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Grave Concerns: An Examination of Brick Street Cemetery

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In the 1950s, my mother, grandmother and I often visited Brick Street Cemetery (370 Commissioners Road West, London, Ontario) to wander among the graves. Some of the names on the headstones were familiar to my elders. My mother's family, the Porters, lived in Westminster Township in the area known as Glendale, the hub of which was at the junction of the second concession and Wharncliffe Road. That corner is now within the city of London at Southdale and Wharncliffe roads. My grandmother recalled seeing the horses and buggies of a funeral cortege passing by their home on the way to the cemetery.



1918 photo of Lorne Dale, left, a descendant of Jacob and Anne, and Stan Porter, right (photo by Reg Porter)



Porter residence, Wharncliffe Road South, 1917
(photo by Reg Porter)

Glendale was named after the Dale family who were early settlers. Jacob Dale (1767-1852) and his wife Anne (Landos) (1775-1865) came to Westminster Township around 1811. They are buried in Brick Street Cemetery along with many members of their family.

Brick Street Cemetery, one of the oldest in London, is an intriguing example of a pioneer burial ground. Its ambience was the cause for many return visits over the years to read the epitaphs on the headstones and to study their motifs. In the early 1970s, I bought a camera and started taking pictures of some of the stones. This hobby, which expanded to researching the names on the headstones, led to the discovery of some interesting genealogical information. The social structure of the area, ethnic identities and religious affiliations also came to light, along with various local events that took place over the years. Eventually, I joined a group called the Friends of Brick Street Cemetery.

This 0.40 hectare churchyard contains approximately 600 graves, but only 400 stones are visible, therefore there are about 200 unmarked graves. Empty areas throughout the grounds presented a mystery. Prodding was the first method used to try to find lost graves and buried stones. The most sophisticated search, however, was done using a system called

Ground Penetrating Radar to identify potential features such as grave shafts and markers. This is a non-destructive and environmentally friendly method of underground exploration. Only designated sections of the cemetery have been surveyed with this procedure so far.

The hunt began for the names of the people who were buried in the unmarked graves. There are many sources for finding this information such as genealogies, cemetery records, vital statistics, land records, church records, wills, military records, newspapers and sites on the internet. To date, over 100 people in the unmarked graves have been identified. Some of their names have been inscribed on auxiliary bricks and placed at appropriate locations throughout the grounds by the Friends of Brick Street Cemetery. (See the appendix). Of course, that leaves approximately 100 unnamed people out of the original 200 unmarked graves. The earliest interments were probably never recorded and there are no surviving cemetery records since they were stored in the Lambeth United Church which was destroyed by fire on January 27, 1952.¹

The location of the cemetery on Commissioners Road is worth noting. In anticipation of war between Britain and the United States in the early 19th century, a Commission was appointed by the government of Upper Canada to build a military road from Burlington to Detroit. The road followed an old Indian trail and became a major thoroughfare for travellers on foot, on horseback, in covered wagons and in stagecoaches. During the War of 1812, troops passed along this route. Subsequently, 12 known combatants in that war were buried here.

The cemetery's name was derived from a small section of Commissioners Road, between Wellington Road and the foot of Reservoir Hill, known as Brick Street. On farms between Wharncliffe Road and modern Wonderland Road, clay was discovered that was ideal for making bricks. Nathan Griffith and his brother Ezra established the first of several brick works

here in 1816.² The local bricks were buff coloured and were used in many buildings over the years. For example, in 1854, 120,000 bricks were ordered from a brickyard owned by a Mr. McNames of Westminster for a house being erected for a Mr. Anderson.³ This may have been Murray Anderson, the first mayor of the incorporated city of London.

As one enters the churchyard, one notices that the headstones face east. This was a common practice in many early burial grounds. Christians who believed in the resurrection of the dead wished to position their loved ones so they could see the Second Coming of Christ.

“For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” (Matthew 24:27)

Grave markers evolved over time. Initially, wooden crosses or name boards and crudely carved pieces of fieldstone were used. These were supplanted by slabs of soft white marble. Although this material was easy to carve, it also eroded from water and the elements, gradually becoming rough and granular. In damp, shady areas lichen grew on the stones. For these reasons some of the motifs and lettering have become indecipherable over time.

