

City of
Yorkton
Cemetery
History and
City Folklore



City of Yorkton Cemetery History and City Folklore

Written by Gilbert Owusu-Yeboah

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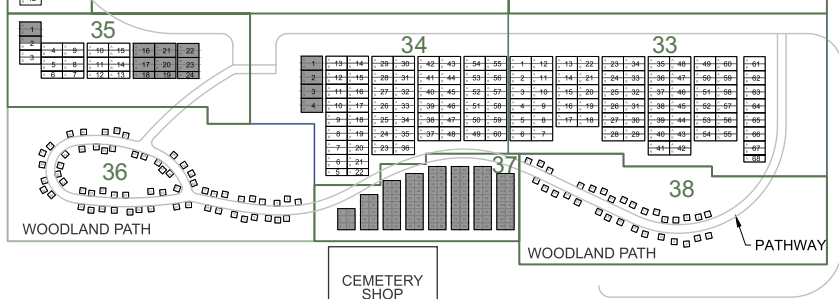
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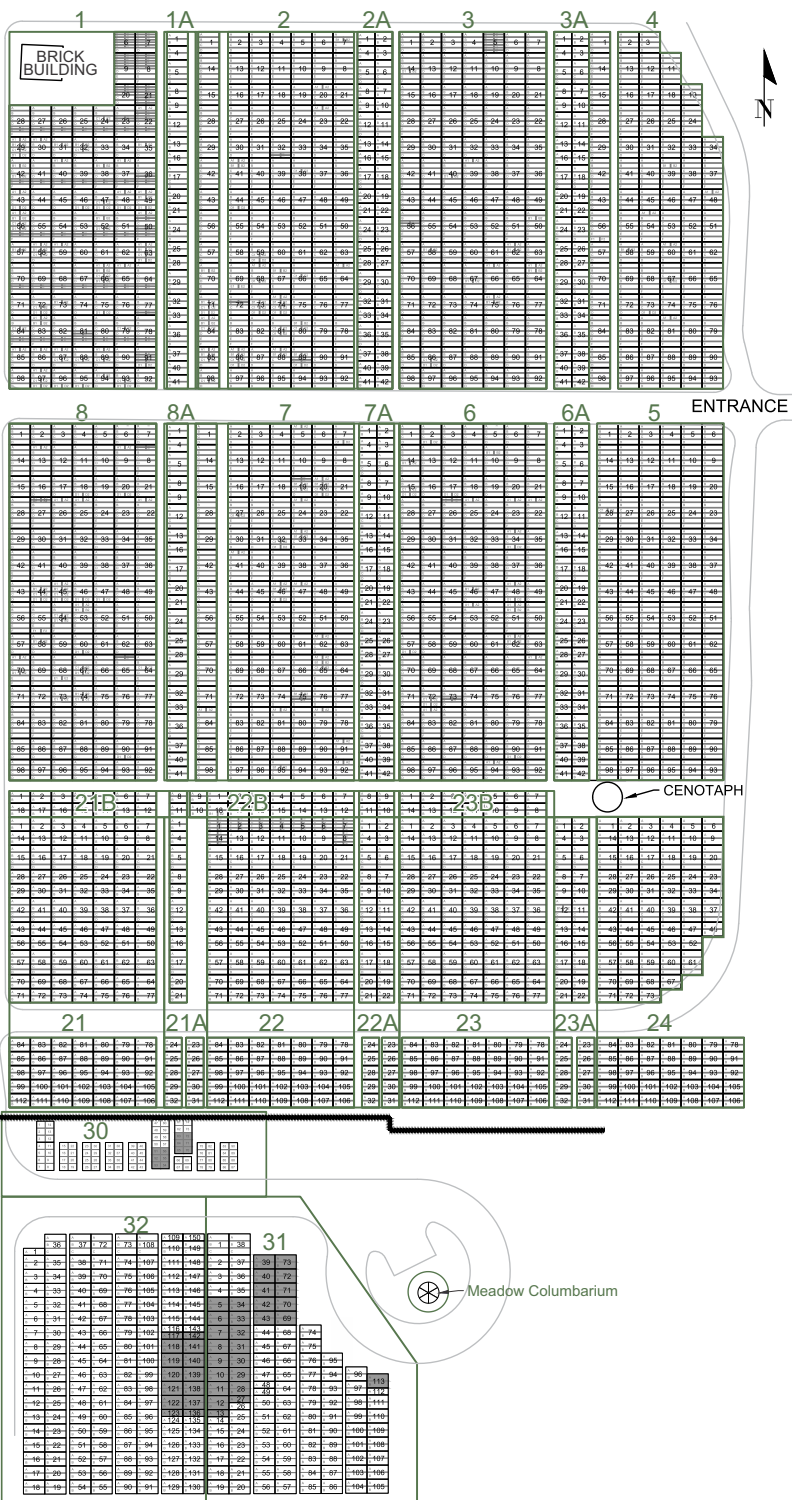
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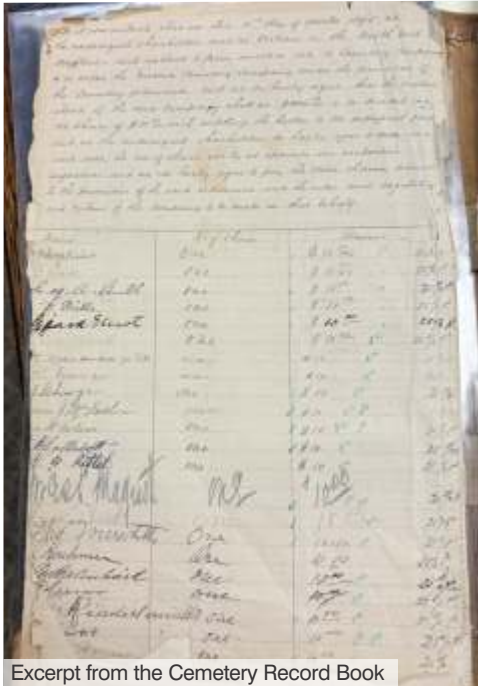
Chapter One

