Augustus Pugin and the Ecclesiologists, when an understanding of church decoration and symbolism was stirring great interest.<sup>12</sup> The Cambridge Camden Society vigorously promoted eastward alignments for liturgical cor-

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1805 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977). “New Englanders almost always faced headstones to the east.” p. 3. In Plymouth Colony, however, “one custom was that of facing the headstones west.” p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscapes of North America, 1580-1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 221-31.

<sup>10</sup> Hummer, “Liturgical Orientation,” 18-19.

<sup>11</sup> Neale and Webb, *Symbolism of Churches*, lxxxvii, ci, 214.

<sup>12</sup> Augustus Welby Pugin, *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England* (orig. 1843, re-

rectness, while J.C. Loudon pushed hygiene and esthetics in his support for airy sites with “a south aspect.”<sup>13</sup> Loudon’s opinion resonated in Ontario, where so many institutional buildings have ‘faced the front’: that is, placed their entrances southward towards Lake Ontario, lying across the bottom of most maps and widely regarded as the front of the province.<sup>14</sup> Facing the main street was another factor, and many a church from Burlington to Cornwall stands on the north side of the lakeshore road. It is this kind of debate that legitimized the positioning of St James’ Cathedral in Toronto, raised in 1849 with its porch showing “a south aspect” and its sanctuary facing north. If the cathedral church could so brazenly show disdain for liturgical correctness, it is hardly surprising that scores of other sanctuaries throughout Ontario followed suit without great pangs of conscience.

A current description of the municipal graveyard in Southampton, on Lake Huron, states that “graves for the most part in this cemetery are off from this

[east-west] line almost 35°, running in a northwest-southeast line. The only ones that are actually aligned east-west are those in the western section of Block R that run along the [Saugeen] river, from no. 1 to 48, and 138-167.”<sup>15</sup> Throughout the year sunrise in Ontario varies about 34° north and south of due east. This is the figure for places at the latitude of Teeswater, Aurora, and Picton, and tells us that the majority of the graves at Southampton would face the rising sun for a few days each year, late in December. Astronomical calculations may be refined with great precision, and eastness clearly remains for some people a serious, measurable matter.<sup>16</sup> But for many more, then and now, ‘sunrise’ and ‘east’ are synonymous, with daylight dawning in a predictable wedge of the sky, above some not very important (and often invisible) spot on the horizon. Perception easily over-rules science, diminishing the significance of east by the compass. Our judgment is that Ontarians in the nineteenth century found their perceptions to be good enough, and felt no strong

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printed Oxford: St. Barnabas Press, 1969). It is debatable whether Pugin read Durandus. See also John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (orig. 1851, reprinted London: George Allen, 1906).

<sup>13</sup> John Claudius Loudon, *On the laying out, planting and managing of cemeteries, and on the improvement of churchyards* (London: the author, 1843), 23.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas F. McIlwraith, *Looking for Old Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 67-70. Courthouses and the several provincial and national legislative buildings have consistently faced southwards, as have many municipal halls.

<sup>15</sup> John Weichel, *Forgotten Lines* (Port Elgin: Bruce County Museum, 2001), 12.

<sup>16</sup> The arc of the horizon through which sunrise sweeps between the June and December solstices increases the farther north one goes (in the northern hemisphere), reaching 90° at the latitude of the Shetland Islands (60° north). In southern England (52° north) the arc is about 78°, and in southern Ontario it is about 68°. These figures are about a degree less at the Detroit River, about a degree more in Pembroke. Royal Astronomical Society, *Observer’s Handbook* (1982). *Canadian Almanac and Directory*, 2002 (Toronto: Micromedia, 2001), Section 1, p. 7.



urge to encumber their lives with perfect calculations.<sup>17</sup>

## TOWNSHIP ORIENTATIONS

Placing rural buildings in southern Ontario square to the lot boundaries directs our focus to the land survey. A current road map shows warps and wefts of straight lines, patched together with seemingly random pleats and gores. Toronto Gore Township, east of Brampton, takes its name from being the wedge between townships oriented 12° west of due north and those 45° off due north – that is, diagonal to the cardinal directions. (Figure 3) Ontario was laid out in anticipation of occupancy, and so escaped the total irregularity of the metes and bounds system widely seen in, say, New England. But the survey was far from perfectly designed. Townships were the basic survey units, and carried a geometry to make Euclid proud, but the reference points were based largely on natural features. In our case it was the Lake Ontario shoreline, reasonably straight but substantially skewed and with a sharp bend just west of Toronto.