Eventually, newer techniques were employed as stone masons, sculptors and artists settled in the area. These artisans often carved their names and the locations of their shops at the base of the headstones. It was the professional stone carvers who introduced the decorative motifs which were chosen on the basis of the aesthetics of the time, as well as the personal preferences of the families. The cemetery contains a wealth of the most common and popular motifs which include urns, weeping willows, doves, lambs, flowers, hands, angels and the open Bible. The best time to tour this churchyard is before noon, when the sun faces the stones making the inscriptions more readable.



Collage of motifs from Brick Street Cemetery, c 1973

A Stroll Through Brick Street Cemetery is a Step Back in History

The following is a small selection of a few of the individuals buried in the cemetery. A compiled list of the unmarked graves known to date is included in the appendix.

Peter McNames

Peter McNames (1788-1855), who was born in New York State, immigrated to Canada with his family in 1804, and settled in Oxford County. Peter joined the Oxford Militia during the War of 1812 but later moved to Lot 34, Concession 1, Westminster Township. He sold some of his land to the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1851 for 5 shillings to provide a dedicated space for Brick Street Cemetery. The trustees listed on the church's deed were: Nathan Griffith, Ezra Griffith, Thomas Summers, Nelson Norton and Lucien L. McNames.⁴ They are all buried in the cemetery.



Headstone of Peter McNames (1788-1855)

Peter's headstone, which is 160 centimetres tall and impressively detailed, lay in pieces for many years. It has a grapevine motif which represents the promise of abundance in the

next life. The final missing piece, which was found underground in 2008, is inscribed with a biblical verse. The stone was repaired and placed upright by the Friends of Brick Street Cemetery in 2011.

Phoebe McNames

Next to Peter lies his first wife Phoebe (nee Brink, c 1798-1824). Her headstone also has been repaired and re-erected by the Friends of Brick Street Cemetery. She is alleged to be the heroine of a skirmish on Reservoir Hill during the War of 1812. It is purported that she provided water and ammunition to the troops.

The Griffith Family

The headstone for Eliza Griffith (1818-1819) is the oldest known marker in the churchyard. It also bears the inscriptions for her siblings, Elizabeth Griffith, who died in 1820, and Lyman Griffith, who died in 1821. These were children of Nathan Griffith and Amelia (Sayles). Nathan moved to Westminster Township around May, 1812, and served at the Battle of Lundy's Lane at Niagara during the War of 1812.



Headstone of Eliza Griffith (1818-1819)

Richard Dale

Not far from the entrance to the cemetery is the headstone of Richard Dale (1859-1862) with the motif of a dove, a common rendering on children's markers. There are many such graves here since the infant mortality rate in the 19th century was very high. The stone, which was unearthed by the Friends of Brick Street Cemetery in 2008, had been underground for at least 100 years. Having been protected from the weather, it looks as if it was carved yesterday, and provides an idea of how a white marble headstone might have looked when new. It may have been carved and erected by the stonemasons Teale and Wilkens of London since their names appear near the bottom. A family headstone was erected on the plot around the turn of the last century so the descendants may have thought that the original marker was redundant and decided to have it buried.



Headstone of Richard Dale (1859-1862)

The Curtis Family

Maria Curtis (nee Carroll, 1801-1871) born in Oxford County was the daughter of Abraham Carroll who built the first hotel in London in 1827.⁵ Called the Mansion House Hotel, it was located on the north side of Dundas Street, east of Ridout. Maria married Silas E. Curtis around 1826 and they lived on Commissioners Road on the east half of Lot 19, 1st Concession. The 1851/52 census listed her as a widow still living at that location. In 1902, her widowed daughter-in-law, Letticia, sold the property and may have used some of the money to erect a new monument and fence on the Curtis plot. The Lethbridge Brothers Monument Works, London did the work. They were in business from approximately 1896 until 1905.



Curtis monument Aug. 17, 2009. Notice the tilt on this large stone inside the fenced enclosure.



