



Canada's
Historic Places

Lieux patrimoniaux
du Canada

Municipal Designation of Cemeteries and the Historic Places Initiative

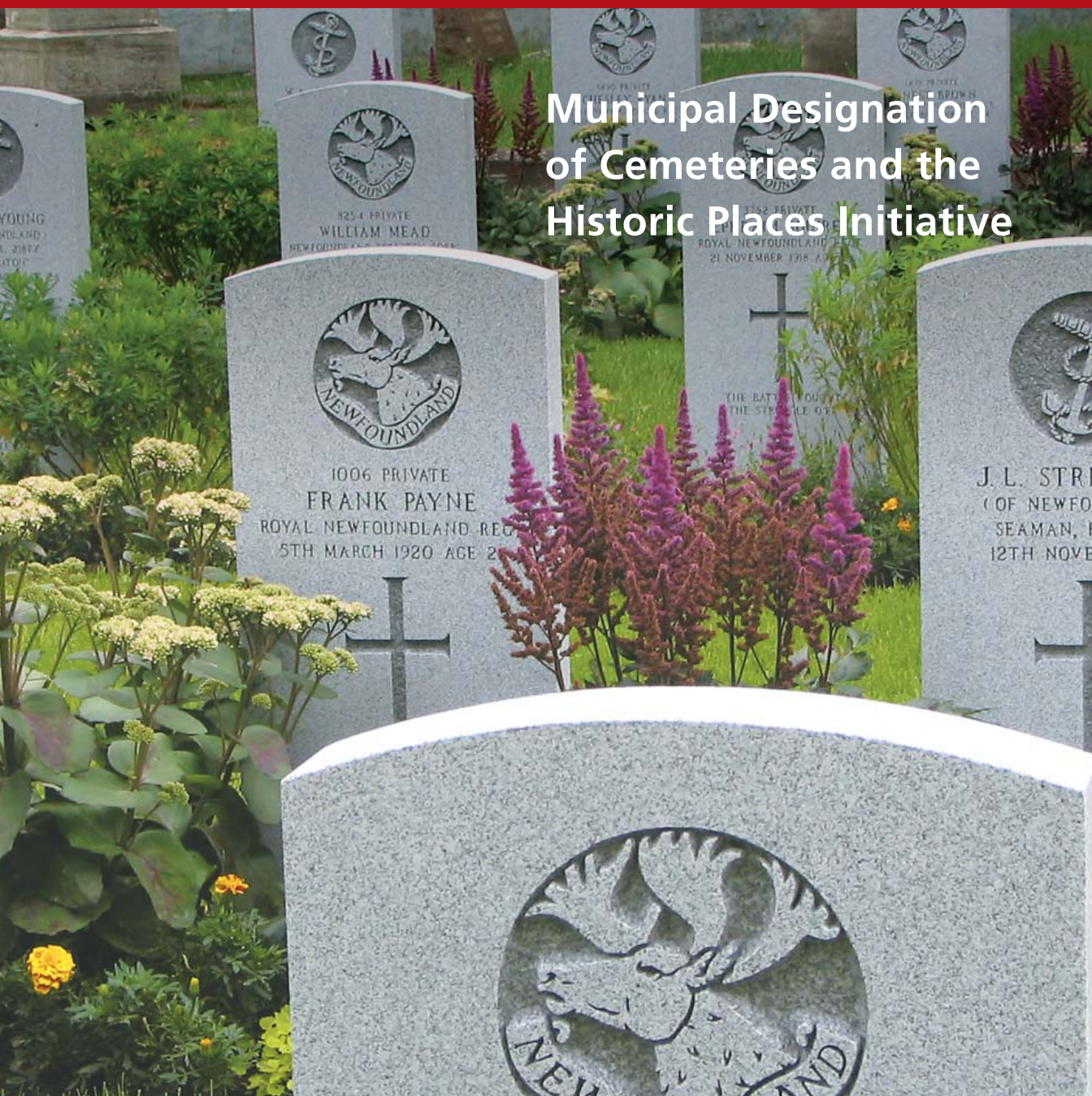




Photo Credit: Nikki Hart



Our Historic Cemeteries

Cemeteries throughout Newfoundland and Labrador are generally revered as special, sacred places. They occupy both emotional and physical space in our communities. Cemeteries are also expressions of our spiritual beliefs and cultural values, as well as rich repositories of genealogical and community history.

Headstones and other types of grave markers can tell us what materials and skills were available in the area at the time they were made, or what could be imported. Family historians may turn to these markers as excellent sources of genealogical information, inscribed with pertinent information. And some of the oldest headstones in our province contain clues about settlement patterns, and subsequently insight into community history and culture.