Of approximately 360 survey townships in the agricultural part of southern Ontario, south and east of the Precambrian Shield, barely one-quarter would be described as aligned with the cardinal

directions.<sup>18</sup> This group includes townships skewed up to 12°, a deviation that is almost imperceptible on the land. About half of the total number are moderately misaligned. The remaining townships – one in five – are severely misaligned; these we have labeled “the diagonal townships.” Major clusters of diagonal townships occur through Peel and Halton Regions, southwest from St Thomas, and in the Ottawa valley. Lots laid out along colonization roads in Grey and Bruce Counties, and fragments elsewhere round out the count. Several townships along the Lake Huron shore in Bruce County, and two tiers along the St Lawrence River east of Brockville, are borderline to the diagonal category, and some of these butt up against adjacent townships abruptly.

Despite such irregularity, we would be hard-pressed to find any place in Ontario where people did not thoroughly believe that their local roads run north-south and east-west. St John’s Nassagaweya stands on the ‘east’ side of a ‘north-south’ road. Kingston is west of Cornwall and London east of Chatham. Every exit from Highway 401 is either ‘north’ or ‘south’, irrespective of the fact that the east end of this 828-kilometer route is more than 300 kilometers north of its west end. It is against this backdrop of inconsistency between perception and reality that our study of the alignment of church buildings and human burials is set.

<sup>17</sup> Notice that phenology – the daily tracking of such natural seasonal events as bird migrations, blossoming, fruiting, harvesting and first frost – attracted great attention, and were standard entries in rural diaries. Ontarians were not entirely beyond taking the pulse of their world.

<sup>18</sup> We placed a protractor on National Topographic 1:50,000-scale Series maps. To the extent that townships vary slightly in size, our proportions are approximate.

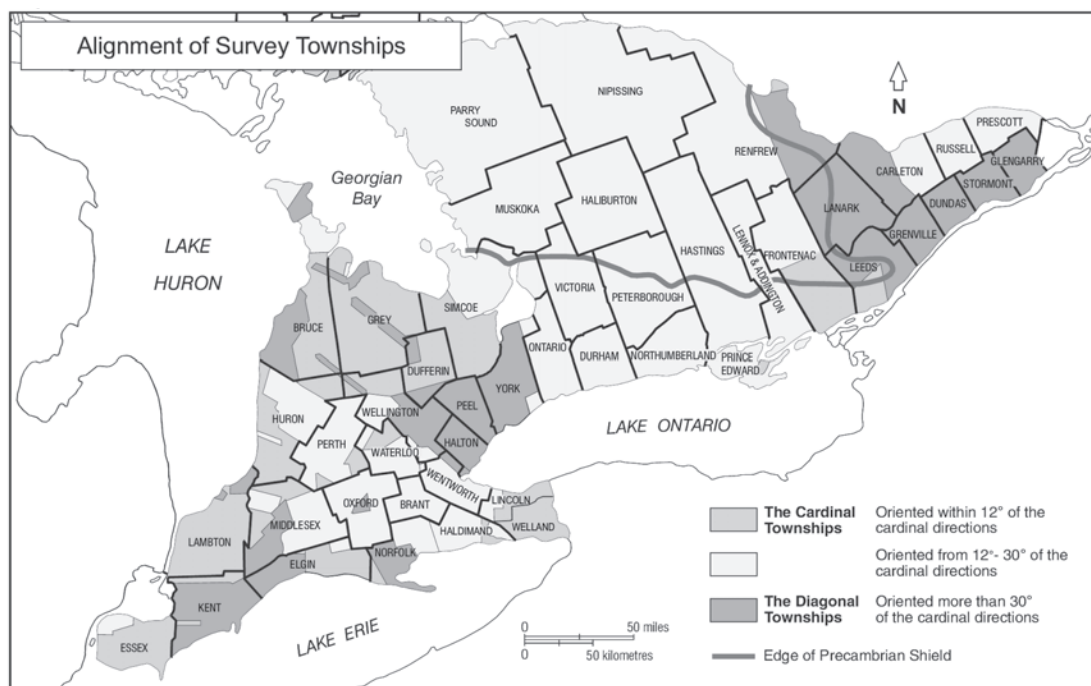


FIGURE 3. *Survey Township Alignments.*

## DUNDAS STREET: A CASE STUDY

Dundas Street, laid out before 1800 through Peel and Halton, displays a variety of religious alignments along a twenty-five-km segment invariably perceived as running east-west. (Table 1) This road runs northeast-southwest through several diagonal townships, and religious site planning along here yielded a broad range of responses. St Peter's Anglican alone comes close to meeting the liturgical needs in the scientific sense. Old St Paul's Presbyterian is one of several churches perceived to be facing south but actually face southeast, which is close to what liturgy recommends.

