



Cortland Rural Cemetery

110 TOMPKINS STREET • CORTLAND, NEW YORK 13045

Spring 2014

SEEKING TO LEVERAGE THE CEMETERY'S PARK-LIKE PAST: *Operation Greenspace!*

Did you know that the Cortland Rural Cemetery was designed, in the "garden" or "rural" cemetery style of the mid-1800s, to be both a place to memorialize the dead and provide a kind of park for the living?

Inspired by both Enlightenment-era and Romantic-era garden and cemetery designs seen in Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, urban planners of both large and small cities in America consciously began to develop their cemeteries in a similar style. As such, the utilitarian, simplistic, and even bleak 'graveyards' that Americans knew in the colonial era were gradually replaced by regal, sprawling landscapes where one might visit a deceased family member – while also enjoying nature, socializing with neighbors (picnics, strolls, and carriage rides were quite common), and enjoying a quiet, respite from their increasingly busy and industrialized lives.

Not to be outdone by its larger counterparts in the Northeast, the emerging city of Cortland followed suit with the 1853 founding of its own rural cemetery.

Now, over 150 years later, your cemetery sees its park-like past as an important asset in securing a brighter future. With the launch of *Operation Greenspace!* – and supported thus far by a generous, Fall 2013 grant of \$30,000 from the JM McDonald Foundation – the Board of Trustees is taking the first step on what will be a multi-year journey to reconnect to its nature-focused heritage.



Conceptual sketches of soon-to-be-deployed "Operation Greenspace!" elements, including (clockwise from top left) a draft layout of an 'interpretive' sign, a tree species marker that will interact with a visitor's smartphone, a map kiosk, and a new main-entrance sign promoting 'cemetrails' and arboretum.

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COMMUNITY RALLIES AGAIN FOR SPRING SWEEP-OUT DAY



In preparation for the observance of Memorial Day and the 2014 mowing season, the Cemetery hosted its 2nd annual "Cemetery Sweep-out Day" on April 26. Sponsored once again by the Crown City Rollerz, the event brought 51 members of the community (including members of both cemetery boards) into the cemetery for a morning of raking, trash removal, project-specific excavating, and paint



scraping. Also in evidence this year were staff and clients from the JM Murray Center, who focused on planting five spruce trees donated to the cemetery by SUNY Professor and Hermit Hill Tree Farm proprietor, Dr. Charles Yapple, in honor of Earth Day (which was celebrated just days earlier on April 22). The City of Cortland also helped out by doing a pre- and post-event visit for the Spring's build-up of green waste. "Between the Rollerz, the great folks from the Murray Center, the city, and an eclectic mix of dedicated individuals -- we really got a great start on what will be an exciting year at the CRC," said Board of Trustees President, John Hoeschele.

At top: J.M. Murray volunteers plant a spruce; at left President Hoeschele thanks SUNY Cortland volunteer Jason Laskin; below left dumping leaves is Ace Prentice, Jr., senior grounds crew member; and on the right young helpers hitch a well-earned ride.



LINKS TO CEMETERY AND COLLEGE INSPIRE GENEROUS DONOR

There is little doubt that every grassy plot, every monument in Cortland Rural Cemetery has a story seldom known. There are stories, too, associated with the generosity of donors, no matter the amount of their gift, who see value in preserving and restoring the Cemetery's beauty. Dr. Louise M. Conley's connection to the original Cortland Normal School recently inspired a very generous and helpful gift.

It was a tumultuous period for the Cortland Normal School as it welcomed its newly appointed Principal, Francis J. Cheney, in 1891. Although he shared some views with the departing Principal, his diplomatic approach to topics which disturbed the school's Board was much less a problem. A topic of great contention concerned increasing college-based courses to the teacher preparation curriculum of the time.

Cheney became much loved and admired by the students and the community. He built a beautiful home at 45 Church Street, adjacent to the campus (where the Cortland County Courthouse now stands). It later was home to the Arethusa sorority which experienced the tragedy of a fatal fire in the late 1940s. In 1912, while tinkering with his automobile, Cheney passed away. Although not native to Cortland, his family chose burial in the Cortland Rural Cemetery.