Yorkton Cemetery History and Background

Yorkton traces its origins to 1882, when the York Farmers' Colonization Company established a settlement known as "York Colony" on the banks of the Little Whitesand River, now known as Yorkton Creek. This original site lay approximately two and one-half miles north of the community's present location. In those early years, the hamlet was often referred to as York City, leading to Yorkton becoming the official name with the opening of the post office on January 1, 1884. With the arrival of the Manitoba and North Western Railway in 1889–1890, the settlement gradually relocated southward to its current position alongside the tracks. This move allowed the growing community to take full advantage of improved transportation links. In those first years at the original site, no formal cemetery existed, or at least none that left behind written records.

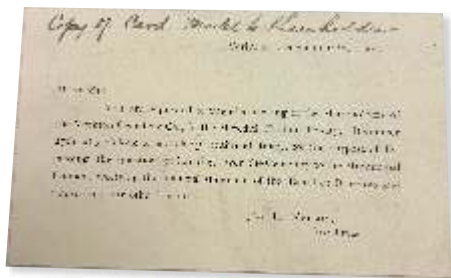
The first indication of a cemetery near the relocated town site appeared in the vicinity of Agricultural Avenue and Borden Street, close to the grounds of the early Queen Victoria Cottage Hospital. According to the City of Yorkton Cemetery Walking Tour Book (2000), the temporary burial ground was located on Borden Street, in the grounds behind the hospital between Agricultural and Assiniboia Avenues. Other accounts, including a 1953 letter from W. F. Hopkins, published in the Yorkton Enterprise, describes it as being in the sand hills just west of the hospital. Unfortunately, no complete burial records survive from this early site.

On October 15, 1895, a group of approximately 22 men met to establish the Yorkton Cemetery Company. During this meeting, they agreed that the capital stock of the company would be \$1,000, to be divided into 100 shares of \$10 each entitling the holder to 100 superficial feet. Mr. Nelson was appointed Treasurer for the purpose of drawing up an instrument in accordance with Section 4 of the Cemetery



Excerpt from the Cemetery Record Book

Ordinance of 1888. At this time, each shareholder paid \$2.50 (25%) of their investment. There is a list of names of such shareholders, including notable names like Beck and Collacott, who both had large roles in Yorton's early business life.



