

Historical Anglican Church Lychgate roof laid to rest



“It’s a tragedy and we have to find some way of getting it back.” MPP Jim Brownell

The Lychgate at Holy Trinity

Lychgate (sp. lichgate, lycugate or lych gate) is a roofed gateway into a burial ground with its origin in England. Traditionally, it provided a shelter while the first part of the burial service was read. The word lych is an Old English or Saxon word for corpse which has survived into modern English as an adjective such as lych bell (the hand-bell rung before a corpse; lych way the path along which a corpse was carried). Lychgates consist of a roofed porch like structure over a gate, often built of wood. The lych gate at Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Riverside Heights was erected in 1903 at the church’s pre-Seaway site by Robert M. Cox of Liverpool, England.

Pictures Tell the Story

Pictured above is MPP Jim Brownell in front of Premier Sir James Pliny Whitney’s Memorial Stone on the grounds of Trinity Memorial. At the top is a close-up of the broken beams making up the lychgate roof and at the bottom right Triple T of Williamsburg uses a lift to remove the roof. Below is the lychgate as it stood when moved at the time of the Seaway Project.

B. McNairn—Leader staff
RIVERSIDE HEIGHTS — On February 14, a piece of area history was laid to rest behind Holy Trinity Anglican Church, where it now awaits its fate.

Until this winter, the historical wood lychgate and the wrought iron fence with stone fence posts that surrounds the church property at Holy Trinity, had not only survived the elements for 106 years, but most impressively had survived its stone by stone move to Riverside Heights at the time of the Seaway project.

Unfortunately, both have fallen victim to frost. The shifting of the stone pillars that hold the lychgate roof, has severely damaged the wooden support beams and the fence posts are deteriorating and also shifting which is causing damage to the fence.

“It simply became a matter of safety,” says Isabel Tuttle who is the People’s Warden at Holy Trin-

ity. “The gate posts have really taken a beating this winter.”

“It was really sad to see it (the lychgate roof) taken down. I now have visions of grass and weeds growing around it at the back of the church.”

Tuttle and South Dundas Mayor Rowdy Gillard who is the Deputy Rectors Warden at the church have been working together to obtain repair cost estimates and seek possible outside financial assistance.

“I’ve had one verbal estimate (\$250,000) that is astronomically high,” said Gillard. “We are looking for help financially. Certainly the church doesn’t have the money. It’s a big job.”

Although Gillard had spoken to local MPP Jim Brownell about the need for repair to the lychgate and fence prior to the roof’s removal in February, Brownell was not aware of the extent of the deterioration and did not know the roof had been removed until he was contacted by The Leader.

“It was shocking, to say the least, to hear that the wooden roof, from the gate had been removed. Although, I had seen some structural problems last fall, I did not know that it was in such serious condition.”

“We cannot lose such an important piece of Ontario’s history. There aren’t too many lychgates left in Ontario, if there are any.”

“I know the church probably has very limited or no funds for

a restoration of this magnitude. It’s a tragedy, and we have to find some way of getting it back.”

“With the church being moved ‘stone by stone’ at the time of the Seaway, by Ontario Hydro, and the beautiful grave site memorial to the sixth Premier of Ontario, James Pliny Whitney, located behind the church, we must pay attention to this piece of Dundas history.”

“As I said, ‘I’m willing and ready to advocate for this project as hard as I can advocate’.”

Financed by millionaire philanthropist, Edwin Canfield Whitney and his wife, Sarah Crysler, the current church was built in 1902, to replace the previous wood church that was badly in need of repair.

The couple welcomed the opportunity to donate a church in memory of their parents and United Empire Loyalist forbears and to this day, the church receives financial support from a Sarah Crysler Whitney endowment.

The new church, which became known as Whitney Memorial, was consecrated in 1904, one year after the lychgate and fence were erected by Robert M. Cox of Liverpool, England, a friend of Edwin’s.

In 1914, Ontario Premier James Pliny Whitney, (born in Williamsburg Township and a brother of Edwin), the sixth Premier of Ontario, 1905-1914, was buried in the family memorial plot.

The Province of Ontario erected a magnificent monument to his memory.

It was under the Whitney government in 1906, that legislation was passed to create the permanent Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario that would later, during the St. Lawrence Seaway/Power Project, expropriate that land where Sir Whitney was buried.

Due to its historical significance, Trinity Memorial was one of just two churches saved at the time of the Seaway Project. In 1957, the church was dismantled stone by stone and timber by timber and rebuilt about one mile north and one half mile east of its original location. It was consecrated in 1958.

At the same time the Whitney, Crysler and Colonel J. Munro (a famous officer of the 1st Royal Yorkers and formerly a British officer who fought through the Seven Years War) monuments were deemed an integral part of the original memorial and also moved to their present location behind the church.

In 1964, the church was designated an official United Empire Loyalist Memorial Church.

Holy Trinity Anglican Church is truly among the most significant pieces of history in this area as well as in the province of Ontario with both its political ties and its ties, through Sir Whitney, to today’s Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation.

The three power players above, will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the official opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway this June.

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