

BEYOND

The Bereavement Authority of Ontario magazine



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About *Beyond*

Beyond is an all-digital, family focused magazine providing useful and interesting stories about the bereavement care industry and why it matters to you.

It is the magazine of the Bereavement Authority of Ontario, a government delegated administrative authority focused on protecting and informing families.

www.TheBAO.ca

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On the cover

This illustration of a police photo shows recovered stolen or damaged items from cemeteries in southwestern Ontario this summer.

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BAO focuses on prudent regulation for a growing population's diverse and changing needs in death care

Registrar's Blog

By Jay Blair, Interim CEO/Registrar, Bereavement Authority of Ontario

The Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) has focused on the prudent regulation of professionals during the last 12 months – in a sector serving an ever-increasing provincial population with a spectrum of cultures, traditions, and interests in emerging death care practices.

We have been laser-focused on our mandate to protect and inform consumers, while providing practical guidance to licensed businesses and professionals at funeral homes, transfer services, cemeteries, crematoriums, and alkaline hydrolysis facilities in the province.

Over the year, our BAO Board of Directors, management and staff have been putting together key components required for improving consumer protection oversight and regulatory actions.



More inspections

Here are some highlights of our actions:

- We conducted more inspections of licensed businesses and licensees than ever, 250 to be exact – almost double what our Inspections team in the previous year. This trajectory will continue in coming years as part of the BAO's assurance of compliance across the sector.

- We replaced and modernized our information technology system. I thank our IT team, working with all staff, especially Licensing.
- Our team contacted late filers of licensing fees resulting in our most effective year of compliance – thanks to the work of our diligent Licensing and Financial Compliance staff. Licensing ensures that the BAO can regulate the sector in the public interest.
- Financial Compliance also identified and ensured that large sums of money to be held in trust were accounted for, detected and addressed income shortfalls for small volunteer-run cemeteries, and secured the transfer of a multi-million-dollar Care and Maintenance Fund to an eligible depository. The fund is important as it helps ensure the long-term upkeep of cemeteries.
- We addressed all recommendations from the Auditor General's Report.
- We alerted the public to the issue of copied obituaries, which cause families added grief.
- We also alerted the public to bring any concerns with the condition of their loved ones' gravesites at a cemetery in Richmond Hill.
- BAO measures effectively closed a problematic funeral home in Toronto. This followed a decision by the Licence Appeal Tribunal upholding our notice proposal not to renew their licences – as a result of conduct inconsistent with the intention and objective of the law – that being the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002.
- The work of our Inspections team helped the Ontario Provincial Police and Crown Attorney's Office achieve a fraud conviction of a former Simcoe funeral establishment owner. The criminal conviction was in relation to consumer prepaid services. The former owner was placed on 12 months house arrest and ordered to pay \$386,000 in restitution to the BAO.

Guidance to professionals

We want you to know that our regulatory work is not just remedial or punitive -- we also provide guidance to licensees on how to comply with the law, which they've told us is appreciated very much.

For example, our Financial Compliance team makes sure that volunteer-run small cemeteries have the information they need to maintain community cemeteries, and their Care and Maintenance Funds.

Public communication

The BAO also informs and engages the public at small and large events in community halls, conference centres, through our website – and this consumer magazine which now reaches half a million people in Ontario.

We provide our BAO Consumer Information Guide free of charge online and in print at licensed establishments. This year our guide overview was published in 10 languages reflecting the mosaic of the province.

We also continue to communicate regularly throughout the year with our 9,600 licensees – through our newsletter 12 or more times per year, notices to professionals, and in presentations at provincial and local professional associations.

Professionalism

While we do focus much attention on outliers, we thank the vast majority individual licensees and business operators who comply with the law. They treat grieving families with respect and dignity every day. They, by far, represent the true professionalism of the bereavement sector.

Looking back on the last year, we thank the public for seeking and finding us online, by phone or in person to learn what they need to know in planning a funeral, filing a complaint, or asking us a question.

We thank our licensees and associations for connecting with us on the needs of the profession and the public.

