

Considerations Regarding the Grave Locations for Alexander "Squire" Fletcher & Rachel Corwin Fletcher

The gravestones of Alexander and Rachel were until 1883 in the old Kirk-yard in Bowmanville's center. Then a town order was passed to move the bodies in this plot. The coffins were taken first to the fire house (seen there by A. Herbert Fletcher) and thought by him to have been put on his father's (Gordon's) lot in the new cemetery. However in 1938 the stones could not be found there. — *The Ancestral Lines of Chester Everts Howell, compiled by Jessie Howel Finch of NY, 1976*

Search For The Squire

By Charles Taws & Dave Fletcher

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Probably because the Fletchers' time of greatest influence was so early their contribution was largely forgotten. That is until the hobby of genealogy caught on. The rise of the internet has enabled everyone to look into their family history. Clarington Museums get requests everyday from people researching their roots. With the Fletcher family the research usually leads to one question: where is Squire Alexander Fletcher buried? You can check the records for the Bowmanville Cemetery or any of the Darlington cemeteries and you won't find him. He's not in the internment record either. It was a mystery to me and one researcher even resorted to shouting in frustration! However, Fletcher descendant George Vice came up with a probable solution.

George said the early Fletchers were buried in the Auld Kirk churchyard. To understand this we must look at the history of the Bowmanville Cemetery. This cemetery was established in 1857, but the first settlers came in 1794. So where were people buried until 1857? Early pioneers lived an isolated life and often they buried their recently deceased on their farm. You can still see this type of family plot along some country side-roads. There is one on the north side of highway # 2 just west of Welcome (north of Port Hope). The earliest cemetery in Clarington was at Port Darlington, but others were soon established. In those days people wanted to be buried close to their church so most churches had a burial place known as a churchyard around them. St. Andrew's, Church Street Methodist (now Trinity United), St. Joseph's Catholic and St. John's Anglican all had churchyards. All, except St. John's, were removed to the Bowmanville cemetery for sanitary and development reasons. As anyone who has taken the Museum's Spirit Walks knows the removal of most of the cemeteries took place in 1867, but St. Andrews was later, 1883, so we have a bit more information about it. The bodies were kept in the fire hall across the street (present day Town Hall) before being transported to the Bowmanville Cemetery. Mr. A. Herbert Fletcher remembered seeing them there as a boy. Sixty-seven bodies and their associated stones were removed from this little churchyard. But why then is there no record of Squire Fletcher? Mr. Vice thought the graves had been so disturbed and the bones so mixed up that they didn't know who was who anymore. That could be so but what about the stone?

This remained a mystery until Dave Fletcher of Coldwater contacted me. He said that family members had gone to the Bowmanville Cemetery in 1938 looking for the Squire's stone but could not find it. He also had a family photo from the 1920's which showed a lady standing near a stone in the cemetery and the caption said she was next to Squire Fletcher's grave! He also suggested I call Ken Sherwood the operations employee at the cemetery who has books that give detailed listings of who is buried in the cemetery. I had already checked all the genealogical records available so I was sceptical anything new would be gleaned from these books. How wrong I was; Drummond Gordon Fletcher's stone is listed (and we knew of this stone), but two other plots with no names are also listed. Ken said all three plots had people buried in them. We went to D.G. Fletcher's stone and its location matched perfectly to the old photo from Dave Fletcher. Near it we found another stone half buried. Ken uncovered it and while badly damaged we could make out a "6". Later Ken re-covered the stone to protect it, but before he did museum volunteer Mac MacDougall and I went and photographed it.

I contacted Dave Fletcher with my findings and he reminded me that, while the stone is damaged, you can still make out a "6" and Squire Alexander Fletcher died on the 9th Day of June 1846. Dave also offered two further pieces of family information. His records state that the stones fell off the transport wagon when being moved which would account for the bad shape of this one. Dave also mentioned that A. Herbert Fletcher thought the stones had been relocated to his father's plot. This is a problem because his father, Gordon Drummond Fletcher, is not buried in this part of the cemetery. However, his great uncle, Drummond Gordon Fletcher, is right next to these two plots. The similarity in names could have created the confusion. With all this corroborating evidence I think we have found the last resting places of Squire Alexander Fletcher and his wife Rachel Corwin. What do you think?

We have put all the pieces together, but can we say 100% that Squire Fletcher is buried here? Maybe not, but I would challenge anyone to find information that would refute it. The last resting places of two of Bowmanville's most influential early pioneers we're unknown. We think we've found one. Can we find the other?

