

WILLOWBANK CEMETERY

4714 County Road #2 - PO Box 123 - Gananoque ON K7G 2T7 www.willowbankcemetery.ca

Newsletter Spring/Summer 2025

President's Message:



Happy springtime! This is my first newsletter message, so I'll try to make it short and sweet. You'll be happy to know that Willowbank is doing well, thanks to the extensive efforts of our long-time volunteers. In particular, we are renewing ourselves with the introduction of four new board members, recruited with the dedicated efforts of Past President Dr. Stephen Heaton. Many of you know Robert Burtch, a retired Lansdowne school teacher and active volunteer on a number of local organizations. Victoria Maitland is the daughter of Peter Maitland, a long-time former President of Willowbank, and will be serving as our Vice President and Webmaster. Tom Shillington brings a financial and project management background to our board and will be active as one of our Sales Officers. And I'm a

retired engineer and third-generation cottage owner who's moved back "home" where I belong. There are now ten of us (full bios on our website) and we all have a love for Gananoque, the Thousand Islands, and Willowbank.

This year was highlighted by the purchase and construction of our new columbarium. The need was pressing, coincidental with the recent sale of the very last niche of our existing facility. The foundation has been poured and the balance of the construction is expected over the summer. Sales have been authorized as of our recent board meeting. Our site took a hit with the recent ice storm, but with some professional help we are clearing away the fallen trees and resetting the memorials. Our annual spring clean-up day was on April 26th with some additional effort put in the following weekend - read on for more details. This was my first clean-up day and it was a lot of fun. I hope you'll be able to join us for a few hours next spring and help to beautify your cemetery.

Charles Kidd

President Willowbank Cemetery



Spring Cleanup Day April 26, 2025

It was a cool dreary day but several intrepid volunteers showed up for our annual Willowbank Cemetery Spring Clean Up Bee. The rain held off until almost noon and by then we had loaded up most of the branches onto the trailer. We appreciate this volunteer effort as it gets our grounds ready for grass cutting, usually around the first of May. This year we had several members of the Willowbank neighbourhood come out to help us. It is so great to know we have friends nearby who love this spot as much as we all do. Some other jobs completed on the To Do List were waste bin clean up, pruning and garden bed tidying, removal of old wreaths and faded artificial arrangements, repair and painting of the benches. We would like to express our deepest appreciation for all the volunteer time and effort.



Heritage Walking Tour of Willowbank Cemetery

Sunday, September 21 at 2:00 PM and Saturday, October 12 at 2:00 PM

Robert Burtch, Secretary of Willowbank Cemetery will lead a guided tour of the grounds which will include a variety of points of interest pertaining to our unique heritage. If you or family members would like to join the tour, please pre register by contacting Robert at burtchrobert1@gmail.com

We are reserving the September 21 tour for interment rights holders, their family and friends. The general public will be invited to the October 12 tour.





Heritage Status News: The Willowbank Cemetery Board had the stone winter vault (deadhouse) listed on the Township of Leeds and Thousand Islands Municipal Heritage Committee's Registry of Heritage Properties several years ago to acknowledge its particular architectural features. Due to recent amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act by the Ontario Government, properties on any municipal registry will no longer be considered for protection, therefore we must undergo the process of formal heritage

designation in order to protect the historic and natural features of Willowbank Cemetery for future generations. The Soperton Cemetery and Union Cemetery located in our municipality are examples of cemeteries which now have formal heritage designation. The deadline to be in compliance is January 2027. We will keep you informed of the process.

Willowbank Cemetery: A Destination for Tombstone Tourists?

Tombstone Tourist (otherwise known as a "cemetery tourist", "grave hunter", "graver", or "taphophile") describes an individual who has a passion for and enjoyment of cemeteries, epitaphs, gravestone rubbing, photography, art and history of 'famous' deaths. The term has been used most notably by author and biographer Scott Stanton as the title of his former website and book *The Tombstone Tourist: Musicians* (2003) about the lives and gravesites of famous musicians. For centuries, people have made pilgrimages to the burial sites of religious leaders and saints. In Chinese culture the ancient tradition of ancestor worship also involved a veneration of dead relatives with visitations and ritual offerings, some of which survived to this day.

During the 19th Century when Garden Cemeteries, of which Willowbank is a mini example, began to appear, visitation by families and even the wider public was encouraged. It would be very common for whole families and large parties to spend a day among the beautiful and peaceful settings found in such cemeteries which filled the role of public parks as they were not widely established at that time. Père Lachaise in Paris and Highgate in London are examples of famous cemeteries that still attract thousands of tourists a year.

