

Remembering Those Buried in 1869 at Mt. Elliott Cemetery

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It must be said at the beginning that we will never know with certainty the names of all of the souls whose remains now lie in Section A at Mount Elliott Cemetery in Detroit, Michigan. They were transferred there from the Catholic section of the old City Cemetery in 1869, but some had most certainly been buried in earlier cemeteries and relocated to the City Cemetery before this transfer. The "Mt. Elliott Cemetery History Guide," available at the cemetery, gives this explanation:

St. [sic] Anne's Cemetery Removal Site in Section A

The final resting place for many of Detroit's early settlers, their remains were relocated due to fire, expansion and neglect of their former burial grounds. Detroit's first cemetery was located outside the stockade of the fort. This location today would be on Jefferson, between Griswold and Shelby Over the years, as St. Anne's Catholic Church changed locations, her dead moved with her. In 1869, they were relocated from the Catholic portion of the city-owned Clinton Street Cemetery. Most of the 1,490 remains brought to Mt. Elliott Cemetery were placed together here. Families who had the means reinterred their ancestors at their new family lot. Unfortunately, memorials and records did not accompany the remains.

The French-Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan visited Mt. Elliott Cemetery in 2007. As part of the tour, we asked Russell Burns, director of Mt. Elliott, to show us Section A, an open expanse of grass with no permanent memorial, consisting of "lots numbered 72, 73, 74, 75, 76 and 77, ... and lots numbered 53, 54, 57, and 58."¹ FCHSM member Sherry Somerset took the initiative to research the journey taken by the remains of the 1,490 souls from one "final" resting place to another. Eventually, we suggested that FCHSM support the erection of a monument to their memory. They have lain unmarked for so long! The Board of the Society agreed, and the dedication of a Southern grey granite grave stone is being planned for 24 July 2010, the 309th anniversary of the founding of Fort Pontchartrain on *Le Détroit du Lac Érié et Lac Sainte Claire*. In further commemoration of these souls, Gail Moreau-DesHarnais has extracted the known deaths and burials from the church registers of Ste. Anne de Detroit, with the first part appearing in this issue of *MHH* [p. 95].

The story of the several burial places used by Ste. Anne de Detroit has been told in more than one source over the years.² A primary source is the parish register of Ste. Anne de Detroit itself. As the excerpts recording deaths and burials demonstrate, some individuals are reported to have been buried, specifically, either in the cemetery of the church or in the church itself. Usually, burial within the church was reserved for those who were being honored. At a time when the church cemetery was still located close to Fort Pontchartrain (near present-day Jefferson Avenue and Griswold), the remains of Father Delhalle, the first known missionary, who died in 1706, were exhumed, on 13 May 1723, from the spot where he had been buried when he died. This exhumation is recorded in the register. His bones were placed under the steps of the altar of the church of Ste. Anne de Detroit that existed then, when Alphonse de Tonty was commandant;³ the transfer was recorded in the register on the 14th.⁴ In 1755, yet another church having been built, Father Delhalle was again given a place of honor, but this time his remains did not travel alone:

Marginal note: Transfer of bodies from the old church to the new

In the year of Our Lord 1755 the 13th of July, we the undersigned recollect priest mission [-] ary for the king at the *fort du detroit heries* [sic] and performing the curial functions in the parish of S^{te}. Anne and in conformity to the deliberation made 29 december of the preceding year 1754 have transferred from the old

¹ "Report of Special Committee," Detroit, January 12, 1870, from the Mt. Elliott Cemetery Board of Trustee Meeting Minutes of January 12, 1870. Page 38, Vol. 2d, October 1869 — May 1879. Copy provided by Mr. Burns.

² The classic account is Clarence M. Burton, "Cemeteries of Detroit," Chapter LIV in *City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922*, Vol. II (Detroit-Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1420-1437, available on Google Books. See also George Paré, *The Catholic Church in Detroit* (Detroit: The Gabriel Richard Press, 1951).

³ It is also during Alphonse de Tonty's tenure that the church at Fort Pontchartrain began to be called *Ste. Anne du Détroit*, first in 1718, and then continually from 1722 on.

