



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

SPRING 2021

On the Road to Restoring a Mausoleum

**BRIAN BOSCH,
VICE PRESIDENT CRC BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

While the Victorians had no qualms about pondering death — indeed, they are said to have dwelled on it — it is safe to say that an appreciation of cemeteries is not as common in our time. Fortunately for today’s visitors, the circa-1820s “garden-cemetery” design of the Cortland Rural Cemetery (CRC) did much to overcome this modern reticence with its conscious emphasis on plants, trees, rolling hills, winding roads, deliberate vistas, and leisure spaces among the headstones. Recently, a mother and three small children were enjoying one of these first wonderful spring days while strolling on the winding CRC roads. Somewhere, those early designers were smiling.

If you have the fortune to serve on a cemetery board, you have plenty of opportunities to enjoy those same roads — and some less traveled ones. These roads can be quite mundane and involve such things as spreadsheets, refuse removal, New York State mandates, insurance, investments, etc. In short, these pragmatic but essential paths allow the cemetery to fulfill its thousands of perpetual promises to the living and the dead (no pressure there!).

In this, the CRC and our community as a whole is fortunate to have a dedicated superintendent, grounds crew and Board. Behind all the pragmatic decisions lies a dedication to those promises.

But recently the Board was challenged with going down a new road: a family has charged the cemetery with the honor of restoring one of its most unique mausoleums.

There are 10 mausoleums in the Cortland Rural Cemetery. The more recent structures are typically smaller and

contain two to four crypts. The mausoleum of E. DePuy Mallery, who is listed in city records as the manager of Cortland’s Taylor Opera House in the 1880s, is one such example of a two-crypt mausoleum. By contrast, the beautiful, classic Wickwire mausoleum is the largest mausoleum in the CRC and stands atop a hill, emphasizing the family’s status in both grandeur and physical height.

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“...It is not by coincidence, then, that their mausoleum’s stained glass, ornate metal, and stonework still speak to the craftsmanship available in Cortland at that time...”



THE C. W. SANDERS MAUSOLEUM;
JUST ONE OF TEN MAGNIFICENT AND UNIQUE MAUSOLEUMS
THAT CAN BE FOUND AT CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

PHOTO CREDIT: MARY DEXTER





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On the Road to Restoring...

As many locals know, the Wickwire family started out selling hardware in the early 19th century and later moved to the fabrication of high-volume and highly lucrative wire products as the Industrial Age came to Cortland; it is not by coincidence, then, that their mausoleum's stained glass, ornate metal, and stonework still speak to the craftsmanship available in Cortland at that time.

Four of the oldest mausoleums in the CRC achieved prominence of their own through proximity to the cemetery's main entrance, while also taking advantage of its topography. These structures were built into the hill that essentially encompasses the entire cemetery. The hill was excavated at the base and the crypts were placed into the hill. Their entries/vestibules extended out from the hill and took advantage of ventilation ports for air and natural light. The majority were built well over a hundred years ago. Records or pictures that might have recorded their construction have been lost through the years. The most logical way to date them is by dates of their earliest interments.

The mausoleum to be restored happens to be in this group of four "hybrid" structures — half below ground/half above ground. It is the Sanders mausoleum, and its earliest interment was Charles W. Sanders, who was born on March 24, 1805 and died July 5, 1889. He is notable as he was the



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THE WICKWIRE MAUSOLEUM
PHOTO CREDIT: MARY DEXTER



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





EXTERIOR DETAILS AND ORNATE CRAFTSMANSHIP SURROUNDING THE WICKWIRE MAUSOLEUM
PHOTO CREDIT: COREY KEENEY

There's a certain mystery and drama that is imbued with all mausoleums. They are, after all, tombs that have been used as a literary device through the ages to amplify human drama and fears. The tomb described in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* informed my view of all tombs as a "nest of death, contagion, and unnatural sleep." Deadly curses, vengeful mummies, evil Nazis have all been recorded by Hollywood in tombs. Nothing good seems to happen there and (spoiler alert) — it doesn't work out well for the Bard's "star-cross'd lovers" either. So, it was with some trepidation that I crossed through the door. The Sanders mausoleum has a short hallway that leads to a small vestibule next to the 16 crypts. Massive blocks of granite form the walls. Larger blocks result in fewer seams — potential entry points of water. The tile floor consists of two types of stone arranged in a checkerboard pattern. One variety of tile has fared better than the other, a victim of water seepage. There is sunlight coming through some ceiling seams. Again, they appear to be the result of shifting stones due to the freeze/thaw cycle and the weight of the hill.

