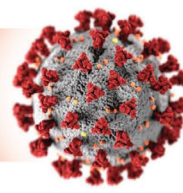




CORONAVIRUS EDITION



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

SPRING 2020

Sadly, We've Been Here Before.

BY BRIAN BOSCH
VICE PRESIDENT, CRC BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The calendar is flipped from a scene of a cold river to an idyllic, 19th century April scene. Young children play together, a father and son ride in a horse-drawn buggy as a mother holds her baby under a canopy of spring blossoms. Currier and Ives had it right.

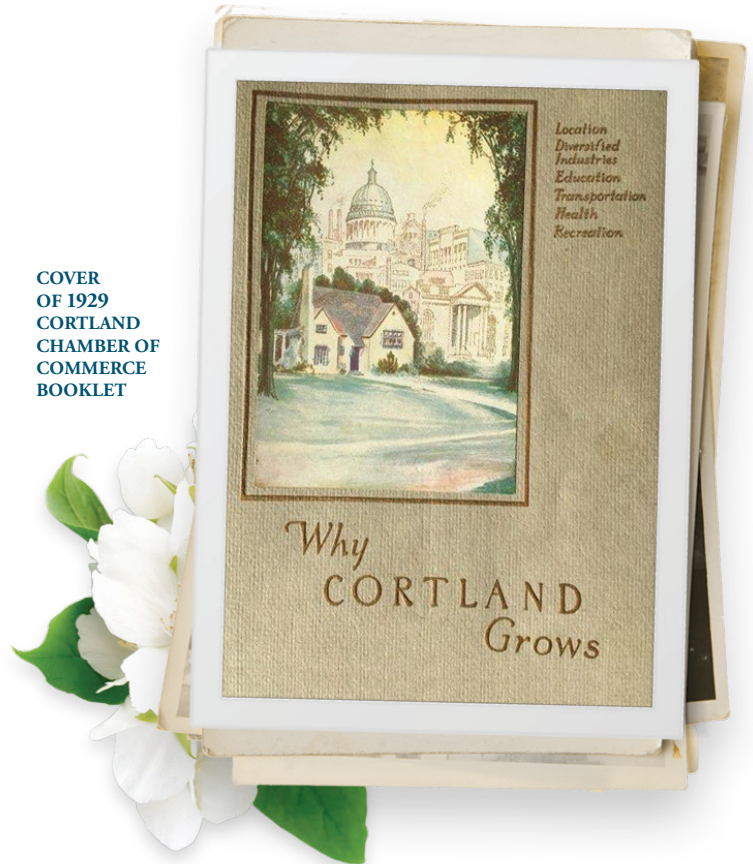
But this April, in 2020, is different: Cortland's celebrations of Spring have been deferred by an invisible invader — Covid-19.

Main streets in Homer and Cortland are largely deserted. Playgrounds, where kids who could barely walk in November would come to try out new skills as parents and grandparents gather and hold their collective breath, are closed. The Spring ritual of the Maple Festival is canceled. Fewer places will be needed to be set for Easter brunches and Passover Seders. We are told to "socially distance" ourselves from family, friends and neighbors. Masks, gloves and plexiglass help to emphasize it all. We are told there is a "new normal" but no one really knows what it looks like. New phrases like "flattening the curve" are mingled with old tragedies like Pearl Harbor and 9/11. The new normal is looking bleak.

You stay at home and begin household projects that have been on the list for years. Cleaning the underside of the coffee table — check. Bookshelves get attention and the relationships with old literary friends are renewed — good to see you again, Mr. Updike. Then the discovery of something bought and forgotten years ago turns into an agent of greater discovery.

The new-found artifact is a booklet published by the Cortland Chamber of Commerce in 1929. It is titled "Why Cortland Grows" and was intended to promote the city and county of that time to potential businesses. Purchased at the Cortland County Historical Society for its illustrations and pictures of Cortland's grand old houses, the text was largely ignored. There's time now and you begin. You learn about the generosity of the citizens who donated \$30,000 more than the target to build the Cortland Free Library. As for agriculture, it states, "Populated by thrifty native stock whose ancestors fought in the battles that made America free, Cortland county stands supreme as an agricultural center of New York State." The picture of a proud, growing city is lavishly embellished. And then a statement comes along that resonates with our current situation. While touting the stats that proves Cortland's overall healthy population, the

COVER
OF 1929
CORTLAND
CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE
BOOKLET



Chamber made the following observation, "Communicable diseases have never been epidemic here."

