

## **Charter Statement**

### **Introduction**

Community initiatives at Holy Cross Cemetery in Halifax during the last five years were organized around a physical restoration program. This work led to a greater awareness of the historical significance of the site for Irish Roman Catholics.

This awareness was also stimulated by a growing body of historical information about the site circulating among various cultural organizations, within the church, and among leading segments of the university community. Information from the 2,500 gravestones was systematically collected, the 23,000 burial records were digitized, and several historical probes were conducted. The picture revealed is of a tightly-knit community of Irish immigrants playing a central role in the historical development of the economic, social and religious institutions of the province.

The physical restoration work was conducted under the auspices of the Holy Cross Cemetery Trust, organized for, and dedicated to, that specific purpose. Eventually, however, there was a realization that the opportunities for research and interpretive education were of such a scale as to require the formation of a continuing organization. This charter document outlines the aims and organization of this new association.

### **Mission**

Much of the impetus for this initiative concerns the search for alternatives to support a renewal of civil society. The new attitudes

pushing Canadian federal government devolution and withdrawal, the efforts to reconstruct the logic of acculturation of immigrant communities and founding peoples, the call for more sustainable and frugal forms of development, and the need to strengthen the church as a transmission belt for moral tradition, all require a different *modus vivendi*. The recovery of our history, making it intelligible and accessible to both contemporaries and future generations, opens the door to alternative paths for social reconstruction and renewal.

The repository of information, in this case, is the “communion of saints” implicated at Holy Cross Cemetery – particularly with the seventeen thousand people buried there in the nineteenth century, together with their ancestors and descendants. Although primarily Irish and Roman Catholic, the burials have included those of other ethnicities, races, and faiths. The long-term goal, then, is to improve the understanding of the social practices, institutional organization, and religious and intellectual discourses of the “Holy Cross Community”.

The benefits for the scholar of such an historical laboratory are derived from a system of rich, cumulative research about major intellectual and cultural issues of social life. The benefits for the community relate to the recovery of their own history and religious traditions. Making these traditions intelligible, in accessible forms, provides some of the intellectual capital required for what has become the central task of this generation – the renewal and reconstruction of civil society.

## **Aims and Purposes**

The Trust has as its primary overarching object the promotion of interest in the historic legacy of the Holy Cross Cemetery, located at South Park and South Streets, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Holy Cross Cemetery which opened in 1843 is the final resting place of approximately 23,000 souls, many of Irish descent. The objects of the Trust are to raise and utilize Trust Property in order:

- (a) To conduct research into the “Holy Cross Community” across the

social science and humanities disciplines, which may include genealogical investigations, historical studies, quantitative analysis, and other methodologies;

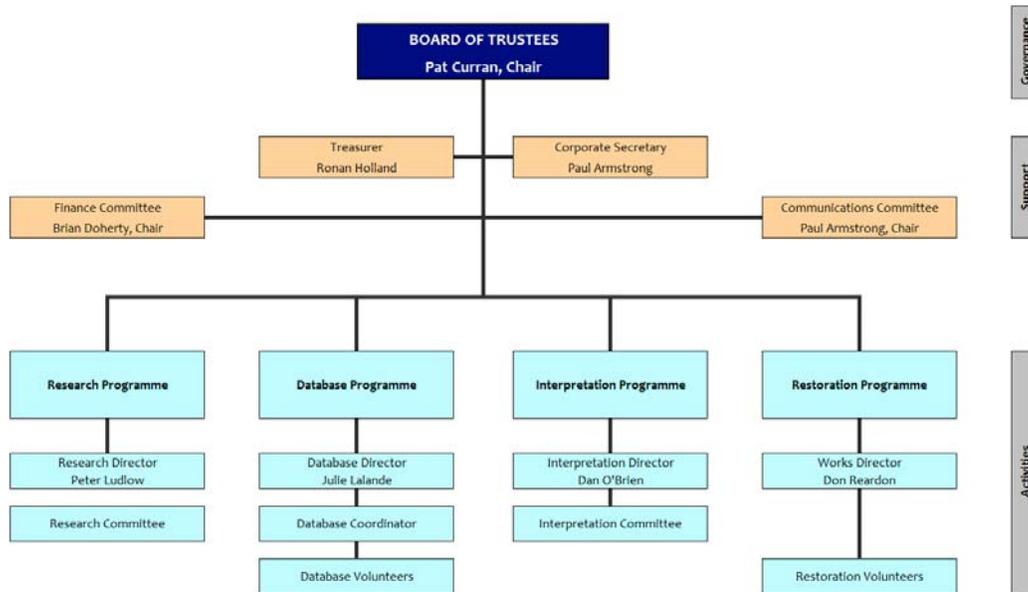
- (b) To provide a “laboratory” for the training of graduate student interns in large-scale collaborative research, and a forum (seminars, workshops, conferences, publications) for communication among established scholars and with the broader community;
- (c) To produce interpretative materials in both digital and physical forms for the education of visitors to Holy Cross, together with ancillary infrastructure and services for visitor movement and support;
- (d) To contribute to the ongoing restoration of the site including any additional property or other facility occupied by the Trust, and help provide for its continued maintenance and viability;
- (e) To provide site tours and promote Holy Cross Cemetery as a central destination and repository for information about Irish Catholics of the nineteenth century in Nova Scotia;
- (f) To use this repository to study how the “Holy Cross Community” influenced, and was in turn influenced by other ethnic communities, cultures, and religions;
- (g) To pursue any ancillary activity which the Trustees shall deem useful towards the attainment of these objects.