A few months later at a Shareholder Meeting on January 4, 1896, five men were elected as Directors - Hopkins, Insinger, Nelson, McFarlane and Bull. These directors were to give their "IOUs" for the 75% of the share in compliance with the ordinance respecting Cemeteries. At another meeting a few days later, January 7, 1896, Mister Hopkins was made President of the board of directors. They also directed Mr. Nelson, the Secretary, to contact companies owning land that might be considered a suitable site for a cemetery and to procure a minute book. Additionally, the Secretary was to contact other Cemetery Companies for copies of Rules and Regulations as a guide in making Bylaws for the Yorkton Cemetery Company.

On March 6, 1896, correspondence from the York Farmers Colonization Company was read, requesting the Directors make an offer for a proposed cemetery site. It was agreed that the Company would offer \$3 per acre for five acres at NE corner of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 35 Township 25 Range 4 West 2nd meridian. They also agreed to procure 250 Tamarack fence posts 7 feet long not less than 5 inches at the small end of the property at the budget of \$0.10 per post. During the next two meetings, the fence was agreed upon with a contract awarded to Rob Betts for 250 fence posts for the sum of \$0.11 per post and the Company agreed to accept the York Farmers Colonization Company offer to sell 5 acres at \$10 per acre. The following month, on August 4, 1896, it was agreed that the cemetery site be surveyed by a "competent surveyor at cost not exceeding \$35".

Several months later, on December 5th, final details were getting worked out and by the end of 1896, the present Yorkton Cemetery opened on land at the corner of King Street and Highway No. 9, becoming the permanent resting place for the community. There was a second call of 25% upon each share to be paid by the end of January 1897. Prices of plots were set at \$12 for a full plot or \$6 for a half. Mr. Nelson was appointed caretaker to ensure that graves were dug only under his guidance and that "no grave be dug less than one foot from the boundary of the plot and six feet deep". And, it was decided that the surveyor's account be paid as soon as there was sufficient money in the account.

In the spring, on May 31, 1897, after much discussion regarding the type of fencing, it was agreed to install a barbed wire fence, with a labour cost of only \$18. The Yorkton Cemetery Company carried on over the next four years and then on December 27th, 1901, the Shareholders of the Yorkton Cemetery Company met for the last time. There were only two big items for discussion on the agenda. It was decided that the Secretary/Treasurer Mr, Nelson be remunerated for his services to the company at the rate of \$10 per annum from the date of organization of the company. It was also resolved that the Yorkton Cemetery Company assign and hand over to the Municipality of the Town of Yorkton, the cemetery grounds, all books, paperwork, outstanding accounts now owing and due the company. The shareholders thanked the Board of Directors for their services during the past six years since the formation of the Company and now the Yorkton Cemetery Company was no longer in business. The town of Yorkton was now the owner/operator.

The first recorded burial at the current cemetery location is a child named Myrtle Large, interred in October 1896. Burials from the earlier site were transferred after this. One of the earliest documented transfers was a child with the surname Shewfelt, who had died in 1892 with the remains relocated to the new cemetery in June 1897.

The original layout of the grounds looked quite different from what is seen today. Driveways and paths criss-crossed the property, taking up a large share of the space, leaving less room for graves. Over the decades, the cemetery served families from many backgrounds. Among them were Doukhobor immigrants who began arriving in the region in the late 1890s. Saskatchewan-based independent researcher and reporter, Johnathan J. Kalmakoff, notes that the first Doukhobor burials took place in 1899, when several unknown individuals died while staying in the immigration sheds in Yorkton. From that point onward, the cemetery became a shared resting place for Doukhobor families who settled in the city and the surrounding district.



Photo: Headstone of Myrtle Large, the first person directly interred at the present cemetery in 1896 (Block 7, Plot 8, Grave A). Source: City of Yorkton Cemetery website.

By the middle of the twentieth century, city officials started considering

future expansion and, in 1956, the council purchased about 40 acres of land from William Wilkinson. The city worked with W. H. Vaughan and received helpful suggestions from the American Monumental Association to plan the new site. Workers contoured the ground and built mounds intended to improve the appearance of the area.

The deep snow brought by Saskatchewan winters caused challenges in the improvement process. The design of the low driveways was ineffective for winter burials. At the time, mausoleums had not yet gained wide acceptance among the public. Around 1963, the city engineer, I. B. Sveinbjornson, along with the author of one archival report, proposed a practical solution. They suggested converting many of the existing paths and streets inside the original cemetery into grassed areas that could hold new grave sites. Council approved the idea, and the change added roughly 2,100 burial plots without needing to open new land right away.