Wait... What?

In historical terms, this statement was written a mere 11 years after the Influenza Pandemic of 1918. Is it boastful hyperbole or fact? In a comprehensive 800+ page history of New York state, editor Milton M. Klein notes that, "Across the state, the virus caused one-half million cases and 45,000 deaths." As of the writing of this article, Cortland has been spared the worst of the current pandemic. Do the beautiful hills that surround our seven valleys act as a buffer? Did Cortland truly ride through the Fall of 1918 relatively unscathed?

You put the booklet down and since it's 50-plus degrees and sunny you need to get out. A short ride places you at the Cortland Rural Cemetery (CRC). Social distancing in the heart of Cortland and a good place to walk.

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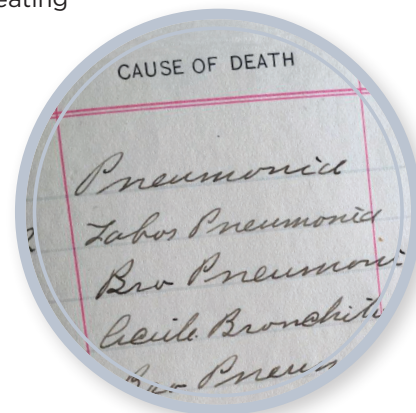
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Sadly, We've Been Here...

Cortland is fortunate that the gentlemen who bought the land from Ann and David Hubbard in 1855 were students of the "new" cemetery design philosophy. At its core it held that death and cemeteries should not be fearful. The chilling churchyards with iron fences to separate malevolent spirits from the living became a vestige of an earlier era. Even more radical, cemeteries should be park-like — a place for families to connect with their loved ones. Like the great public parks designed in the mid-1800s era, people would be inspired by stone sculptures and natural beauty as they strolled leisurely on curved paths. Trees were planted liberally. The public needed easy access, so the founders of CRC purchased land directly on the shoulders of a growing town. Cortland residents were a short walk or buggy ride away from enjoying its beauty. (Sadly, for other towns, the economic efficiency of creating cemeteries with straight rows and few tree would be the next wave in cemetery design.)

The curved paths force visitors to interact with their surroundings. Names, some familiar, lead you off the paths and among the memorial stones. Dates and relationships create dots to connect. Incomplete stories are authored by stones. Thoughts of the Pandemic of 1918 are automatic when you come across stones that list 1918 as the year of death. Unscathed? Maybe not, but more information needs to be added to these stories.

Records are important to cemeteries. At CRC, one essential record is contained in an old, beat up leather-bound book. Starting in 1855 and continuing through 1952, it's a list of each burial date, location and, most importantly to the mission — the cause of death. Each entry was entered by hand in that beautiful, bygone script that confers dignity to the departed that no Excel spreadsheet can muster. On these pages the tragic truth is revealed. The Pandemic of 1918 rolled through the county like a tidal wave.



EXCERPT FROM CRC RECORDS BOOK

Cortland Rural Cemetery

	BURIALS	FLU-RELATED DEATHS
AUGUST 1918	5	0
SEPTEMBER 1918	14	3
OCTOBER 1918	48	34
NOVEMBER 1918	14	1
DECEMBER 1918	15	8
JANUARY 1919	15	5

Thirty-four flu-related burials were recorded in October of 1918. The average age of these individuals was 31. In October of 1917 there was none; in October of 1919 there was one. When those 1918 burial numbers are extrapolated through the other cemeteries such as St. Mary's, Glenwood and other smaller cemeteries throughout the county, the picture gets horrifically clearer.

The numbers do not lie but they don't tell the whole story. Since all of the usual local sources of information are closed, online sources will be needed to help fill in the stories. The *NY Times* Archives would provide a big picture but a local angle is needed. Fortunately, a gentleman named Tom Tryniski spent 10 hours a day, seven days a

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!

We've Been Here...cont.

week for at least 18 years digitizing old newspaper pages and making them available on fultonhistory.com. Thank you, Tom.

One of those papers is the **Homer Republican** which covered both Homer and Cortland news in 1918. In both the **Times** and **Republican**, it is apparent that news of the pandemic took a back seat to the news about "our boys" driving the Hun back to Germany. In the **Times**, one must pass the sporting news and financials to arrive at sparse pandemic information despite the staggering number of flu-related October obituaries in New York City.