Curtis monument being reset, Sept. 17, 2009

Maria Curtis' uncle, Captain John Carroll of the Oxford Militia, was accidentally killed by friendly fire in the War of 1812. It was during an ambush at Reservoir Hill in the late summer of 1814. He had been captured by a party of raiding Americans and was forced to ride Andrew Westbrook's horse at the head of the column of men when he was mistakenly shot for the traitorous Westbrook.

James Greer

The life of James Greer (c 1798-1866) of the Junction, later known as Lambeth, came to a tragic end due to an accident on November 3, 1866. James was driving his team and wagon down Reservoir Hill when one of the wagon's floor boards shifted forward and bumped into the horses' haunches. The horses bolted down the hill at top speed, throwing Greer from the wagon and dragging him along the road. The appearance of the driverless team at Byron was cause for concern and a search was organized. The broken body of Mr. Greer was found at the foot of the hill. He died later that day.⁶

Albert S. Odell

Albert S. Odell (1787-1856) arrived in Westminster Township in 1810. He and his wife Charlotte (nee Percival, 1780-1846), had no children, and as a result 45 relatives were listed as beneficiaries in Albert's will. Among others, William Loop, Priscilla and Eliza Odell each received \$100 (\$1,670 today⁷) upon their uncle's death in 1856.⁸ Albert and his wife each have a headstone in the same row as their niece Priscilla.



Headstone of Priscilla Odell (1825-1859)

William Loop Odell

William Loop Odell (1824-1902) was born in Odelltown, Quebec and moved to Westminster Township in 1837. Shortly after he arrived, he helped clear the land for Wellington Road, which extended from Commissioners Road to London. The construction of Wellington Road included the first bridge across the Thames River on this route. William was a blacksmith, a farmer and a noted horseman. In 1847, he married his cousin Priscilla Odell (1825-1859), a daughter of John Odell and Annis (nee Griffith). William bought 7 1/2 acres on the northwest corner of Commissioners Road (Brick Street) and Wellington Road in 1856, which became known as Odell's Corners. He built the Warrior Hotel there, (later renamed the Odell Hotel⁹), and was appointed the first postmaster of Odell's Corners. On September 21, 1883, the annual exhibition of the Westminster Agricultural Society was held on his property adjoining the Odell Hotel with 900 people in attendance.¹⁰ After Priscilla's death in 1859, William married her sister Eliza (c1821-1906). William and his two wives, are buried here. Priscilla has a headstone, but William and Eliza do not.

Margaret Nixon

The left side of the stone has an inscription for Margaret Nixon (c 1837-1891) who predeceased her husband. The right side is blank.



Right: Headstone of Margaret Nixon (c 1837-1891)

Ground Penetrating Radar shows that there are three adults buried here. They would be Margaret, presumably her husband James Nixon (c 1828-1907) and someone else whose name is unknown.



Use of Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to search for graves in front of the Nixon headstone, Nov. 9, 2012

John O'Neill

John O'Neill (1797-1859) was born in the Niagara District but moved to the London District around 1822. He joined Mount Moriah Lodge in Westminster Township and was an active member of the area's earliest Masonic fraternity. He was a member of the governing Police Board in London's early days, and served on its town and city councils. John was a tavern keeper in London and operated the Prospect House Hotel near Blackfriars Bridge, around 1851, which was advertised as "a good house and good liquors." He also ran a saloon on Market Square in 1857. After he died in September of 1859, he was buried with full Masonic honours.¹¹

Barnabus Skuse

Barnabus Skuse (1843-1890) was born in Westminster Township. He gave up farming in 1882 when he purchased a limestone quarry in the township, where he operated a lime kiln. His business grew and he became a successful manufacturer and dealer of building materials. Around 1867, Barnabus married Hannah

Griffith (1849-1873). Shortly after Hannah's death, he married her sister Annis (1852-1921) in November of 1873 at Evergreen Cottage on Commissioners Road (Brick Street).¹² By 1888, his lime yard was located at 93 York Street in London. An advertisement for the company boasted that they had a full stock of different types of lime, plaster of Paris, cement, lath and hair, although building stone was a speciality.¹³