The early burial stones are blank to the roadside, facing southeast also. (Figure 4) The newer ones are labeled on their roadward sides. We wonder if these burials face northwest, with the lettered sides overlooking the casket, or could it be that the stone is reversed and the burial placed in the same relative position as for the earlier graves. We shall await the larger sample of observations before offering an opinion. The graves at St Luke's and Munn's are parallel to the road, but these sites have been decimated to the point that clear evidence of which is head and which foot has been lost.

Knox Sixteen, facing southwest on the east bluff of Sixteen-Mile Creek, tells a further story. Its cemetery is

FIGURE 4. Granite blocks at the roadside show boldly their labeled faces, while simple marble slabs retire in the background, their carved sides turned away. All burials have a common axis, perpendicular to the roadside. Wesleyan Methodist cemetery, looking towards Lake Ontario at Palermo, Halton Region, 2004.



aligned like most of the others, but the building appears to be badly misaligned. When Knox was built it actually had its porch steps towards Dundas Street, however, and stood on the north side (or westbound side we would say today). The church has not moved, but until well into the twentieth century traffic bound

every other church (except St Peter's), placing its doorstep to the roadside regardless of perceived or actual direction. We shall find that every denomination did this.

TABLE 1  
DUNDAS STREET THROUGH  
HALTON AND PEEL COUNTIES

PROPERTY	SITE	SIDE OF ROAD PERCEIVED	ORIENTATION OF CHURCH		ORIENTATION OF OLD CEMETERY	
			PERCEIVED	ACTUAL	PERCEIVED	ACTUAL
Nelson United	west of Guelph Line	north	north	48° NofW	south	48° SofE
St. John's Ang	west of Guelph Line	south	south	48° SofE	south	48° SofE
old St. Paul's Pr	east of Highway 407	south	south	48° SofE	south	48° SofE
St. Luke's Ang	Palermo, w of Bronte Rd	south	south	48° SofE	east?	not clear
Palermo United	east of Bronte Road	north	north	48° NofW	—	—
Palermo United	east of Bronte Road	south	—	—	south	48° SofE
Knox 16 Presb	at Sixteen-Mile Creek	"south"	west	42° SofW	south	48° SofE
Munns United	Sixth Line	north	north	48° NofW	—	—
Munns United	Sixth Line	south	—	—	east?	not clear
St Peter's Ang	Mississauga Rd	north	east	15° NofE	east	15° NofE
Erindale Meth	east of Credit River	south	south	60° SofE	—	—
Cooksville Un't'd	west of Hurontario Street	north	north	48° NofW	—	—

westward turned left (downstream) along the crest of this very deep glacial valley, passed the doorstep of Knox Sixteen and then looped back upstream and angled down the steep bank to a water-level crossing of the river. Knox was just like

## AN ARCHIVE OF CEMETERY PLANS

We move on to the broader Ontario experience, first by sampling from some 1,300 cemetery plans in the

Ontario Archives.<sup>19</sup> The alignment of graves is almost always discernible, but we found the head end identified only once in over a hundred instances. Many plans place east at the bottom, however, and this serves as a clue. It is as if the reader is looking west to read the headstones, acknowledge that the front of the cemetery is to the east, and that burials face that way too. In fifty-two cemeteries the axes of their nineteenth-century burials lie within 34° of due east, the wedge through which the sun rises some day of the year; twenty-eight of these are 15° or less off due east. (Table 2) Ten that lie beyond this eastward wedge appear to be east-west because of their relationship to the adjacent, skewed road. The most instructive cases include examples from near Strathroy and Chatham that are aligned east-west by being positioned diagonally in diagonal townships; likewise a cemetery near Harriston, on the old diagonal Kincardine road, and Ford Cemetery, on the Talbot Road near Port Glasgow.<sup>20</sup> (Figure 5)

The Waterloo Mennonite cemetery plan offers a number of useful marginal notes.<sup>21</sup> “Monuments are on the [inked-in] lines” is a signal that those developing the site must carry the geometry of the plan clearly onto the ground. With south at the bottom of the plan, we read

that “monuments are to the left of the grave, or west.” Furthermore, “head [is] at monument end” is accompanied by a drawing of a recumbent, ‘stick-man’ body, head to the left – west – and toes to the right – east. As a gratuitous bonus, on a possible subject for future inquiry, “the husband is usually to the right of his wife, or south, except on special request.” This is the same positioning as in the marriage ceremony. Waterloo Mennonite is a textbook rendering of the Christian liturgy, but a rarity in a collection of limited utility for this study.

