



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

SPRING 2024

Restoring the Historical Sanders Mausoleum... Rebuilt for “Another 100 Years”

BY BRIAN BOSCH, CRC BOARD VICE PRESIDENT

Anyone who has had the pleasure of owning an old house knows the joys and pitfalls of renovation work. It seldom proceeds like the typical “plot” of the PBS series “This Old House” in which a 300-year-old New England house is in danger of collapse and needs to be restored. The Old House team is assembled; specialists are found (need horsehair finials? Norm knows a guy in Pittsfield; it’s all he does!), and by episode 12, the owners are beaming as they tour their totally restored and updated saltbox.

The initial work and planning for the CRC’s circa 1888 “old house” project began almost exactly two years ago after the Board received money from the Sudee Sanders estate that was earmarked for the restoration, preservation, and maintenance of the C.W. (Charles Walton) Sanders mausoleum. Evidently, Sudee was concerned about the deterioration of the vault when her mother was interred there in 2018.

Sudee, the great-great granddaughter of C.W.’s brother, Darius, passed away in South Carolina in March of 2020. She grew up in Cortland and was the daughter of Richard and “Twister” Sanders. Her parents owned the Sanders Sport and Luggage Shop on Central Avenue. Later, they operated ski shops on Tompkins Street and at Greek Peek. Still later, Richard would serve as an executive at Cortland Line.

So, with Sudee’s money and a tacit obligation to carry out her wishes, the Board started researching and contacting possible contractors. After a few dead ends, the Board hired the engineering firm of Klepper, Hahn and Hyatt (KHH) because of its unique restoration experience with historic structures — especially mausoleums.

After initial discussions and inspections with KHH’s engineers, the Board decided that, as opposed to some of KHH’s projects, the occupants of the Sanders mausoleum would not be moved during the work. Moving the remains would have resulted in logistical problems and legal hurdles for the cemetery. Fortunately, subsequent inspections by KHH engineers confirmed that the back wall and the entire burial chamber were essentially in sound condition. No major work would have to be done to the walls. And water leakage into the mausoleum appeared limited to the entryway and vestibule.





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Another 100 Years... CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Throughout the planning and evaluation process, snags occurred due to the usual suspects such as weather and construction crew availability. The echoes of COVID also slowed the planning pace with personnel changes, backlogs of work, and the dreaded supply chain syndrome.

A plan was eventually finalized and drawings were created by KHH and reviewed by the Board. After the Board's approval, more detailed drawings for construction bids were produced. The Board hired R.E. Kelley Specialty Construction as the chief contractor for the project. Again, this company's track record with historical stone structures (they were in the process of restoring the steps at our county courthouse) indicated it possessed the experience and skills to carry out KHH's plan.

After waiting out the 2023/24 winter and before any dirt and stones could be moved in March, the mausoleum site had to be surveyed by ground-penetrating radar (GPR). Board member Karen Halstead, whose breadth of experience includes surveying the cemetery (without the benefit of radar) and finding lost gravestones, noted, "The ground radar was important because of the possibility of unmarked graves over and around the mausoleum. Besides many unmarked graves (more than people realize), stones fall and become buried. Many times, there are not records recording all burials and locations. GPR helps find what we can't see from above." With the contractors scheduled to begin, the Board's collective fingers were crossed that no "surprises" would be revealed. The radar search did indicate unexpected "hits" around the perimeter of the excavation approximately six feet deep. Again, fortunately, the space between the hits and the perimeter of the vault would allow a skilled excavator operator a challenging but not impossible job of removing the necessary material without disturbing whatever was marked by the GPR. Manual digging would still be necessary to avoid damage to the vault itself.

Prep work on the mausoleum was needed before any stones could be moved. The bronze door was removed and replaced with a door to provide security for the interior of the vault. Bracing for the doorway was also created to guard against any movement of the large granite door pillars.

Before digging, a crane was employed to move each of the distinctive three-ton "wings" that framed the entrance. According to one of Kelly's workers, when the pressure of these granite wings was removed from the doorway, the massive stone columns of the doorframe moved almost three inches back to vertical.

The excavation was completed by mid-March. The removal of material from the burial chamber's roof revealed the large scale of the entire building. Furthermore, it revealed five huge slabs of rough granite with mortared seams that formed its flat roof. Each slab was estimated to weigh approximately 12 tons. A flat roof invites leaks. Therefore, a six inch sloped cap of concrete was added to the granite roof. Also, a weatherproof coating for extra protection was then added to the smooth surface of the cap. Furthermore, to address the weight and flow of water from the hill, a drainage system was installed around the walls to direct water around the structure to the street.

It became apparent that the original architects of the mausoleum depended on sheer mass to stand up to the pressure of the hill behind it. There was no solid foundation under any of it. The box shape of the burial chamber, as well as its massive blocks and roof, allowed it to fare well against the hillside. The wings, standing alone, didn't fare as well despite their weight. They had pinched and pulled the entire front of the structure away from the burial chamber. To address the movement of the wings, a concrete retaining wall



Another 100 Years... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

was created uphill for each wing. The retaining walls rest on new, steel reinforced concrete foundations which extend below the frost line. The reset wings are now secured to their own new foundations.

A matching granite walkway to the entrance replaced cracking bluestone and concrete. Copper flashing was added at points which might be susceptible to water leakage. The site was graded and sodded.