## **Organization**

The Trust has been organized as a legal trust and is a registered Canadian charity. Informal representation on the Board of Trustees is sought from each of the three Irish organizations in Halifax: the Charitable Irish Society of Halifax; An Cumann, the Irish Association of Nova Scotia; and St. Patrick’s Church Restoration Society. While the Board is vested with legal authority, there is a large and active

volunteer corps who are involved in programme committees and project activity.

Organizational Chart



Work is organized around four programmes – research, database, interpretation, and restoration – each led by a Director with defined authority and responsibilities. Several standing committees with external appointments have been set up to assist with the development and organization of key activities. In other cases, work is organized in projects with various, and sometimes extensive, volunteer involvement. Where projects are implemented through a partnership agreement, it may be sufficiently complex to have its own governance structure in which our officers participate.

While volunteers play important continuing roles in our programmes, some portion of work – sometimes a large portion of work – is of such a scale, or duration, or intensity, that it must be funded and accomplished with paid labour. The substantive work is presently organized as a series of projects, each led by its own team and sustained with targeted project funding from foundations, businesses,

government, and individual and community donations.

However, it is much more difficult to obtain resources for ongoing repetitive services, such as graduate student training and site tours. Project fees are a chief source of revenue for this, but require a relatively high volume of project activity and entrepreneurial achievement. This needs to be supplemented by a steady stream of self-financing from product sales.

## **Operations**

### **(a) Research Programme**

Obviously the Irish Catholic experience in Halifax is important to the local community and our research will help illustrate the Hibernian character of the city. However, we believe that the Irish-Halifax experience will help scholars to better understand the Irish Diaspora in the Atlantic World and the historical patterns of community development and institutionalization which occurred within it. Much of the nineteenth century experience took place in a period of intensive immigration and rapid growth, and can be used to model similar contemporary processes. Irish-Catholic Halifax, therefore, has something specific to say about general social processes. Within this framework, present research efforts are concentrated within three streams: migration and settlement; business formation, labour, and political history; and church and religious development. The most important project at the present time is the Halifax SSHRC, a research partnership between Saint Mary's University, the Canadian Catholic Historical Association, and the Trust.

### **(b) Database Programme**

Our database efforts started with building two independent datasets - one for the cemetery stones and one for the burial records. The cemetery stone dataset consists of some 2500 records, with geographical coordinates, photographs of the stones, and the text of the inscriptions. The burial record database consists of some 23,500 records, of which some 17,000 records are from the 19th century, with

names, date of burial, and some information on relatives and occupation.

In the current phase of research, we are linking the cemetery stones and the burial records, and are now working on thickening those by adding additional datasets - from the censuses which were done, and from the various birth, baptismal, and marriage records which exist.

We are also building a wealth indicator by building a new dataset from the Halifax property assessment records. Once this is complete, we will attempt to link the burial records to the property assessment records. This has future potential for GIS mapping of residential patterns.

This work is being conducted by a corps of db volunteers. Spurred by the desire to uncover more information about their own ancestors and build a social history of the Holy Cross community, these dedicated workers are now making a difference to our understanding of the past.

#### (c) Interpretation Programme

The organization has grown out of a revitalization of Irish identity and culture within the Halifax community. The intent is to serve that community with information, ideas, and paradigms which can support and build out the movement. Current efforts are directed at an Annual Lecture Series and an Interpretative Programme at Holy Cross Cemetery. The goal of the annual lecture series is to focus on Irish Nova Scotia. The subject matter, therefore, will be about the forms of life and experiences of the Irish Diaspora community in Nova Scotia, its practical affairs, institutional and religious formations, and cultural adaptations. While the Holy Cross Interpretation efforts encompass cultural and historical interests, the cemetery remains a Roman Catholic site. The cemetery occupies a prominent location within the central core of the city, is not proximate to a parish church, and for the most part is no longer an active site for burials. We hope that the site can provide glimpses of transcendence that will support a dialogue among all comers about ultimate values and meaning.

#### (d) Restoration Programme

Located on five and a half acres of land and housing a chapel,

caretaker's cottage, some 2500 cemetery stones, about 2100 feet of fencing, and numerous trees and shrubs, the restoration and maintenance is a large ongoing undertaking. During the last five years, we have had teams of 20-30 volunteers who have shown up every Saturday morning in the good weather season (May-October) to carry out this work. Projects requiring specialized skills have been hired out. To this point, about \$250,000 in cash and 17,000 hours of labour have been contributed to the restoration. The spirit of community in this work has been very tangible. For many, these efforts are understood as an ongoing labour of love and a central part of their ministry in building God's Kingdom.

This Charter establishes an Institute, but one that is not limited to research, but has broader aims related to education and restoration. We hope to find once again the spirit and passion which led those early immigrants to make a new life in Nova Scotia, and which may inspire us to recover and rebuild a strong civil society in our own time.

Holy Cross Historical Trust  
Halifax, January, 2014

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Holy Cross Cemetery is about 5½ acres in size, and is located in the downtown area of Halifax, Nova Scotia, at the corner of South Park and South Streets. The property includes a chapel and caretaker's cottage. It was opened in 1843, and by 1900 had about seventeen thousand burials, most of whom were Irish Catholics.