⁴ Early U.S. French Catholic Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1695-1954, D > Détroit, Ste-Anne; Autres Registres > 1704-1744 > Images 92 & 93 of 198, pp. 180, 181 of original register. Other references to the Ste. Anne de Detroit registers are from the same Drouin collection. See also, *MHH*, January 2001.

church into the new, firstly, the bones of the venerable father *cons* [-] *tantin de hale* [*sic*] [crossed out: who had been] formerly missionary recollet of this same mission, who had been killed by the *Savages*⁵ in fulfilling his functions, the which [bones] had previously in [the year of: blank space] been trans [-] ferred into the said old church and placed under the steps of the altar of the old church by Father Bonaventure Lionard [*sic*] our predecessor, we have deposited them anew under the steps of the altar of the new church until the contemplated apse and addition to the church⁶ allow us to give him a fixed burial appropriate to his merit and to the miracles that many persons worthy of belief have reported to us were accomplished through his intercession in favor of all of the parish; secondarily, **we have also transferred into the new church all of the other bodies and bones that were found in in [*sic*] the old [church] and performed a general service for the repose of their souls** the day and month and year as above
[signed] *f simple bocquet recollet* [with *paraphe*]

Thus, the remains that were found of those who had been honored with burial inside the old church were given a resting place within the church of 1755. The old Ste. Anne cemetery ground, in use since at least 1704, continued to exist until about 1797. Clarence Burton reports that, under the jurisdiction of the Americans, [*sic*, see * below] a “new cemetery was opened near the intersection of [what is now] Woodward Avenue and Larned Street for the English inhabitants, and the Catholics took another piece of land between this and Griswold Street. ... Additional lands were also given to the Catholics in what is now Congress Street east of Bates.”⁷ This is the burial ground that was in use at the time of the 11 June 1805 fire that destroyed the 1755 church and the French City of Detroit. Father Gabriel Richard was then pastor of Ste. Anne. No record explaining what became of the remains of all of those buried within the church that burned has yet been found. Religious services had to be held in various locations. A new church was not begun until 1818; and it was not completed for ten years. One would think the Church authorities might have made some attempt to transfer at least some ashes of the deceased from the burned structure to a new consecrated place, but known documents are silent on the issue. The first two decades of the nineteenth century, which included the War of 1812, were, after all, a confusing and troubled time, because Detroit was then experiencing the transition from British to American political jurisdiction, as well as an increase in population.

While the original cemetery established near the old fort continued to exist, the need to open up what had been Ste. Anne Street (also known as the *Grande rue* or big street, later named Jefferson Avenue) for business purposes resulted in the exhumation and relocation of the remains from the original cemetery. After a long and bitter conflict that divided the Catholics of Detroit and required the intervention of Bishop Flaget of Bardstown, Kentucky, the bones from the original cemetery were removed.

1817 The first day of the month of May and the fifth day of the same month, we undersigned priest pastor of S^{te}. Anne have moved a certain quantity of bones lifted from the middle of the *Grande rue* that was formerly the old (*ancien*) cemetery of the old (*ancienne*) Church of S^{te}. Anne; with the usual ceremonies and in the presence of Etienne dubois undersigned and a large assembly of people. The bones [*Ossements*] were placed in two large *fosses quarries* [square ditches] near the middle of the actual cemetery [the one in use since [at least] 1798]
[signed] *Etienne Dubois*⁸ *G Richard ptr cure*⁹

⁵ In the dispute among the Indians that occurred in 1706, Father Delhalle was shot by one Indian, not many.

⁶ Paré translates *rond et elargé* as “the contemplated apse and addition to the church,” 155. Otherwise, my translation.

⁷ Burton, 1420. See also mention of this cemetery in the letter of 22 April 1807, signed by Charles Moran, Joseph Campau, and John Williams, 1422. The land had been granted when Hamtramck was the military commandant.

⁸ Dubois is identified as “chantre,” or cantor, in another record. It is he who reports the burial of Charlotte Cecire, widow of Lorin, about ninety years old, who was placed by him in the cemetery of “la Cote du nord,” on the twenty-fourth day of the month of February of the year eighteen hundred seventeen. The rest of the act is missing but signed by Etienne Dubois, confirming the existence of another cemetery for a few years during the dispute about where the new church of *Ste. Anne du Détroit* would be built after the fire of 1805, whether near the former site or on the East side, near present-day East Grand Boulevard and the Detroit River. The Eastsiders, those who lived on “la Cote du nord,” preferred a location closer to their homes. Both Burton and Paré describe the controversy.

⁹ Early U.S. French Catholic Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1695-1954 > [D](#) > Détroit, Ste-Anne; Autres Registres > 1801-1842, image 50 of 94.