In the spirit of Sudee's wishes, the Board also intends to address some of the aesthetic issues that age has brought to the mausoleum. The exterior needs to be cleaned. The checkerboard stone floor of the interior needs to be brought back to its former beauty. Also, the floral design over the entry needs restoration. The slabs that enclose each burial chamber need to be cleaned, and it would be nice if Sudee's information was engraved on her resting place.

The unofficial mantra of this project became "another 100 years" for Board members and workers alike. The Board is confident the Sanders' "old house" will grace the cemetery's hillside at least for that long.

And Sudee and C.W. — we hope you are beaming.

The CRC Board would like to thank Jim Palumbo of KHH and Steve Sandroni of R.E. Kelley for their help and expertise on this project.

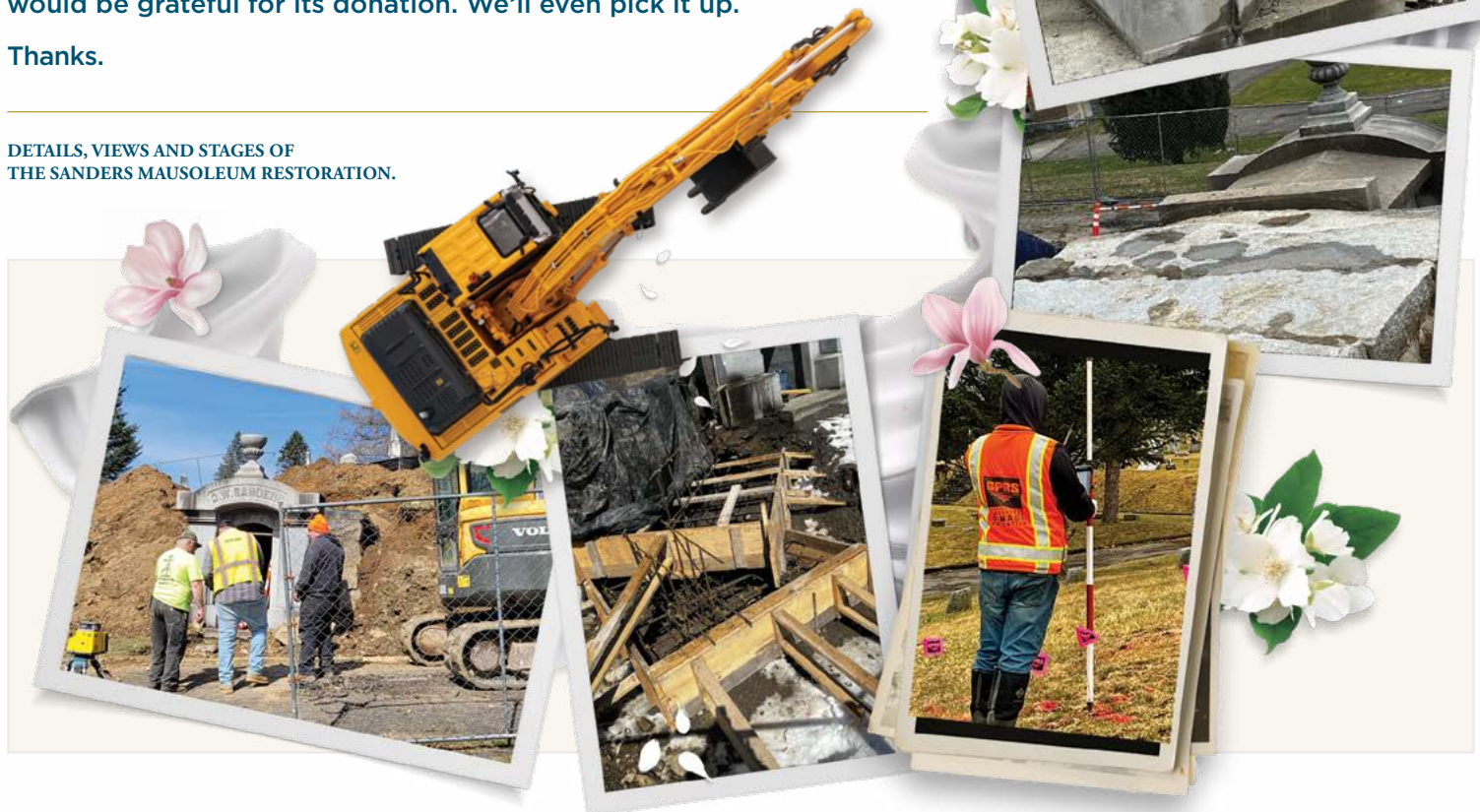
Also, thanks to all the workers who lent their skills and pride to making the next 100 years possible.

Thanks to the Cortland County Historical Society for their gracious help.

Also, if anyone has an extra GPR unit or just one hanging around the garage not being used, the cemetery, and especially Karen Halstead, would be grateful for its donation. We'll even pick it up.

Thanks.

**DETAILS, VIEWS AND STAGES OF
THE SANDERS MAUSOLEUM RESTORATION.**



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A big Thank You!

The CRC wishes to express its deep appreciation to **The Ralph R. Wilkins Foundation, Inc.** for a grant of \$1,517 — which enabled us to purchase two new commercial-grade string trimmers and a professional leaf blower. We'd also like to thank **Economy Paving** for donating a sturdy and excellent condition pre-owned pick-up truck (the second one they've supplied us over recent years!) The ongoing generosity, thoughtfulness, and commitment to our mission demonstrated by **both** of these fine organizations truly makes a difference in our day-to-day operation, the beauty of our grounds, and the continuance of our cemetery!



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