

# INDIAN OSSUARY

The largest Indian burial ground in the Province of Ontario was found in 1828, when a violent thunder storm blew down a large tree, and bones and Indian relics such as pipes, pottery and arrowheads were found to be entangled in the roots. More bones and artifacts were unearthed during the construction of the St. David's Ravine Road. In 1908, during a commercial excavation of sand and gravel, many specimens and artifacts were destroyed, and a number of skeletons were uncovered and delivered along with the sand. There was no archaeologist present to collect and preserve the artifacts, and as a result, the bones and relics were taken to private homes as souvenirs and eventually lost or destroyed. The artifacts which were found at the quarry site included clay pots, brass and copper kettles, shell gorgets, beads, and clay and stone pipes. The Indian Ossuary was located on land which was known as the Berriman or Mount Dorchester Farm, on the St. David's Ravine Road, near Mountain Road.

The dense concentration of skeletons at the Ossuary site had led its early discoverers to conclude that the area had been a battle site, or that a plague had decimated the population. However, as there is little evidence of large Indian communities in the area, it is more likely that the skeletons belonged to members of distant tribes who were brought here for communal burials, as was the custom of area tribes. When an Indian died, his or her body was wrapped in bark or skins and placed in a tree or given a temporary burial until the next communal burial ceremony, the Feast of the Dead, was held. These ceremonies occurred every seven or eight years, and individuals arrived from all over with the remains of their deceased friends and relatives wrapped in beaver or otter skins. They dug a large pit and lined it with fur, and the remains were buried in a ceremony which lasted two or three days.

The burial ground on the Ravine Road was likely chosen by the Indians because it has the highest elevation in the area. It is also predominantly composed of sand, which would have

made digging with primitive stone shovels easier. Unfortunately, no trace of the ancient burial ground remains, as three major excavations have removed nearly all of the relics and bones which once marked the resting place of the members of many distant Indian tribes. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Recreation has declared that they believe that all remains and artifacts have been removed from the area. In 1995, the construction of a sub-division of over 300 houses was approved at St. Paul Street and Mountain Road.

A stone cairn marking the site of the Indian Ossuary was unveiled by the Lundy's Lane Historical Society on October 5, 1934. Rising to a height of twelve feet, the monument is topped with a carved limestone arrowhead pointing in the direction of the Ossuary, 200 yards north-west of the cairn. The cairn had two granite tablets, one bearing a description of the Indian Ossuary, and the other marking the site of the former residence of Sir Peregrine Maitland, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada from 1818-1828, which was located across the street from the cairn. These plaques were replaced with marble ones in 1967-1968.



## Lundy's Lane Historical Society

PROGRAMME  
of the

### UNVEILING CEREMONIES

of the  
CAIRN to COMMEMORATE the SITES  
of

Maitland Cottage and The Indian Ossuary

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5th, 1934, at 2 p.m.

on HIGHWAY No. 8 at ST. DAVIDS HILL.

- (1) Bagpipes Selection.
- (2) Chairman's Address.
- (3) Unveiling Tablet 1, by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor Dr. Herbert Bruce.
- (4) Unveiling Tablet 2, by Mrs. H. A. Brant, assisted by Miss Bernice Loft.
- (5) O Canada.
- (6) Address by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor.
- (7) The Two Historic Features, by Secretary of Lundy's Lane Historical Society.
- (8) Brief Addresses by Reeve R. F. Booth, J. W. Marshall, I.P.S., Warden Richings and C. E. Steele (County representatives), George Pettit, M.P., Mrs. H. A. Brant, Col. C. E. Morgan (Indian Superintendent, Brantford), W. L. Houck, M.L.A., Harry Oakes, Rev. Father Paulding and others.

**PUBLIC MEETING** — DRUMMOND HILL S.S. AUDITORIUM  
Friday, October 5th, 8 p.m.

MRS. H. A. BRANT, MISS BERNICE LOFT and others will give historic addresses, to which all are cordially invited.  
Musical selections by orchestra, male quartette and other vocalists.