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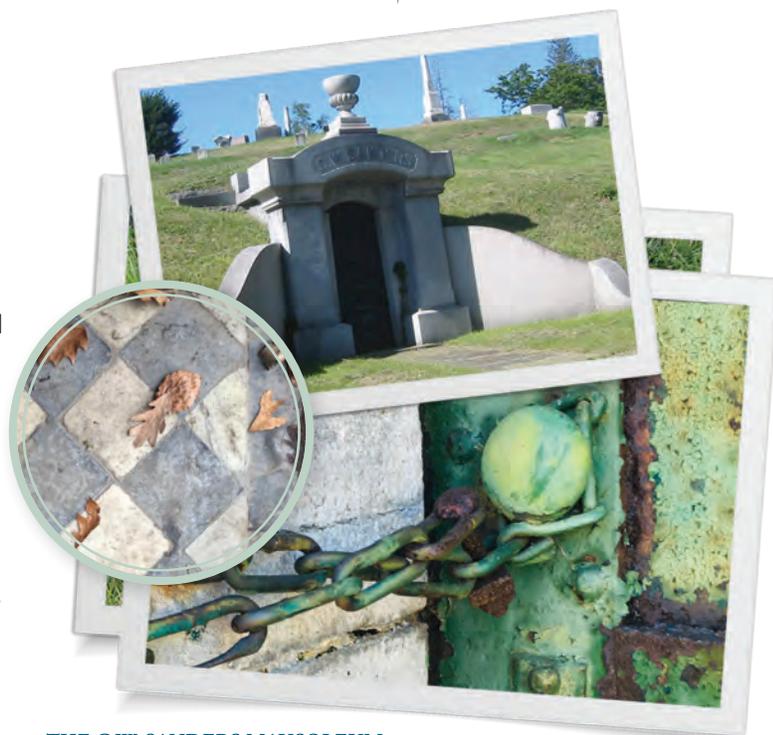


On the Road... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

author of the Sanders Series of School Books. These books became widely adopted as comprehensive tools for teaching English skills starting in the 1840s and continued to be used through the turn of the century. Later generations of Sanders are interred there as well.

At first glance, the exterior of the mausoleum looks to be in decent condition as it pushes past its estimated 130 years of existence. It has classic column; a large, stone ornamental urn has survived wind and rain to top the entrance. However, with a closer look, it is evident that parts of its structure are losing their "battle of mass" with the cemetery's hill. Decorative "wings" which extend from its entrance have been pushed off their foundations from the weight of the hill that just wants to comply with gravity. The ripple effect of this energy has created a shifting of the stones supporting the bronze door.

Since the interior also needed evaluation, yet another personal road would need to be traveled — into a mausoleum for the first time.



THE C.W. SANDERS MAUSOLEUM
PHOTO CREDIT: BRIAN BOSCH



On the Road... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Restoration issues aside, I was pleased to find this was not the tomb of mythic horror. To the contrary, it was a place of quiet serenity and respectful tranquility, with the sounds of nearby Tompkins Street traffic erased by the thick walls. Still, having seen the vault's condition first-hand, I confess that I was happy to enter the autumn sunshine once again.

Speaking of which, much more light will need to be shed on this project before restoration can proceed, including exhaustive studies and planning by qualified engineering and historic architecture experts. (As of this writing, the Trustees have found at least one such resource in Syracuse, though no agreement has been reached). No doubt, there'll also be many regulatory, logistical, and practical hills to climb akin to the CRC's own knolls

Still, even with such challenges, if only we had the wherewithal and luxury to restore all of our mausoleums!

