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## Chapels of Rest and Cemeteries

### Significant development between 17th and 20th centuries



Notre-Dame-de-la-Côte-des-Neiges cemetery  
Photo : François Brault



Tomb in  
Notre-Dame-de-la-Côte-des-Neiges cemetery  
Photo : François Brault



Tomb in  
Notre-Dame-de-la-Côte-des-Neiges cemetery  
Photo : François Brault



Inside the chancel house  
at Saint-Pierre cemetery  
on the île d'Orléans  
Photo : François Brault



The original style of burial grounds in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries  
Garden-cemeteries of the 19th century  
The management of funerary arrangements since the nineteen-seventies

#### Garden-cemeteries of the 19th century

From 1855 onwards a decree prohibited burial in towns. Cemeteries were to be located just outside the towns instead. Four large cemeteries were founded around Québec city between 1848 and 1879: Mount Hermon (1848), Saint-Charles in Basse-ville (the Lower Town) (1855), Belmont in Sainte-Foy (1859) and St Patrick in Sillery (1879). In Montréal, two large cemeteries were set up on the side of the mount. The Mount Royal cemetery, a Protestant burial ground, was inaugurated in 1852 and Notre-Dame-des-Neiges cemetery, a Catholic one, in 1848. With more available space, members of the same family were now buried next to each other. These were called family lots. Sometimes people constructed tombs which were often quite imposing. They became part of a dramatic landscape giving an ostentatious character to these tranquil places.

Later in the century, this practice was copied in the countryside. Outlying places were used for cemeteries more and more as opposed to the centre of the villages.

"Several parishes have preserved the old plans of these 'parks of eternity'. Some were based on a very simple design such as a rectangular grid, others were more baroque and decorative. [...] The garden-cemetery was a piece of ground which was divided up into various sectors and pathways [...] Sociologically, the cemetery, rather like a town, seems to be a microcosm of the class structure and identities of a given community. The central walk or the main boulevard is home to people in authority, the powerful and the rich, those who have succeeded in life. [...] The middle classes are to be found in the lowlier avenues. In the biggest cemeteries ethnic communities are grouped together in a Chinese quarter, an Italian quarter, a Greek quarter." (Michel

As a result of this separation from the church, people felt a need for some kind of blessing in the places of burial. The church was no longer the spiritual focus of attention, acting as a key symbol in people's lives. So coincidentally, it was about this time that there was a remarkable increase in the placing of religious objects in cemeteries, and one finds wooden monuments, statues of angels and Calvary crosses alongside stone memorials. Together they formed a garden "uniting vegetable and mineral" where sentimentality was mixed with contemplation.

#### The management of funerary arrangements since the nineteen-seventies

A new tendency has appeared over the last few years to the detriment of the garden-cemeteries. Large cemetery parks have been set up outside towns in rural areas. Being totally private enterprises they no longer come under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction. They can also cover vast tracts of land of up to several hundred square kilometres.

Anonymity is the rule in these huge complexes. One is offered the choice of traditional burial, or burial in a communal mausoleum. Upright grave memorials, however, are no longer used. Only a granite or bronze plaque on the ground indicates the exact burial spot. The large garden-cemeteries have reacted to this development by starting, in their turn, to offer clients the option of burial in a mausoleum.

"If, in the 19th century, the removal of the cemetery to outlying areas signified a distancing from the churchyard, the creation of peripheral necropolises has definitely cut the link both territorially and administratively. With the advent of private enterprise, cemeteries have become detached from social and religious affairs, putting the accent on the economic aspect. They are concerned to reduce to a minimum the formalities surrounding death to a minimum. This change is not without its significance. It points to a marginalising of death as well as of the Church, signalling a further separation between the

Charnel house at  
Saint-Pierre cemetery  
on the île d'Orléans  
Photo : François Brault

« Les cimetières de paroisses, hauts lieux du patrimoine », *Le patrimoine de nos cimetières: s'entendre pour agir*, Actes du colloque, Université Laval 23 et 24 octobre 1997, Économusée de l'Au-Delà, Montréal, 1997, p. 70)

The cemetery, thus detached from the church, lost its value bit by bit as privileged holy ground. It continued to be linked to the parish but the church people involved had now to associate with an increasing number of lay people. The cemetery official living on the edge of the cemetery is one example of this new association.

« L'absence de séparation entre le sacré et le profane. »  
(Lorraine Guay, « L'évolution de l'espace de la mort à Québec », *Continuité*, no 49, hiver/printemps 1991, p. 27.)

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Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

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