Later surveys showed that about 5,500 grave sites remained unused in the current cemetery, though some lay in undeveloped sections. Of those, approximately 1,500 were reserved, mostly inside family plots. These numbers suggested the existing grounds could continue serving the community for years to come. At the same time, health regulations prevented any further expansion on the present site. City planners understood that economics would favour keeping any future cemetery close to the current one for easier maintenance and preparation work. Experience showed that thinking at least 25 years ahead for such needs was reasonable.¹



This photo shows an area of the cemetery where former paths and streets were converted into grave sites.

¹The core historical details come from the archival document “Yorkton Cemetery History – Cemetery review,” the 2000 City of Yorkton Cemetery Walking Tour Book, Jonathan J. Kalmakoff’s documentation on Doukhobor burials, Kenton de Jong’s travel article, and the 1953 Yorkton Enterprise report referenced in multiple sources. Additional context on founding and railway move draws from City of Yorkton heritage pages and standard historical summaries.

Chapter Two

Cemetery Directions and Sections

The Yorkton Cemetery has continued to evolve to serve the needs of the growing community since its opening in 1896. Today the grounds cover 10.5 acres on the west side of Highway No. 9 at its intersection with King Street and contain approximately 12,000 interments. Visitors can reach the cemetery easily by following King Street or Highway No. 9. The iron gate and surrounding spruce trees clearly mark the entrance.



View of the cemetery gate from Highway No. 9 facing west.

The cemetery is organized into several distinct areas that reflect the history of the land as well as key values of the community. The Hill contains many of the cemetery's older graves, including those transferred from the original site near Agricultural Avenue and the earliest burials dating from 1896. The Meadow is a newer section of the cemetery, reflecting the continue expansion of the grounds to accommodate the community's changing needs. The Veteran's Section honours individuals who served in Canada's military forces. The cemetery also includes two columbariums, providing above ground options for cremated remains and memorialization. The Woodland Path offers a quieter, more natural route through the grounds.

The Hill



The Meadow



The Veteran's Section

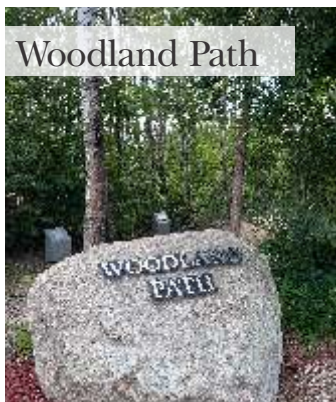


The Hill Combarium



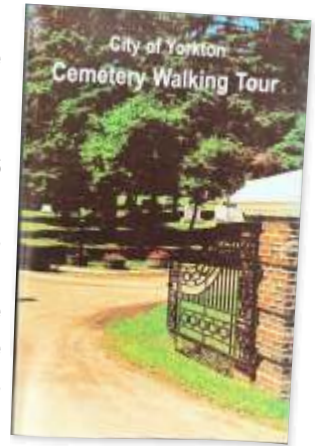
The Meadow Combarium

Woodland Path



The Cemetery Walking Tour

The city has a 28 stop self-guided walking tour, which focuses on the early pioneering days of the city - "The Cemetery Walking Tour". In addition to this, two new walking tour books are available, providing even further exploration, one with 26 stops highlighting contemporary notable people in Yorkton's history, and the second with 60 stops dedicated to buried veterans. These self-guided walking tours have allowed people to explore the different sections of the cemetery and learn more about the people who have been buried as well as the stories connected to each one.²



²Information on the cemetery areas and current size comes from the official City of Yorkton Cemetery website. Section boundaries have evolved with formal naming.

Chapter Three

Yorkton Folklore and Ghost Stories

Yorkton Cemetery has long served as a central point for local folklore and ghost stories. Although many residents remain sceptical about the real existence of spirits, the tales continue to circulate, keeping historical memories alive in an accessible and engaging way. The stories often connect directly to the cemetery's past or to nearby locations tied to its earlier history.

Phenomena Inside the Cemetery

The City of Yorkton's former Culture and Heritage Specialist, Hayden DeGrow, noted locals and visitors to have reported unusual occurrences within the cemetery grounds over the years. Some claimed to have heard whispers of their own names from among the graves. Others described how the trees swayed and rustled suddenly on otherwise calm days, particularly soon after a new burial took place. Accounts coming from night circumstances were even more vivid, with several people saying they had observed glowing orbs of light hovering above grave sites. These orbs reportedly moved at random to begin with, then drifted toward one another as if they were communicating. Sightings such as these occurred only for certain individuals, which adds to the mystery, even drawing ghost hunters to the site on some occasions.