Case in point, this newfound interest in mausoleums brought my attention to an all-but-forgotten "hybrid" mausoleum, off on its own in an often-overlooked corner of the cemetery. The road to it is rarely traveled by visitors; by its looks, it could be the oldest one in the cemetery. Head Groundskeeper, John Duff, who has been associated with CRC since the mid-70s, notes that he's seen the interior of every other mausoleum in the cemetery — but not this one. There is no door. Instead, bricks and cement seal out visitors. The blocks framing the entry are crumbling. And there is a single name above the would-be door: Josiah Hart.

And so, one cemetery road leads to another even less traveled and yet another story. 🌿

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: DOOR DETAIL OF THE PRICE MAUSOLEUM.
HISTORICAL ENTRANCES TO THE
MALLERY, PRICE AND REYNOLDS-HOLMES MAUSOLEUMS.
BELOW, THE JOSIAH HART "HYBRID" MAUSOLEUM.

PHOTO CREDIT:
BRIAN BOSCH



A Little More On Mausoleums

Consult Merriam Webster and you learn that the term “mausoleum” officially began when Queen Artemisia built a magnificent monument for her husband, King Mausolus, in the fourth century B.C. in what would be part of modern Turkey. Evidently, while it “only” survived for 1000 years — the eponym lives on. Furthermore, a mausoleum is defined as “a usually stone building with places for entombment of the dead (crypts) above ground.”

Go to mausoleums.com, a site created by Forever Legacy (a company that builds new and repairs old mausoleums) and you find that there are distinct types of modern mausoleums. A “walk-in mausoleum” is a free-standing structure that allows the visitor to walk in — some walk-in mausoleums add a vestibule for quiet reflection. Additionally, mausoleums can be private or public. Public mausoleums are typically owned by the cemetery and available for unrelated people (indeed, the Cortland Rural Cemetery contains a public mausoleum located adjacent to its chapel). Flip through examples on Forever Legacy’s site and it’s clear that a new private mausoleum is expensive to build. “The price of a custom designed private mausoleum starts at a few hundred thousand dollars. Large, detailed, or conceptual mausoleums run into the millions of dollars.” According to their site, Forever Legacy offers the highest level of craftsmanship, materials, custom service, and a trust-backed “Eternal Guarantee.” Although located in Texas, they will build in the cemetery of your choice or on your own estate. They offer some designs to choose from — identified by the name of famous musical composers. Classic Greek and Roman columns are well represented in most. The relatively modest yet classic “Gabrielli” model with a basic 10’ x 10’ footprint, six crypts and a vestibule requires 80,000 lbs. of Barre, Vermont granite delivered and constructed at your site. When it comes to eternity — sheer mass counts.

Just ask the ancient Egyptians!



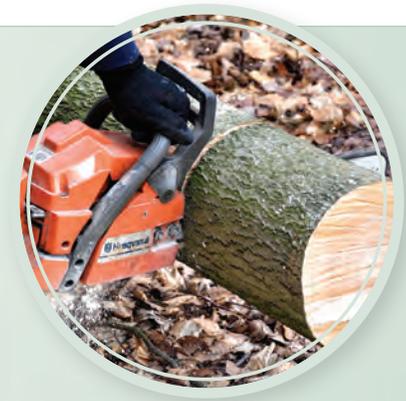
WHEN IT COMES TO ETERNITY—
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We Could Use Help with Trees and Trimmers!



As you might expect, the top-five expenses that the CRC contends with each year are salaries, insurance, fuel, mowers, and ongoing repairs/maintenance needed to preserve our historic structures. That being said, two additional cost-culprits that really chip away at what little cash we have on hand are:

- Heavy-duty, commercial-grade string trimmers; unlike residential models you can pick up at Lowes, these babies run about \$400-450 a piece!
- and expenses related to proactive removal of dangerously old and outright deceased trees — or sawing and disposing of healthy trees felled by our region's biggest storms. Noting that our crew does what it can to manage small- and medium-sized trees, taking down a single large tree typically runs \$1,000 when engaging a professional tree service (and that's including the discount several of our local tree-pros are kind enough to offer us!)

So, if you love the Cortland Rural Cemetery and are in a position to make a donation, please consider designating your gift to one of these expenses for the 2021 season. As always, your help and generosity are greatly appreciated!



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www.cortland-rural-cemetery.com