Cemetery volunteers

The BAO is grateful to volunteers for their work at licensed cemeteries, which mean so much to their communities across the province.

We appreciate and thank municipalities across the province for their maintenance of cemeteries, including their assumption of responsibilities at gravesites that become abandoned over time.

In closing, I offer much thanks to our diligent staff for their work, and our BAO Board of Directors sound and constructive leadership.

Watch out for and report any thefts of metals, urns, or damage at Ontario cemeteries



OPP media release photo

The Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) is advising families and licensed professionals to lookout for and report signs of thefts and damage at cemeteries, as a police investigation expands to additional cemeteries in southwestern Ontario.

Since August, the BAO has been recommending that families and licensed professionals report such thefts or damage at cemeteries to the local cemetery operator, police, and to the BAO – Ontario’s regulator of the death care sector.



OPP media release photo

The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) started its investigation of thefts of bronze plaques, urns, and metal artifacts from cemeteries at communities within Norfolk County, located on the north shore of Lake Erie in southwestern Ontario.

But the investigation soon expanded to thefts reported in Brant, Oxford, and Elgin counties. Police have stated that additional cemeteries may also be affected.

The OPP has informed the BAO that some urns have been stolen from columbariums, which house niches containing urns of cremated human remains. Certain urns are valued for their recyclable metal content as are bronze and other metals used in various gravesite monuments.

Cremated human remains have been recovered during the police investigation, and criminal charges have been laid.

The BAO is liaising with the OPP in this ongoing investigation.

“We take this very seriously as these incidents are deeply upsetting for families, communities, and for licensed professionals who work every day to uphold dignity and care,” says Jay Blair, Interim CEO/Registrar of the BAO.

So, what can you and your family do?

If family members discover theft or damage at their loved one’s gravesite, columbarium, mausoleum, or monument, they should contact the cemetery operator and the local police or OPP.

The BAO also wants you and your family to know what our professionals at cemeteries, funeral homes and other licensed facilities are doing to help safeguard your community’s cemeteries, cemetery installations, columbariums, and memorial monuments.



OPP media release photo

Requirements for licensed professionals

Under the law, the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002, licensed cemetery operators are responsible for ensuring the safety, security, and dignity of interment sites in their care by:

- Conducting regular inspections of cemetery grounds, monuments, and columbariums;
- Ensuring that locks, fastenings, and other security measures on columbariums are intact;
- Reporting immediately to local police and the BAO if/when there are any signs of tampering, theft, or vandalism;
- Maintaining accurate burial and interment records to assist in the identification of recovered material.

Recommended cemetery actions

The BAO recommends that cemetery operators be vigilant by:

- Inspecting all columbariums, and mausoleums (above ground structures containing human remains), immediately for evidence of tampering or forced entry;
- Checking the cemetery grounds for missing or damaged plaques, urns, or monuments;
- Informing the families, about affected monuments and gravesites.

The BAO advises cemetery operators that when theft or damage is discovered they must:

- Contact local police or OPP immediately;
- Secure the area and preserve any evidence;
- Notify the BAO Licensing Unit without delay;
- Consider improving surveillance and visibility (signs, lighting, community awareness);
- Reassure families with empathy, and direct any additional concerns to the BAO.



OPP media release photo

Reporting and support

If you or BAO-licensed professionals have questions, or discover such thefts and vandalism, please be sure to also contact us at the BAO Licensing Unit:

- Call 1-844-493-6356;
- Email Licensing@TheBAO.ca

About the BAO

The Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) is a government delegated authority and not-for-profit corporation administering provisions of the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002 (FBCSA). Accountable to the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement and the government, the BAO is responsible for the protection of the public interest. The BAO regulates, ensures compliance with the law, provides resources and services to licensed:

- Funeral establishment operators, directors and preplanners;
- Cemetery, crematorium and alternative disposition operators;
- Transfer service operators; and
- Bereavement sector sales representatives across Ontario.

The BAO is wholly funded by licensee fees (not tax dollars).