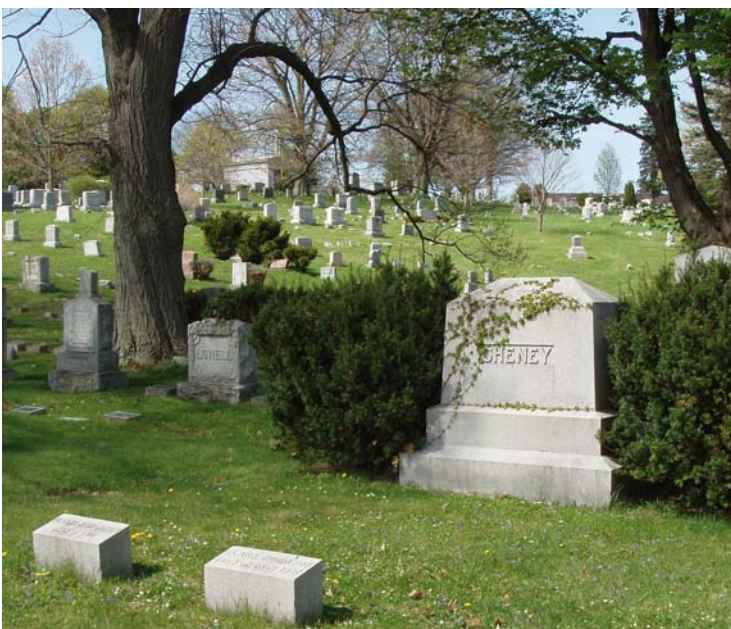
An August 1922 *Cortland Standard* article of more than two full columns celebrated the nuptials of Cheney's daughter Clara Frances Cheney and World War I veteran and Cornell University graduate Rollin H. McCarthy. Both young people had earned a diploma from the Normal School. Clara Cheney was subsequently awarded a bachelors degree from Vassar and a Master's degree in physics from Cornell.

Clara and Rollin celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary in 1990; Clara passed away just two months later. The McCarthys had lived in New Jersey forty years, as well as ten years in Ithaca. Time and family history called for burial in the Cortland Rural Cemetery in a section not far from Clara's parents.

Their daughter Louise M. Conley, Ph.D., did not receive her basic education in Cortland or its College; however, a 100-plus year connection inspired her million dollar gift to SUNY Cortland in 2010 for the College's first endowed professorship, the Louise M. Conley Chair in Educational

Leadership. Her generosity is reflected in other significant initiatives at the College. She created and co-sponsors the annual Francis J. Cheney Educational Issues Conference at SUNY Cortland where education leaders share their approaches to improving programs for kindergarten through college. Dr. Conley has also supported the Francis J. Cheney Scholarship for education majors with high academic achievement and great need, as well as the Lynne Parks Alumni House in the former Charles Wickwire home on Cortland's Tompkins St.

Dr. Conley also chairs the Cortland College Foundation Board of Directors regularly commuting to Cortland while continuing her private psychology practice in Princeton, NJ.



The strategy: It is well known that the CRC, not unlike other non-profit, non-municipal cemeteries across the state and nation, has seen better days. While the reasons for this are many and multi-faceted, the fact remains that new sources of revenue must be found to counteract declining burials and the rise of far-less-remunerative cremations. Just as any struggling business must leverage its assets in new ways or even invent altogether new products and services to sell -- the Trustees believe the cemetery's long-neglected and underutilized natural beauty can help fund a revival of sorts. By affording the community opportunities to enjoy nature, get fresh air and exercise, attract new visitors (aka: tourism), and provide quantifiable 'ecosystem services' (e.g.: aquifer recharging, air filtering, pollination, etc.) -- these activities will, in turn, help increase individual donations, grants from environmentally minded foundations, and support from surrounding municipalities.

Phase 1: Powered by the aforementioned McDonald grant, the first phase of Operation Greenspace! will include two key deliverables, each of which will unfold in 2014 and involve collaborations with members of the adjacent SUNY Cortland community.

- First, you will see the cemetery's network of rolling roads begin to be reimagined as "cemetrails." Mapped with the help of geography Professor Wendy Miller and her supporting students, the first cemetrail will feature 20-25 interpretive signs, each one containing educational information from across disciplines, including: geology (developed by Professor Tim Conner and his students); art history (compliments of Professor Kathy Kramer's team); and local history (via some of the cemetery's own descriptions of some of our historically significant gravesites). Over time, other trails may focus on birding, rigorous exercise, and access for the disabled.
- Second, the cemetery will initiate its bid to become an accredited arboretum. With help from a SUNY students team headed by biology Professor Steve Broyles, this will involve counting, inventorying, and documenting the CRC's many trees - and labeling upwards of 100 of our most prominent or notable species for the educational benefit of cemetery visitors. Longer term, activities required to expand and maintain our accreditation will include proactive maintenance/trimming, development and execution of a strategic plan for planting new trees (most likely with an emphasis on native species), and public outreach on the value of trees in an urban setting.