Some cemetery tourists are particularly interested in the historical aspects of cemeteries or the historical relevance of those lying at rest. Willowbank Cemetery is rich in history going back to the establishment of Upper Canada in 1784. We have many notable gravesites

and the stories of those interred here are waiting to be told. Through this newsletter and our Facebook Page we will endeavor to share these stories with you.

Genealogical tourists make considerable effort to search out cemeteries and their records to verify grave records and ancestral burial locations. The Leeds and Grenville Branch of the **Ontario Genealogical Society** published a Genealogical Reference Listing (ISBN 0-920300-57-X) of Willowbank Cemetery in 1986. It contains the names and epitaph information on all the known graves at that time. It opens with a history of the cemetery written by Ed Clark, a longtime board volunteer and father of current board member Shirley Clark. **The Ontario Cemetery Index** maintained by the Ontario Genealogical Society is another database which the public can access at ogs.on.ca

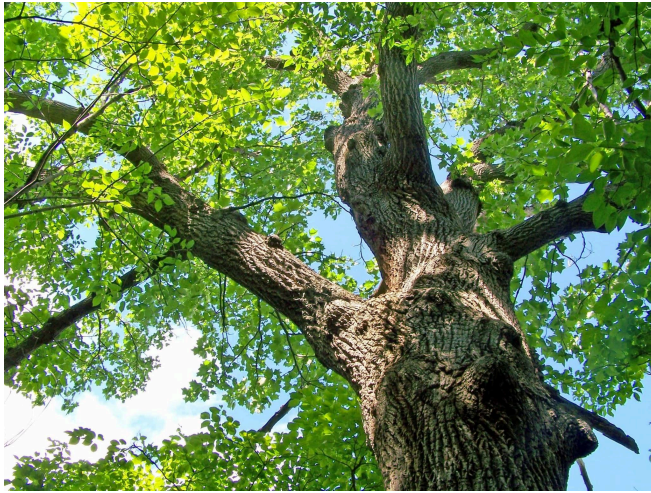
Find A Grave is a website and volunteer-driven project that serves a large online database of cemetery records, including information about the final resting places of people all over the globe. It is owned by Ancestry.com. The site's mission is to help people find, record, and present final disposition information in a virtual cemetery experience. It has a searchable database which can be browsed based on name or location.

The Archives at Queens University holds the hard copy of our Willowbank Burial Registry. It is a very large and fragile binder which was used up until the early 2000s. There are about 900 pages in total with records of burials in all sections of the cemetery. Although fascinating it is awkward to use and we now have digital records of burials but it is good to know this one is in safe hands.

What does it mean to be a 'registered' cemetery?: The Ontario Historical Society through its dedicated volunteers has donated countless hours to research, document and compile a listing of over 1,500 unregistered cemeteries across Ontario. All cemeteries need to be registered with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario whether they are active or not. Unregistered cemeteries are often abandoned private family plots or pioneer cemeteries and do not have any level of protection and little can be done to protect the dignity of the deceased if their presence is unknown to the authorities.

Willowbank is registered as an active cemetery meaning we still have burials or interments and inurnments which is the placement of an urn containing cremated remains into a columbarium niche. About half of the 40 cemeteries in our Township are 'inactive'. Many smaller heritage cemeteries like ours are finding it difficult to keep up with the workload and costs associated with property upkeep, in particular regular grass cutting and trimming. Some Ontario municipalities have had to take on this workload as rural cemetery boards dissolve. Fortunately we are not at this stage as we have a well functioning board, we sell our services to the public and we do receive support from our municipality (Township of Leeds and Thousand Islands) in the form of a grant. We appreciate this ongoing source of funds as well as donations and bequests to keep the cemetery running smoothly.

