



# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

FALL 2017

## A Walk Through History... A Closer Look at Our Record Books

By John Hoeschele, Board Chair

Your cemetery was recently fortunate enough to have received a grant from our good, generous, and constant friends at the Ralph R. Wilkins Foundation to fund our record-book scanning project. Don't be fooled by how fancy and expensive that sounds: Ever resourceful in stretching our limited dollars, our 'scanner' was decidedly not one of the genuine and fully automated archival book scanners major libraries and museums use (which can cost \$30,000-50,000!) - but, rather, a lower-cost, DIY affair comprised of a digital camera with a remote trigger, mounted to stand made of PVC tubing, that sent photos of our book's pages to a nearby computer. Price tag? About \$1500.

Cost discussions aside, what we were able to achieve with the unit was, as the MasterCard commercials say, "Priceless" - in that we now have digital backups of our one-of-a-kind, irreplaceable record books, should anything ever happen to our cemetery office in the way of water, smoke, or (heaven forbid) fire damage. Secondly, we now have ability to 'publish' some of these files on our website, though our Board of Trustees is mulling over the rules-of-the-road on that particular point. (While anyone can visit our office to see our books in person, sensitivity to and respect for the privacy of the individuals in our care suggests it might be a different matter to post them on the worldwide web. More on the outcome of that analysis, some other time.)

For today, and in the wake of our book-scanning effort, I just wanted to touch on how interesting some of our oldest records are. (Not coincidentally, it also makes the point we've been emphasizing over the last few years about the Cemetery being a multifaceted resource!) For demonstration's sake, I'll focus to just one of them: A tattered, old tome measuring 13 x 9 x 2", with a broken binding, frail pages now uniformly yellowed, and a classic, old-book scent to it. In this volume you'll find Cortland Rural Cemetery burials recorded in the years from 1885 to 1952.

The first thing you notice once you get past how fragile this book (hence the necessity for scanning it, before further deterioration)

ONE OF THE  
CRC'S ORIGINAL  
BURIAL RECORD  
BOOKS



is the handwriting. Filled with page after page of elaborately scripted, flourish-filled names, dates, section/lot identifications, and more - most of it meticulously scratched and scrawled with fountain pens - this book is a testament to a bygone era when handwriting was taught in school, a source of personal pride, expected of all (including, it is clear, cemetery supervisors and clerks), and just a pleasure to behold.

The second items to draw your eye are the detailed descriptions our ancestors conveyed in the "Cause of Death" column. Now, this won't come as a surprise to those steeped in online genealogy and familiar with the shocking specificity newspaper obituaries once offered; back in the day, it was common to read in your morning paper that one's neighbor had been crushed by a tree, eviscerated by the wheels of a railcar, or self-dispatched with a knife, shotgun, or sturdy rope.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2





# CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY Trustees

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Newsletter layout courtesy of

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## A Closer Look...

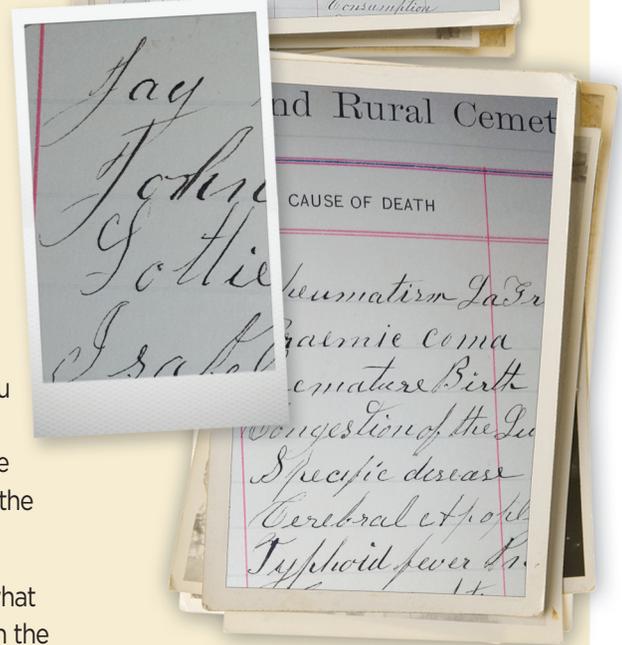
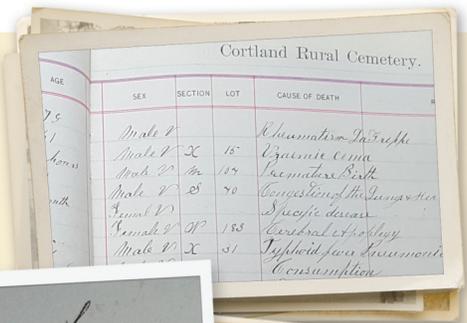
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But while less severe, the descriptions are surprisingly detailed to the modern eye and sensibility. On page 52, for instance, you'll find lives taken by Intestinal Obstructions, Bright's Disease, Cerebral Abscess, Consumption, Spasms, and Apoplexy.

Finally, and for the truly analytical or observant among us, there are the 'macro' patterns that begin to emerge if you turn enough pages. For instance, in the ebb and flow of Italian, German, and Irish surnames, you may hear whispers and hints of our nation's immigration trends. If you're paying close attention to the diseases or ailments listed - or, you happen upon those sad occasions when multiple family members are listed on the same or adjacent pages - these may be the tell-tale signs of epidemics or wars.

And all of that does not even speak to what you might learn about your own family in the CRC's record books, if your family history is well-entwined with this region.