## EXPLORING ONTARIO’S RURAL ROADSIDES

Our fieldwork has yielded alignments for more than 200 churches and nearly 100 cemeteries, a small fraction of the several thousand of each in old Ontario. This has been an opportunistic sampling extending over some thirty-five years, and we have made no effort to establish statistical significance. Nonetheless, striking patterns emerge and these are worth exploring. We have focused on the flat marble grave-markers and the small country churches, but details of sites as they appear today have deepened our understanding of the historical

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<sup>19</sup> Old burial sites, often closed and disused, lay in the path of redevelopment with increasing frequency by the 1960s. Addressing land-use conflicts seems to have precipitated this activity at a time when the Cemeteries Act was administered by the Department of Health. Reference RG31-33, Archives of Ontario (AO); aperture cards of 35mm frames. The sample is taken from cards #1 through #277.

<sup>20</sup> AO, RG31-33, C-9-1-3, aperture card #155.

<sup>21</sup> 800 King Street East, Waterloo. AO, RG31-33, C-50-7-2, aperture card #47.

TABLE 2  
CEMETERY PLANS

ORIENTATION OF GRAVE in degrees of deviation from true east - west	PERCEIVED AXIS OF CASKET				TOTAL CASES
	E - W	NE - SW	N - S	NW - SE	
more than 34 ° north of east	9	2			11
between 34 ° N and 34 ° S	49			3	52
more than 34 ° south of east	1	1	11	3	16
90 ° (ie, north-south)		4	5		9
total	59	7	16	6	88

context for those earlier features. We have assessed churches from the outside only, excluding those of indiscernible alignment.<sup>22</sup> We are confident that we have been able to establish – usually instantly – the overall direction of cemeteries, despite repeated instances of individual stones reversed. The current landscape remains the best resource for this project, albeit imperfect.

### *Churches*

Our sample of 213 churches shows no preference for sites on one side of the road rather than another. Only one church in five faces within 34° of due east, thus meeting the rising sun twice a year. (Table 3a) But nine out of ten face perpendicularly away from the road. (Table 3b) Of these, twenty-nine stand on the east side of the road, happily achieving both expectations simultaneously. Direct access onto the road is stunningly

more common than facing east.

The congregation of St Mary's Anglican, Metcalfe, is one that took liturgical correctness to heart, even at the price of having an odd-looking church, placed sideways on the north side of a road, with its narthex door on the side of the tower. (Figure 6) Huge numbers of buildings stand, like St Mary's, on the north side of the road, but face north. All have forsaken liturgy in preference for having their porch doors issuing to the south or, symbolically, the front of the province. The doorstep felt the warmth of winter sun, and presented itself towards 'civilization.' Inside, parishioners looked down the aisle to the chancel and, for those who cared to think such thoughts, gazed onward north and west into new opportunities in a raw land.

Churches on the south side face south without undue criticism; only two of thirty-four attempt to face east. Those on

<sup>22</sup> Generally they have corner towers, making them asymmetrical and allowing for large windows at both narthex and chancel. On churches of rotunda design the roof lines may obscure even the axis of the sanctuary. Very few rural churches present this latter problem.



FIGURE 5. Below: Plan of Ford Cemetery, near Port Glasgow. Ontario Archives, RG31-33, C-9-1-3. Left: Modern-day Ford Cemetery.