Theft at cemeteries: A disturbing crime across time and place

By Stuart Lyall Manson



A 19th-century engraving of the ancient yew tree Fortingall Graveyard, Scotland. (J.G. Strutt)

In Ontario, the theft of infrastructure from cemeteries is becoming increasingly common. This phenomenon is driven by the high value of scrap metal, and the willingness of perpetrators to steal from the dead and their families. While rare historically, the act of

stealing items from cemeteries, here and abroad, is not without precedent.

Fortingall Graveyard and its yew tree

Located in the heart of Scotland lies Fortingall Graveyard. Here an

ancient yew tree has watched over the tombstones during the entire existence of the burial ground. And for several millennia before that: Experts estimate that the tree is several thousand years old. It is consequently famous worldwide and has been a magnet for tourists – and thieves – since at least the 18th century.

So popular is this tree that visitors often stole branches to keep as mementos. They were also known to hack away at its trunk, to dislodge pieces of bark for the same purpose. Locals also got in on the act, illicitly taking wood to make drinking cups to sell to the tourists.

In 1785, the problem was so rampant that a wall was built surrounding the tree to protect it from the thievery, as the cuttings and bark-removals were beginning to affect its health. This barrier was replaced by a more substantial one in the early 19th century. This wall still stands today, shielding the oldest living tree in Europe from sticky fingers.

The Tombstone of Jesse James

Jesse James, the notorious American outlaw of the 19th century's Wild West, was a figure of fascination long after his death. He headed a criminal gang best known for their train and bank-robbing antics, which made James an unsavoury legend. For example, during an 1869 bank



Jesse James, the notorious outlaw of the Wild West. (US Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-3854)

robbery in Gallatin, Missouri, James intentionally shot and killed a bank teller.

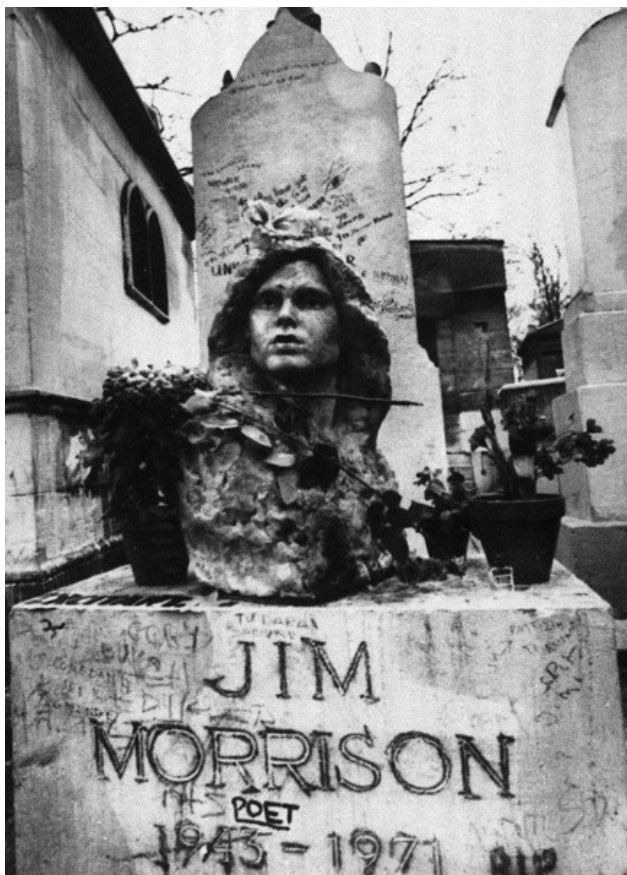
James himself was murdered by a fellow gang member in 1882. Originally buried on the family farm, his remains were later reburied in Mount Olivet Cemetery in Kearney, Missouri. Despite his criminal history, he was buried under a towering, eight-foot-high stone marker. Interest in James continued following his death, as souvenir hunters chipped away at this marker, eager to own something associated with the notorious criminal. With these removals, the height of the marker was slowly whittled down from the original eight feet to only three feet.

Eventually the entire stone marker vanished. It is not unheard of for an old tombstone to succumb to the

ravages of time, but in this case the marker had been stolen and was later found in the possession of a collector. Its remnants are now safely displayed in a museum, and James' final resting place is presently marked with a replacement tombstone.