Looking for some interesting reading? Stop by our office and ask for a closer "look at our books" some day when we're not in the peak of mowing and burial season (i.e.: rainy, late fall, or winter days are best for this sort of request). My guess is you'll find plenty that's intriguing both on, and between, the lines.



**SOME OF THE BEAUTIFUL  
DETAILS YOU'LL FIND IN OUR  
RECORD BOOKS!**

## Be An Angel

*Learn how your donation or legacy gift  
can make a difference  
at the Cortland Rural Cemetery.  
Contact us to schedule a private  
consultation and learn about becoming  
a member of our Angel Society.*

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



# Much Accomplished, Far to Go

Eight years ago, the recently disbanded Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation had their then Board Secretary, and ex-SUNY Cortland President, Dr. Jim Clark recruit me to join their group after they'd heard I'd done research, published a website, and was giving 'talks' on the old South Cortland Cemetery located across from Walmart. Before long, I realized I could be of more use to the Cemetery by jumping ship from the Foundation Board, which was solely a fundraising organization, to the Cemetery's Board of Trustees, which handled day-to-day operations, finances, staffing, equipment, among other duties. Busy body that I was (and, apparently gullible, to boot), the next thing I knew I was nominated and elected Chair of the Trustees.

Not to put too broad a brush on it, those were "dark times" – characterized by not uncommon red ink on our balance sheet and bad ink, in the form of critical op-ed letters, in the Cortland Standard. Cash reserves were low; staff turnover was high; the grass was routinely too long; and, candidly, given the headwinds we faced (and still do, in terms of burial trends, worker's comp costs, regulations, and more), so were the odds of our remaining an independent cemetery vs. becoming a ward of a local municipality and area taxpayers.

Since then and certainly not alone – believe you me, I fought and still fight this battle alongside many incredibly dedicated, hardworking, talented, and generous individuals and entities too numerous to name here – I am proud to have played a role in steering the ship a good distance from the shoals that might have sunk the CRC. That said, as I step down as President and let my excellent colleague and good friend, Kathy Cincotta, take the helm, I am compelled to tell you our work is not done. Nor will it ever be.

Quite to the contrary, if the memory of nearly 200 years of deceased loved ones is to be truly cherished, our grounds will forever need to be mowed, our headstones will forever need to be righted, our roads will forever need to be maintained. Even more challenging, all of this will one day need to be accomplished even after our grounds have received their final remains, even after there are no more lots to sell. Put more bluntly, people both inside and outside our profession frequently toss about phrases like "perpetual care" and "permanent maintenance." But those concepts are meaningless without "perpetual" cash, equipment, fuel, oversight, respect, and commitment from the living.

The four-times Prime Minister of England during Queen Victoria's reign, William Gladstone, was known to have said *"Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals."*

I've zero doubt Ms. Cincotta, as my successor, will do her part and more. After all, she has a vested interest in our success – being a native of the area whose great grandfather, Elbert Warfield, served as a CRC Board member a century ago – and given that she has already proven her unflinching devotion to the institution through literally thousands of volunteer hours over the last few years.

The question, and challenge, I have for the Cortland community is will *you* do yours?

❦

*"I am compelled  
to tell you our  
work is not done.  
Nor will it ever be..."*

❦



**OUTGOING  
PRESIDENT  
JOHN  
HOESCHELE**

**INCOMING  
PRESIDENT  
KATHY  
CINCOTTA**

## Want to Continue Our Progress?

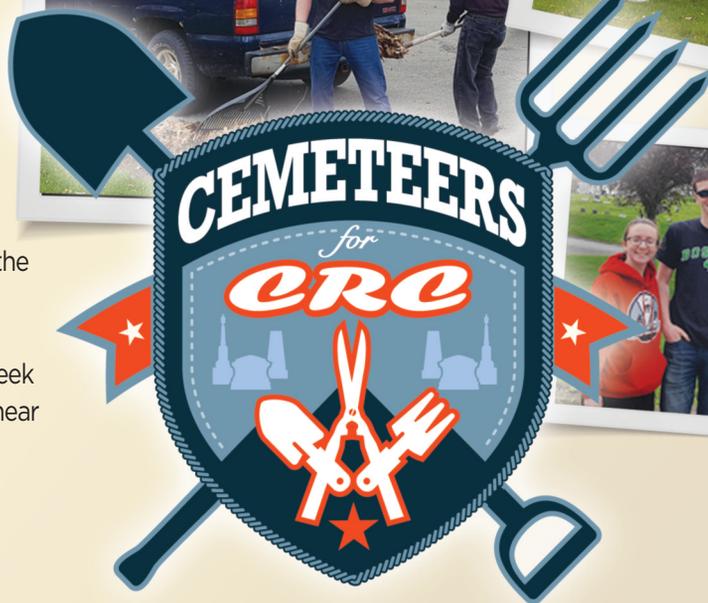
*Please consider making a tax deductible gift  
to the Cortland Rural Cemetery  
and returning it using the enclosed envelope.  
Thank you for your support!*



# Want to Help the CRC? Join our Cemeteers Volunteer Corps Today!

The Cortland Rural Cemetery is always interested in obtaining (and tremendously grateful for!) any help we can get from individuals, groups, or the community as a whole! That's why we formed our CEMETEERS volunteers corps!

Whether you wish to contribute to the maintenance of our grounds or the maintenance of our records – and whether you can give one hour a week or one week a year – we'd love to hear from you!



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**CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY**

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**CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED**