



# Cortland Rural Cemetery

110 TOMPKINS STREET • CORTLAND, NEW YORK 13045

SPECIAL EDITION

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## A Glimpse Into the Past Board of Trustees' Minutes 1853-1899

by CHRISTINE BUCK

The history of Cortland Rural Cemetery is tied closely with that of Cortland. The cemetery was established only two days after the Village of Cortland's Incorporation in 1853 and shared the same first President, Joseph Reynolds. The list of Cemetery Trustees through the years includes the names of those whose efforts also allowed the village and subsequent city to prosper.

Two 10 x 15" leather-bound tomes contain handwritten records of every formal

Board of Trustees' meeting since November 7, 1853. In spidery handwriting with ink faded to coffee color we follow the development of what was just a vision to a community treasure. For the most part, the minutes record just the facts—date, time, and place of the meetings; elections of Trustees and officers; and approval of the Treasurer's report. Occasionally a tantalizing sentence or two appears, giving one a glimpse into the past.

The decade of the 1850's was the organizational period for the Cemetery. Imagine taking a dream to reality. No funds, fourteen wooded acres, no rules or regulations, just a few interested persons wanting to establish a Victorian garden-style cemetery.

Their volunteer tasks were to organize, elect trustees, write by-laws, obtain a corporate seal, obtain funds for the land purchase, arrange for a survey, clear the land, grade the site, lay out lots, plots, alleys and walks . . . to build a receiving vault and dwelling for a Sexton yet to be hired . . . to sell lots and record the sales . . . to handle and account for the money . . . to call on delinquent subscribers to collect funds.

The first by-laws, in committee for six years, were approved in 1859. They reflect the era, with rules such as a speed limit of 3 miles per hour; no hunting, shooting, rubbish, loose dogs, or refreshments; no picking flowers or harming trees; no wooden fences or monuments; no children without a parent, guardian, or teacher; no carriages or horses while the roads were in a boggy condition; no offensive or improper inscriptions (if so, the



*In the Cortland Rural Cemetery circa 1875  
Sturtevant lot*

Trustees would remove the tombstone); no visitors on lots with locked fences; and no owner neglect of lots. *Owners* were responsible for maintenance in those days. Later that same year the Trustees enacted a new rule: "If a lot is buried on and not paid for within 30 days, then the Sexton is ordered to remove the bodies off of the lot."

During the 1860's the cemetery expanded its holdings. The Trustees purchased adjacent land and established a Potter's Field site. They donated lots "of medium size not to exceed 400 feet" to each Village religious society for burial of clergymen and their families: Universalist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Grace.

In 1864 the Trustees employed "three labouring men in the cemetery — Robert Winters, Sweeney, and M. Finn." The Board began investing cemetery funds; they held a note for A. C. Garrison and S. D. Garrison, and in 1867 they invested \$500 at 7% interest.

A "difference" between the Trustees and lot owner Mr. Bixby was reported in 1869, with a committee formed to study the claim.

The 1870's brought some stability to the operation. The Trustees hired a year-round Sexton, and two workers were hired for the working season. Settlement of the Bixby dispute occurred, with bodies buried on the south side of the lot removed to the west side. The first bequest is mentioned in 1872 — \$300 from Enoch H. Dowd for the purpose of forever keeping in repair and preservation his lots and monuments in Cortland Rural Cemetery. In 1876 the Trustees authorized Moses Rowley to spend up to \$125 to make a well and fountain on the cemetery grounds.

The cemetery reached a level of maturity where personnel issues appeared by the 1880's. Deceased long-time Treasurer Morgan L. Webb was eulogized for his contributions — "entrusted with the principal management of Association business, asking no return for his services except the pleasure he derived from its prosperity and the increasing beauty of the grounds." Several Sextons came and went. In 1887 Trustee Norman Chamberlain took charge of the cemetery grounds, employing the workmen and consulting with the Executive committee on general management of the cemetery.



*Looking East, Monuments of A. J. White and Loring Tisdale*

Dr. Charles Sanders of New York appeared before the Board, asking for some privileges connected with the Sanders vault. The Secretary was instructed to notify the executor of Robert Tenant Shaw to repair the Shaw lot and vault and put the same in order.

While not noted in Trustee minutes, 1885 is the year that New York State first required cemeteries to keep records of burials — name, age, cause of death, place of death, date of death, and burial lot number.

The first mention of a cemetery office was in 1888. Before then Trustee meetings were held around the Village at offices, homes, stores, the engine house, Fireman's Hall, and the Cortland Savings Bank. A wrought-iron fence was purchased for the length of the cemetery along Tompkins Street.

1890 saw the death of Superintendent Chamberlain, and Burton Morehouse was hired as Superintendent of Grounds. In 1891 he was paid \$600, with the use of the cemetery dwelling house. In later years he was also granted hay and grain for his horse as perquisites.