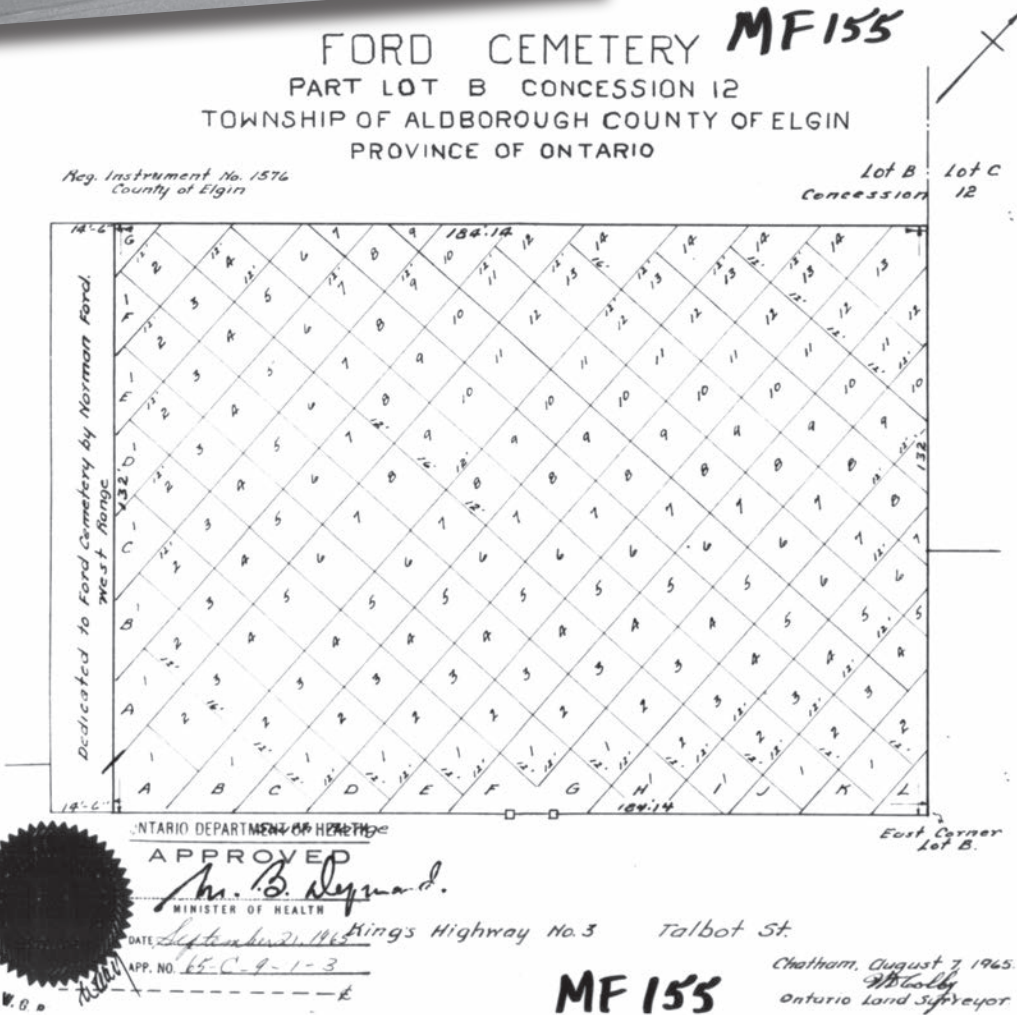


FIGURE 6. *St Mary's Anglican church faces east on the north side of a country road. The overhead wires show the road alignment, and the entrance is positioned towards it. Metcalfe Township Road 5, Middlesex County, 1979.*



the west just give up and face west. Of course these are well positioned to contend with winter winds and scudding snow. But it rarely seems to have mattered that a driveway led back into the lot, to a cemetery, a dwelling or a drive shed, and that that access route put people onto the church site at the end of the building remote from the road. It would have been so simple for west-side churches to face east, yet it so seldom occurred. The need for a roadside tower and belfry as visual and audible cues was doubtless important, but a corner tower could have served this purpose without difficulty.

For those readers with too many numbers swimming in their heads, Table 4 is a simplified statement and a benchmark from which further, more refined studies could spring. We conclude that for churches in Ontario the roadside narthex was the defining feature and facing east was of no particular importance.

### *Cemeteries*

We find that, of eighty-three burying grounds inspected in the field, fifty-two (or about two out of three) lie within the eastward orientation as defined in this paper. (Table 5a) Eastward graves occur only slightly less frequently on the south side of roads than on the other sides. But half of the graveyards facing well south of east are on the south sides of roads, and at least give lip-service to eastward orientation. These examples contribute to the overall picture of cemeteries occurring on any side of the road with equal likelihood. All but one of eleven graveyards in diagonal townships actually face northeast, but in common experience these may be said to face east. (Table 5b) That is the impact of the perception, generated by the land survey, of where east must be.

TABLE 3a  
CHURCH ORIENTATION AND ROADSIDE POSITION

TRUE ANGLE OF BUILDING in degrees of deviation from true east	CHURCH SITE: PERCEIVED SIDE OF THE ROAD							TOTAL CASES		
	NE	N	NW	W	SW	S	SE		E	
more than 34° north of east		70	1	3				19	93	
between 34° N and 34° S		6		3			2	1	29	41
more than 34° south of east		2		43	2		32		79	
total		78	1	49	2		34	1	48	213

TABLE 3b  
TRUE AND PERECEIVED ORIENTATION OF CHURCHES

TRUE ANGLE OF BUILDING in degrees of deviation from true east	CHURCH SITE: PERCEIVED SIDE OF THE ROAD							TOTAL CASES		
	NE	N	NW	W	SW	S	SE		E	
more than 34° north of east		68	1	2				22	93	
between 34° N and 34° S							1	40	41	
more than 34° south of east				44	2		33		79	
total		68	1	46	2		33	1	62	213

Price's Corners is one of the eighteen facing southeast, although appearing to face south.<sup>23</sup> (Figure 7) Again, these examples are in diagonal townships. Mayfair, Caledon, and St John's Nassagaweya are laid out diagonally in diagonal townships, and their burials in each case make distinctive statements of eastness.

