
The initial step taken by the original subscribers for the taking of land in response to a movement launched nearly 100 years ago for a Roman Catholic burial place. The Boston Catholic Cemetery Association incorporated 1851, with which the original subscribers were affiliated, witnessed the fruition of this movement.

In making possible a burial place for Roman Catholics, where the last sad rites could be performed in accordance with the doctrine of their Church, is something for which their kith and kin will ever be grateful.

The fierce fires of religious bigotry, racial hatred and general intolerance ran riot against the French, German, Irish and small groups of other races then in the country. The Irish, of course, had to bear the brunt of this hostility.

Instances of the patience of the Irish in those days are many. That they suffered much for their religion at the time no one familiar with the history will gainsay. It was a time that tried the souls of men and women of Roman Catholic persuasion. They were mobbed when they attempted to bury their dead.

From the “Story of the Irish in Boston” we quote the following:

“On Sunday, June 11, 1837, occurred the famous Broad Street riot. An Irish funeral procession, going along East Street, met a fire company returning from a fire in Roxbury.

A contest began about the right of way, in which, at first the funeral people had the best of it, and took possession of the engine house.

The firemen went to the churches and sounded an alarm of fire, to which the other companies responded, and now drove the Irish through to Purchase and Broad Streets.

They sought refuge in their houses, but their assailants followed them, breaking their windows and smashing furniture. The air was full of flying feathers and straw from the beds which ripped up and empties into the street.

Some of the tenement houses were completely sacked, the occupants fleeing for their lives.

The Mayor of the city, Samuel A. Elliot, was early on the scene, but with the scanty police at his disposal could do little to control the disturbance. He took immediate steps to call out the military.

The National Lancers, a cavalry company recently organized were all well-known and easily reached, and in about two hours after the beginning of the riot the Mayor entered Broad Street with about 800 men, the Lancers heading the column.

The riot was speedily quelled; but the people were so excited that a military patrol was posted at the churches to prevent false alarms.”

We cite this incident to disclose what the Irish had to contend with in that period, and indicate what our original subscribers toward the purchase of land for a Roman Catholic cemetery faced in their day in “looking after their own” when God beckoned them toward his kingdom.

There were 13 Roman Catholic churches in the Boston archdiocese in 1845, with many smaller places for worship in outlying sections.

Of the 40,000 of the Roman Catholic population in the Boston archdiocese many were French, German and Irish.

In all New England there were 28 churches and 41 priests, with a Roman Catholic population of 65,000.

Priests did considerable traveling in those days. The famine in Ireland resulted in many settling in Boston and suburbs after perilous voyages across the Atlantic Ocean.

By 1856, the Roman Catholic population was greatly enhanced by the emigrant Irish. The Boston archdiocese benefited. An accurate census of the Roman Catholic population could not be taken because of difficulties encountered. At any rate, the figure was close to 100,000, with about 50 churches.

The Roman Catholic population in 1936 was 1,084,000.

In 1856, bigotry was still rampant in the Boston archdiocese. The Irish were referred to as “foreigners,” “Paddies,” “Papists” etc. There were however, a better class of Bostonians who believed in fair play, whose qualities of mind and heart proved the truth of the lines:

*“Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood”*

These good people assisted Martin Lynch, James Nugent, Nicholas J. Bean and associates (God rest their souls) in sponsoring legislation for the incorporation of laws for the burial of Roman Catholics in consecrated ground.

The Catholic Cemetery Association in Dorchester held its first meeting in its new office 2382 Washington Street, Roxbury, on December 11, 1876.

Name of the Association changed by Act of the Legislature from Catholic Cemetery Society in Dorchester to Boston Catholic Cemetery Association.

House of Representatives February 14th, 1877

Senate February 15th, 1877

Approved by Governor, March 6th, 1877

Act changing name of Association approved by the Association March 18th, 1877

The wisdom of the original subscribers, their keenness of mind in visualizing the future, in taking the initial steps a half century ago in providing a cemetery for Roman Catholics deserves our everlasting prayers.

These hardy pioneers possessed wonderful foresight in the interest of their Holy Faith. They inherited from the hardy stock who came to these shores from Europe, those ideals that took root and made these great United States of America what they are today.

Space will not permit of extended references to the passing years and the progress made in developing and enlarging, the cemeteries for which the Boston Catholic Cemetery Association stands sponsor.

Much could be written of the pioneers in the movement for the taking over of the land for "God's acres," a name given to burial places, and of the sacrificing devotion to duty of the officers and members of the organization to the present day.

We ask your indulgence to overlook our shortcoming in this "Foreword" to the annual report and profit by the wisdom of the poet:

*"More than fame and more than money
is the comment kind and sunny*

And the hearty, warm approval of a friend;

*For it gives a life a savor,
and it makes you stoner, braver,*

And it gives you heart and spirit to the end.

*If he earns your praise, bestow it;
if you like him, let him know it;*

Let the true words of encouragement be said;

*Do not wait till life is over
and he's underneath the clover,*

For he cannot read his tombstone when he's dead."

Main Office (Monday – Friday 8:30am – 3:30pm)
366 Cummins Highway • Roslindale, Massachusetts 02131
617-325-6830 • Fax 617-325-0883 • e-mail: bcca@mindspring.com