

St David's Exec Summary Archaeological Findings

Davis MacIntyre & Associates conducted one of our largest projects to date in 2016 and 2017: the relocation of a portion of a historic cemetery in downtown Halifax, most of which had been capped by a 1951 building that was scheduled for demolition. Between 1793 and 1844, members of several Methodist churches in Halifax were buried on a property on the outskirts of Halifax's downtown core. After 1844, burying within the city (except for the Poor House Cemetery) was discontinued and the new Camp Hill Cemetery was used instead. The year 1852, only eight years after burials had been taking place, the new Grafton Street Wesleyan Church was constructed overtop a portion of the cemetery. At this time, remains within the building's footprint would have been exhumed and presumably reburied, and headstones were shifted to other areas of the cemetery. In 1868, the wooden church burned, and was replaced by the slightly larger brick and stone Grafton Street Methodist Church a year later. This is the church that still stands today. A series of additional construction projects took place on the cemetery property, including a large brick and stone schoolhouse in 1865, an extension around the church chancel in 1928, a church hall connected to the church in 1951, and a final extension to the hall in the 1960s. The 1951 church hall was the most significant impact after the initial church construction, and though the headstones in the portion of the cemetery covered by the hall were reportedly laid flat in situ and covered over, the 2016 excavation revealed that all of the stones had been moved in 1951 and later buried in two groups under the southern rooms of the hall. The many phases of impact caused many complications in relocating and identifying these historic graves. The movement of the headstones - or in some cases, multiple moves - meant that even the 1951 positions could not be relied upon to mark the correct individual's remains. The footings of the building, along with the movement of heavy equipment during construction, had caused widespread damage to the graves, sometimes crushing and sometimes truncating graves, and disinterring isolated bones. The excavation of the cemetery lasted for approximately 14 months, the first 10 being dedicated to excavation while the remaining four were spent monitoring demolition of the hall - which had remained standing with its floors removed during the excavation. In total, although only thirty-six headstones had been present in 1951, the remains of at least 244 individuals of all ages (from 15 gestational weeks to advanced age) were recovered from the site, and are now reinterred in a crypt below the church, which remains standing. Most individuals were interred in their own separate graves, but three mass graves were identified, one representing mostly primary burials in coffins (possibly related to one of Halifax's several epidemic events), while the other two were secondary burials, meaning that the skeletal remains of multiple individuals had been exhumed and reburied together. The largest of these mass graves was a secondary burial of at least 54 individuals, who due to a variety of pathologies were most likely former residents of the Poor House Cemetery on the neighbouring property. Notable findings during the excavation include the discovery of a mass

grave of at least 54 individuals who were exhumed from their original graves and reburied in one location (likely in the mid-nineteenth century), the presence of three lead coffins (an adult, a child, and an infant buried together), the presence of a remarkably small adult woman with an intact blue shell-edged pearlware plate placed over her feet inside the coffin, two cases of 1830's coins buried over the left side of an individual's chest, and multiple instances of group burials in separate coffins, either stacked or placed side-by-side. Preservation of the remains varied widely, from no physical remains and only a coffin outline (especially in infant burials), to badly degraded bone representing only a portion of the full individual, to nearly complete skeletons. Wooden outlines of six-sided coffins, usually with collapsed lids, were present in almost every instance. Other archaeological features and artifacts were encountered that were unrelated to the cemetery. These included the footings of the 1865 schoolhouse, an unidentified stream bed or sluice running across the site, footings for two smaller structures or walls, and a variety of artifacts including several that are possibly related to the neighbouring soldiers' barracks to the north. HOME ARCHAEOLOGY IN N.S. PROJECTS SERVICES OUR PEOPLE CO-OP PROGRAM NEWS CONTACT US The full details of this project have been compiled into a large three-volume report detailing all findings. If you are a researcher, historian, or archaeologist and wish to review this data in relation to other cemetery projects, please contact the Co-ordinator of Special Places at the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and heritage.