Again, in the interests of simplicity and overview, we present Table 6. The 'common' instances now fill a single column, quite in contrast with the pattern in Table 4.

Almost all cemeteries face east, regardless of the side of the road on which they are situated. The remainder face south, often in conjunction with north-facing churches. Liturgical correctness in the layout of country graveyards has been important to Ontario's early generations.

### *Churches & Cemeteries Together*

St John's Anglican on Dundas Street may be the picture-perfect religious setting, with the door to the sanctuary and

<sup>23</sup> We have not studied whether cemeteries are on concession lines predominantly. But we think so, simply because, historically, concession lines opened sooner than sideroads and tended to have concentrations of buildings. See McIlwraith, *Looking for Old Ontario*, Chapter 14.



TABLE 4  
CHURCH ORIENTATION IN RELATION  
TO SIDE OF ROAD WHERE SITUATED

		PERCEIVED ORIENTATION OF CHURCH (narthex to chancel)					C = common	
		N	W	S	E	TOTAL	SE	
PERCEIVED SIDE OF ROAD ON WHICH CHURCH STANDS	N	C	—	v rare	a few	2/5		
	W	—	C	—	v rare	>1/5		
	S	—	—	C	—	<1/5	—	
	E	—	—	—	C	>1/5	—	
TOTAL		1/3	>1/6	1/6	<1/3	100%	V rare	

the nearest gravestones each facing the street. But neither element is, as we have seen, quite right. When nave and grave on one site both display liturgical fidelity, casual observation says that they seem to be in conflict. If a church faces east on the east side of the road, the cemetery is backwards. If a cemetery on the west side faces the road, then the proper church must be backwards. In Utica, at a country corners in Reach Township on the east-west road (that is, 20° off the cardinal direction) west of Port Perry, a church and graveyard stand together on the northwest corner. The building faces north, with its entrance onto the main road; the burials face east. Here, at least, one may look diagonally across the intersection and get a satisfactory view.

In a sample of thirty-five cases (Ta-

ble 7), twenty-six cemeteries face east yet only sixteen of the churches do. In twelve cases both church and cemetery face east, reinforcing each other. The other nineteen, where church and cemetery are oriented differently, both are square to the survey and the irregularity is really very subtle. The two cases of both features facing south might be added to this list; at least there is consistency, and facing south was a plausible substitute. And all seven south-facing churches are in diagonal townships. The two cemeteries that appear to face southeast, diagonally to the road and to their respective churches are, again, St John's Nassagaweya and Mayfair. Both face celestially east.

The Anglican church seems to have been the most committed of any denomination to liturgical correctness. Of

TABLE 5a  
GRAVE ORIENTATIONS AND ROADSIDE POSITION

TRUE ORIENTATION OF GRAVES in degrees of deviation <u>from true east</u>	CEMETERY SITE: PERCEIVED SIDE OF THE ROAD				TOTAL CASES
	<u>N</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>E</u>	
more than 34° north of east	2		3	6	11
between 34° N and 34° S	11	17	8	16	52
more than 34° south of east	5	4	10	1	20
total	18	21	21	23	83

TABLE 5b  
TRUE AND PERCEIVED ORIENTATION OF BURIALS

TRUE ORIENTATION OF GRAVES in degrees of deviation <u>from true east</u>	PERCEIVED ORIENTATION OF GRAVES				TOTAL CASES
	<u>N</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>E</u>	
more than 34° north of east	1			10	11
between 34° N and 34° S				52	52
more than 34° south of east		2	18		20
total	1	2	18	62	83

the twelve churches facing east, eight are on the east side of the road, and therefore no accommodation is needed. But the other four are instructive. St Mary's Metcalfe and St John's Grafton are on the north side of the road, in the middle of a block, and aligned parallel to the road. Grafton has a number of stones that appear to be backwards, but all burials have an east-west axis. Perrytown, north of Port Hope, is on the south side, facing east. St Peter's Erindale is on a northeast corner, with the porch towards Dundas Street and Streetsville Road simultaneously.

Instances of church and cemetery

facing different directions are useful because they demonstrate trade-offs which one may imagine generated debate, even among Anglicans. (Figures 8 and 9) For example, St John's Anglican church on a northwest corner on the Brock Road north of Port Perry, faces west, even as its cemetery faces east. Seven churches with eastward-facing cemeteries are all on the north sides of important features; they face north, while their porches issue southward towards "the front." In Port Burwell, the Anglican porch overlooks Lake Erie; in Wesleyville the Methodists survey Lake Ontario. In Frome, Dundela, Alsfeldt, North Augusta, and Kirkhill the

porches stand on main roads. Canton United, west of Port Hope, also stands on the north side, but faces south – a rare thing.

