

Let's begin the tour alphabetically, so please use the map and head to Section A.

Standing by the Sect. A bench, look off to the left at the back of this section and you will see an indentation in the dirt, which is where a crypt was dug. The walls were two bricks thick, hand polished, yellow bricks. There was larger white polished brick on the base. Unfortunately, the top, to seal it is gone. This would have been the resting place of a person with money, and it is the only crypt discovered.

Frederick Sharp's tombstone is one of the more ornate in the graveyard and close to the crypt. He and wife Sarah Brown, immigrated from England in about 1850, coming to Tillsonburg. He was a successful butcher, with a shop on Broadway and a home on Bidwell Street. When he died at 47, his son Robert took over.



There are several **Rutherfords** buried here, but only two markers remain. **Orlando Rutherford** born in Barbados, was raised in part by his famous grandmother, authoress Eliza Fenwick, in the Caribbean, USA and Ontario. He apprenticed as a farmer and married the farmer's daughter, **Elizabeth Pherrill**. Through Eliza, he received Conc. 11, lot 8 in Dereham, on the edge of town. Clearing the bush and building a cabin were not easy feats in 1837. Letters from Eliza to literary friends tell of their adventures and help us to understand how difficult a life the first settlers had. The closest store was 14 miles away!

Their young, son, **William**, fell into the fireplace and was badly burned.

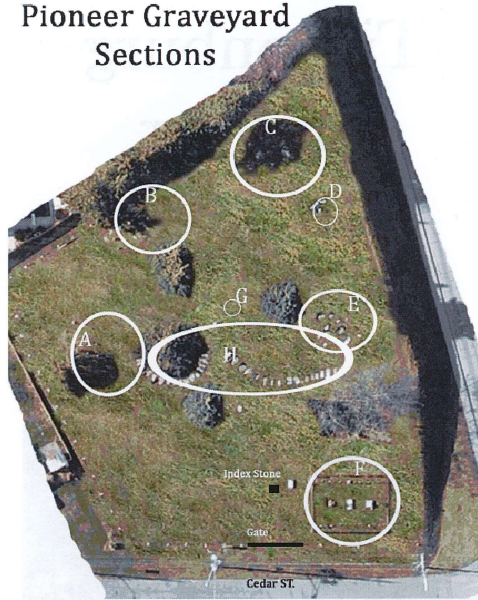
Elizabeth, at 54, was the first to die in 1869 and has the large marker. William who everyone expected to die young, did not do so until 1871, at the age of 33. Orlando died in 1881 at age 63 after a good life. [Neither man has a marker. The other Rutherford stone belongs to little **Sarah Elizabeth**, granddaughter of Orlando, by son Stephen. The other five children moved or lived long enough to be buried in the Tillsonburg Cemetery. There are still descendants here today.

A booklet is available on this fascinating family at Annandale NHS on 30 Tillson Avenue.



Section B Amongst those stones remaining is **Nathan Hayes**, who packed a lot of living in his 82 years.. Born in 1788, in New York State, he served with Captain Procter in a NY regiment and Chapman's 21st US infantry, during the war of 1812. He very well could have been

Pioneer Graveyard Sections



fighting British war veterans in Section F! After the war, the lure of free land in Canada caused him to move north in 1828. Nathan married his second cousin, Eunice Emma Hayes. They moved to the Tillsonburg area after his daughter **Cynthia**, wife of John Adamson, moved here in about 1850. [She is in Section C.] Cynthia and John, died young so Nathan and his wife Eunice, raised their children. Fortunately, grandson Nathan Adamson wrote about the fascinating history of both families.

Dr. John Rolph Graham's father was an assistant staff surgeon for the British in the War of 1812. His love of medicine was inherited by two of his sons. Dr. John studied at the Rolph School of Medicine in Toronto and practiced in Tillsonburg. He married a widow, Elizabeth Sarah Sawyer, in 1857 and moved to town with her young daughter. He set up housekeeping on the east side of Broadway, three town lots south of Concession Street. In 1860, at only 30 years old he became very ill and died on December 28th. The shock must have been too much for Elizabeth who was pregnant and delivered little **James F. J.** the next day. Unfortunately, the little one, died five days later. His name is at the bottom of Dr. John's tombstone. Elizabeth started a music school and moved to Fergus with her three children.

The Sanders family, is well represented. There is **Andrew Fredrick**, 9 years old, son of Joseph and Charlotte Sanders. Andrew's sister, **Elizabeth Sanders**, married George Darrow and one of her babies, and Andrew's mother. **Charlotte** was moved to the Tillsonburg Cemetery to be with her husband Joseph.

The Sanders family married into other prominent Tillsonburg families. The Sanders family has a rich heritage and descendants remain in Tillsonburg today.