Barnabus died on May 31, 1890 at the age of 46. Since he was an active Mason in several lodges, a Masonic symbol is carved above his name on the family gravestone. A large group of friends and lodge members gathered to commemorate his death. Led by a band, the mourners marched to the boat dock at the foot of Dundas Street at the forks of the Thames River, where they boarded a waiting steamer which transported them to Cooper's wharf. The party then proceeded to Barnabus's home on Commissioners Road (Brick Street) and then on to the cemetery. Those going back to the city re-boarded the steamer for the trip home.¹⁴

Oliver Odell

Oliver Odell (c 1836-1870) married Lois Ann Bostwick in 1856. Their infant son Eddy Odell's headstone (1866-1867) can be seen in the northwest section of the cemetery. Oliver was a long-time employee of the London and Port Stanley Railway as a fireman, but later worked in the local oil refining industry. Crude oil came by rail from the Petrolia oil fields in Lambton County to East London, which was often referred to as "The Refinery District".

Oliver died of injuries sustained in an explosion at Englehart's Oil Refinery on Adelaide Street in East London on February 25, 1870.¹⁵ Fires and explosions were not unusual, often with tragic consequences. When a still exploded, the ground would tremble and vast quantities of burning oil would be thrown over the area. Burning oil flowing down ditches and gutters into the river was a common occurrence.

After her husband's death, Lois Odell and her young daughter moved to Independence, Iowa, where Lois married twice more and died there in 1925.



Pieces of Oliver Odell's headstone, some of which remain missing in 2013.

James McLaren

James McLaren (c1785-1868) had a farm located west of Wharncliffe Road on the 1st Concession. His headstone has a carving of an hourglass showing the sands of time which have run out. The hourglass is not a common motif in this area, and this is the only one at Brick Street. The headstone has been carefully repaired and re-erected by the Friends of Brick Street Cemetery.

The annual County Plowing Match was held on James McLaren's farm on September 28, 1851.¹⁶ The names of the

successful competitors were:

MEN – Robert Wilson, best, 1 pound, 10 shillings; Hugh Kennedy, 2nd best, 1 pound; John Crawford, 3rd best, 15 s.

BOYS – Haliburton Kennedy, best, 1 pound 10 s.; William Beattie, 2nd best, 1 pound; Duncan McMillan, 3rd best, 7 s. 6 d.¹⁷

Margaret McLaren

Margaret McLaren (1790-1893) was born in Scotland and moved to New York State with her parents when she was six years old. She married James McLaren and they had ten children. The family moved to Canada in 1834, settling in Westminster Township. Margaret died in 1893 at the age of 103 years, 5 months and 23 days. She may be the oldest person buried in the cemetery. She does not have a headstone, however, but presumably is buried beside her husband James.



Headstone of James McLaren (c1785-1868)

Luke Rispin

Luke Rispin (1846-1910) was a South London resident. He never married and lived like a hermit in a rudely built log shack. He inherited money and property near the Coves from his father, Richard Rispin (1806-1895). Luke sold most of the property to the Government and moved into a new brick house on Duke Street. At the time of his death, he left an estate valued at about \$20,000 (\$435,500 today).¹⁸ He never displayed his wealth but maintained a simple lifestyle and had an unkempt appearance.

Luke was a reclusive but kindly old man who spent hours working in his garden. Although he kept to himself, he was always ready to lend a hand. His friends and neighbours, who were the chief beneficiaries of his will, were completely surprised by his bequests. Luke's house was left to his housekeeper "for the term of her natural life". She died in 1910, at the age of 80, which was only seven weeks and five days after Luke. According to the conditions of the will, the house went to the Byron Sanatorium.¹⁹

Friends of Brick Street Cemetery – committed to preserving history

The Friends of Brick Street Cemetery have taken a keen interest in maintaining and upgrading this burial ground. Some of the mysteries have slowly unravelled, aided by the use of Ground Penetrating Radar which locates remains in unmarked graves. Broken stones have been unearthed, repaired and re-erected whenever possible. Research on the pioneers of Westminster Township has revealed a thriving, committed community with close ties and far-reaching achievements.

It is hoped that Brick Street Cemetery will continue to draw those interested in the past and provide them with the opportunity to be enlightened by the region's history.

Appendix

Brick Street Cemetery – Listing of unmarked graves (Compiled by Glen Curnoe)

The following is a compiled list of the unmarked graves in the Brick Street Cemetery as at August 13, 2013. As indicated in this article, it is suspected that there are a total of 200 unmarked graves.

