



# Cortland Rural Cemetery

110 TOMPKINS STREET • CORTLAND, NEW YORK 13045

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## “A Neglected Cemetery in Ruins Is a Sad Spectacle”

By CHRISTINE BUCK

Dark gray, 6" x 9," 47 pages, cover entitled *Cortland Rural Cemetery*, Cortland, New York, published in 1911...what is the history of this little book purchased years ago at a house sale? Was it prompted by a cemetery anniversary? It was not a special anniversary year for the cemetery. Was it a marketing piece? Possibly, but the cemetery had been serving the community well for 58 years.

Opening the cover, we see that the book consists of rules, regulations, by-laws and a brief historical sketch of the Cortland Rural Cemetery Association. Along with the text are twenty-one magnificent photographs of the cemetery, taken by Dr. Frank Sornberger, most likely in the summer of 1911. The photographs illustrate the special attention that had been given to beautifying the cemetery through planting and landscaping.

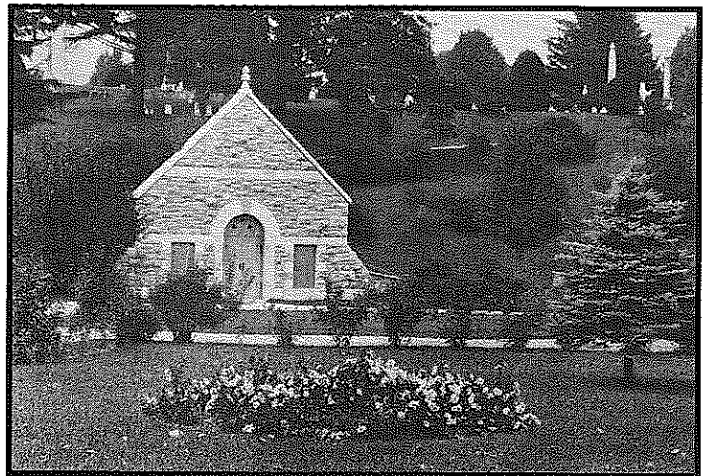
The book includes a list of officers, trustees and the then-current superintendent Burton E. Gallagher. There are newly revised by-laws and a brief history of the cemetery, together with a complete list of the trustees and officers from the date of its organization in 1853. We read about the cemetery's dedication exercises on August 11, 1854, with participation by Rev. Davis, Pastor of the Methodist Church; Rev. Dunham, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church; Rev. Dr. Bowen, Pastor of the Baptist Church; and Rev. Bristol of Ithaca. The Presbyterian Church Choir provided the singing, including a hymn composed for the occasion by Professor Burt of the Cortlandville Academy and Professor Blodgett of Buffalo (the words for which are included in the book).

The revised by-laws listed duties of the officers and superintendent and rules for foundations and monument work, interments, and

disinterments. Birds and plants were to be protected. The price of lots and burials were stated. There were rules for visitors and rules for workmen.

Also discussed were payments for the care of lots and contributions for perpetual care. Since cemetery lots were traditionally maintained and cared for by family members, this was a new concept for many people. An 1890 New York State law concerning perpetual care funds was printed. Bequests for perpetual care (to be used in a will) were explained.

Minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting on December 2, 1911 shed more light on the purpose for this publication. The following statement and resolution was offered by Board President Judge Joseph E. Eggleston:



“Public Vault” (1911)

*This stone façade has been hidden by the additions of a “modern” mausoleum in 1915 and chapel in 1922.*

"On the 7th day of November 1911 there appeared in the columns of the Cortland Daily Standard an article having reference to the book recently published by the Standard Printing Company for this association, of a historical nature, and containing a number of views from the cemetery."

"The article speaks in a kindly way of the care and management of the cemetery at the present time and of the effort being made to establish a sufficient fund to provide for the future perpetual care of the cemetery."

