



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY
 FOUNDATION

FALL 2015

Fraternal Society Symbolism at the CRC

Most people are familiar with, and fully expect to see, the more common symbols of faith in cemeteries — be they Christian crosses, Jewish Stars of David, angels, hands in prayer, mortality-oriented flora like lilies and weeping willows, and obelisks pointing to heaven, suggesting ‘ascendance’ of the soul after death. Far less obvious, but plentiful to observant cemetery visitors, are the symbols of Fraternal organizations previously so popular in American culture. Once well-known to all, many of these symbols or acronyms have become obscure to modern observers, except for those who make a study of their history or who are themselves members of those organizations still operating today. For those new to such organizations and their symbols — and hopefully without offending any organizations that have been omitted — here are just a few, among many others, one can find in Cortland County’s older cemeteries, including the historic Cortland Rural Cemetery.



• **FREEMASONS** — Perhaps the best-known and storied fraternal society, thanks to famous members (George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, etc.) and dramatized depictions in popular culture like the recent blockbuster, *National Treasure*, Freemasonry is, according to its official Facebook page, “a fraternal organization

that arose from obscure origins in the late 16th to early 17th century” which “now exists in various forms all over the world, with a membership estimated at around five million, including just under two million in the United States...” While Freemasonry is renowned for its use of symbolism, the most common Masonic symbol one is likely to see on regional gravestones is the combination of a square, compass, and capital letter “G.” Here the tools used by early stone masons are meant to

convey universal moral concepts embraced by Freemasonry: The square stresses the idea of “squaring” one’s actions (aka: living by the Golden Rule of *Doing unto others as you would have others do unto you*); the compass teaches humanity to limit its desires and passions (per Aristotle’s teaching of moderation in all things);

“Many of these symbols have become obscure to modern observers...”

while the letter “G” concurrently suggests ‘geometry’ and God, both of which help Masons unravel the mysteries and wonders of nature.



• **IMPROVED ORDER OF RED MEN** - Taking its name and inspiration from the members of the original Sons of Liberty who dressed as Native Americans during the Boston Tea Party, the Order of Redman is one of several, secret fraternal organizations that emerged from, and focused on defending the principles of, the American Revolution. The group was officially founded in 1813 near Philadelphia, grew its membership across the US through the late 1800s and early 1900s, and still exists today. According to its website, the group fosters “love of and respect for the American Flag,” “preserving our Nation by defending and upholding the principle of free Government,” and “helping our fellow men through organized charitable programs” such as Alzheimer’s research, among other goals. In terms of symbolism, the organization’s iconography has varied and evolved over the years to include tomahawks, eagles, and most often the image of a Native American chief donning an elaborate feather headdress.



• **KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS** — This fraternal service organization was founded in 1882 based on both Catholic and patriotic principles - and named in honor of Christopher Columbus. Focused then, as now, on “charity,” “unity,” “fraternity,” and “patriotism” — the society today boasts over 15,000 regional councils and 1.9 million members worldwide, contributing many...

“Fraternal Society Symbolism” continued on page 3





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CRC in the National News!

Our strategy of improving our financial circumstances by establishing the CRC as a cultural, natural, and historic resource secured us quite a bit of 'ink' this year. One example was a wonderful piece by blogger Glenn Coin, whose article on *Syracuse.com* was also picked up and including on the front page of the "Living" section in a Sunday issue of the *Post-Standard*. Another piece, coordinated by cemetery supervisor Jeff Briggs, was written and distributed clear across the country by Carolyn Thompson, a Buffalo/Niagara-area correspondent for the Associated Press. And a little bird tells us students in SU's Newhouse School are also working on a story as we write this! (To see these articles, simply Google the phrase "Cortland Rural Cemetery" and see what comes up!)



*A special farewell and thank you to longtime CRC Foundation Board Member,
Jean Seligmann.*

*Having joined the Board in January 2005 as the representative from the Temple Brith Sholom,
Jean was a member of our newsletter committee and contributor of several articles
in this publication. Her calm and stabilizing influence will be missed!*

Staff spotlight: John Duff

The cemetery is happy to welcome John Duff as our chief groundskeeper! Residing in Truxton — with many years of construction-company experience both in and outside NYS — John worked at and held the same post at the Cortland Rural Cemetery for 21 years and during four previous cemetery administrations. Over the last two years, John supervised the crew of youth workers provided to us by Cortland Works! and the Cortland County Alternatives to Incarceration program, where his exemplary work led us to offer him the grounds crew leadership post yet again.

**Welcome aboard, John and
keep up the great work:**

**The cemetery's been
looking great!**



Fraternal Society Symbolism at the CRC continued

millions in capital and volunteerism to such initiatives as the Special Olympics, Habitat for Humanity, and KoC projects like Coats for Kids. Those interested in seeing the organization's symbol on both older and modern day headstones should look for an emblem composed of a shield mounted on a cross with a fasces (symbolic of authority), an anchor (representing Columbus), and a dagger (the weapon used by medieval knights).



• INDEPENDENT ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS

Founded in the US in Baltimore in 1813, with roots reaching back to 18th century England, this fraternal organization began with a particularly fervent focus on charity and altruism (considered by some to be "odd" – hence the name). The first national fraternal organization to accept women in 1851 (aka: "Rebekahs"), the IOOF of today has 10,000 lodges across 26 countries and continues its efforts to improve the conditions of humankind through its continuing devotion to Friendship, Love, and Truth through a wide range of initiatives ranging from assistance to youth programs to memorials for Veterans. In cemeteries, the IOOF organization's symbols includes a chain of three links (typically accompanied by the letters "F," "L," and "L" to represent their guiding precepts), the acronym "IOOF," and the "all knowing eye," which it shares with Freemasonry symbolism.