*Names marked in this list indicate an auxiliary stone placed by Friends of Brick Street Cemetery.

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|--|---|
| 1. Beaman, Sarah (c1861-1925) | 22. Garside, Lillie (1890-1891) |
| 2. Bolton, Laura I. (Nuttall) (Strasser)
(c1870-1943) | 23. Griffith, Amy Catherine
“Emma” (McPherson) (c1855-1893)* |
| 3. Broad, James P. (1837-1898) | 24. Griffith, Elizabeth (c1818- 1820) |
| 4. Bryant, Margaret Lavinia (McCauley)
(c1805-1897)* | 25. Griffith, Elizabeth (c1820-1821)* |
| 5. Bullen, John (c1817-1889) | 26. Griffith, Elizabeth (1827)* |
| 6. Bullen, Martha Grant (c1818-1902) | 27. Griffith, Julia Ann (1828-1830) |
| 7. Clark, Eliza (c1815-1864)* | 28. Haines, Eliza (Manning) (1859-1905) |
| 8. Clark, Elizabeth (c1810-1883) | 29. Haines, Isaac R. (1859-1948) |
| 9. Cocks, Moses (1875) | 30. Hammond, Elizabeth
(Dorman) (Murdock) (c1860 - 1949) |
| 10. Cole, Annie (1884-1920) | 31. Hammond, Hannah Elizabeth
(Leslie) (1864-1934)* |
| 11. Dale, James S. (1861-1929) | 32. Hammond, John (1850-1937) |
| 12. Dale, Sarah Ann (c1819-1889)* | 33. Hart, James (c1807-1877) |
| 13. Darch, Vincent Gordon (1908-1910) | 34. Hart, Mary (c1810-1887) |
| 14. Dorman, Dennis C. (c1842-1907) | 35. Heath, Mary H. (c1874-1875) |
| 15. Eager, John (c1807-1893)* | 36. Hubbard, Frank Lester (1902) |
| 16. Eager, Richard Robert (1850-1926)* | 37. Hubbard, Ray Leslie (1904) |
| 17. Eager, Sarah Ann (Peace)
(c1858-1928)* | 38. Jacobs, Caroline Maude (1838-1858)* |
| 18. Eager, Walter (1879) | 39. Jacobs, Charles (1830)* |
| 19. Fletcher, Jane (Dicy)(c1837-1907) | 40. Jacobs, Elizabeth Ann (Bostwick)
(1803-1871)* |
| 20. Fletcher, Levi Wesley (c1873-1906) | 41. Jacobs, Herman (1827-1832)* |
| 21. Frank, Elizabeth (Dell) (c1788-1874)* | |