Yorkton's Ghost Child

The folklore extends beyond the boundaries of the cemetery itself. One of the most prevalent stories is that of the Ghost Child, also known as the Crossroads Ghost or the Yorkton Child. Accounts of the precise location of this tale tend to differ. According to Hayden Degrow's *Haunted Yorkton*, sightings have been reported along Manitoba Avenue, while others have mentioned sightings on King Street, the main road that passes the cemetery. The story is sometimes linked to a young girl who was killed while walking along the roadside. A different account from *Skary Saskatchewan*, places the ghost at the intersection where Laurier Avenue meets the independent and park streets, where a little girl appearing to be no more than four years old has been seen, wandering alone. When concerned passersby approach, thinking she is a lost child, the figure fades away. She also never appears to age. There are a range of possible explanations for this sight, from

connections to the nearby cemetery to a fire at the local hospital. In any version of the story, however, the true identity of the child and the reason for her continued presence, remains a mystery.



Photo: View of King Street/Manitoba Avenue - one of the locations associated with the Ghost Child

Yorkton’s Haunted Playground

One of the best known local ghost stories is the Kiwanis Kiddies' Playground tale, which is a playground that once stood across from the Queen Victoria Cottage Hospital. According to Yorkton legend, the playground was haunted by the lonely spirit of a small child. On calm summer days, people walking past often saw a single swing moving back and forth as though carrying an invisible rider. Neighbours reported that even when the playground appeared deserted, the merry-go-round would begin spinning and gradually pick up speed. The rusty bolts of the teeter-totter would creak, accompanied by the bumping of the seats as they hit the ground.

Kathy Morrell, who researched, wrote, and produced the Haunts of Yorkton productions, considered this one of the more authentic local ghost stories. Eventually, a myth developed that a little girl had died during a routine surgery at the nearby hospital in its early days and was then buried secretly on the land that later became the playground.



Photo: Historic view of Queen Victoria Cottage Hospital (Source: Kenton de Jong)

The Nurse Apparition

Another haunting connected to the Queen Victoria Cottage Hospital comes from Kathy Morrell's *Haunts of Yorkton II* production. As night gave way to grey dawn, an apparition was seen floating from the hospital's back door. The translucent figure appeared as a woman dressed in a floor-length cotton tunic with a bib and apron, a white nurse's cap neatly pinned on her head.



Photo: Queen Victoria Hospital. Two nurses sit on the railing of the steps at the hospital.

The Skeleton Find

In January 1953, the *Yorkton Enterprise* published an article headlined "Skeleton Stirs Old Cemetery Mystery." As city workmen were digging sewer trenches near the former hospital, they were reported to have uncovered human skeletal remains. The discovery sparked a widespread discussion as to where the remains could have come from, additionally renewing further interest in local history.

The Haunted 1905 Building

Another haunted location in downtown Yorkton is a building that many people pass without a second thought. According to Hayden DeGrow's *Haunted Yorkton* video, the structure was built in 1905 and has been a familiar part of the city's streetscape for well over a century. When it first opened, the upper floor housed apartments while the main floor was occupied by a bakery. The bakery soon moved and the ground floor was taken over by McKay's Paint Shop, a business that remained there for over forty years.

It was during the time of McKay's Paint Shop that something unexplainable was said to have occurred, apparently involving a lingering presence. Today the building houses a variety of small businesses and the public can move freely through both floors, with many visitors and workers having reported strange experiences while inside. Some describe a sudden drop in

temperature in certain areas while others have said that they felt an invisible hand gently brushing across their backs, arms, or shoulders. The abnormal sensations vary from room to room and from person to person, making it difficult to form a single clear story. Even without a fully developed legend, the building has earned a reputation across Yorkton as one of the town's creepiest spots. It remains a quiet, almost inconspicuous haunt, tucked into the heart of the city's downtown.