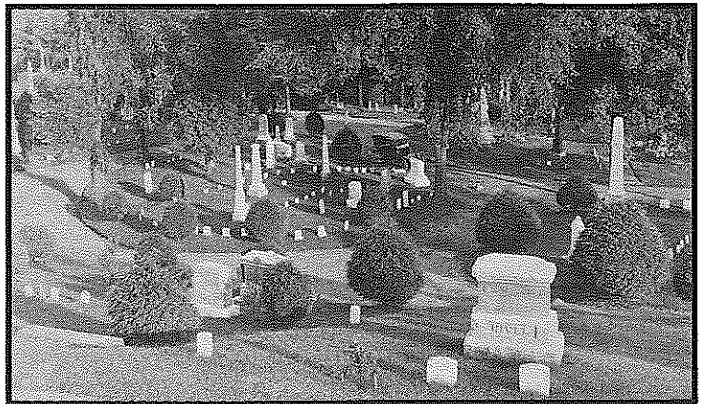
"One purpose in putting out these books was to interest the lot owners in the present management of the cemetery and to call their attention to the fact of the necessity of creating and establish(ing) a fund which will insure perpetual care for the cemetery in years to come."

"A neglected cemetery in ruins is a sad spectacle."

"The growth of this fund should be gradual, increasing from year to year, each lot owner, if he or she can comfortably do so, contributing a small or large sum to the same. This fund should be safely guarded and securely invested."

"There being no objection, the published printed article may be inserted in the minutes of this meeting."

The original Cortland Standard article appears in the minute book.



"View from Top of Joseph Reynolds' Private Vault" (1911)

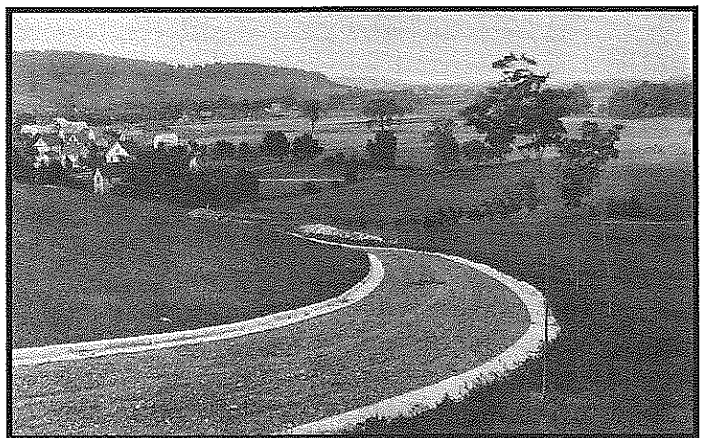
*Looking from Section M to Sections G and L. Note the "horseless carriage" at center right.*

The Trustees of 1911 gave future generations two gifts through their efforts—first, twenty-one charming, irreplaceable historical photographs of the cemetery. Second, the initiation of an endowment fund to help with the cemetery's permanent maintenance. The Trustees and Superintendent of the Cortland Rural Cemetery continue to concern themselves with the maintenance of, beautification of, and improvements to the cemetery. Along with the Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation, established in 1996 to accept gifts and assist the cemetery with its goals, adequate funding and financial stability remain priorities.



"Looking West, Showing Monuments of A. and S. D. Freer" (1911)

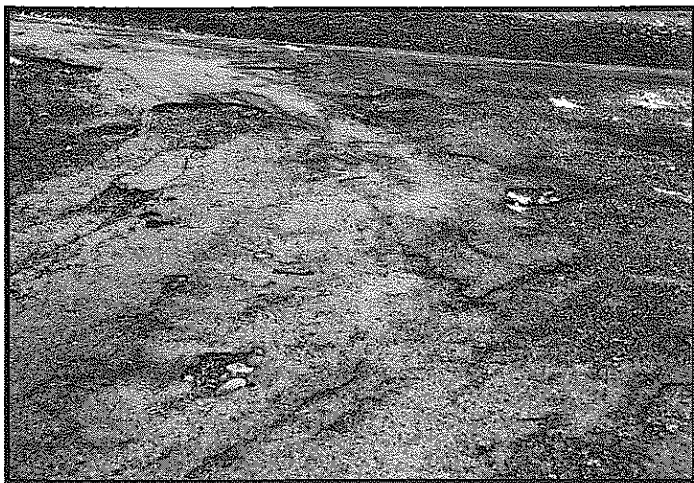
*Sections D and B. Fences of this type were removed from many cemeteries for the war effort and/or to make mowing more efficient.*



"Part of New Addition, Looking Towards South Cortland" (1911)

*Sections B-2 and D-2 are today an integral part of the cemetery. The open fields in the distance are today State University College at Cortland's Physical Education facilities.*

# Road Repair Money Request



*The condition of many of the roads*

At the turn of the 20th Century, the roads in the Cemetery were surfaced with stone dust which was periodically raked and rolled to form an acceptable roadway for the vehicles of the day. Later in the 20th Century, the roads were paved with asphalt similar to City streets. Based on observations from repair work done, some of the more heavily used roads had been resurfaced several times but the last paving was done several decades ago.

