

PIONEER ARCHITECT WILLIAM THOMAS'S  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO BE COMMEMORATED  
WITH A PLAQUE ON HIS GRAVE



William Thomas, by F. Rosenberg, 1837. (Toronto Reference Library)

A project has been under way over the last few years to restore the monument on the plot in St. James Cemetery, Toronto, where architect William Thomas and his family are buried, and to erect a plaque there. It has involved several SSAC members, including Neil Einarson, Bill Greer, and Steve Otto.

William Thomas (1799-1860) is almost too well-known to need any introduction here. After emigrating from England in 1843, he settled in Toronto and was responsible for designing such notable city landmarks as St. Lawrence Hall, St. Michael's Cathedral, and the Don Jail. His many other Canadian works include Brock's Monument at Queenston as well as churches and public buildings in Guelph, Halifax, Hamilton, London, Niagara-on-the-Lake, and Quebec City. He was founding president of the Association of Architects, Civil Engineers and Provincial Land Surveyors of Canada, the earliest professional body of its kind in the country.

Thomas was the subject of a handsome book by Glenn McArthur and Annie Szamosi published in 1996, an entry in volume VIII of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, and a National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada plaque in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

In his will, Thomas left £50 for the erection of a suitable

Gothic monument on his grave, "the design for such monument to be selected from my own work on Monumental designs." His book, *Designs for Monuments and Chimney Pieces*, appeared shortly before his departure from England. Sadly, his wishes were not carried out in spite of his request, and even though two of his sons, William Tutin Thomas and Cyrus Pole Thomas, were architects themselves. Thomas and his wife Martha were buried under a stone he had designed about 1850 for the graves of three of their children who predeceased them. Adding to the injury, no one looked after having their names added to the inscription on the marker.

By the early 1990s the monument was in poor shape. Formed of four great monoliths of Ohio sandstone sitting on a base and held together by mortar and a capstone, it was soiled with grime and damaged by seeping rain and melting snow. The surface of the stone had spalled so much that the inscription was nearly illegible. In places the mortar had fallen away and a squirrel had made its home in the hollow interior.

Clearly, it was time for something to be done, to which end a group came together under the informal leadership of Steve Otto. By begging, cajoling, and persuading, this group has managed to have the monument restored *gratis* by some of the most skilled practitioners in their respective fields: Thomann-Hanry of Montreal sent two men and their equipment to Toronto to clean the stone; Arcontest of Toronto did specialized grouting, repairs, and conservation; and Clifford Restoration of Toronto dismantled and re-erected the monument using a special lime mortar, Unilit, supplied by Plewman Roofing of Toronto, which also donated and installed a heavy sheet of lead directly below the capstone to prevent moisture from seeping into the verticals. Spencer R. Higgins, Architect, Incorporated, the country's leading firm of restoration architects, provided specifications and supervised the work at every stage.

Now all that remains to be done is to have a plaque made commemorating Thomas's accomplishments, describing the monument and its lost inscriptions, and drawing attention to the three people who were buried there but not noted in the inscription. Plans are being made to unveil the plaque on 6 June 1999, the 200th anniversary of William Thomas's birth.

The marker and its installation are expected to cost about \$1,500. Donations to offset this expense have been received from the Ontario Association of Architects (\$250), Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (\$100) and a couple of individuals. The Ontario Heritage Foundation has been asked to grant up to its limit of \$400 towards the marker, and a private donor has offered to match the Foundation's grant.

Members of SSAC who may be in Toronto on Sunday, June 6, and would like to attend the unveiling are asked to let Steve Otto know (e-mail: saotto@sympatico.ca) so an invitation can be mailed to them. Also, donations continue to be welcome – any small amount will do – and should be sent to Stephen Otto in trust, 1 Rosedale Rd., #206, Toronto, Ontario M4W 2P1.