



Mount Pleasant Group 200th Anniversary Media Backgrounder
Yesterday. Today. Forever.
Official Launch: January 30, 2026

1. Overview

The Mount Pleasant Group (MPG), one of Ontario's oldest and most trusted non-profit cemetery, funeral, and cremation service organizations, marks its **200th anniversary on January 30, 2026**. Established through a landmark act of social inclusion in 1826, MPG has grown from a six-acre non-denominational cemetery into a community institution spanning **10 cemeteries, nine funeral centres, and four cremation centres** across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

The bicentennial theme – **Yesterday. Today. Forever.** – reflects the organization's enduring commitment to serve families with dignity, compassion, and choice, while preserving Toronto's historic cemeteries as cherished public spaces.

2. Origins: The Founding of an Inclusive Cemetery System

MPG's history begins in **1825** in the Town of York (now Toronto), when only Anglicans and Roman Catholics were permitted burial in authorized cemeteries. That year, a group of citizens petitioned the Province of Upper Canada to create a *general burying ground* open to **all people, regardless of religion or background**. Their petition led to the passage of a special Act, granted **Royal Assent on January 30, 1826**, establishing what would become the Mount Pleasant Group.

Key milestones from this formative era include:

- **1826:** Creation of a statutory trust to hold cemetery lands "*in perpetuity for ever.*"
- Purchase of the initial **six-acre Potter's Field** at Yonge and Bloor.
- Establishment of one of Canada's earliest public, non-sectarian burial grounds—an act that shaped the city's commitment to diversity.

By **1871**, the Trustees of the Toronto General Burying Ground were formally incorporated, guiding the organization's expansion as Toronto's population grew.

3. Two Centuries of Innovation and Service Leadership

From its earliest days, MPG has been recognized as an innovator in funeral, burial, memorial, and cemetery land development practices.

3.1 Service Innovations

- **1826** — Ontario's first burial grounds open to all religions.
- **1870** — Creation of North America's first **perpetual care fund**, predating legislation by 60+ years.
- **1890** — Winter holding facility to support spring burials.
- **1917** — First **dedicated veterans' burial section** in Canada.

- **1933** — Opening of **Ontario’s first crematorium**.
- **1953** — Outdoor granite-faced columbaria.
- **1968** — Professional trust fund management and expanded “special care” maintenance services.
- **1998** — First in the GTA to offer visitation, funeral services, and receptions on cemetery property.
- **1989** — Launch of **The Simple Alternative** to ensure affordable, choice-driven funeral services.
- **1999** — Opened Ontario’s first on-site Visitation Centre at Pine Hills, creating the standard of integrated cemetery and funeral services widely adopted in the decades since.
- **2010** — Opened Ontario’s first self-sufficient columbarium building at York cemetery. Utilizing solar power and a geothermal heating and cooling system, this green building operates without the need for outside electricity or natural gas and became the model for all MPG columbarium buildings built since (three more at York and one at Elgin Mills).
- **2012** — First **natural burial section** in the GTA at Meadowvale cemetery. Second natural burial section at Duffin Meadows would shortly follow.
- **2014** — First in North America to install cremation equipment with advanced abatement systems, virtually eliminating crematorium emissions.
- **2022** — Introduction of human and pet resting areas at Meadowvale and Thornton Cemeteries
- **2025** — First funeral and cemetery operator in Canada to provide mushroom-grown, biodegradable caskets (aka "the living cocoon") for clients looking for more eco-friendly and sustainable death care options.

3.2 Memorial Innovations

- Introduction of markers and urns made from bronze, granite, ceramic, marble, glass, and wood (1930s–1980s).
- Development of **flat-marker sections, scattering gardens, shared monument lots**, and the **Book of Remembrance** (a low-cost perpetual memorial option).
- **1984–1986** — Expansion into upright monuments, memorial dedications, and artist-supported custom monument design.

3.3 Public Use of Cemetery Properties

MPG cemeteries have long served as community gathering spaces, offering:

- **Remembrance Day services**, historical tours, and nature interpretation programs.
- Support for genealogical research and access to historical records.
- Greenhouse conservatories (1960), arboretums, and art collections.
- Chapels for memorial services.
- Public concerts and other community events.
- Passive recreation for biking, walking, jogging and dog walkers

3.4 Land and Greenspace Development

MPG has consistently championed environmental stewardship, shaping Toronto’s green landscape:

- **1870** — Commitment to greenspace preservation and beautification.
- Establishment of arboretums, specialized botanical collections, and ecological planning models.

- Integration of cemeteries into Toronto’s park systems (e.g., the Mount Pleasant Cemetery corridor linking Vale of Avoca and Balfour Park).
- Development of feature gardens (e.g., Mount Pleasant’s Garden of Remembrance) and contemporary sculpture installations.
- **1989** — Heritage Garden and sculptural spatial design projects.