Jim Morrison monument

Jim Morrison was the charismatic frontman of The Doors. An icon in his own right, his band was launched into the spotlight by their 1967 worldwide hit "Light My Fire." Morrison died in Paris in 1971, at the young age of 27. He was buried in that city, in the Père-Lachaise Cemetery, and in 1981 a white marble bust of his likeness was added to the gravesite.



The Jim Morrison gravesite and the original bust stolen in 1988. (AP Photo)

Unfortunately, the bust became a target for vandals and souvenir seekers. After some time, the nose of this bust was sliced off and stolen. Later, in 1988, the remainder of the bust was also taken. Stealing such a heavy and bulky item – it weighed 128 kg – must have required lots of strength and plenty of careful planning. One report suggested it was stolen by two fans in the middle of the night, whose getaway vehicle was a small motorcycle.

Remarkably, French police announced that they found the bust earlier this year. It was still plastered in the graffiti that was its defining feature before its disappearance. Police noted that they were lucky to have discovered it during an unrelated police investigation.

Indigenous artifacts among burials

On a far more serious note, the desecration of Indigenous burial grounds has a long and shameful history in the Americas. Throughout the 19th century, these sites were frequently disturbed by artifact hunters. These actions not only disrespected these sacred grounds, but they also often disrupted human remains.

Many communities in 19th-century Ontario were the scenes of this activity. Michelle Hamilton, in her book "Collections and Objections: Aboriginal Material Culture in



An Indigenous clay pot from an Iroquoian burial site in Grenville County, Ontario. In this case, the artifact was unearthed during a professional archaeological excavation (W.J. Wintemberg, Roebuck Prehistoric Village Site. Ottawa, 1936, Plate XI)

Southern Ontario,” notes that the town of Orillia was a particularly problematic area. Hamilton located a letter written by Orillia lawyer J. Hugh Hammond, explaining his early participation in this pursuit:

In the early [eighteen] seventies, as a schoolboy, I spent the greater part of some Saturdays and holidays with my playmates in excavating Indian graves... Our schoolmaster (Samuel McIlvaine) urged us to make all available collections of any objects such as beads, wampum and the like. ... These excursions lasted over three years and were pursued by us every convenient Saturday during the summer seasons.

Orillia’s reputation in this regard also extended into literature. In 1912 the famous Canadian author Stephen

Leacock published his series of short stories, called “Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town.” The stories were loosely based on the author’s personal experience with the Orillia region. The book has a recurring character – Dr. Gallagher – who was a collector of Indigenous artifacts such as arrowheads, likely taken from Indigenous burial grounds.

From ancient yew trees to the graves of notorious outlaws and rock stars, and the desecration of Indigenous sites, the theft and vandalism of burial grounds reflects a disturbing disregard for the respect of the dead. Whether motivated by profit or sheer ignorance, such acts serve as a reminder of the importance of preserving and protecting these sacred spaces of remembrance.

■ Stuart Lyall Manson (stuartmanson.wordpress.com) is an historian, heritage cemetery advocate, and author of the book series Sacred Ground: Loyalist Cemeteries of Eastern Ontario.

Lane Changer - Sybil Chandler (1928-2025), proud to find life's off-ramp

By Celia Chandler

My mother, Sybil, had a number of significant lane changes in her life: WWII replaced peacetime when she was 11; Canada replaced England as home at age 21; farm wife-dom and motherhood was her lane from age 23 to 57; and then she and Dad were in the happy retiree lane for two decades.

My father's sudden death on her 79th birthday bumped Mom into a new lane where she became the poster-child for responsible widowhood. She pushed herself to re-enter the dance world she and Dad had occupied, even though walking into the dancehall that first time to the applause of her friends made her want to crawl under the parquet. After four years of living independently in the country house Dad built, she moved into a retirement home where she participated so actively I swear they nearly put her on an actual poster. I'd planned to feature Mom's widowhood lane in my lane changer



Sybil Chandler and her daughter, Celia

series, because I so admired the way she embraced the challenge of solo life.