The decline of the rural religious landscape has been uneven. Where once nave and grave stood together as harmonious units, now that situation is a rarity. These thirty-five cases make up only one church in six in our sample and less than one cemetery in two. Denominational convergence, such as led the Methodists, Congregationalists and some Presbyterians into union in 1925, left many small country church buildings redundant, and declining rural population during the first half of the twentieth century further hastened decay. Buildings collapsed or were dismantled. Neglect overtook their burying grounds, and stones toppled and

sank from sight. Such decline has diminished steadily the ability to recognize east as important.

## BEYOND LITURGY

This story would have been ever so much easier to discern and relate in the 1880s than it is today. By then nearly all the Ontario pioneers had been buried: parents, aunts and uncles resting close to the family farm, mill or local store passed into the hands of the next generation. As these younger descendants themselves were gathered to their fathers, the neat rows of thin white marble stones became more and more interrupted with monuments set centrally within family plots. Genealogies of three or four generations appeared in the cemetery landscapes, of-

TABLE 6  
BURIAL ORIENTATION IN RELATION  
TO SIDE OF ROAD WHERE SITUATED

		PERCEIVED ORIENTATION OF CEMETERY (head to toe)					C = common	
		N	W	S	E	TOTAL	SE	
PERCEIVED SIDE OF ROAD ON WHICH CEMETERY IS LOCATED	N	—	v rare	a few	C	1/4		
	W	—	—	a few	C	1/4		
	S	v rare	—	some	C	<1/4	v rare	
	E	—	—	a few	C	>1/4	v rare	
TOTAL		—	—	1/4	3/4	100%	—	



FIGURE 7. *Bethel Presbyterian Cemetery appears to occupy a southeast corner site, its stones turned backwards to the 5th Sideroad (running across the scene) and sideways to the 12th Line, at left. In fact, this is an eastward corner in a diagonal township; the graves face southeast. Price's Corners, East Garafraxa Township, Wellington County, 2000.*

ten as obelisks or huge blocks, sometimes in the old marble but more often in pink or gray granite. A few were in zinc, with name plates that could be bolted on as needed.<sup>24</sup> Old Carrying Place cemetery, south of Trenton, has a particularly fine collection of marble obelisks.

By the interwar years gravestones were becoming simpler and carried fewer names. Descendants were being buried in the cities to which they had migrated. Many stones bore only the names of husband and wife, and more and more often faced outward so that passers-by could spot an old family name from a distance. East of Oakwood (Mariposa Township, Victoria County) stands a cemetery with

two distinct parts, strung out along the north side of Highway 7, an east-west road. The older, westerly portion consists mainly of slender limestone slabs facing east, sideways to the road. They are most easily read on a sunny morning in the low-light seasons, when the illumination best catches the worn text and highlights the nuances. The newer portion, further east, features granite blocks facing the road. The family names are large and bold, and easily legible from the roadside at any time of year.

Our field work turned up nine instances of reconstructed cemeteries. One – Dickson's Hill, in Markham – is a portion of a continuing active cemetery.

<sup>24</sup> McIlwraith, *Looking for Old Ontario*, 229-30.

The other eight appear as greenswards with no active burials. The orientation of the graves is no longer discernible, but stones gathered up and remounted in every instance face the road. (Figure 10) Sites that once marked the last resting places of individuals are now memorial grounds in which the cluster of stones constitutes a monument to pioneer society as a whole. Particular stones have become generic examples of infant mortality,



FIGURE 8. A stressed site, with church and cemetery at right angles to each other. Roman Catholic Parish church, Maryhill, Waterloo County, 1978.

TABLE 7  
CHURCH AND CEMETERY TOGETHER  
perceived directions

Church faces	N	W	S	E	Total
N	—	—	—	—	—
Cemetery faces	W	—	—	—	—
S	—	2	2	3	7
SE	—	—	1	1	2
E	7	3	4	12	26
Total	7	5	7	16	35

overseas birthplaces, or the decorative arts. Individuals and families recede into the general collectivity, their burial sites offering no more than fragments of scenery.

