

News Release – SHSB Plays a Key Role in Shedding Light on the Asile Ritchot Cemetery

February 4, 2025, St. Boniface, Manitoba — The Saint Boniface Historical Society (SHSB) is shedding light on the forgotten history of the Asile Ritchot cemetery through its rich archives. Its goal: to better understand this site and its heritage significance. This approach comes in a context of tensions between the citizens of Saint-Norbert and the current owner of the Lemay Forest land, where this historic cemetery is located. The Ritchot Asylum, active at the turn of the 20th century, was a Catholic institution that played a central role in housing people without support, including orphans and pregnant girls and women who were unmarried. Like many similar institutions of the time, it operated with limited resources and understaffing, due to a lack of adequate funding. This resulted in unsanitary conditions, underlying factors in the spread of disease, creating significant challenges in its provision of care and services.

The role of the SHSB

The SHSB is dedicated to preserving and promoting the Francophone and Métis heritage of the province of Manitoba. The research conducted as part of the Asile Ritchot file is part of this role, and the organization consulted historical documents to better understand the history of this site. In addition, the Lemay Forest in St-Norbert is home to Catholic monuments built by religious communities and their allies, contributing to the built heritage of Manitoba's Francophonie.

Considerations

- The available records indicate the presence of a cemetery, but the archival documents do not allow us to know precisely its extent through time and space, nor the funeral practices of the time.
- Two burial registers from the Ritchot Asylum list 726 burials of children aged one year and under from 1907 to 1912 in the "Sisters of Mercy Cemetery in St-Norbert", also known as the Ritchot Asylum Cemetery.
- A preliminary quantitative overview of the admission records of children to the Ritchot Asylum had listed a total of 3,383 deaths associated with the Asylum.

Link to article on SHSB website -

<https://shsb.mb.ca/news-release-shsb-plays-a-key-role-in-shedding-light-on-the-asile-ritchot-cemetery/?lang=en>

However, the place of burial of the children is not generally indicated in this primary source.

- Primary sources do not provide a clear indication of the ethnic origins of the children who were housed at the Ritchot Asylum. A preliminary analysis of existing sources suggests that most of these children were of French-Canadian or European descent. Of the 3,383 reported deaths, 31 children were identified as Métis. There were 225 Métis children registered at the Asylum.
- Data analysis is ongoing and preliminary quantitative data still need to be confirmed by verification.
- Winnipeg has historical precedents for losing heritage sites and cemeteries to redevelopment for modern developments, including part of the St. Boniface Cathedral cemetery.
- The SHSB is not an expert in funeral law and therefore cannot comment on the legality of the developer's actions wishing to establish a residential complex on this site. That said, the SHSB believes that additional analyses are necessary.

“As guardians of an important part of our historical heritage, our role is to provide facts and historical context. Research on the Ritchot Asylum provides a better understanding of the issues of the time and sheds light on sometimes difficult realities. We believe that a rigorous and informed approach is essential in this matter.”

– *Émilie Pigeon, Executive Director, Société historique de Saint-Boniface*

-30-

For any information or interview request:

Émilie Pigeon
Executive Director
direction@shsb.mb.ca
(204)-233-4888 ext. 277
Saint-Boniface Historical Society (SHSB)

Link to article on SHSB website -

<https://shsb.mb.ca/news-release-shsb-plays-a-key-role-in-shedding-light-on-the-asile-ritchot-cemetery/?lang=en>