• **WOODMEN OF THE WORLD** – Another fraternal society formed in the 1800s – and emerging from an earlier group called the "Modern Woodmen of America" – the WOW organization (founded by the aptly named Joseph Cullen Root) likewise concentrated on the uplifting concepts of charity, love, honor, remembrance, and patriotism.



The society accepted woman in the 1950s, established its headquarters in a high-rise in Omaha, Nebraska, and even operated its own radio and TV stations for a time – with a young Johnny Carson as one of its featured hosts! Like other societies mentioned here, the Woodmen are still active in society and are perhaps most notable for benefits they afford their members, such as insurance, bonds, loans, and other services. Want to see evidence of the WOW organization in an older cemetery? Their members are very often buried beneath headstones shaped entirely like logs or tree-stumps – complete with limbs, bark, and tree-rings – many of them paid for by the WOW fraternity, until the costs became prohibitive. Note: Genuine WOW headstones usually include additional wood-working symbols (axes, mauls, saws, etc.) or the phrase "Dum Tacet Clamet" ("Though silent, he speaks") suggesting that our good works on earth last after we have perished. (Learn more on WOW history, at Joy Neighbors' excellent "A Grave Interest" blog on Blogspot.com!)



Happy hunting and symbol deciphering on your next visit to the CRC!

– By John Hoeschele, CRC Board President.
Photos courtesy of CRC Trustee, Karen Halstead.

Arboretum Update

This year – as part of our strategy of leveraging our cemetery's natural assets – we officially 'launched' our nascent arboretum by counting and identifying our current trees, tagging 30 of them with species markers (with help from SUNY Cortland's Biological Sciences Department Chair, Dr. Steven Broyles). In the coming months and years, we'll continue along the path of establishing the CRC as a bona fide – and, ideally, a National Arbor Society certified – arboretum.

To achieve this goal, we will (1) grow our inventory to at least 100 major species; (2) draft and implement a planting and proactive maintenance program; (3) engage an arborist to assess, and advise us on, our tree stock; (4) and offer occasional public educational programming and outreach on our trees. Want to participate in this exciting endeavor? We'll be offering new "tree memorial" sponsorships soon, but by all means contact us if you want to get a head start!

SHOWN AT RIGHT, SMALL STEPS ON OUR PATH to becoming a fully realized arboretum, your support this year has enabled us to purchase a stump grinder, which improves aesthetics and safety; proactively remove two dangerous trees; and identify our notable species...

"We officially launched our nascent arboretum by counting and identifying 30 species of trees...!"



2015 End-of-Year Wrap Up!

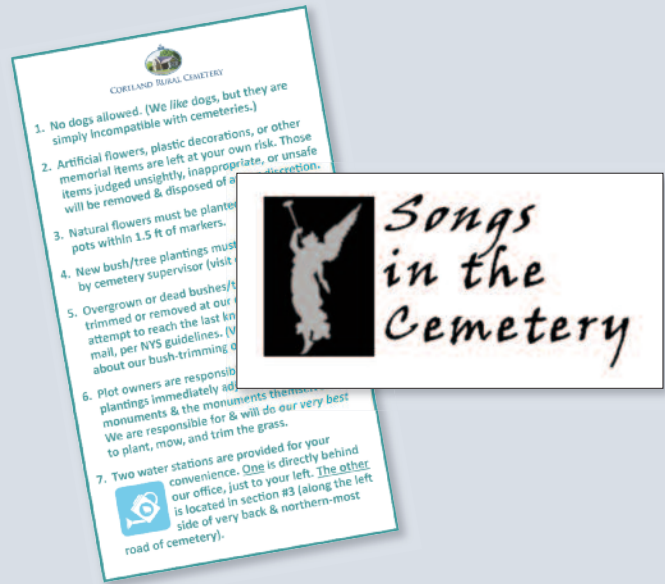
As busy as our spring was — with the opening of our interpretive trail and Angel Society inaugural event (covered in our last issue) — we kept up the pace this summer and fall, accomplishing goals like these... Many of them made possible by YOUR ever-appreciated donations to the CRC!

> **FINISHED REPLACEMENT OF THE COPPER VALLEYS** on our one-time Superintendent's House (a final step in our **Save the Slate** campaign) — which will go far in protecting the interior of this historic structure from leaks. Not to mention ensuring the facility is hospitable for our tenant/ally: The Cultural Council of Cortland County!

> **NEW RULES SIGN** and several new speed limit signs are being erected, to improve safety, preserve the beauty of our grounds, and inform visitors and mourners of our top-level rules. These signs were funded by the remnants of our "Operation Greenspace!" grant from the JM McDonald Foundation and designed free of charge by a Board member.

> **A NEW GATE IS BEING INSTALLED** (in stages) on the western fence-line — at the request of Temple Brith Sholom (who will partially fund the project) — to facilitate winter burials, occasionally required to accommodate Jewish burial tradition.

> **WE LAUNCHED OUR "SONGS IN THE CEMETERY" CONCERT SERIES**, which will feature occasional musical performances in our beautiful Gibson Memorial Chapel. Concert #1 in the series (held November 21) featured Espresso — a quartet of professional, highly accomplished Cortland-area flute players!



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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED