

Old Canadian Cemeteries: Places of Memory By Jane Irwin,
with photographs by John de Visser

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regulation, to be convincing and applicable to the Toronto context, and the sources utilized are appropriate to the task. Yet the contribution made by *Toronto Sprawls* remains limited. Solomon does not position his arguments within any scholarly traditions, and the book lacks discussion of the theoretical or philosophical bases undergirding the visions of the social reformers and municipal leaders that he criticizes, as well as those views supporting his own perspective. Because of this, the book ends up naturalizing a neoliberal discourse which posits the market and the state as logically opposed, and thus fails to understand the complex relationship between state regulation and private-sector development aims. Furthermore, Solomon does not ponder the array of political-economic forces acting on Toronto over the course of its history, and thus cannot adequately consider alternative hypotheses that connect prevailing social relations to state initiative. He likewise fails to consider the effects of (and reasons for) the pervasive *lack* of government initiative and implementation. As Richard White has recently shown, the latter is as much a cause of Toronto's sprawling form as are any direct government actions.

These flaws limit the contribution of the monograph. While accurately representing the relative importance of state institutions, regulatory mechanisms and policy in shaping Toronto's regional form, *Toronto Sprawls*

remains radically incomplete in explaining *why* the city has developed the way it has. Finally, permeating the analysis is an anti-suburban bias, which appears to imply that it would have been socially just, because it would have been economically efficient, if municipal and provincial governments had allowed poor fringe suburban communities to remain alienated and severely under-served in favour of elites residing in the urban core. While gentrifiers living in the urban core may identify with these sentiments, Canadians living outside the inner city (many who are poor and struggling) may find the message implicitly smug and dismissive of their own aspirations.

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Old Canadian Cemeteries

Places of Memory

By Jane Irwin, with photographs by John de Visser. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Firefly Books, 2007. 320 pp. \$75.00 hardcover. ISBN 1-55407-146-1. (www.fireflybooks.com)

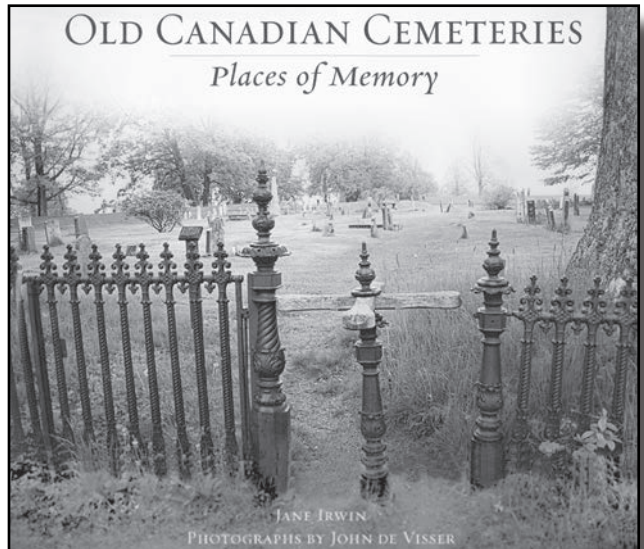
The concept of a permanent resting place for our dead is relatively new. At one time, churchyard cemeteries were periodically emptied and their bones transferred to charnel houses to make room for

more burials. In fact, as Jane Irwin tells us in her excellent book, *Old Canadian Cemeteries*, it was not until the 1600s that Europeans in India established the first permanent burial grounds. Canadian cem-

eteries, she goes on to say, inspired by the beautiful Moghul tombs of India, French examples such as the famous Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris (a true ‘City of the Dead’, complete with paved streets lined with house-like tombs), Victorian London’s ‘Magnificent Seven’ private cemeteries established in the 1830s and ’40s, and the picturesque designs of the American ‘Rural Landscape’ cemeteries, provide an important window into our past.

Irwin, formerly professor of English literature at Trent University, has produced an extensively-researched and lyrically-written paean to historic cemeteries and burial grounds in Canada. *Old Canadian Cemeteries* is organized into eleven chapters, some no more than short thoughtful essays, others much more extensive. Every page of this large-format book (I’m tempted to say ‘coffee table book’ but it is so much more) is lavishly illustrated with John deVisser’s wonderful photographs, carefully taken at day’s beginning or end to highlight faded lettering and softened sculptural elements. I suspect that these photos reveal far more than one would see on a mid-day visit.

