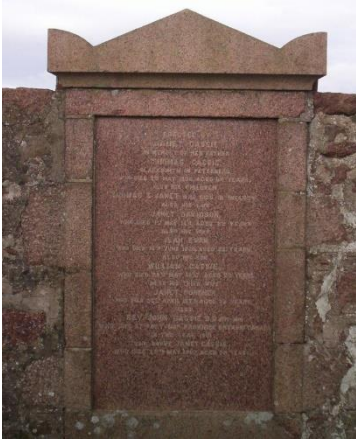


# Rev. John Cassie, 1807-1861

Jim Campbell and Peter Bolton



In the wall near the SW corner of the Old St. Peter's Kirkyard in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, there is a large memorial to blacksmith Thomas Cassie (1772-1836) and his family. Thomas, his three wives – Janet Davidson (1778-1811), Jean Evan (1782-1820) and Janet Cordiner (1795-1873) – and several of his sons and daughters are interred there. The memorial also commemorates “the Rev. John Cassie, D.D., his son, who died at Port-Hop [sic], province Ontario, Canada, in the year 1861.” Nevertheless, it is unlikely that son John actually held the degree of Doctor Divinitatis (D.D.), which requires advanced academic study. Indeed, his gravestone in Port Hope describes him as the Rev. John Cassie A.M.; i.e., with a Master of Arts (Artium Magister) degree.

As a young man the Reverend John came to Canada as a missionary from the United Secession Church of Scotland, becoming in 1835 minister of the United Presbyterian Church of Port Hope, a role in which he served until his untimely death in 1861. Services were originally held in a small frame building built around 1831 just south of the Pioneer Presbyterian Cemetery on Bruton Street, but nothing now remains of this original structure. It was replaced by a larger brick building in 1854 on Baldwin Street, which still stands although now converted into two semi-detached private dwellings.

In September 1840 John Cassie married Pamela Kidd, born 1820, daughter of George Kidd, a linen manufacturer, and Margaret McKinstry, originally of Greenmount, Co. Armagh, Ireland. Pamela had emigrated to Canada sometime in the early 1830s, presumably with other members of her family, one



of the many Irish families emigrating to Canada in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Where the Reverend lived before his marriage, and afterwards until 1850, is unknown, but he appears at some point to have acquired land at the corner of Julia and Baldwin Streets and, according to tax assessment rolls, 15 Julia Street, the couple's final home, was built there in 1850. Now known as the Cassie Cottage, it still stands, although the eastern half of the property was later severed to permit the construction of 35 Baldwin Street around 1870. Although built nearly a decade after the death

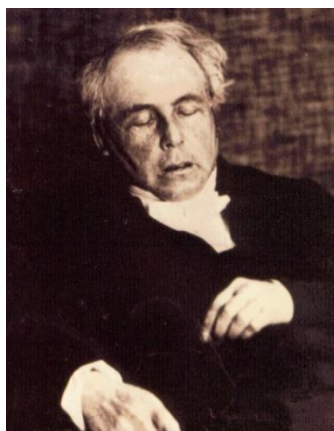
of the Reverend, the much grander Baldwin Street edifice with its mansard roof is still known as Cassie House.

John and Pamela had one child, a daughter, who died unnamed aged 10 days, August 8, 1842. While there is no existing record of the baby's interment, it is likely that this was in the pioneer cemetery, to be accompanied later by her father.



The passage of time has not been kind to the old cemetery, which has suffered greatly from vandalism and neglect. Although extensive renovations were carried out by members of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in the 1980s many stones have been displaced and the brickwork is crumbling. Church records of actual burials there have been lost although it is considered that the first of about 60 took place in the late 1820s with the last around 1873,

just before the opening of the Port Hope Union Cemetery at 114 Toronto Road in 1874. But no trace of a Cassie stone now exists there. There is, however, an imposing monument to the Reverend and his family in Union Cemetery, the frontal inscription of which reads, "In memory of a beloved pastor and husband, born in Peterhead, Aberdeen, Scotland, who, for over 26 years faithfully and affectionately administered the duties of Minister of the United Presbyterian Church of Port Hope, inducted March 1835, suddenly summoned on high June 19 1861." The opposing face of the monument commemorates wife Pamela who died on January 18, 1896 in Toronto (although still residing at 15 Julia Street), and a side face is inscribed to Margaret McInstry, her mother, died February 1840 aged 63 years, and Emily Louisa King, died April 1847 aged 18 years. Emily was Pamela's niece: her mother was Ann King, née Kidd, Pamela's older sister, who died in 1883. The 1841 Port Hope census lists the Cassie household as consisting of '1 man, 2 women, and a girl of less than 16 years' – presumably John, Pamela, Ann and Emily.



As noted in the *Port Hope Guide*, the minister's "failing health rendered it necessary for him to resign his stewardship, to which he reluctantly consented, a few months before his sudden death, in 1861, caused by disease of the heart." He appears to have been an avid gardener, and may even have died while working in his garden. In 1852 the *Guide* reported that he had delivered a "very delightful lecture" at the Mechanic's Institute on the subject of "Botanical Theology" in which he provided "evidences of a Supreme Being as gathered from the vegetable Kingdom." In life he had declined to have his picture taken because of the cost, but upon his death widow Pamela had him dressed in his gown and bands and had a tintype photograph made of him.

But where are he and his baby daughter actually buried? The original Town of Port Hope Burial Record books contain no record of their being reinterred in Union. The monument itself, however, raises some questions. The style of writing on three sides commemorating the earlier deaths reflects that seen on

stones still standing in the pioneer cemetery. This is especially apparent in the embossed names commemorating Margaret McKinstry and Emily King, while the inscription to wife Pamela on the fourth side is in a much simpler script, indicating that it was added at a different time. Was the stone therefore originally erected in the old cemetery to mark the grave of the Reverend John and his daughter, with both being transferred to Union Cemetery after this opened in 1874? The inscription to wife Pamela might then have been added after her burial there in 1896 (but dated 1897). This, however, is simply conjecture. While the stone in Union Cemetery provides an appropriate memorial for him, perhaps he still reposes, albeit in a now unmarked grave, in the old cemetery, in the company of members of his congregation and other Port Hope pioneers.