Section C has the honour of being home to **John Hopkin's** gravestone. John, a carpenter, was killed in a pre-election riot in Tillsonburg in 1858. The politician was addressing the crowd when a group from the opposition rushed the podium to stop him. The floor gave way, plunging 150 people, 20 feet into the cellar, resulting in the death of John. A few weeks later **Lancelot Waller**, the carpenter who constructed the stage, also died and was buried here but has no marker.

Letitia Bayly VanSittart, is in the graveyard with no marker. She was a descendant of Lewis Bayly. Bayly was a tutor for James I of England's sons. He later became Archbishop of Bangor, Co. Down, Ireland. Letitia married James G. Vansittart, descendant of the Plantagenets of England; whose uncle, Admiral Henry Vansittart received a land grant from Queen Victoria, on which he built the city of Woodstock. James, a lawyer came to practice in Tillsonburg with his family. Although Letitia died first, she was not buried in the VanSittart family vault in Woodstock.

Section D is the tall obelisk, to the right of **C**, for the **Hardy Family**. Thomas Hardy was a farmer and created the Hardy Pond to run his sawmill. He was the proprietor of the first steam driven sawmill. The great 1937 flood, which drained Lake Lisgar, caused his original earthen dam to become visible. He was also a founding master of Hiram Masonic Lodge in town. His wife **Azubah Eastman**, bore his nine children. His brother, **Dr. John Hardy**, the first member of the family to die in 1855, is also listed on obelisk.



Section E contains several **Tillson and VanNorman** markers, which should be in the Founders Plot. **Harriet Tillson**, daughter of founder George, married Benjamin VanNorman at 15 years old. She bore him eight children. Their daughter, **Sarah Melinda VanNorman**, predeceased Harriet in 1839 and has her own marker in **Section E** and is also listed with her other siblings on the square VanNorman obelisk in **Section F**.

The Herrick Family markers were not placed together. **Emiline** is in **Section E**, husband **David**, is back in **Section B** and David's mother is in **Section A**!

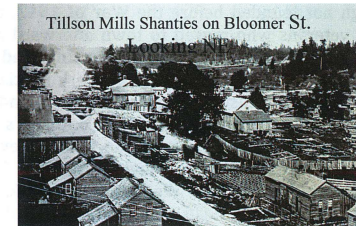
The Herricks are descendants of William Herrick, jeweler to Elizabeth I and James I. Large families, little land, and few jobs caused many to immigrate to the new world. This family came first to the USA and various members were involved with the Salem Witch Trial and the French and Indian War in the United States. David and brother Ira, came to Tillsonburg in about 1832.

David and his wife, Emiline, had a good life, as David was a merchant and postmaster in Tillsonburg. Their son Albert, was only 12 years old when she died in 1852. David's mother **Nancy Ann Perverly**, may have come from the United States to care for Albert, and run the house. Albert's father, David died in 1854, and Grandma in 1858.

John McRae, E#15 John McRae Jr., was an international traveller, born in Scotland in 1871 and died in Tillsonburg on September 13, 1872. John's parents, John and Jane Campbell, both came from farming families in Aberdeen. The family departed Glasgow on January 4, 1872, and arrived in Quebec City. John was six months old, and lived through the crossing, on the SS Corinthian, in steerage. The ships were crowded, with poor sanitary conditions. A crossing could take 6-8 weeks or months if the ship was blown off course.

It is unknown how the family got from Quebec to Tillsonburg. Normally, if there was money available, settlers would often take a ship to Toronto and if possible further on. Trains were also used for parts of the journey, otherwise it was by horse and wagons and on foot.

John landed a job with E.D. Tillson, likely at the Tillson mills. They also lived in a home on Bloomer Street. He worked in Tillsonburg from 1872-1881. It was here that their first born, John Jr. died in 1872.





The Founders Plot [Sect. F] was formed 100 years after the graveyard began, during a road widening, when many, but not all of the **Tillsons & VanNormans** were moved here.

There are two obelisk markers, the larger commemorating **George and Nancy Tillson**, who also have two small headstones as well. Beside them is their daughter, **Tamsen's** tombstone; she was the first to be buried in the 'old burying ground'. In 2013, the 175 Anniversary of the that death saw descendant, Tamsen Tillson, cleaning the original's tombstone!

Many of the Tillson children and their children married into the VanNorman Family. **Benjamin VanNorman**, his wife **Harriet Tillson** and their family are listed on the large square obelisk. Although Benjamin assisted George in building his first cabin and forge, he was not a founder of the town, and did not move here until 1837, when he opened the first store. Finally, a place to purchase goods that was not 15 miles away!

Ben was involved in municipal, township and county politics always bettering our community.

Although not founded before the **War of 1812**, there are several veterans who moved to town afterward and were buried here. Father and son, **Ephraim and Abram VanNorman** were privates in the 2nd York Militia, fighting the Battles of Queenston Heights, Chippewa and Lundy's Lane. They moved to town to be close to Abram's daughter **Christiana** who married Harry Hogan, whose previous wife had been George and Nancy's daughter **Hannah**. The wives and children are listed on the smallest obelisk, however there are no remaining head stones for Abram and Ephraim.