Photo of the Historic Building from 1905
(Source: City of Yorkton Archives and Hayden DeGrow)

The Ghost of Levi Beck at the Fire Hall



Photo of Levi Beck (Source: City of Yorkton Archives and Hayden DeGrow)

One of the most commonly known ghost stories in Yorkton takes place in the Yorkton Fire Hall. According to Hayden DeGrow's Haunted Yorkton video, the fire hall stands on the former site of one of the largest and most impressive single-family homes ever built in the city. Constructed in 1902 for Levi Beck, a prominent businessman and former mayor known as the "Merchant Prince of Yorkton," the grand mansion was a symbol of his success. Beck owned numerous properties and businesses across town until the Great Depression destroyed his empire. He died in 1936, and his widow eventually moved out after the Second World War. The house stood empty for years, being demolished in the 1980s, an act that caused significant upheaval in the local heritage community.

It was not long after the opening of the new fire hall that reports of strange activity had begun. Firefighters and paramedics described various abnormal happenings such as blankets being ripped off them while they slept between calls, pillows being pulled from under their heads and couches suddenly tipping over, sending them to the floor. In the kitchen, plates, cups, water bottles, and cutlery were said to move on their own or disappear and reappear in unexpected places. During quiet nighttime shifts, nicknamed the “graveyard shift,” some heard whispering voices, frequently described as a deep male voice, potentially resembling that of Levi Beck's. Many of the first responders conjecture these disturbances to be caused by Beck's spirit, who may remain angered by the loss of his beloved home, viewing the new building's occupants as trespassers.



Photo: Levi Beck's House in the 1980s before it was unceremoniously demolished
(Source: City of Yorkton Archives and Hayden DeGrow)



Photograph of the Fire Hall (Source: City of Yorkton Archives and Hayden DeGrow)

The Water Tower Ghost

One of the more elaborate ghost stories connected to Yorkton involves the town's water tower. According to an account published in 2023, a series of strange events began with reports of mysterious break-ins throughout the town. Homes were entered at night with no sign of forced entry and nothing taken. Residents claimed to have seen a ghostly figure inside their houses just before the incidents occurred.

Most sightings were reported near the water tower. A local amateur investigator and a group of paranormal enthusiasts set up cameras at the site in hopes of capturing evidence. After many quiet nights, the investigator reviewed footage and saw a ghostly figure standing at the foot of the tower.

Further investigation into the town's history revealed a possible theory of the ghost being that of a young woman who had died by suicide many years earlier. She was heartbroken after her fiancé broke off their engagement and had jumped from the water tower. Her spirit was said to have remained trapped in Yorkton until her incomplete endeavours could be satisfied.



The investigator is said to have helped the ghost find closure by locating her former fiancé, who was still living with deep guilt and remorse. Shortly afterward, the man was found dead near the tower. According to the story, both spirits finally found peace, and the haunting came to an end.

Some residents still claim to see a ghostly couple near the Yorkton water tower on full moon nights. In response, the mayor and townspeople decided to light up the tower as a way to honour this tragic love story.

Chapter Four

Ghost Walking Tour Events

Yorkton's connection to folklore and ghost stories goes beyond private tales as they have adopted several public celebrations that blend the paranormal with the city's history. In 2005, as part of Yorkton's centennial celebrations, the Yorkton Centennial Committee organized an interactive ghost walk titled *ThE HaUnTS oF YORkTON*, written by retired teacher Kathy Morrell. Posters invited people to "Dare to Walk Where Spirits Haunt." Tours began at Shaw Park on Fifth Avenue across from Patrick Place and wound through downtown streets along Smith Street, Third Avenue, Second Avenue, and onto Livingstone before ending at the Army and Navy with the honky-tonk piano playing of Laurene Jemieff. Participants received a Centennial Coin, valued at three dollars, which could be kept as a souvenir or spent at local businesses until the end of 2005.

The event was very successful resulting in more events such as this being held, like the more elaborate versions in 2006 and 2007, for example. These later occasions featured a choir of people dressed up like the dead and expanded dramatizations. Actors and volunteers portrayed historic figures



Photo of the Haunts of Yorkton Cast

(Source: City of Yorkton Archives and Hayden DeGrow)

Back row: Merle Sherwin, Kathy Morrell, Jack Dawes, George Maben, Bill French,
Don Trevena, Adam McVey

Middle row: Garry Fletcher, Dick Bolt, Laverne Rawlick, Wendy Stricker, Carol Bolt,
Whitney Skinner, Samantha Stewart