Financial stability, beautification, and growth seem to be the focus of the 1890's. Trustees set burial prices at \$3.00 for children and \$4.00 for adults. Wages for laborers could not exceed \$1.50 per day. The Superintendent was instructed to collect all monies for burials, sale of lots, and all other bills due the Association and to make monthly reports to the Treasurer and pay the funds collected to the Treasurer. No burial or tombstone was allowed until the lot had been purchased, paid for, or security given for the purchase.

Trustees gave the Superintendent permission to purchase a new lot book and copy the old one into it. The Executive Committee purchased a fire-proof safe. The President and Treasurer were authorized to receive monies left by individuals or executors of estates for perpetual care of lots. The Treasurer was paid a salary for the first time—\$100 per year.

The Trustees purchased 100 stone steps 2 inches thick, 5 feet long, 12 inches wide—also 100 marble posts 4 inches square and 2 feet long to use were necessary on cemetery grounds. 500 corner markers were purchased. Superintendent Morehouse was to notify lot owners, whose monuments or gravestones were leaning or down, to put them in proper condition without delay, and to see that new monuments were set upon proper foundations. The house, office, and barn were to be painted. The Superintendent was to make improvements to lots and collect pay from lot owners for the work as far as possible.

The cemetery purchased adjacent property to the north, and a portion of that tract was donated at the request of H.M. Kellogg for burying indigent soldiers who had no relatives or friends to bear the expense. It was agreed that the deed for this soldier lot would be given to the Grand Army of the Republic after they had erected a suitable monument.

In April of 1899 C.F. Wickwire appeared before the Board and requested that it sign a petition for the Village to pave Tompkins Street from Main Street to the west side of the cemetery. The request was approved and the paving was done. As its last official business of 1899 the Board authorized payment of the paving assessment before January 1, 1900.

## Trustees Serving During the 1853-1899 Years

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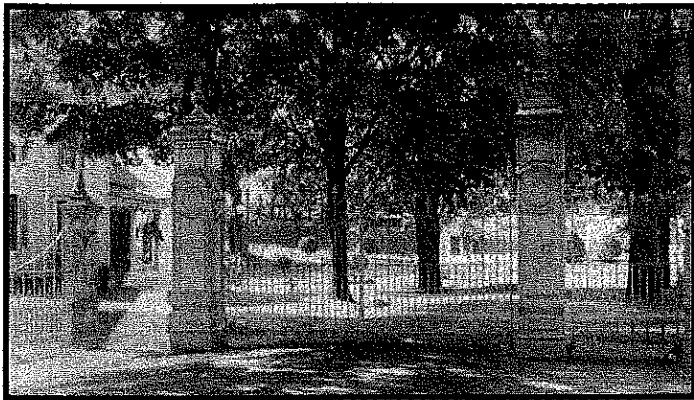
Joseph Reynolds  
 Henry Stephens  
 Timothy Rose  
 Abraham Mudge  
 Anson Fairchild  
 Horace P. Goodrich  
 David Fisk  
 Morgan L. Webb  
 William O Barnard  
 Rufus A. Reed  
 Stephen D. Freer  
 Enoch H. Dowd  
 David R. Hubbard  
 John L. Burst  
 Abner C. Garrison  
 John S. Samson  
 Moses Rowley  
 Charles C. Taylor  
 Henry Brewer  
 M. L. Webb  
 Hiram Hopkins  
 Henry Stephens  
 Myron H. Mills  
 Edwin P. Slafter  
 William H. Shankland  
 Allen B. Smith  
 George Conable  
 Madison Woodruff  
 Norman Chamberlain  
 Emmet A. Fish  
 Le Roy Cole  
 R. Bruce Smith  
 Calvin P. Walrad  
 Samuel E. Welch  
 R. Holland Duell  
 William S. Copeland  
 Fred Conable  
 Alonzo D. Blodgett  
 Joseph Eggleston



## Centennial Committee Members

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 Amy Bertini  
 Mary Connery  
 Brenda Cottone  
 Pat David  
 James Dempsey  
 Warren Eddy  
 Mark Fingar  
 LeRayne Hesse  
 Mary Ann Kane  
 Sarah Lifshin  
 Kerry D. Meeker  
 James Place  
 Bud Quinlan  
 Shirley Randolph  
 Carol Sonnacchio  
 Dale Taylor  
 Mayor Bruce Tytler  
 Ronald Walsh, Jr., Esq.

*We wish to thank the*  
**CORTLAND  
 CENTENNIAL  
 COMMITTEE**  
*for their help with this program.*



*The Main Entrance  
 of the  
 Cortland Rural Cemetery*

*Photograph reproduced from the  
 Rules, Regulations and By-Laws  
 published in 1911*

*by the  
 Cortland Rural Cemetery Association*

## Cortland Rural Cemetery

### *Foundation Members*

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*Vice President*  
 Mr. Robert C. Howe  
*Secretary / Treasurer*  
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 Ms. Lisa Court  
 Ms. Dale Stergink  
 Mrs. Debbie Geibel  
 Mr. Walter Grunfeld  
 Mr. Sanford Gay  
 Mrs. Libby Sullivan-Spaulding  
 Mrs. Sue Rose Covington

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 James Place  
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 Gary Marsted  
 Angela Thurlow