Two stones in this plot are not part of our founding family: **'Our Little Fred'** and a different **Abraham VanNorman**, who was very distantly related and came to die with his family, just outside of town.

Section G. This large obelisk was erected for 2 month old **William** and 1½ year old **Christiana Dewar**, children of John W. Dewar and Christiana Young. Much of this graveyard was filled with young children struck down by one of the many diseases back then.

Section H This large section has many fascinating families. The 1958 workers put the three **Mason** markers together, but not with the town's veterinarian, William Brady's three children. Stone #18 of the last stone in the first section had crumbled and the name was illegible until a 1958 photo, taken during the clean up, was discovered in 2014, showing the stone still standing in the centre of the photo, and legible. The name is **Thomas J Compow**.



Perhaps the most historically significant stone in this section of 38 others, is the **Bird child** at H6. This marker represents a black African American family that moved from Pennsylvania to Tillsonburg. Malachi, the father, was known as Professor Bird the Barber on Broadway. Malachi, fought in the US Civil war in Co. B 6th Regiment US Coloured Infantry and other regiments during the war from which he deserted every time. His wife, **Ellen Wilkinson**, had been a slave in Virginia. Moving north, they left behind Martha, their 5 year old daughter. Daughter **Elizabeth**, born in 1864 and little **George W.** born in 1869, also made the journey between 1871, and before 1874, when the child died. The marker could be George W. or another child born before or after the move.

1875 saw a large fire destroy the barber shop, but the family carried on. Little **Ellwood** was born in Dec. 1876, but shortly after that Malachi's world collapsed. Elizabeth died in February; Ellen, about the same time; little Ellwood in June and George W.'s name also disappears at this time. His whole family was gone.

Four months later, Malachi married Margaret Deadman from Ingersoll and they set up a barber and hairdressing shop in London. Unfortunately, Malachi only lived for two more years.

In Tillsonburg, blacks were allowed to not only work, but live in town and could be buried in the graveyard, not outside the perimeter as blacks were in some other communities. Their story is fascinating.

Russell Blakely, his wife **Permelia** and son are in H section, but not together. He was a soldier in **War of 1812**, with the US, serving with Captain Freeman's Co. NY Militia.

There are many people in the graveyard with no stone marker. For example **John Amberger**, murdered at the public school, **James Coutts** who took a shortcut and drowned, **Fanny Woodward's** baby she killed and **Dewitt Armstrong** who was killed saving the life of his employer W.S. Law, owner of the newspaper.

Like all towns there are tales of heroism and shame, but mostly everyday people who, because they lived here, participated in making our town what it is today.

Tillsonburg Pioneer Graveyard's Self-Guided Tour



Meet Tillsonburg's First Families

For more information contact:

Annandale National Historic Site
30 Tillson Avenue, Tillsonburg, ON, N4G 2Z8

519-842-2294



The History of the Pioneer Graveyard

Tillsonburg, founded in 1825 by George Tillson, did not see its first death until the Hill child died and was buried in the Vienna Woods.

In 1838, George's own daughter, Tamsen, died and her mother, Nancy insisted on a proper graveyard. Benjamin VanNorman, Harvey Hogan, William Darrow and George Leavitt, each gave George five dollars for an acre of land. This land became the community graveyard, not associated with any religious denomination, allowing people from other villages without their own church graveyards, to be buried there. The graveyard closed in 1881. George's son, E.D. Tillson, formed the Tillsonburg Cemetery Company, opening a new large cemetery further east on Simcoe Street. In 1895, the Town took over both cemeteries.

Over the decades, the old graveyard disappeared, becoming a dense bush. Many of the stones were broken, buried, vandalized or stolen.

Years later, Simcoe Street was expanded several times for convenience becoming wider and straighter. Numerous bodies were moved and re-interred either in the new cemetery or elsewhere in the Pioneer Cemetery.

A committee formed in 1958, and decided to move all the stones into eight groups. Many were illegible; some had only small pieces remaining. Most were stood up in cement, but over time broke again and lay for decades on the ground, which led to overgrowth. Only 110 stones were found at that time.

In 2010, The Tillsonburg & District Historical Society formed an ad hoc committee to spruce up the old cemetery, in partnership with the Town of Tillsonburg, who is responsible for the maintenance of the cemeteries.

The wrought iron fence around the Founder's graves was restored. A mold was made from an old marble post and enough replicas produced to surround the graveyard on three sides.

The gravestones were dug up, scrubbed up and are now standing up. This work was done by hard-working volunteers.

Extensive research showed that there were probably over 1500 graves. The names of almost 400 people are inscribed on the large index stone.

Section markers were erected to help people find specific tombstones. The benches are for relaxation and reflection. The money for these items was donated by caring people.