## PRACTICALITY TRUMPS THEOLOGY

By leaving to settlers decisions on where to build a house, when to plough a field, and how to pray or to bury one's dead, British colonial administrators in early Ontario unconsciously provided people opportunities to express on the landscape their deepest values. They grappled with a problem beyond the day to day routine of making a living, and came up with pragmatic solutions reflective of life in a maturing rural society. Ontarians decided that the price for li-

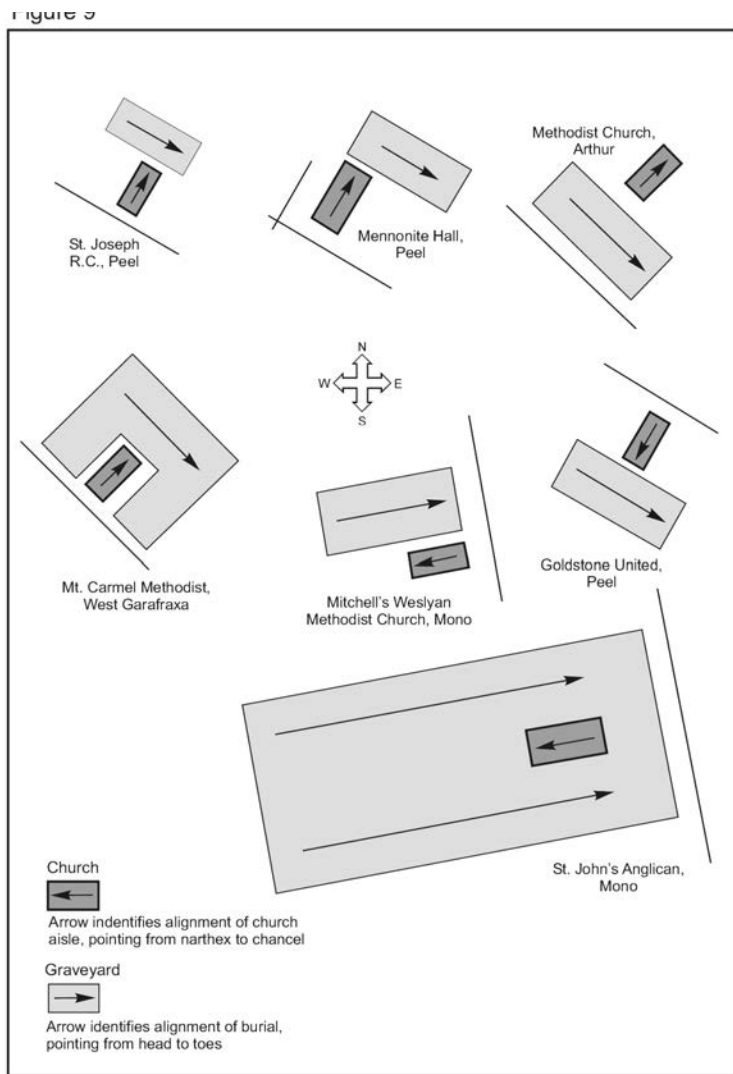


FIGURE 9. Church and graveyard sites with differing orientations. Wellington and Dufferin Counties. Hummer, "Liturgical orientation," 52.

but to do so risks trivializing the importance of religious expression in settlers' lives. It is this conflict that makes cases like Mayfair and Nassagaweya so interesting. We add one final example: St Stephen's Anglican, east of Hornby, in Halton County. Here, once again in a diagonal township, stands a church diagonal to the site and thus faithful to liturgy. In the graveyard some of the rows of stones stand squarely with the building, but others are diagonal to it. If one place in Ontario addresses the struggle upon which this paper focuses, St Stephen's surely would be it. Let us hope that such unanticipated attention does not disturb the

turgically-correct burials was acceptable, but that the price for liturgically-correct sanctuaries was frequently beyond reach, and not necessarily worth reaching for. One might say that facing the right way in this life was less important than doing so for eternity. Practicality may be misconstrued as indifference,

incumbents as they rest in peace.

Today's religious and burial landscape tells us that the significance of the east has declined over the past century and a half. Millennial fervor has died down. Family plots have replaced single stones. Lawn cemeteries became parklike features of urban design for city folk.



*FIGURE 10. The reconstruction of Melancthon Cemetery, probably in the 1970s, shows that even such memorials to pioneer life themselves decay. Facing west, east side of Highway 10, lot 295, Dufferin County, 2000.*

Landscape architecture and regional planning – secular subjects – have taken the limelight even in the most traditional parts of rural Ontario. Sooner or later, at some time of the year, the sun will rise to illuminate directly old gravestones and cast long shafts of light through a chancel window and down the aisle to the narthex. Giving attention to the east is easier than one might have imagined,

and perhaps the St John's site is less stressed than we initially suggested. St John's Nassagaweya looks like a lesson in Enlightenment thinking, demonstrating how perception and reality may be bound up in a single *coup d'oeil*. In the end, practicality, planning, philosophy, and planetary motion have converged to contribute to an intriguing aspect of the rural cultural landscape.