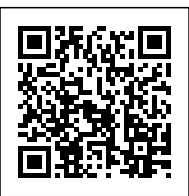


CEMETERY TO HONOUR "MUSLIM" DEAD

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By Vincent Ball, [Brantford Expositor](#), 13 May 2014

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The city is planning to recognize 14 men buried in a previously unmarked section of Mount Hope Cemetery.

Most of the men were buried from 1912 to 1918, city officials say.

Councillors at a committee of the whole meeting this week voted to support using stanchions and chains to section off the area of the unmarked grave. They also voted to support installing a stone, which will include a Muslim prayer, to recognize the names of those buried on the site.

The Brantford Mosque and the Muslim Association of Brantford raised funds for the headstone and foundation.

The plan will come to city council for final approval May 26.

"This is the right thing to do for these 14 individuals," Mayor Chris Friel said after bringing the resolution forward at Monday's meeting.

"They have been forgotten for generations."

Friel noted that people have been walking across the graves for years without knowing the significance of that section of the cemetery.

The mayor also read a 1912 Expositor story about the first burial to take place at the site. The story described the burial as "the first Mohammedan funeral ever held in this city."

The city's plan follows a highly contentious debate that first surfaced in August when plans to erect a plaque or monument at the site became public. At that time, the plan called for the plaque to have the dual purpose of marking an early Ontario Muslim burial plot and telling the story of the 1914 roundup of about 100 so-called "enemy aliens" following the outbreak of the First World War.

Plans for the plaque were prompted by a visit to Brantford by the Turkish consul general Ali Riza Guney, who toured the Mount Hope Cemetery and paid a visit to Friel. The Turkish government had become interested in the topic after learning that a local historian – Bill Darfler – was researching the internment of the city's Turkish population following the outbreak of the First World War.

But the proposal stirred up controversy that went beyond the boundaries of Brantford for a lot of reasons.

First, some of the people buried on the site were buried there two years before the First World War began.

As well, representatives of the Canadian-Armenian community objected to the plan, calling it a politically motivated gesture by the Turkish government. An online petition to "Stop the Fake Monument" was started.

There is also a question of who is actually buried at the Mount Hope site.

Most of the people buried there are believed, by their names, to be Alevi, a distinct religious sect. Suleyman Guven, editor of Yeni Hayat, the Alevi newsletter, said the inclusion of a Muslim prayer on the stone is "inappropriate" and that people in the Alevi community would find that objectionable.

He said he will be consulting with members of the Alevi community to determine what should be done but said there will be a protest with respect to the council's decision.

City councillors need to be educated about who is buried there and should not be putting up any

kind of stone or monument without consulting with the Alevi community, said Guven.

At Monday's meeting, several councillors praised Friel for taking the initiative to recognize those buried at the unmarked plot.

"Whoever they are, they are deserving of respect," Ward 2 Coun. John Utley said.

Coun. Dan McCreary, however, said that the city needs to be careful with respect to what appears on the marker.

"I think we need to be extremely cautious about the messaging on the stone," McCreary said. "...I think we should be checking our own cemetery bylaws to see what is and isn't allowed."

In presenting the resolution to council, Friel said the federal government has provided the city with no guidance even though the issue is one for federal authorities.

But Brant MP Phil McColeman said Tuesday that the federal government is aware of the issues surrounding the Mount Hope burial site.

"I'm kind of surprised the mayor would say that because we've had numerous discussions and in fact those discussion have been ongoing and are continuing," McColeman said. "The Turkish ambassador has spoken to various ministries about the site."

However, nothing has been decided with respect to the placement of any marker or plaque at the site, he added.

In addition to discussions with Turkish representatives, the federal government has also heard from representatives of the Canadian-Armenian community, McColeman said.

He said he believes the Armenian community has no issue with a stone or plaque going up on the site but has insisted that whatever is put on the plaque must be historically accurate.

