



# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

FALL 2021

As imagined in Bill Whiting's "Tioughnigoe River Anthology"

## Revisiting the Randalls

BY JOHN HOESCHELE, CRC TRUSTEE

*Back in the summer of 2014 - and with the help of local thespians, CHS students, and other volunteers too numerous to name here - the Cortland Rural Cemetery put on a live, musically rich, and under-a-big-top production of the "Tioughnigoe River Anthology." Inspired by Edgar Lee Masters' renowned, 1918 book of poetry -- the "Spoon River Anthology - this anthology was conceived and written by Mr. William "Bill" S. Whiting (1932 - 2010), who was a beloved Homer English teacher and theatrical expert. (Indeed, we were honored to have his widow Ruth (1921-2016) in the audience that evening.) Like its inspiration, Bill's anthology offered a series of life stories as told by the dead; but, unlike Master's original work -- which was a fictional account of small-town America -- Whiting's take on the concept dramatized the lives of actual people who lived, and died, right here in Cortland County. (Some, though not all, are buried right here in the CRC.) I hope you will enjoy this brief excerpt focused on early members of the Randall family; I likewise hope you will be inspired to watch the entire production at our website or on YouTube: There are representations of nearly two dozen characters from our local history, including David Hannum, Amelia Jenks Bloomer, Frances Carpenter, Charles W. Sanders, Dr. Elmer Ambrose Sperry, Spiegel Wilcox, Joseph B. Reynolds, among other notable and less famous folks.*

- John Hoeschele, Board Member

### From the grave of Robert Randall

Well I have to tell you the Randall's are among the oldest families in this area. We are so old, we go back to William the Conqueror, yes sir we do. You'll find Randall's in the doomsday book that William had drawn up with all the names of landowners in it, and we've owned land ever since.

We left England and landed in Connecticut, like everybody else and his 3-toed brother in those day. Pap had enough of Connecticut and in 1792 he packed up Lucy and the nine kids and we headed

*"... Well I have to tell you the Randall's are among the oldest families in this area. We are so old, we go back to William the Conqueror..."*

for greener pastures. We settled down in Brookfield for a while, and some stayed there.

Esther did and Prudence -- she was the last of the kids. Seven boys in a row, and then three girls. Well, Lucy and I pushed on to Cortland and we're the first Randalls to be planted up here in the Rural Cemetery. There's a lot more now. We were prolific.

### William Randall

Some people called me conservative, and I guess I was, in some ways. My brother Roswell and I built a general store on

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



THE ROBERT AND LUCY RANDALL  
MARKER AT CRC





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## Revisiting the Randalls ... CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

### *William Randall (cont.)*

the corner of Main and Port Watson Streets and painted it yellow, and guess what it was called; "The Yellow Store!"

We did pretty well, but to tell the truth, Ros and I didn't always see eye to eye. Finally I built my own store and opened a bank, and I became a damned good banker. I was made President of the First Bank of Ithaca and made frequent trips there in my carriage or on Billie — a fine gray mare.

I had a huge farm; I was on horseback early every morning, visiting my fields and directing the laborers. I prided myself on that farm: handsome buildings well adapted to their various uses, clean fields, good fences, choice cattle, horses and other livestock — and sheep, lots of sheep; lots of wool. Lots of money.

When I was 33, I figured it was time I got married. Betsey Basset was a lively girl — bright eyed and quick of tongue. Better yet she was very thrifty and a good housekeeper.

**His wife Betsey:** We lived in a small house, but I wanted something bigger, so William set out to build it for me. God knows, by then he had money enough.

**William:** Well, we built a pretty big house — probably the biggest in Cortland yet — and Ros — he wanted it! He was always like that — had to have the biggest and best...

**Betsey:** ...like that awful pew of his in the Church.

**William:** Anyway, he persuaded me to sell him that house.

**Betsey:** So we decided to build something even bigger and better!

**William:** And we did! It was magnificent, that house! There were gardens all around — I loved gardening — and we had cactus and orange trees growing in the conservatory. Ros just about had a conniption fit when it was all finished and grander than his place.

**Betsey:** I was always surprised that he didn't get around to building a bigger and better one, but guess he was too busy with other things.

**William:** He outdid us in one way though, we had three children; he had four. By the way that "General" thing... He always wanted to be called "General Roswell Randall." Well, he was General of the local militia and never got any closer to a battlefield than I did.

### *General Roswell Randall*

William may scoff, but a General I was and I always will be remembered as such. I cut a handsome figure if I do say so myself, as I marched into writs, and buckled knee britches. As for my pew — well, it was really a block of pews. I bought the space for eight pews and had it turned into a sort of drawing room for the family — Rocking chairs, sofas, footstools, and foot stoves — it could get awfully cold in that Church! That's why I had it raised up two steps off the floor. I tried to get William to take half the space, but he preferred to sit with the hoi polloi!

I suppose he thought my carriage was too fancy also. It was pretty sumptuous, must say that. Four well-groomed horses pulled it and there was a high front seat for coachman and footman.

After I died the carriage was sold to someone in Ithaca and some wags put their heads together and decided it should leave town with a history. So the new owner got the carriage and the information that it had been brought over from France by a member of the staff of General Lafayette and was presented to Alexander Hamilton. After the duel between Hamilton and Aaron Burr, the carriage came into the possession of the father of James Fennimore Cooper, who presented it to his good friend General Roswell Randall.