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| 42. Jacobs, Horace (1823-1832)* | 72. Odell, Ernest Edward (c1861-1940) |
| 43. Jacobs, Lomire (1825)* | 73. Odell, Harriet (1860-1933) |
| 44. Jacobs, Lorin (1826-1827)* | 74. Odell, Harriet "Hattie" (1862-1935) |
| 45. Jacobs, Lucinda G (1842-1858)* | 75. Odell, Jeremiah "Jerry" (c1872-1941)* |
| 46. Jacobs, Nathan (1787-1861)* | 76. Odell, Mary (Jarvis) (c1857-1909)* |
| 47. Jacobs, Orrin (1829-1852)* | 77. Odell, Percy (c1891-1894)* |
| 48. Jarvis, Ann (Tunks) (c1827-1907)* | 78. Odell, William Loop (1824-1902) |
| 49. Jarvis, Betsy (1834-1839)* | 79. Osborne, Mary A (1910-1913) |
| 50. Jarvis, Oliver E. (1859-1912) | 80. Perkins, Sarah A. (Moore)
(c1842-1915)* |
| 51. Jarvis, Richard Samuel (1852-1931) | |
| 52. Jones, Mary Evans (1874- 1875) | 81. Player, Ida Elizabeth (Topping)
(1865-1935) |
| 53. Joyce, Mary (c1845-1886) | |
| 54. Kerr, Michael Lloyd (1952)* | 82. Player, John H. (1896-1915) |
| 55. Lane, Charles Alfred (1856-1922)* | 83. Player, Lyla Maud (Bowerne)
(1885-1916) |
| 56. Lane, Jane (Trowbridge) (1858-1945)* | |
| 57. Maddie, Charlotte (c1853-1882) | 84. Player, William J. (1861-1931) |
| 58. Mair, William (1850-1933) | 85. Post, Sarah Ellen Margarett
(1903-1904) |
| 59. McIntosh, Annie (c1877-1893)* | |
| 60. McLaren, Margaret (1847-1930) | 86. Purdy, Margaret M. (McIntosh)
(1875-1919)* |
| 61. McLaren, Margaret (1790-1893)* | |
| 62. McLaren, May (1892-1893) | 87. Redding, Emily (c1872-1875) |
| 63. McLaren, Norman Bradley (1938) | 88. Rosell, Ralph (1905-1909) |
| 64. Nichols, David (1833-1920)* | 89. Sample, Arthur (c1875-1876)) |
| 65. Nichols, Lucy (Jones) (c1837-1906)* | 90. Shenick, Jacobus (c1745-1827)* |
| 66. Nixon, James (1828 -1907) | 91. Shenick, John (c1784-1857)* |
| 67. Nixon, Margaret (1868-1924) | 92. Shenick, Mary (c1745-1827)* |
| 68. Nixon, William A. (c1867-1881) | 93. Smith, Harvey (c1860-1881) |
| 69. Norton, George Walker (1865-1929) | 94. Summers, Fanny (c1871-1891) |
| 70. Norton, Ellen "Nellie" (McDonnell)
(c1859-1941) | 95. Summers, James (c1851-1920) |
| | 96. Summers, Robert (1842-1919)* |
| 71. Odell, Eliza (c1821-1906) | 97. Summers, Susan (Eager) (1845-1936)* |

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| 98. Teeple, Burley (c1860-1883)* | 104. Wyant, Sarah Maria (Whitehead) |
| 99. White, Walter Henry (c1859-1918) | (1852-1934)* |
| 100. Whitehead, Emeline (Curtis) | 105. Yeaman, William (1846-1934) |
| (c1813-1906)* | |
| 101. Whitehead, William (c1809-1896)* | Addendum |
| 102. Wood, Ruth Ann Hughena | 106. Egan, (1937) |
| (1930-1931) | 107. Nichols, William F. (1859) |
| 103. Wyant, Frank Benjamin (c1843-1916)* | |

End Notes

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2. -----, *History of the County of Middlesex, Canada*, P.368.
3. *Surveyor's notes and notebooks of Samuel Peters*. (microfilm).
4. *Deed to M.E. Church and Cemetery: Memorial No. 438-Peter McNames to The Methodist Episcopal Church, Recorded 30th day of August, 1851.*
5. McEwen, *No Smiling Path*, p.24.
6. *London Free Press*, Morning Edition. Tuesday, Nov. 6, 1866, p.3, c.3.
7. Brock, *Fragments from the Forks: London, Ontario's Legacy*, p. 427.
8. *Ontario Surrogate Courts. Probate Records, 1846-1900, No. 55. Western Archives*
9. London Archeological Society. *Details of the fall dig for 1973 taking place on the 13th and 14th October, at the Odell site*, p. 1, 2.
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11. *London Free Press*, Saturday Morning, Sept. 28, 1859, p.2, c.2.
12. *London Free Press*, Saturday Evening, Nov. 22, 1873, p.2, c.4.
13. *London Free Press*, Wednesday, Feb.29, 1888, p.8, c.3. *London Free Press*, Monday, June 2, 1890, p.8, c.3.
14. *London Advertiser*, Morning Edition, Tuesday, June 3, 1890, p.8, c.3.
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16. *Canadian Free Press*, Thursday, Oct. 25, 1851, p.7, c.5.
17. *Ibid*
18. Brock, *Fragments From the Forks: London Ontario's Legacy*, p.427.
19. *London Advertiser, Last Edition*, Friday, Nov. 4, 1910, p.7, c.2. *London Free Press*, Friday, Nov. 4, 1910, p.2, c.1. *Ontario Surrogate Courts. Probate Records, 1846-1900, No 347. Western Archives*

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