Instead, Mom's lane change story is the one she was proudest of: exercising her right to a medically assisted death (MAiD) on August 3, 2025.

MAiD was legalized in Canada in 2016 for those meeting three key eligibility

criteria: death had to be reasonably foreseeable; the person had to express intolerable suffering; and MAiD candidates had to have mental capacity during the assessment and at the time of death. That's the framework under which my husband, Jack, died in November 2018, described in the May issue of *Beyond*.

Checks and balances

In 2021, legislators expanded access to MAiD. One way they did so was to add Track 2 which removed the need for a reasonably foreseeable death but, for Track 2 cases, established more checks and balances, including a 90 day waiting period.

Since Jack's death, Mom spoke of wanting MAiD when the time was right. For the last three years, she seriously contemplated getting assessed. She knew if she was eligible at all, her relatively robust health would likely make only Track 2 open to her.

97 years of living

She suffered though from the restrictions her aged body provided including: reduced mobility, increased leg pain and tingly hands, inability to knit or hold a book, and so on. Yet the stiff upper lip of 97 years of living as an Englishwoman rendered her mouth incapable of forming the words necessary to convince even her own physician she was suffering at all, much less intolerably.

In early July, two falls pushed her into the hospital lane. When she was released six days later, she relied for the first time on personal support worker (PSW) support to dress and shower and she had to be hyper-vigilant to avoid more falls. With diminished independence my mother began looking in earnest for the MAiD off-ramp. When she met with the two independent assessors required by law, she finally found the words necessary to articulate her intolerable suffering. She could not have been prouder or felt more empowered to advocate for herself for the first time in a long time. The pride I've felt about Mom's graceful aging and widowhood has been eclipsed by the new admiration I feel for her ability to find her voice at the most critical time in her life.

In the 11 days between her decision on July 23 and her death at 2 pm on August 3, Mom basked in the attention she deserved. She spoke in person and by phone with children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, overseas and out-of-province relatives, her retirement home friends, her kids' friends, former neighbours, her financial advisor, her accountant, and couples she and Dad taught to dance more than 20 years ago. Mom delighted at the affection and respect people showed her. Life accelerated for those days as she jammed a lot of living in. Throughout she remained very, very content with her decision.

Lane changing can have a domino effect: Mom's move to the off-ramp shifts me into the orphan lane. Mom and Dad's greatest parenting accomplishment was creating independent children, yet I phoned weekly for the last 40 years. I will miss hearing her perspective on current events, but I'm happy she won't have to live through more global atrocities; the implications of Canada's aging population; or the ways the climate and housing crises will continue to grow, all topics of many phone chats.

Laugh

I've always been able to make Mom laugh in our calls. Non-believers both, in those last calls we speculated that if there were an afterlife, Dad would surely have hooked up again - otherwise who would make his lunch and do his laundry? We agreed that Jack, too, would have found a 4th wife, since, well, Jack was that way. Even on the day she died, we shared a few laughs about life's absurdities.

We'd also connected in recent years through my blog — she was a fan. She joked that she never knew as much about me. While ours was not a relationship that included outpourings of emotion, in her quiet way, I knew she was proud of the lanes I've been in professionally and personally, and my writing was no exception. I'm sorry Mom will not share in whatever new lanes future-Celia will explore.

Mom's exit from life's highway on Sunday brings up issues of my own mortality. I'm certain that if circumstances allow, my last breath will occur on my timetable, just like hers did. Because, when the law allows safe access to the off-ramp on your own terms, why wouldn't you signal your intention and move over? Until that time, Mom lives on in my 'get stuff done' nature. For that, I'm forever grateful.



■ Celia Chandler writes weekly about life - from dining solo to housing and death - and all points between. She's currently releasing a series about women who've made big shifts, Lane Changers, as Celia's dubbed them. These profiles foreshadow her own book, Lane Change, about reinventing her life since Jack's death and moving into her custom laneway house. Subscribe at celiachandler.com

Exploring the rare honour of burial of average people in church gravesites

By Stuart Lyall Manson

In the last issue of Beyond, we explored historic gravesites in Ontario churches, focusing on prominent figures such as clergymen and governors. In this article we turn our attention to laypeople who were granted this rare, posthumous honour.