Irwin begins with a personal account of how her own enthusiasm for the discovery and exploration of old burial grounds grew from a general interest in local history. Cemeteries represent the past and their preservation of memories illuminates the future or, as she puts it, “it is the future that gives meaning to history.” (p. 13) Burying places connect us to our roots and give us a strong sense of place. They are receptacles of fine art and architecture, and they often contain such significant natural heritage features as specimen trees or rare native plants. Some of the best-known cemeteries



are fine examples of landscape design, “expressly designed to be admired, visited and appreciated.” (p. 15)

Much may be learned from the exploration of cemeteries. There are many stories, not just of individuals and families but also of religious beliefs and practices, settlement history, artistic trends, social systems and class differences. Irwin’s lengthy section, ‘Changing Burial Traditions,’ provides a fascinating historical overview, taking us back 7,500 years to a native child’s burial in South Labrador and moving forward in time to explain what influences have shaped cemeteries in Canada. In ‘Ancestral Ties’ Irwin examines what we can learn from old burying grounds associated with waves of settlers from France, America, the British Isles, Europe, China and Japan. Each description is a revelation, combining an exploration of the reasons for different religious beliefs and markers’ styles with stories of the ordinary and extraordinary individuals buried within. One such example was John Payzant, of French Huguenot extraction, who moved from Jersey to Lunenburg, where his fa-

ther “was killed by Indians, who took John and one of his brothers for adoption...” (p. 60). The family was reunited in Quebec, and John was educated at the Jesuit College until the British Conquest in 1759. Payzant, a ‘Congregationalist Planter’ (a version of Puritanism), later followed the famous Nova Scotia preacher Henry Alline to New England to help lead the ‘Second Great Awakening’.

A dozen cemeteries from across Canada are singled out for detailed description. Five hold National Site status but Irwin believes they all merit the designation. The earliest, the Old Burying Ground, is in Halifax, and Quebec has four. Ontario has six: Notre-Dame and Beechwood in Ottawa, Cataraqui in Kingston, Mount Pleasant and the Necropolis in Toronto, and Hamilton Cemetery. The twelfth is Ross Bay, near Victoria, overlooking the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the snow-capped Olympic Mountains in Washington State. The emphasis on central Canada in this chapter is balanced by many examples from the east coast and prairies in other parts of the book.

Irwin describes the iconography of war memorials in some detail, starting with the Seven Years’ War Memorial, inaugurated in 2001 in the small Hôpital-Général cemetery in Quebec City, and concluding with the National War Memorial in Ottawa. She also looks at memorials to marine disasters, the Irish famine, and Inuit victims of tuberculosis in Hamilton.

Old Canadian Cemeteries ends with a gentle plea for better conservation of our historic cemeteries. “We have no right to sacrifice, selectively, the memory of those who predeceased us.” (p. 295) Irwin illustrates her feelings with the contrasting tales of two pioneer burying grounds: one in Burlington, lost forever, and the Old Protestant Burying Ground in Charl-

town, preserved since 1826, where former citizens’ stories have been recorded and are still memorialized in the cemetery.

This is such a fine book that I hesitate to mention shortcomings. The idea of cemeteries as prime examples of cultural heritage landscapes is not explored in great detail, however, and Irwin’s description of a Mi’kmaq burial mound in its context serves to emphasize how landscape is neglected elsewhere. I would have appreciated maps of some of the designed cemetery landscapes, but nevertheless the text provides much that will enhance any reader’s ability to read these significant landscapes when they are visited. I would also like to have learned more about the efforts of volunteers to protect historic burial grounds. The Ontario Historical Society has made a special effort to resist the closure of cemeteries, in legal hearings and through promotion and education. The Ontario Heritage Trust has erected 1,210 plaques in Ontario; five directly commemorate cemeteries, and another 28 located in and around burying places recognize people, events and local settlement history. In addition, the Trust has supported 43 local marker projects to commemorate cemeteries, burial grounds, dead houses and specific monuments in communities throughout the province. There are many others doing this work, but this is a topic for another day or, I suppose, another book. The book we do have already does much for the future conservation of historic cemeteries, by explaining their history, symbolism and art to the visitor, explorer and amateur historian, and by raising our awareness of their strange allure.

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