In Cortland County, the pandemic of 1918 started with a light slap and evolved to a tragic gut punch to its citizens. It was the norm for local newspapers in 1918 to report the various day-to-day visits, injuries, births, travels, etc. of its readers. In the **Homer Republican** this was accomplished in a section entitled "Correspondence." (Think early 20th century Facebook.) It is here, among the most ordinary, mundane news that the grim picture of the pandemic comes into focus.

On September 26, 1918, local men in the military were the first affected: "...Harold Frink is ill with pneumonia at Newport RI in the naval hospital." In other news, there's the story of Pvt. Elmer Tryon (29) of Cortland who was assigned to Fort Dix, N.J. on July 23 for training and died there of pneumonia on September 20. His body was returned to Cortland and buried in CRC. Mrs. W.H. Foster of Homer accompanied her son, Capt. Donald Foster, to Fort Dix to spend time before his deployment to France. Once there, she was unable to see her son because "Camp Dix has been placed under quarantine." One week later, the **Republican** reported Paul Hagerty (32), John Spaulding (47), Anna Ellsworth (24), and Dorothy Shopley (18) succumbed to the flu. Anna is buried in CRC. Grace (27) and Frank Kellogg (32) died in Cortland and were buried together in CRC five days apart. Dwight Kellogg (36) was buried six days after that. This strain of flu mowed down people in the prime of their lives. On October 17, the **Republican** listed 43 death notices.

In October 2018, local schools were closed for weeks, meetings were canceled, businesses were hobbled by absent employees but remained open. Travel by trains continued which fed the spread of the virus. Many avoided the train. It was reported in the **Republican** that Plattsburg teacher, Miss Mignon Burnham was not allowed to return here to her family in Homer by train because the Plattsburgh school board feared for her health. She had to return by automobile. Hospitals in Cortland and Homer were overwhelmed; patients were sent home since there was no effective treatment. Family homes became hotspots for the virus, often taking multiple family members.

War Loan drives continued with volunteers going door-to-door to fulfill quotas. Despite the imminent victory in Europe, Cortland County males between the ages of 19 and 36 were still being selected, examined, classified and sent by train to military camps which were major incubators for the virus. Events in Europe were the major national and local focus. The quiet onslaught at home went on through October.

By the beginning of November, the virus was easing. Some attribute its passing to a cold snap while others point to a fortuitous mutation on the part of the virus. Despite resurrecting the old virus from infected tissue, scientists really don't seem to know for sure. For the most part, life went back to the "old normal" for the people of Cortland. The energy of the 1920s placed the pandemic solidly in the rear view mirror. So much so that the Chamber of Commerce could thumb its nose at history and declare Cortland untouched by serious scourges of disease.

Of course, for the people who endured the loss of loved ones, there was no "old normal" to be had.

Stay safe everyone. Isolate. Take care of one another. The month of May is around the corner and will be better.



*"In Cortland County,
the pandemic of 1918
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SOME OF THE
STARK REMINDERS
OF THE AREA'S LOSS
DURING THE
1918 PANDEMIC



Just like *other* non-profit institutions and commercial enterprises, the Cortland Rural Cemetery is suffering from the financial hardships of the coronavirus outbreak. Identified as an 'essential business' by New York State — and mandated to perform our normal operational duties (i.e. burials and funeral services *if* demanded by customers, foundation installations, mowing, and maintenance) — we've nonetheless seen a decline in our usual Spring income, as funeral homes and families have understandably altered or deferred their burial, and memorialization plans.

Adding to that, an early Spring means we're having to hire-up and deploy grounds people earlier than usual. And due to social distancing requirements, we were obliged to cancel our customary, annual *Cemetery Sweep-out Day* (which gives our modest grounds crew a nice head-start on the season).

Fully recognizing and appreciating that many are facing great need at this time — please do consider us in your charitable giving plans *if* you are able. (No amount is too small!) Thank you so very much.

***Need to plan a burial, memorial service,
or monument placement despite the epidemic?***

Considering a visit to the CRC to beautify a loved one's grave or just get some fresh air and exercise? PLEASE REVIEW THE COVID-19 ADVISORY ON OUR WEBSITE AT:
www.cortland-rural-cemetery.com/covid-19-information

Coronavirus
Has Impacted
Us, Too!
Please help
if you can!



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

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

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Contact us to schedule a private
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