Trees For the Future



As you can imagine, a cemetery of Willowbank's age contains a great number of mature trees. Many of these magnificent specimens are nearing the end of their natural lives and many others have been damaged by pests and storms. We spend a considerable amount every year on tree maintenance by licensed professional arborists that must be done to ensure the safety of our visitors. This year so far we had to remove some large limbs from several massive trees that

suffered damage in the March Ice Storm. There are also a few other ash trees that have succumbed to the Emerald Ash Borer and will need to be removed. It was very sad to see them go as they shade the surrounding area. We need to begin planting a variety of new trees on a yearly basis to ensure that the ambiance of this "Garden Style Cemetery" survives into the future. We have a source for new trees at a reasonable price, in 3 and 5 gallon pots up to 6 feet high that will grow into beautiful shade trees in the years to come. Won't you consider contributing to the tree fund to restore our forest canopy as a donation, perhaps in memory of a loved one? All trees are priced at \$100. We will ensure that your tree is planted in an appropriate site in the cemetery to be enjoyed for future generations. Please go to our website:



www.willowbankcemetery.ca click on the Donate link or mail to

Tree Fund Willowbank Cemetery PO Box 123 Gananoque ON K7G 2T7

Thank You

Speaking of trees for a new generation, it would be preferable to have the majority of our newsletters sent digitally by email or read/downloaded from our website. If you are currently receiving this newsletter by Canada Post won't you please consider this option? It would be a significant saving in costs for paper and postage. If you have not already done so, please email our secretary Robert Burtch at burtchrobert1@gmail.com and he will add your email address to our database.



Did you know you can now follow us on FaceBook ? Check out our page and keep in touch at facebook.com/willowbankcemetery



Willowbank Cemetery Memorials

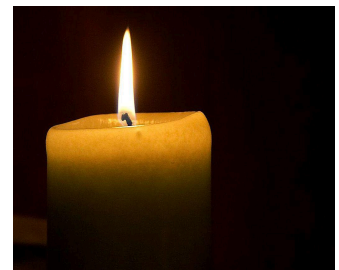
In remembrance of your loved ones, please keep Willowbank Cemetery, a charitable organisation in mind.

We would appreciate anyone making a donation in memory of loved ones to consider us as an option in your choice of charitable giving.

Please go to our website at www.willowbankcemetery.ca and go to the **Donate** link. OR you can reach us at our mailing address:

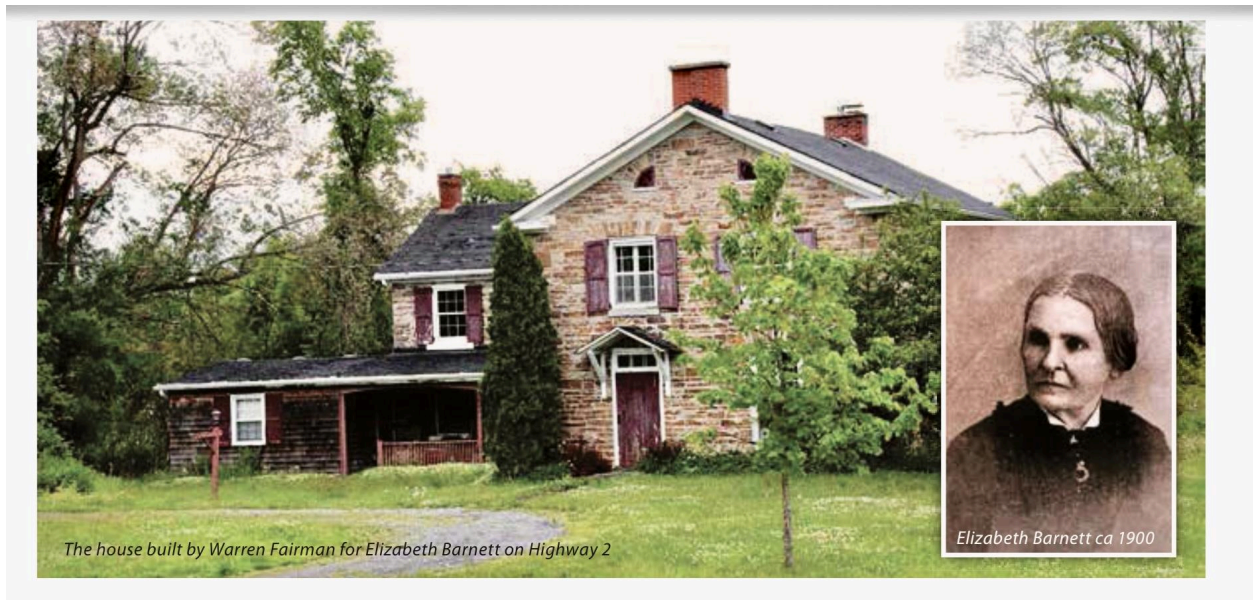
PO Box 123 Gananoque, ON K7G 2T7

We would also ask you to consider us in your estate planning by remembering us in your Will. There can be considerable tax advantages to charitable giving with careful estate planning. Imagine the comfort of knowing that this special place of remembrance will continue to be administered in a sustainable manner for years to come. You are invited to connect with board member Tom Shillington for a confidential discussion about your legacy options. You can reach him at: **613 849-6091** or by email at tom@limestonefinancial.ca