This “new” cemetery, the property at Congress and Bates, appears to have functioned until 1827.¹⁰ In that year Antoine Beaubien sold to the City of Detroit a section of land “along the westerly line of the Beaubien farm [modern-day St. Antoine Street],” to be used as a burial ground, leading to the creation of the City Cemetery, which was divided into Protestant and Catholic areas with a fence separating the two parts. As it was located on St. Antoine Street, near Gratiot Avenue and Clinton Street, Burton calls it the Clinton Park Cemetery. It did not take long for the City Cemetery to become full, especially after the cholera epidemic of 1832-34. “The report of the city sexton for the year between April 1, 1832 and March 30, 1833 shows that there were 126 Protestants buried, of whom sixty were cholera victims, and 165 Catholic burials, or 301 deaths in twelve months.”¹¹ Meanwhile, the cemetery near Father Richard’s stone church of Ste. Anne continued to exist without any burials taking place there. When Congress Street was “being straightened and graded between Bates and Randolph streets,” in 1837, Burton reports that, it “ran through the Catholic burial ground, east of Bates Street and Alexander Chapoton superintended the removal of bodies to the [then] new cemetery”¹² at what became Clinton Park, but burials there ceased in 1849.¹³ Thus, there seems to be no doubt that the remains of at least some of the persons originally buried near Fort Pontchartrain, the founders of Detroit, were eventually transferred to the City Cemetery. It is from the Catholic portion of this City Cemetery that the remains of 1,490 unidentified souls were transferred to Mt. Elliott in 1869.

Of course, by the time the City Cemetery was created, the Catholics of Detroit included not only the descendants of the French-Canadian settlers but also people who had emigrated during the years of British or American rule. The Irish, English, and German Catholics, in particular, had established themselves in Detroit by the mid-1800s. Most Irish and English Catholics worshiped at Most Holy Trinity parish; and it is this community, in fact, who bought the land now known as Mt. Elliott Cemetery in 1841 to be a Catholic cemetery.¹⁴

Nevertheless, for some of the souls under the expanse of grass in Section A, the journey had been long, from the original cemetery in the middle of Jefferson, first, to the Congress and Bates Street location beginning in 1798, then to the St. Antoine Street - Clinton Park location in 1827, and, finally, in 1869, to Mt. Elliott.

Whoever the remains may have been in life, our monument will remember them, and it will also commemorate those whose passing has left no trace at all.

***Correction to “Remembering Those Buried in 1869 at Mt. Elliott Cemetery,”
MHH, Vol. 31, #2, Apr 2010, 92-94**

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On page 93, as originally published, I wrote :

Clarence Burton reports that, under the jurisdiction of the Americans, a “new cemetery was opened near the intersection of [what is now] Woodward Avenue and Larned Street for the English inhabitants, and the Catholics took another piece of land between this and Griswold Street. ... Additional lands were also given to the Catholics in what is now Congress Street east of Bates.”¹⁵ This is the burial ground that was in use at the time of the 11 June 1805 fire that destroyed the 1755 church and the French City of Detroit.

The above passage should have read as follows, including the bolded and bracketed information below:

¹⁰ Burton, 1425.

¹¹ Burton, 1429.

¹² Burton, 1458. Burton refers to a Session of Common Council in March of 1837 in connection with the road work on Congress.

¹³ Burton, 1431.

¹⁴ Burton, 1430.

¹⁵ Burton, 1420. See also mention of this cemetery in the letter of 22 April 1807, signed by Charles Moran, Joseph Campau, and John Williams, 1422. The land had been granted when Hamtramck was the military commandant.

Clarence Burton reports that, under the jurisdiction of the **British**, a “new cemetery was opened near the intersection of [what is now] Woodward Avenue and Larned Street for the English inhabitants, and the Catholics took another piece of land between this and Griswold Street. ... **[Then, after the Americans arrived,]** Additional lands were also given to the Catholics in what is now Congress Street east of Bates.” This is the burial ground that was in use at the time of the 11 June 1805 fire that destroyed the 1755 church and the French City of Detroit.

My only excuse for the imprecise reference is that I had to keep the article to less than three pages and cut too much after quoting Burton. An earlier draft of the article correctly reads “under the jurisdiction of the British.” I had also written “According to Peter Audrain, writing to Governor St. Clair, the opening of a new Ste. Anne cemetery on the Bates site occurred in 1798, when the old cemetery had become full and ‘a great public nuisance.’ This is the burial ground that was in use at the time of the 11 June 1805 fire that destroyed the 1755 church and the French City of Detroit.” What would have been footnote 16 (Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan*, 1884, Chapter XI, 53, read at <http://www.archive.org/stream/historydetroit01farmgoog#page/n9/mode/2up>) for the reference to Peter Audrain did not make it into the final version of the article. Footnote 15 established Hamtramck’s role in granting “additional” land under the Americans, but the earlier grants mentioned by Burton were under the British, therefore before 1796.

Thanks to Gail Moreau-DesHarnais for noticing a reference “that Father Payet might have opened a new cemetery in 1783” in George Paré, *The Catholic Church in Detroit* (Detroit: The Gabriel Richard Press, 1951), 233. She called my attention to this detail in an e-mail 3 April 2011. When I checked, I noted that I had, in fact, marked that reference in my copy of Paré, and I realized my error in framing the Burton quotation with a reference to the American jurisdiction. This correction will also be published in the July 2011 issue of *MHH*.