## Revisiting the Randalls ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Not that I was snobbish! Lord no! I was a trustee when the Cortland Free Library was established. I loved to read. Shakespeare was one of my favorites and when my eyes grew too dim to read anymore, I loved to hear selections from my favorite plays read by my family. William was right — I outdid him in children as in so many things.

### Wilhelmina Randall

How would you like to be a footnote? That's what I am — a footnote in the "Book of Randall." When you say "Randall," everyone says "Oh yes — General Roswell Randall, the showiest man in town" or Henry S. The famous author of books about sheep or goats or some animal, heaven knows how he got involved with them! Or the William Randall's father and son who ran the Randall Bank.

But Wilhelmina? Wilhelmina Randall? Who is she?

Well, I outlived them all. Ninety-three years old I was when I died. Every New Year's Day Alonzo Blodgett, bless his old heart — he was a childhood friend — dressed himself up in his best and came to call. Just as he had for 60 consecutive years. We sat in that magnificent mansion and talked of the days when it was full of young people like us laughing... dancing...

Now I'm just a footnote. But if people only knew — I left the city the land to build a school on. Yes, Randall school, but not the Wilhelmina Randall School — it could have been named for Roswell or William or Henry with all his sheep. Nobody ever thinks of Wilhelmina Randall.

## Karen Halstead's Favorite Headstones

We recently asked CRC board member, cemetery buff, and avid headstone photographer, Karen Halstead, to name a few of her favorite markers in our historic cemetery — with hints as to why she favors them. Enjoy the resulting photo montage!

From top to bottom:

1. "Potter": *Darling we will meet again* reads the epitaph: George H.C. Potter lost his wife, Fanny, in May 1906 — when her heart gave out. But even though death separated them here on earth, the stone placed on the Potter lot shows their bond and that Mr. Potter planned on being together with her again.
2. "His Children": Surrounded by nearby stones of children lost, an angel watches over the otherwise unmarked remains in the CRC's baby section.
3. Transplants: As early small towns in the Northeast grew, rural cemeteries were created — providing town planners with a chance to consolidate smaller graveyards' burials and markers into one centralized cemetery. When this occurred in Cortland, many of the stones that were moved into Cortland Rural Cemetery were laid on the ground and grown over over the years. A little "digging" reveals most of these early handmade stones were created by gravestone carvers that traveled in our area in the late 1700s and early 1800s.
4. Barker: Stones come in many shapes and forms. The stone for Malcolm and Frances Barker was carved to mimic a natural stone foundation or wall and topped by a cross. A note for people looking through cemeteries for their ancestors: You'll see that there is no death date for Malcolm on the stone; this doesn't mean he's not there... Paper records show Malcolm passed in May 1918 and was interred next to his wife. So, be sure to check cemetery records in your search!
5. Mericle: During the Victorian era, an urn draped over an urn symbolized the thin veil between life and death.



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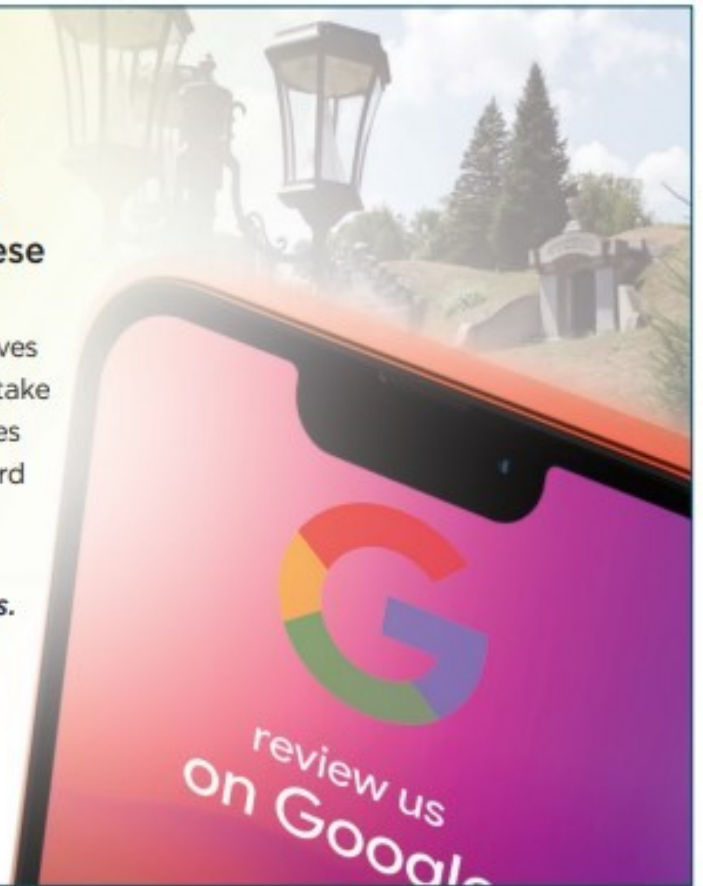
The CRC is so pleased to have received these recent reviews on Google:

Please consider adding your own. When you do, it improves our ranking as one of Cortland's assets (e.g. a place to take a pleasant walk, learn a little local history). It also provides a much-appreciated nod to our staff and volunteer board for all the hard work they do!

★★★★★ *"Scenic cemetery on a hillside. Winding roads and plenty of creative, unique stones. A must see for we who love old cemeteries."* - Eric

★★★★★ *"Beautiful!"* - Gianna

★★★★★ *"What an exquisite field of stone... Truly breathtaking!"* - Tiffany



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE  
**CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY**

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[www.cortland-rural-cemetery.com](http://www.cortland-rural-cemetery.com)