Front row: Kevin East, Dion Walker, David Sumner, Tamara Hall

Missing: Kim Elashuk, Brian Woodward, Phil De Vos

from Yorkton's past as “ghosts” also sharing their stories and personalities. Different casts each year kept the evenings exciting and engaging. Storytellers included Wendy Stricker, Whitney Skinner, Samantha Stewart, Merle Sherwin, and Laverne Rawlick, to name a few. Among the ghosts portrayed were Dr. Patrick (Dion Walker), the lamplighter (Brian Woodward), Constable Junget (Dick Bolt), Pud Ball (Don Trevena), the three lost mayors, the woman from the speakeasy, the sax player, the woman from the Christian Women's Temperance Union, the schoolmarm, the bank robber, and Harry Bronfman.

The series concluded in March 2008 when the Yorkton Chamber of Commerce presented The Haunts of Yorkton with a Community Award of Excellence. Organizers designed the productions primarily as theatrical history lessons rather than literal ghost hunts. Nevertheless, the events highlighted many of the locations and legends already associated with the cemetery and surrounding areas, including the old Kiwanis Kiddies' Playground across from the former Queen Victoria Cottage Hospital. One tour stopped at the site of the former Levi Beck Store, now Frameworks.⁴



Actor Jack Dawes as Harry Bronfman (Source: City of Yorkton Archives and Hayden DeGrow)

⁴Details come from the City of Yorkton Municipal History 1900–2020, Jo-Anne Christensen's Ghost Stories of Saskatchewan 3, Kenton de Jong's article, Hayden DeGrow's “Haunted Yorkton” video. Specific tour information, including dates, route, cast, and Centennial Coin, is drawn from contemporary accounts and Kathy Morrell's project description featured in the Windows on our History book published by the City of Yorkton in 2005.)

Chapter Five

Stories from Neighbouring Towns

While Yorkton Cemetery holds many of the city's own folklore and ghost stories, similar tales have emerged in surrounding rural areas and neighbouring communities. One of the better-known local hauntings lies along McKim Road, a grid road located halfway between Yorkton and Melville. Although little remains of what may once have been a small settlement or town site, the road has developed a reputation for paranormal activity.



Illustration of McKim Road (Shared by Saffron Mandzuk-Pavlic on the Yorkton News Facebook page on March 1, 2024)

According to local accounts, a man riding his motorcycle collided with a grain truck at an intersection on McKim Road and did not survive. Tradition holds that if drivers park their vehicle at that crossroads after dark, they may see the headlight of a motorcycle approaching from a distance. In some versions the light continues straight or turns and vanishes. If the driver tries to

follow it, the light simply disappears. In other versions, those who remain parked with their headlights off experience strange effects, like the car shaking, dust from the gravel settling on the vehicle, and handprints appearing on the dashboard or windshield. One witness described seeing a handprint that dragged slowly across the glass.

Some reports describe even more unsettling encounters. A few people claim to have seen a legless apparition dragging itself across the road with its arms. In at least one telling, the figure appeared in the backseat on the drive home, accompanied by a strong odour of rotting flesh. Details vary from storyteller to storyteller, yet the core image of the motorcycle light at the lonely intersection remains consistent.

The McKim Road haunting has drawn the attention of paranormal enthusiasts over the years. Cole Smith and Ryan Crouse, hosts of the Yorkton-produced television show *Knights of the Dark*, investigated ghost stories across eastern Saskatchewan. During their travels, Smith personally encountered an unidentifiable light on McKim Road on multiple occasions. He described the light as holding its distance as he drove toward it, accompanied by a low bass-like sound. Smith was skeptical, while his partner seemed more open to paranormal explanations. The pair used equipment like electromagnetic field meters and cameras, but they stressed that their goal was honest exploration rather than manufactured drama.

These accounts from McKim Road demonstrate how folklore in the areas neighbouring Yorkton often have tragic accidents at isolated rural crossroads or half-forgotten settlement sites as their central story. Such stories continue to circulate among residents of Yorkton, Melville, and the surrounding district. Each story adds another layer to the region's shared paranormal heritage and reminds us that the echoes of the past reach well beyond the cemetery gates.⁵

⁵McKim Road stories come from the *Sask Hauntings* blog (2023), *Cryptid X Cutie* (2024), and related social media posts. The *Knights of the Dark* details appear in the 2014 *SaskToday.ca* article by Calvin Daniels. The original accident lacks official confirmation and remains anecdotal.

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