Religious iconography, including statues and engraved symbols on headstones, and inscriptions in historic cemeteries are often related to denomination and spiritual belief. Other symbols and inscriptions may indicate military service, or membership in a fraternal organization. Epitaphs on the grave markers of prominent citizens may commemorate their contributions to their communities. Some markers record historic or tragic events, such as lives lost at sea, occupational or natural disasters, or war.

The locations of cemeteries in our landscapes, their layouts, and the kinds of vegetation, fencing and decoration are also significant factors in the heritage value of what may be amongst the most precious of our historic places.



What Does Designation Mean?

Under the Municipalities Act, incorporated Newfoundland and Labrador municipalities can create Heritage Advisory Committees and designate locally important heritage buildings, structures and lands.

Designation means that a historic place occupies a special place in your community. It means that the place has been identified as having value to the people of your community and as a source of community pride. Heritage designation also provides some protection for historic places under the Municipalities Act:

A building, structure or land designated by council as a heritage building, structure or land shall not be demolished or built upon nor the exterior of the building or structure altered, except under a written permit of the council specifically authorizing the alteration and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the permit.





Why Designate Cemeteries?

- Designation is good promotion of the history and heritage of your community.
- Designation can be a celebration or memorial to a specific person or event.
- Designation can help increase tourism interest, thereby increasing revenues for “your community.
- Designation can help ensure longevity of a site.
- A designation can be listed on the Canadian Register of Historic Places.
- Designation involves an historical statement, thereby acting as a stepping stone for future research.
- Designation can increase community involvement in the heritage preservation process.





Steps to Designate a Cemetery

1. Place nominated for designation – contact the Heritage Foundation to discuss what information is needed.
2. Place reviewed by Heritage Advisory Committee.
3. Statement of Significance drafted.
4. Place designated by Town Council.
5. Designated place listed on Provincial Register of Historic Places and nominated to the Canadian Register.

What is a Statement of Significance?

The Statement of Significance helps to explain the heritage value of historic places to locals, visitors or people viewing places online. The Statement of Significance also clearly states what is designated and provides guidance to property owners, municipal officials, planners, developers, etc.



For more information about municipal designation see the booklet “Municipal Designation and the Historic Places Initiative” available at the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Sample Statement of Significance

Description of Historic Place

Topsail United Church Cemetery is the burial ground to many original settlers of Topsail. The Cemetery is located next to Topsail United Church, which is situated at 2424 Topsail Road, Conception Bay South.



Photo Credit: HFNL

Heritage Value

Topsail United Church Cemetery was designated a municipal heritage site because it has spiritual, historical and cultural values.

Topsail United Church Cemetery has spiritual value because from the earliest time, settlers to this province held strong religious beliefs and this is evident in the early burials at the United Church cemetery. Although the daily work of the early settlers was very demanding, whenever a death occurred, a solemn ceremony was held. As a sign of the high regard and reverence settlers had for their dead and the cemetery, grave markings can be found as basic rock formations serving as headstones, and commercially made headstones with basic markings and engravings. These customs remind us of the strong religious beliefs the Topsail settlers had for their church and cemetery, and how death was always a part of their lives.



Photo Credit: Carla Myrick

The Topsail United Church Cemetery has historical value because there are notable residents buried there, including Rev. Dr. Reynolds who was the senior president of conference and frequent guest preacher at the church. Also buried there is Rev. Thomas Fox, who was one of the earlier ministers of the Methodist Church. He resided in Topsail and acted as supernumerary in retirement. Both Rev. Dr. Reynolds and Rev. Fox were active members of the community, as well as the church.

Another noteworthy Topsail resident, Postmistress-poet Mrs. Phebe Florence Miller, rests at Topsail United Church Cemetery. Mrs. Miller was born in 1889 and spent all of her life in Topsail. In 1907, she entered the work force as the government telegraph operator in Topsail; in 1928 she was also made postmistress and in 1935 she moved to the newly established wireless station. The post office, which often housed the telegraph and wireless stations, was an important addition to many Newfoundland communities in the later half of the 19th century.



As the main centre for communications with the outside world, it was a gathering place where people learned of happenings both local and international. It was vital that the person who operated these marvels of modern communication command the respect of the townspeople, as he or she was often privy to very personal and private information. Phebe Miller gained her nickname “Postmistress Poet” because she was an accomplished writer who had many poems published, most notably by the American Greetings group of companies. Miller remained very active throughout her life until she died in 1979.