Phase 2: Beyond our nascent cemetrails and arboretum, additional Operation Greenspace! ideas under consideration include: (1) participation, at some suitable level, in local farming and sustainability movements afoot in both the City of Cortland and on the SUNY campus, via such concepts as a modest herb or pollen garden; (2) offering grieving families a selection of natural memorial options; and (3) implementation of the cemetery's 'green waste' productivity stations behind our Sands Street property (e.g. composting, chipping, wood-fuel utilization, and soil sifting).

If you are interested in learning more about any of the particulars of Operation Greenspace!, or would like to lend your own financial support to any of these exciting initiatives, please post a letter to me at the cemetery office or send me an email to contact@cortland-rural-cemetery. I'd love to hear from you. -- John Hoeschele, President - CRC

“SAVE THE SLATE” WORK SLATED TO BEGIN THIS SUMMER



The Carl W. Clark-designed Cemetery Office building on Sweep-Out Day in 2013

On April 7, 2013, at the annual meeting of the Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation, John Hoeschele, President of the Cemetery Board of Trustees, informed the Foundation Board that the slate roofs and underlying copper systems on the Superintendent's House and the Office had deteriorated to a point where total replacement of the copper system on the Office and spot repairs of the Superintendent's House were mandatory in order to protect these historic structures, one-of-kind cemetery records, and office equipment. Estimates collected through a Request For Proposals from

slate-roofing experts ran \$30,000 to \$45,000. Thus began our "Save the Slate" campaign, with calls for support promoted in the form of advertising, Facebook appeals, and a letter included in the Cemetery's Spring 2013 newsletter. The response was most gratifying: over fifty generous individuals, board members, and organizations responded with donations - including the Cortland Community Foundation (\$5,000) and the Ralph R. Wilkins Foundation (\$3000) - enabling the Foundation to raise over \$30,000 thus far!. As a result, repairs will begin this summer, executed by the winning contractor, Statewide Roofing of Port Byron, NY. The funds raised to date will cover the repairs for the Cemetery Office; donations are still being sought for the more modest repairs to the Superintendent's House. When the two projects have been completed, the Cortland Rural Cemetery website (www.cortland-rural-cemetery.com) will list all "Save the Slate" donors. Major donors giving \$250 and above will be listed on a recognition plaque now under development.



Staff are tickled pink (orange?!) to announce the latest addition to the Cemetery's equipment arsenal: a new, "used" Kubota tractor...featuring a sorely needed front-loader. (Until now, workers have literally been back-filling burials by hand, requiring two to three man-hours!) Many thanks to staffers Ace Prentice, Jr. and Ken Little (shown) for driving all the way to Pennsylvania to pick this versatile machine up.

At the Foundation's annual meeting in April the Cemetery Board of Trustees presented its "wish list" to the Foundation. The items on the "wish list" consist of purchases and expenditures that the Cemetery would not be able to make without help from the Foundation. This year the Foundation allocated \$4,000 toward salaries for spring cleanup and improvements, \$3,300 for a lowering device and tent package, \$1,200 for the replacement of 11 sidewalk panels, and \$800 for the purchase of 4 trailer tires. An additional \$1,400 was put toward the purchase of a used dump trailer for a total of \$10,700 allocated to the Cemetery. Foundation funds to support the Cemetery come from donations, many in response to appeals in this newsletter, as well as earnings from the Foundation's endowment.

Cortland Rural Cemetery Trustees

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Spaces in the Gibson Chapel are available in its public mausoleum and its columbaria for cremation remains. The Chapel may also be used for memorial and other services. Please call the Cemetery office at (607) 756-6022 for costs and other information.

Tax-deductible gifts to preserve and enhance the Cemetery may be made to the Foundation. Checks should be made out to the Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation.

Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation

Post Office Box 288
Cortland, NY 13045-0288
www.cortland-rural-cemetery.com



Old yew, which graspest at the stones
That name the underlying dead,
Thy fibers net the dreamless head,
Thy roots are wrapped about the bones.

The seasons bring the flower again,
And bring the firstling to the flock
And in the dusk of thee the clock
Beats out the little lives of men.

*Alfred Lord Tennyson,
"In Memoriam"*