Sorting “Natives” from “Indians”: interrogating historic burials in the Catholic Burying Ground on the Dartmouth Common (1835-1865)

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Abstract:
This research disrupts a colonial narrative about settlers and hundreds of “Indians” inscribed on a monument as part of a non-Indigenous tourism scheme to raise money and clean up the abandoned Catholic Burying Ground on the Dartmouth Common. Many Natives of Ireland and others, not Natives of North America, are identified by a detailed analysis of handwritten death records and other sources. They were all but forgotten when the municipality took control of the cemetery in 1975 without a copy of the church records. This left a gap in public memory that allowed variations of an “old Indian burial ground” narrative to evolve from burials in the ground (1962) to burials in a mound (2010). The findings are relevant to the national project of Truth and Reconciliation and serve as a cautionary tale about the importance of seeking truth before reconciliation. This research will be of interest to Irish researchers and descendants of those who died; residents of Halifax Regional Municipality who own the cemetery in trust; government administrators, planners, and surveyors; Catholic organizations in control of historic records; and to social, legal and Indigenous researchers who grapple with constructed “Indian” identities as a way of decolonizing the story of Canada.

Description:
vi, 111 leaves : illustrations (some colour), colour map ; 29 cm
Includes abstract and appendices.
Includes bibliographical references (leaves 100-111).

Subject:
- Catholic Burying Ground (Dartmouth, N.S.) -- History
- Cemeteries -- Nova Scotia -- Dartmouth -- History
- Collective memory -- Nova Scotia -- Dartmouth
- Monuments -- Nova Scotia -- Dartmouth
- Burial records -- Nova Scotia -- Dartmouth
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Historically, burial in perpetuity has tended to result in the eventual neglect and deterioration of cemeteries as they fill and cease to generate income, as survivors die off or relocate, or as they become otherwise less relevant to subsequent generations. At the same time burial does offer the hope, at least, of a permanent home. If the grave is the body’s last house, then the cemetery may be considered its last village or city. The cemetery can be a sort of ideal, utopian city — well-organized, self-sufficient, egalitarian, and void of social conflict. In many cemeteries one finds the doub...