

Is it time to rename Mount Cashel Road?

Premium content

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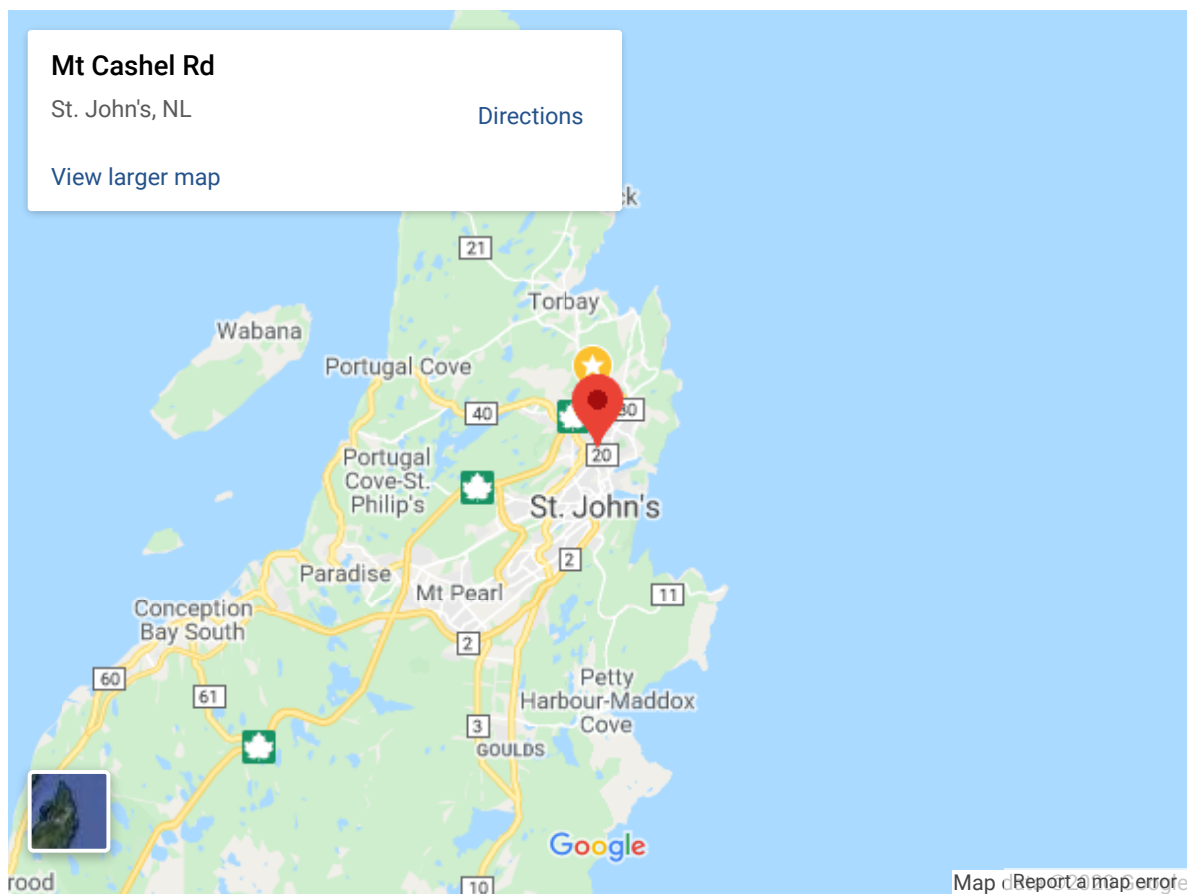
Mount Cashel Road in St. John's runs from New Cove Road to Torbay Road, across from the site of the former boys' orphanage. BARB SWEET/THE TELEGRAM

In the aftermath of a Court of Appeal decision, a victim says it's time to rethink street names



ST. JOHN'S, N.L. — A John Doe involved in the recent civil case involving 1940s to '60s victims of abuse at an infamous St. John's boy's orphanage says the city should rename Mount Cashel Road and other streets honouring the Christian Brothers' order.

Mount Cashel Road is a relatively short street tucked away behind Elizabeth Avenue, and runs from New Cove Road to Torbay Road across from the former orphanage site, and its namesake connection to the disturbing institution is clear.



Below Howley Estates, built on the site of the former Mount Cashel Orphanage, is a series of streets named in the mid-1960s to honour various Christian Brothers from early periods of the orphanage's history.

"I'd like to see them all changed," said the man, who is in his early 80s and was one of five brothers sexually abused at the orphanage.