In 1999, the Cemetery Foundation was able to fund repair of three different sections of roads, with your donations, which made a noticeable difference in the appearance and ease of travel in the Cemetery. Road repair work is quite expensive and not enough money was raised in the past year to continue the repaving work. Your generous contributions have enabled us to do much needed work and we hope you can help us again in 2001 so we can continue to make regular repairs to the roads. In order to repair the worst road section this next spring, we will need approximately \$35,000. Many hands make light work and if all of our lot owners pitch in, we believe we will raise enough money to get needed work done.



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## Centennial Trees

The Rural Cemetery is a style of landscape architecture featuring winding, tree-lined roadways. While our roadways wind, they are not tree-lined anymore, and this year the Cemetery began a program to remedy that situation.

In support of the plans of the Cortland Rural Cemetery to restore the historic appearance of the Cemetery, the Cortland Rural Cemetery began soliciting donations to purchase trees to replace those lost over the years to storms and old age. The trees will be planted in places where trees formerly existed in unsold lots reserved for trees and in walkways where appropriate. This tree program is not designed to benefit a particular lot owner, but instead to add grace and beauty to the entire Cemetery, so trees are not being sold to be placed on family lots.

In honor of the City of Cortland's celebration of its Centennial in the year 2000, we designated these trees as Centennial Trees. Each tree will bear an identifying tag which will note the species of tree, date planted and the name of the donor who actually

purchased the tree.

Larger scale shade trees such as oaks, maples and lindens will be used in larger sections and smaller scale ornamental trees such as crabapples, hawthorns, spruces and firs will be used in sections where space and size are a limiting factor. The spruces and firs will also be used in areas where winter foliage visibility from the surrounding roads is an important attribute.

Thanks to your very generous donations, the Cemetery has eighteen new trees planted to date including White Oaks, Red Oaks, Crimson King Maples, Honey Locusts, Sweet Gums and Bradford Pears. More trees, of these and other species, still need to be planted so we are extending the Centennial Tree planting program into next spring.

Donations may be made of \$300, which purchases the larger species, or \$250, which purchases the smaller species. Please specify, on your check, that you want your donation to go toward a Centennial tree and forward it to the Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation.

# Where's the Need?

Sometimes the question is asked – why doesn't the Cemetery have the money to do all the things that need to be done? We'll attempt some responses in a question and answer format.

**Q.-** Doesn't the Cemetery have Perpetual Care and Permanent Maintenance Trust Funds?

**A.-** Yes, but they only total about \$350,000 in value and the interest and earnings only provide about \$15,000 in annual income. The Cemetery has an operating budget of over \$100,000 per year. We maintain almost fifty acres of lawns and five buildings. We manage to cover our operating expenses with this income and revenue generated from lot sales, and fees for opening graves, setting monuments and the like. Unfortunately, we don't generate any extra revenue that can be used for road repair, major building maintenance or capital improvements. Fundraising is necessary to cover those items.

**Q.-** If the Cemetery has been in existence for almost 150 years have you always had this problem? Why don't you charge more money for lot sales and other fees?

**A.-** The problem emerged in the last ten to fifteen years when the effects of the raging inflation of the 1970's and 1980's caused the prices of labor, fuel and goods

to increase dramatically while the careful, conservative management of investments didn't appreciate in value at the same rate.

In the last few years, we have increased our lot sale prices and fees to the high end of cemeteries in the area along with carefully controlling expenses. Hindsight is 20/20 and charging higher prices all along would have provided more income for capital expenses. We didn't because the Board of Trustees was always trying to maintain the Cemetery while keeping in mind the cost to lot owners and probably erred on the side of being too low-priced. Our current prices are in line with the costs to keep the Cemetery attractively maintained.

**Q.-** How can I help now?

**A.-** Donations to the Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation, a tax-exempt 501(C)(3) charity, for restoration and maintenance of the historic Cemetery will enable us to continue to maintain the existing buildings and grounds while the Cemetery adds new interment products such as the Chapel Cremation Niches. Sales of these Niches (and other things to come) will result in building the Trust Funds since 25% of the proceeds of the sales are currently being placed in the Trust Funds.



**Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation**

Post Office Box 288

Cortland, New York 13045-0288