The Topsail United Church Cemetery has Cultural value because it displays how the early settlers had a strong sense of religion and despite daily activities, duty to church and the importance of following sound Christian values shaped the spiritual life of the community residents. Whenever a death occurred in the community all the residents would be available to help, whether it was to hand dig the grave, or for some to stay up all night for the typical three day wake, to the eventual burial of the body, which always faced the feet east. It was those customs and religious acts that kept the settlers grounded and fixed to their Christian beliefs and values.

Source: Conception Bay South Historic Trust, Designation file

Character-Defining Elements

All those elements which represent the age, natural environment and sacred function of the cemetery, including:

- a variety of carved headstones and grave markers belonging to a number of historic local persons;
- original memorial stones and monuments, with their surviving inscriptions;
- the unimpeded view of Conception Bay; and location, orientation and dimensions.



Ten Steps to Cemetery Preservation

1. **Create a plan.** Although your town may be eager to complete preservation work on the cemetery, it is important to properly prepare through completing a Plan. This includes gravesite documentation and plans for treatment, maintenance, landscape issues, and priorities.
2. **Document the cemetery.** Create a form for recording each site and include in this form how to identify monument types, condition and inscriptions of tombstones, and construction material of grave markers. Find volunteers to help in documentation.
3. **Assess the condition of gravesites.** Inspect individual tombs on a regular basis for structural defects. Note the conditions of the tomb and its surrounding environment. Keep this information on your standard form.
4. **Evaluate the landscape.** Assess landscape elements including the trees, shrubs, and plants, and also the pathways, roads, benches, fences, and lighting of the cemetery. Think long-term about the landscape and any future maintenance. Don't try to apply your personal tastes to an historic cemetery.
5. **Prioritize the work.** Consider the needs of the particular cemetery and create a list of projects based on those needs. Keep in mind the need for both short-term and long-term efforts. Assess the resources you currently have available.

6. **Consider treatments.** Conservation of stone monuments, sculpture and ironwork is usually the last effort that should be undertaken. Cleaning stones should be done with the gentlest means possible. The repair of tombstones and monuments requires previous experience with historical materials and treatments.
7. **Examine maintenance issues.** Regularly scheduled maintenance for the monuments and grounds of the cemetery is an excellent way to practice preventative preservation. Training for maintenance and ground crews will minimize damage to markers.
8. **Seek professional assistance.** Contact people who have experience with historical materials and who respect the original material of the tombs. Ask contractors about their previous work.
9. **Involve the community.** Seek volunteers within the community and involve the community in fund-raising efforts. Use the cemetery as an educational resource. Cemeteries can be places to learn; consider annual cemetery tours.
10. **Know the law!** It is illegal in Newfoundland and Labrador to excavate an archaeological site, exhume a grave, or interfere with human remains without the proper permits and permissions. Get the right information before disturbing any modern or historic grave site.





Resources:

Provincial Archaeology Office

The Provincial Archaeology Office is the regulatory agency for all archaeology conducted within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Contact the PAO with questions regarding the discovery of human remains, cemeteries in abandoned communities, or any proposed archaeological work.

(709) 729-2462

www.tcr.gov.nl.ca/tcr/pao

Family History Society of Newfoundland and Labrador

The Family History Society's database of cemetery records is part of an ongoing project to index all the cemetery records in Newfoundland and Labrador. The database is available for research by the general public. The Society also publishes a handbook for recording tombstone inscriptions, available from their office for \$4.00.

(709) 754 9525

www3.nf.sympatico.ca/nlgs

Conservation Corps Newfoundland and Labrador Green Teams

The Green Team Program supports the efforts of communities to improve the natural and cultural environment of our province. It provides training and work experience to young people (local youth between the ages of 16-30 that make up a four person team) in the fields of cultural heritage, community research and heritage conservation. More information please contact:

Darren Feltham, Director of Programs

(709) 729-7266

www.conservationcorps.nf.ca

Online Resources:

Saving Graves

Preserving, protecting and restoring endangered and forgotten historic cemeteries.

www.savinggraves.com

Association for Gravestone Studies

An international organization for the study and preservation of gravestones.

www.gravestonestudies.org

Landscapes of Memories

An excellent technical guide for repairing tombstones.

www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/culdiv/heritage/memories.htm



Photo Credit: HFNL

The Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador is a non-profit organization which was established by the Provincial Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in 1984 to stimulate an understanding of and an appreciation for the architectural heritage of the province. The Foundation, an invaluable source of information for historic restoration, supports and contributes to the preservation and restoration of buildings of architectural or historical significance.



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