St. Mary's Church, Williamstown

Before his death in 1848 and burial within the walls of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Williamstown, Ontario, Hugh McGillis had seen more than his fair share of the world.

Born in Scotland around 1767, McGillis experienced two major migrations before reaching adulthood. The first was in 1773 when he and his parents crossed the Atlantic Ocean to settle in the British colony of New York. The second followed in 1784, when as Loyalist military refugees connected with the King's Royal Regiment of New York, they resettled in Upper Canada – later Ontario.

The young McGillis then joined the North-West Company, a firm that actively explored and traded furs in the far interior of North America. He

was rapidly promoted and within a few years he became a partner in the concern. He was stationed in the company's posts in the Great Lakes, and in the remote watersheds of what is now prairie provinces of Western Canada.

After an arduous career, he was one of many fur traders who retired to Eastern Ontario, specifically Glengarry County. For McGillis it was a homecoming: It was here where his family settled in 1784. Flush with wealth, the retired trader decided to reside in the quaint village of Williamstown. There he purchased the manor house previously owned by Loyalist leader Sir John Johnson, the former commander of the King's Royal Regiment of New York, a unit in which McGillis' father had once loyally served.

McGillis became known as "Laird McGillis" due to his extensive landholdings in the area. In the late stages of his life, he donated part of this vast estate to the local Roman Catholic community, which did not have a proper place of worship in Williamstown proper. This donation included land for a church, presbytery and cemetery, now known collectively as St. Mary's.

Laird McGillis was a popular figure in the village of Williamstown, but in 1822 he gained an adversary in the nearby Town of Cornwall. In that year

a man named Edward Lee applied for a government grant of a town lot in Cornwall. Lee had already occupied a vacant town lot and started to make improvements. In due course he learned that Hugh McGillis had also claimed ownership of the very same lot.

Lee fought against McGillis for ownership of the lot, arguing that he had a better claim to the land: He was an immigrant without land and with a large family, whereas McGillis was "a partner in the late North West Company, now a resident at Williamstown... where he has purchased a valuable property and intends constantly to reside." Lee was ultimately successful in his efforts and he gained control of the Cornwall town lot.

Back in Williamstown, Hugh McGillis did not live to see St. Mary's official opening as a church. He died one year before its opening. Due to his donation of the land for the church, it was decided that he should be honoured with a burial within its walls. A memorial tablet marks the spot, refering to him as "an eminent benefactor."

Trivitt Church, Exeter

In the late 19th century, Anglican churches were uncommon in small towns, which were more typically served by Presbyterian, Methodist, or Baptist structures. Yet Exeter, located north of London, Ontario, was home to an impressive Anglican church made possible by a generous donation of the Trivitt family.

The church, completed in 1888, has a prominent tablet that states: "This church, dedicated to the glory of God, was erected by Thomas and Elizabeth Trivitt as a grateful memorial of the many divine favours conferred upon them." The Trivitts were English immigrants who had made Canada and little Exeter their home.

Thomas Trivitt was a lawyer and had been appointed as the local Clerk of the 5th Division County of the County of Huron. His moderate earnings from this office were supplemented with a large family inheritance, which he and his wife devoted to this ecclesiastical building project.

In an article in *The Canadian Church Magazine* (Vol. IV, No. 48, June 1890), the church was described as one "fit for any city in the Dominion." It was built in the Gothic English style, with local brick, Ohio sandstone, and New Brunswick granite. Nine bells occupied the solid tower, sourced from the McShane Bell Foundry in Baltimore, Maryland. Beautiful



Trivitt Church, Exeter

stained-glass windows were installed, described as "producing results of uncommon loveliness."

When the church was consecrated on December 31, 1889, an event overseen by the Bishop of Huron, the joy of the ceremony was dampened by a recent tragedy. On the same day as the consecration, the mortal remains of Elizabeth Trivitt were laid to rest in the crypt of the church. She had died on Christmas Eve, and in addition to donating money for the building of the structure, she was fondly remembered for her "untiring zeal" and leadership with the church and community projects.

