



Cortland Rural Cemetery

110 TOMPKINS STREET • CORTLAND, NEW YORK 13045

WINTER 2010

THE JEWISH CEMETERY: A DEDICATED AREA

As far back as the Middle Ages, every Jewish community believed that having its own burial ground was as important as building a place of worship. Along with its own cemetery, each Jewish community organized a Burial Society whose duty was to supervise the religiously dictated care of the deceased from the moment of death through burial. On the eleventh of July, 1954, an Agreement between the Cortland Rural Cemetery and Temple Brith Sholom was entered into, "to set aside, in perpetuity, a plot of land within the confines of the Cortland Rural Cemetery, for the burial of members of the Jewish faith only."

Thus, the Jewish community of Cortland was able to consecrate its own burial ground within the Cortland Rural Cemetery. Through the cooperative effort of the Cortland Rural Cemetery Board and members of Temple Brith Sholom, an important tradition in Judaism was

continued. Prior to this achievement the local Jewish Community buried their loved ones in Jewish cemeteries in Syracuse and Binghamton.

Today, the Temple Brith Sholom Cemetery Committee, a semi-autonomous entity within the Temple, functions as administrator and burial society guided by a set of procedures based on traditional Jewish religious guidelines, approved by the Temple members and trustees, in cooperation with the staff and Board of the Cortland Rural Cemetery. The late Emmett Louis was the founding Chair of this governing body and continued in the position until his death in 1999. Service on the committee is considered a lifetime commitment and a religious duty.

To reconcile the various circumstances of those wishing to be buried in the Temple Brith Sholom

Cemetery with the formal religious requirements, two areas of this cemetery were established.

Section A is maintained to adhere to strict religious traditions and is reserved for the burial of those who, at the time of death are of the Jewish faith. Section B burials do not require the strict adherence



A CORTLAND COUNTY LEADING LADY

The prominence of Jennie Benton's surname in the community might be measured by the height of her family's memorial shaft, with its granite drape at the top. On the four-sided base are the



weather-worn vital statistics of three generations of the Bentons who arrived from Tolland, Connecticut in the early eighteen hundreds to farm on Cortland's South Hill. Sons George and Henry went west to the Chicago area and worked as agents in the sale of lumber but at the urging of aging parents, Henry returned and purchased the lumber company which would bear the Benton name from 1866 to 1938. The firm's contributions to the area's construction of homes and businesses included generic to intricate woodwork. Located near its mills, the family home once stood proud at 79 Central Avenue.

Jennie, born in 1863, was raised at a time when women's efforts outside the home were usually concentrated on their church's organizations. At the age of 15, she began teaching Sunday School at the Presbyterian Church, and would devote 35 years teaching and supervising the work of its mission bands. As the educational opportunities for women increased and household chores were relieved by new inventions, literary groups brought women together from various backgrounds who exchanged ideas about the needs of the community. By the beginning of the new century, now recognized as Jeannette Benton Sherwood, she began an active life in providing outlets for women's voices.

She was instrumental in the formation in 1900 of the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The chapter was responsible for moving the giant boulder from Kinney Gulf Road to the flatiron park at Clinton Avenue, Church and Elm Streets (since moved twice more), to honor those war veterans who settled in the county. In 1906 its members recognized Alton B. Parker who had run for the U.S. presidency in 1904 by placing a large plaque at his birthplace in Cortland.

Jeannette Benton Sherwood began the city's 20th Century Club in 1904 which provided a variety of departments, from art to science, for

JEWISH CEMETERY

to religious demands, and are for those who, at the time of death, are practicing Jews, for their non-Jewish spouses and children, and for cremated remains.

The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow used an interesting and appealing term for a cemetery. He wrote, "I like that ancient Saxon phrase that called the burial ground God's Acre." The Cortland Jewish Cemetery area of the Cortland Rural Cemetery is our community's "God's Acre," where our community is able to maintain the traditions of our ancestors while providing burial grounds for generations to come.

*Article written by Len Cohen and Jean Seligmann;
photo by Janet Steck*

its members to study. In its work to improve the community's social welfare, it hired a nurse who met with young women with the purpose of improving their overall life skills. The ultimate purpose was to encourage the city to hire a public health nurse, which it finally did, and from the club's example of providing help to women in the work place, came the local Y.W.C.A. where Mrs. Sherwood served as its first president.

Her leadership positions, not only in the city and county, but also State-wide, had brought her to the attention of the State's Historian who encouraged her to begin the Cortland County Historical Society in 1925, which she directed until 1932. She also was Cortland County's first County Historian. The list of her offices and memberships formed a column of some 13 inches in the *Cortland Standard* at the time of her death in 1938.

Jeannette Benton Sherwood was dedicated to her community, her church and to inspiring women from all economic and educational levels with the idea that in organizing around a common goal, they could improve not only their own lives, but also the lives of others.



Jeannette Benton Sherwood

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR CEMETERY

The Cortland Rural Cemetery needs your help. Due to changes in burial practices, increases in labor and fuel costs, and a decrease in investment earnings, the funds available to run the cemetery are extremely inadequate. We need monies to repair roads, remove dead trees, right fallen monuments and maintain the grounds. Add to that the additional funds required to repair or replace machinery, and the struggle to find enough money seems insurmountable.

Please consider making a tax-deductible gift to either the Cemetery's general maintenance fund or the endowment fund. Your gift, be it large or small, will help us in our quest to support and maintain the dignity of the cemetery and to ensure that the final resting place of our family and loved ones will be a place of beauty and peaceful surroundings.

Thank you.

Elizabeth S. Spaulding, Treasurer

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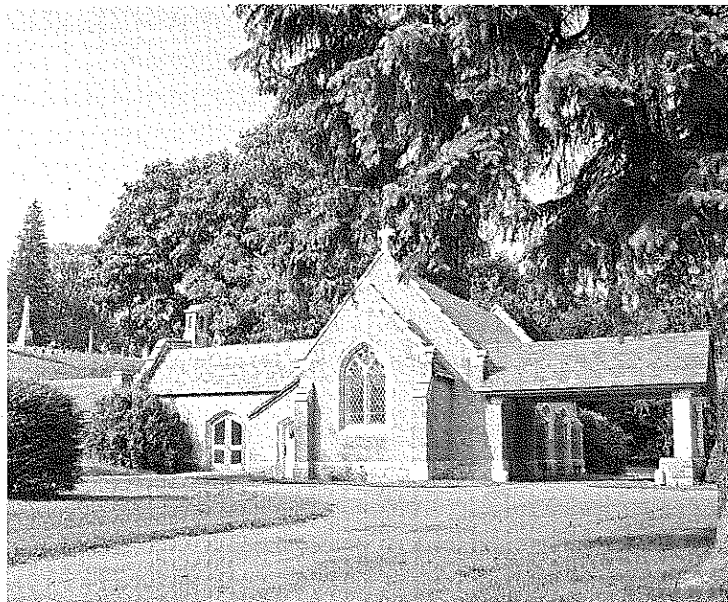
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The Gibson Chapel has undergone significant renovations over the past few years. Spaces are available in its public mausoleum and its columbaria for cremation remains. Visits and consultations can be arranged by calling the Cemetery office at (607) 756-6022.