4. MPG Today

MPG now:

- Cares for more than **700,000** interred individuals.
- Maintains **1,200 acres** of cemetery lands and **16,000+ trees**.
- Employs over **600 staff** across the GTA.
- Operates under a statutory trust as a **not-for-profit** organization.
- Manages a **\$700M+ Care and Maintenance Fund**, ensuring perpetual cemetery upkeep.
- Provides substantial community support, including **1 in 6 burials** in 2025 being social-assistance burials.

MPG also supports hospice and palliative care organizations, recycles metals recovered during cremation to fund community initiatives, and maintains full transparency through provincial regulatory oversight.

5. The 200th Anniversary Program

MPG’s bicentennial is a year-long celebration designed to highlight the organization’s history, contributions, and ongoing role in the life of Toronto.

A. The 200 Stories Project

A digital showcase at mpg200.ca, featuring:

- 200 curated stories of individuals, monuments, and community histories.
- Profiles of notable Canadians, including cultural icons, political leaders, veterans, and everyday heroes.
- Stories from cemeteries such as Mount Pleasant, Pine Hills, Meadowvale, York, and the Toronto Necropolis.

B. Immersive Art Installations

- Artist-led installations across select cemeteries.
- Interactive educational experiences combining storytelling, nature, and public art.
- Seasonal programming throughout 2026.

C. Community Events and Engagement

- Guided tours, concerts, cultural programming, and educational workshops.
- Public access to MPG’s historic cemeteries—open 365 days a year.
- Support for community groups, students, historians, and families.

6. How People Can Get Involved

Members of the public are encouraged to:

- Visit MPG cemeteries and explore their historical, natural, and artistic features.
- Experience installations and anniversary events (updated throughout 2026 at mpg200.ca).
- Read and share stories using **#mpg200** and **#200yearsofcare**.
- Participate in commemorations, tours, and educational programs.

7. “200 Stories Project” Disclaimer:

In commemoration of its 200th anniversary in 2026, the Mount Pleasant Group (MPG) is pleased to present its “200 Stories Project.”

These 200 stories – compiled from those of the more than 700,000 decedents interred across the 10 cemeteries of the Mount Pleasant Group today – feature an eclectic mix of people who contributed, in ways both small and large, to the development of Toronto and Canada over the past two centuries. They include visionaries, activists, veterans, innovators, educators, business leaders, artists, icons, everyday heroes, and extraordinary villains. Most represent Toronto at its best, but a handful remind us of humanity at its bleakest. Taken together, these stories offer a compelling snapshot of a city and a country during two centuries of rapid growth and change. All 200 are publicly accessible here at mpg200.ca.

Mount Pleasant Group has made every effort to gather and tell these stories accurately, fairly and honestly. The stories you read here have been identified, curated, written and edited with input and inspiration from a number of different sources. They include both company and public archives, monographs, encyclopedias, and various online platforms. Historians and researchers were engaged to recommend, provide and/or review stories, and both current and former MPG staff members contributed ideas and feedback at all stages of project development. AI technologies were used in some instances to source story origins and background information, recommend wording and to ensure consistency. Sources and references are listed throughout the site.

In presenting these stories, Mount Pleasant Group acknowledges that history(ies) are often told from different – and sometimes conflicting – vantage points, perspectives, and narratives. Sometimes what is told – or allowed to be told – depends on the storyteller and the power and influence they may hold in society. There are also biases to consider in the telling of any (his)story. As a result, truth and fact can sometimes be hidden or obscured, wholly or in part. If you feel strongly that a story included on this site omits or misrepresents the truth as you understand it, MPG welcomes your comments at 200Stories@mountpleasantgroup.com. While MPG cannot guarantee it will alter a story based on every comment received, it will certainly review all comments carefully and make amendments where it deems necessary in order to ensure accuracy.

It should be noted that some stories feature controversial events and people, including some people who caused significant harm to other people or communities. Some such stories have been included here, too, because they are part of the history(ies) or Toronto and Canada, and they have contributed to the world, however imperfect, that we know today. Remembering both the idealized and the imperfect voices of our past is important to our future. Just as death itself does not discriminate, the Mount Pleasant Group offers deathcare services to all who need them. That is the Mount Pleasant Group’s mandate and its commitment – yesterday, today and forever.

The Mount Pleasant Group

8. About Mount Pleasant Group

Founded in 1826, the Mount Pleasant Group is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing inclusive, compassionate, and choice-driven cemetery, funeral, and cremation services across the GTA. MPG operates under the ***Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act (FBCSA)*** and adheres to its statutory mandate to care for cemetery lands “***in perpetuity for ever.***”

Learn more: www.mountpleasantgroup.com
Media inquiries: media@mountpleasantgroup.com

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