Willowbank Heritage Highlights

The following article was originally written by local journalist Lorraine Payette for the magazine Living Here Brockville, January/February 2016. I have decided to include it in its original unabridged format. It tells the fascinating story of one of our Willowbank notables. When Upper Canada was threatened from forces to the south she demonstrated outstanding courage to protect her adopted home. Used with permission.



ELIZABETH BARNETT (FAIRMAN) : “Gananoque’s Laura Secord”

Born in Stones Mills, NY, in 1815, Elizabeth Barnett always wanted to be a teacher. She completed her schooling in LaFargeville, near French Creek (now Clayton), but there were no opportunities available in the area. Her brother lived in Gananoque and encouraged her to try her luck here. So at the age of 22, she picked up her bags, rented a room on Stone Street at Dr. Potter’s house, and began her new life teaching school in Canada. In February, 1838, she decided to go back across the river to visit her family. The St. Lawrence River was frozen solid, and people traveled back and forth across it by sleigh. French Creek was only 8 miles away, and it would be the perfect place to stop on her way to Stones Mills.

“She crossed over with others and headed off home to visit her family,” said Marcia MacRae of the Arthur Child Museum. “She noticed there were an awful lot of strangers in town, all kinds of men, and there was a lot of bustle going on. There were supply wagons, guns, ammunition, coming in, and all sorts of things were going on. “Then she heard that the arsenal in Watertown had been raided. Four hundred guns and all kinds of ammunition had

been stolen, and these things were coming up to French Creek.” Listening to the men talk, she soon learned that they were planning to attack Gananoque two days later. They planned to evict the British from North America by taking Kingston and Brockville, then moving on to conquer the rest of Canada. Elizabeth was horrified by this idea and couldn’t bear the thought of an invasion. She feigned an illness and returned to Gananoque, going immediately to Dr. Potter and telling him everything. He in turn told John MacDonald, the richest man in town, who shared the news with Warren Fairman, a young dragoon. Fairman took word to Kingston and Brockville. Immediately, women, children and valuables were packed up and moved to safer locations. Fortifications were enhanced with materials on hand, and six companies of the Leeds Militia responded. Professionally trained soldiers poured into the blockhouse and prepared to man the cannon. Meanwhile for the invaders, things were not going well. Of 2,000 expected troops, only 600 arrived. Those who did show up learned of trained soldiers moving into Gananoque and realized that the strength of the element of surprise was no longer there. Instead of proceeding with the invasion, they decided to go back home. Elizabeth had saved Gananoque and all of Upper Canada from this invasion. She later married Warren Fairman, and he built her a stone house outside of Gananoque on Highway 2 where they raised 11 children. The house still stands there today. For her own safety, Elizabeth’s story was not made public in her lifetime. As an American, she would have been guilty of treason in the US and could never have seen her family again. Instead, her act of extreme heroism was recorded in Miss MacKinnon’s Notes, a collection of people’s recollections of true local events made by the daughter of Samuel MacKinnon. Although the book Miss MacKinnon intended to produce never materialized, her notes made it possible for us to know of Elizabeth and all she did for Gananoque and Canada. In 1996, Councillor Gord Brown (MP Leeds-Grenville) proposed that February 21 be forever remembered in Gananoque as Elizabeth Barnett Day. “It was from Miss MacKinnon’s notes that we got the story of Elizabeth Barnett,” said MacRae. “Can you imagine where we would be today without her?”



Elizabeth Barnett (Fairman) is buried here at Willowbank with her husband Warren Fairman of Pittsburgh Township and some of her family just north of the Lloyd Burial Plot on the west side of the cemetery. Warren, besides being a farmer, ran a blacksmith shop at his farm just west of Willowbank. He also had several mills close to the mouth of the Gananoque River having procured the water rights from Joel Stone. He built a house for his daughter across the road which is also still standing. Elizabeth lived to the age of 91 and died in 1906. Warren died in 1909 at the age of 93.

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By Clare Harner

Immortality or Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow;
I am the diamond glints on the snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain;
I am the gentle autumn's rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft star that shines at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry.
I am not there; I did not die.