



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

FALL 2020

Flora & Fauna Symbolism in the CRC

BY JOHN HOESCHELE, CRC TRUSTEE

Humankind's impulse to capture life's great mysteries and immutable truths through symbolism pre-dates the written word. Little wonder, then, that a vast array of symbols have long been carved into the stones we use to mark our graves — as we seek to express something profound about lives lost or express our feelings for the departed. In this, the Cortland Rural Cemetery is no exception; we are also no exception in that, along with the religious, patriotic, and fraternal organization symbols (e.g. Freemasonry, IOOF, etc.), we offer countless instances of symbolism drawn from the natural world.

Floral symbolism

With roots (pun intended) tracing back to paganism and the dawn of Christianity — carved images of trees, flowers, vines, and various manmade configurations of such greenery, like wreaths and bouquets, are perhaps the most common adornment on headstones next to religious iconography. Doubtlessly used, in part, because they add a touch of ornamentation and aesthetics, such imagery is also rich with meaning long understood by previous generations. Here are but a few of them:

- **Lilies, morning glories** = restored innocence, purity of the soul at the time, resurrection, purity, hope
- **Weeping willows** = mourning, sadness, 'weeping'
- **Lotus flowers** = rebirth
- **Daisies, bellflowers, buds, blooms, seeds** = innocence for children who have passed
- **Ivy, evergreens** = everlasting memory, unfailing Christian faith
- **Laurels** = triumph, achievement in life
- **Poppies** = eternal sleep, but also potential rebirth (seed pod)
- **Thorns, thistles, acanthus** = overcoming life's hardships, the suffering of Christ
- **Oak leaves and acorns** = strength, rebirth
- **Lilac** = purity, faith
- **Roses** = hope, beauty, love, the blood of Christ, ascendance to heaven from life's suffering (rose emerging from a thorny branch)
- **Clover** = the holy Trinity

SOME OF THE FINER EXAMPLES OF
FLORAL SYMBOLISM YOU'LL DISCOVER
AT CRC



CONTINUED ON PAGE 2





CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY Trustees

President

Ms. Kathryn Cincotta

Vice President

Mr. Brian Bosch

Secretary

Mr. Scott Gay

Treasurer

Mr. John Hoeschele

Board Members

Mr. Warren Eddy

Ms. Karen Halstead

Mr. Jim Nichols

Ms. Patricia Place

Mr. Mark Suben

Ms. Sara Tily

Cemetery Supervisor

Jeff Briggs

Newsletter Layout

Jerome Natoli

Cont. from front page

Flora & Fauna...

- **Fruits and vegetables (apples, pineapples, grapes, corn)** = rewards of a life well-lived
- **Grain** = God's 'harvesting' of the living
- **Trees, tree-stumps, logs** = strength, also a good life cut short, connection to the natural world/naturalism of the late 1800s, and, on occasion, membership in the Woodman of the World fraternal organization (as described in our Fall 2015 issue).

In any exploration of floral symbolism in modern cemeteries, it must be noted that uses of plant symbology is increasingly secular and as likely to reflect interests of the deceased (e.g. gardening, a favorite outdoor retreat, etc.) as they are to convey deeper meanings.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



New Members Inducted Into Our Angel Society

This fall, the Cortland Rural Cemetery board of trustees was honored to welcome two new members to its Angel Society, an exclusive group of individuals or organizations who have been particularly generous to the cemetery through financial or in-kind support.

A descendent of Charles W. Sanders (a renowned, 19th century author whose mausoleum is well-known to visitors of our cemetery) **Ms. Sudee Sanders** (deceased, March 26, 2020) made a sizeable estate gift to the CRC, which will be used for general operations at the Board's discretion. An additional sum was left by Ms. Sanders' estate, which is restricted and reserved for activities related to maintenance and upkeep of the Saunders family mausoleum.

Mr. Paul Benjamin, of Cortland, was also inducted into the CRC Angel Society, in recognition of his generosity in support of physical improvements to the cemetery's Gibson Memorial Chapel — including refurbishing of the chapel's doors and forthcoming re-pointing of some of the exterior brick work.

Those interested in learning more about our Angel Society — including ways to make a legacy gift to the Cortland Rural Cemetery — are encouraged to contact our Board President, Kathy Cincotta through the CRC office at (607) 756-6022.



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!



Cont. from page 2

Flora & Fauna...

Fauna symbolism

Like their botanical counterparts, images from the animal kingdom are also imbued with symbolic meaning – many of which are well-known to us thanks to children's stories, Aesop's fables, and other legends. (Think of the cunning fox, the loyal dog, or the wise owl.) Some examples of animal iconography are noted below; some, though not all, may be found in our cemetery.

- **Lambs or other immature animals** = death of a young person or child, innocence, member of Christ's flock, "Lamb of God"
- **Doves** = peace, Christ, ascendance
- **Horses** = strength, fertility
- **Lions** = strength, courage, majesty, or guardian of a gravesite
- **Oxen** = hardworking, yoke of life
- **Deer, stags** = solitude, piety, grace, dignity
- **Butterflies** = rebirth, resurrection, transformation, fragility of life
- **Eagles, hawks, owls** = strength, virtue, diligence, physical height (i.e. heaven)

Here again we're obliged to note that animal symbolism, like plant iconography, is slowly evolving – conveying something about the life interests of the departed, in lieu of overtly religious concepts. Aided by advanced monument carving and etching techniques, today's headstones commonly feature favorite pets or animals drawn from an outdoor hobby (hunting, fishing, horseback riding, and the like).

We hope you've enjoyed this brief exploration of symbols found on tombstones. Needless to say, more extensive resources exist both online and in bookstores, but perhaps we've piqued your interest in these signs of life found in the hallowed places for the dead!

JUST A FEW OF THE EXAMPLES
OF ANIMAL SYMBOLISM TO
DISCOVER ON THE GROUNDS
OF THE CRC

"...Like their botanical counterparts, images from the animal kingdom are also imbued with symbolic meaning – many of which are well-known to us thanks to children's stories, Aesop's fables, and other legends..."



Giving Thanks, Despite a Difficult Year!

To say that 2020 has been a difficult year is, of course, a gross understatement. Yet it's precisely because of the extraordinary difficulties we've faced, the strain we've been under, the lives that have been decimated or lost that we must search harder for – and be all the more appreciative of – blessings we've received: The courage and resolve of those who've reported to work under dangerous conditions; the resourcefulness of individuals and organizations who've innovated and re-invented themselves in the face of adversity; technologies and tools that have allowed us to stay in touch when required to keep our distance; the human propensity to care, show compassion, sacrifice self, and persevere until a new day dawns... These are the bright spots yet to be found in these otherwise troublesome days. With the advent of the holiday season, please join the staff and Board of the CRC in being thankful for them.



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

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

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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