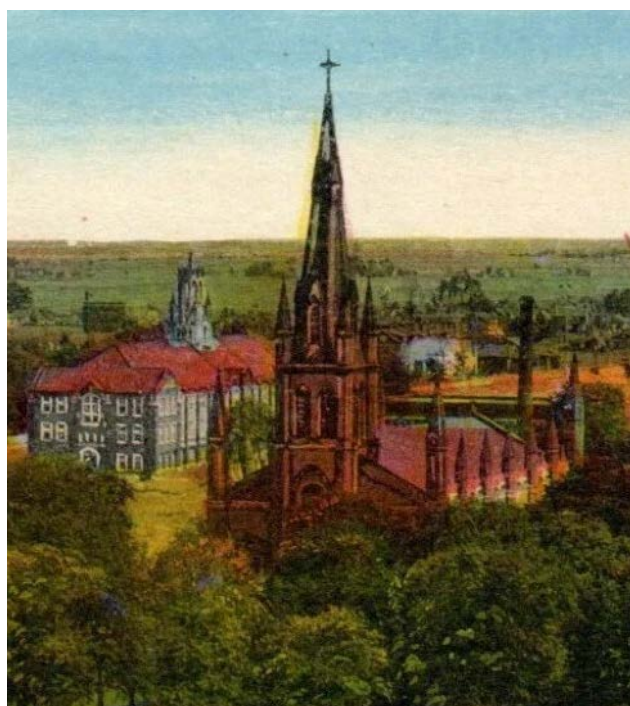
Her husband, Thomas Trivitt, died in 1894 and was laid to rest with his wife. Brass plaques indicate the location of their burial, beneath the chancel of the church.

Our Lady of the Assumption Church, Windsor

Rosalie Baby is buried within Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Windsor, Ontario. She was not an official of that Roman Catholic congregation, but her connections to two prominent families appears to have led to her burial within the church.

Her husband was Charles Baby, a member of a prominent regional family. The Babys were a powerful clan harkening back to the French Regime and the early settler community on both sides of the Detroit River. Charles was Mayor of Windsor for several years and chaired the building committee of Our Lady of the Assumption Church.

Rosalie's connection to the Baby family was twofold. In addition to her marriage to Charles, she was also the



Our Lady of the Assumption Church, Windsor

godchild and niece (through marriage and therefore non-biological) of her husband's sister, Elizabeth Anne Casgrain.

Rosalie was the daughter of Philippe Panet, a prominent French-Canadian politician and judge. Upon Rosalie's early death in 1846, Judge Panet commissioned a large painting for the church. This work of art, "The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary," was painted by the prominent Québec artist Antoine Sebastien Plamondon, who also studied and worked in France.

The painting has graced the church for almost 180 years, except for a seven-year stint at the Art Gallery of Windsor and the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa.

Rosalie was evidently buried in Our Lady of the Assumption Church within months of its completion, within the elaborate brick tunnels that contain the crypts beneath the building.

After Rosalie died, Thomas married Mary McQuekin. Continuing the Baby tradition of marrying someone with a connection to the family, Mary McQuekin was the late Rosalie's adopted sister. The practice of a widower marrying his deceased wife's sister was then socially controversial. Perhaps, in this case, the fact that Mary was Rosalie's adopted sister may have softened the public disapproval in the community at the time.

The remains of seven other people are also buried within this significant church: Several priests and nuns connected with the local congregation. Four were reburied from the earlier Huron Mission Church, which was a wooden building that was replaced by Our Lady of the Assumption Church. They were Pierre Potier, Francois-Xavier Dufaux, Jean-Baptiste Marchand, Clothilde Raizenne. The other three people were A. Phileas Villeneuve, Marie Connally, and Marie Martine.

■ Stuart Lyall Manson
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is an historian, heritage cemetery advocate, and author of the book series Sacred Ground: Loyalist Cemeteries of Eastern Ontario.



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