"They're tearing down statues and monuments (of questionable historic figures) in the States. I would love to see them go and be named after some of the (orphanage) youngsters."

He also favours the removal of the Christian Brothers' pillars in a parkette across from the Sobeys store that occupies the orphanage site.



These pillars from the former Mount Cashel boys' orphanage in east end St. John's remain standing in a Howley Estate parkette. — BARB SWEET/THE TELEGRAM

When asked about renaming Mount Cashel Road and possibly other streets, Ward 4 Coun. Ian Froude said it's an interesting question and he welcomes a public conversation on the subject. He wants to do some research, he said.

Street names, statues and other geographical namesakes in the city "should reflect the values we have as a society," Froude said.

Froude said Indigenous constituents also have concerns about various namesake sites and he's looking forward to the outcome of a provincial review of all monuments and statues in the province.



Coun. Ian Froude

Victims' lawyer Geoff Budden said he thinks it's a good idea to rename Mount Cashel Road.

"I can see it being troublesome to people. After all, (the name) is synonymous now with violence and abuse and very evil things," Budden said.

The origins of other street names may be long forgotten and therefore no longer associated with the Christian Brothers by the public.

Conway Crescent, according to the city archives, was named for Brother J.A. Conway, a prominent teacher at Holy Cross School in 1889.

Ennis Avenue was named for a Mount Cashel educator.

O'Regan Road and O'Regan Place were named for Brother Thomas O'Regan, also closely associated with Mount Cashel, according to the archives' database. (They also acknowledge the O'Regan family's support of the orphanage.)

Slattery Road was named for another Christian Brother, the first principal at the orphanage.

None of those brothers, to Budden's knowledge, were associated with abuse allegations.

"I can see it being troublesome to people. After all, (the name) is synonymous now with violence and abuse and very evil things." — *Geoff Budden*

The Christian Brothers is the Catholic lay order that ran the orphanage, which opened in 1898 and was demolished in 1992.

A scandal erupted in the 1980s when systemic sexual and physical abuse of boys who resided there in the 1970s and '80s was finally exposed after coverups and led to the Hughes Inquiry.

Certain brothers, but not all the orders' members, were abusers — some were criminally prosecuted, but the cases don't trace back past the 1940s.

Boys abused at the orphanage in the mid-20th century weren't compensated by the provincial government, and after the Christian Brothers went bankrupt, victims of that era sought further compensation from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. John's in a lawsuit fought by Budden and Associates of St. John's. There are more than 60 claimants represented by the firm, and the outcome affects the cases of about 20 represented by various other lawyers.

The civil trial was first won by the archdiocese, but the Newfoundland and Labrador Court of Appeal ruled in August in favour of the victims, represented by four John Doe test cases.

At his dining room table this week, John Doe looked at the wall opposite, but his eyes were focussed on the past.

He was remembering his older brother who died this year without ever knowing the victory that came after years of fighting and waiting.

The man described how his brother was top of his class, had a scholarship to Memorial University and wanted to be a doctor. He didn't finish his first year and went into the military instead.

"His path was changed. What could have been should have been," the man said.

Another of his brothers is suffering dementia.

Although he had success in life, John Doe knows his own path was not as promising as it should have been, having been altered by Mount Cashel — he was thrown out at age 15 during the Christmas holidays after an altercation with an abusive Christian Brother while defending his friend, who was also expelled.

"We're very long, long in the tooth," said the man, a retired professional.

"But as long as I am alive and have my faculties both mentally and physically, I will be there right to the end."

His wife, who he refers to as his foundation, described the joy when he hung up the phone in late July and told her the Court of Appeal's decision.

"He said, 'They actually believed us after all these years,'" she said.

The decision affirmed the Catholic church's relationship to the orphanage. The church had not denied abuse occurred, but said it wasn't liable, as it insisted the Christian Brothers was an independent order solely responsible for running the facility. The appeals court overturned a March 2018 Newfoundland and Labrador Supreme Court ruling. The Court of Appeal hearing was covered exclusively by The Telegram, as was most of the original civil trial.

Some people over the years have asked the couple why they bother, and why they don't just give up. They are resolute.

"Geoff (Budden) and his associates went to the end of the wharf and then some to fight for us," Doe said.

Co-counsel on the appeal was Eugene Meehan of Ottawa firm Supreme Advocacy.

The case isn't over yet. The archdiocese can still apply for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada.

"When is enough enough?" Doe asked. "We've been at this now for 20 years."

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