



Cortland Rural Cemetery

110 TOMPKINS STREET • CORTLAND, NEW YORK 13045

NOVEMBER 2001

The Marble Letters

By CHRISTINE BUCK

Everybody has a story to tell—famous or everyday person, rich or poor, old or young, male or female, 18th century or 21st century. The Cortland Rural Cemetery is the final resting place of more than 10,000 people, each with a story . . . just waiting to be told.

At the cemetery's main entrance, immediately right of the Shaw and Sanders mausoleums, embedded in the grass are 20" long marble letters spelling "F R O S T." Covered by sod for decades, the cemetery staff unearthed them in the 1990s. On that lot in Section T are buried Adolph Frost, Sr. and wife Fannie and Adolph Frost, Jr. and wife Margaret. The Frosts had an early connection with Cortland Rural Cemetery and were long-time Tompkins Street residents and business proprietors.

ADOLPH FROST, SENIOR

Adolph Frost was born in Prussia in 1831 to a father who was superintendent of the king's woods and a mother the daughter of a German baron. He worked in the timber business moving logs through the Prussian rivers and then entered the German army, where he became a corporal of heavy artillery. He was with the army that conquered Austria and Bavaria in 1853 during the Crimean war. After



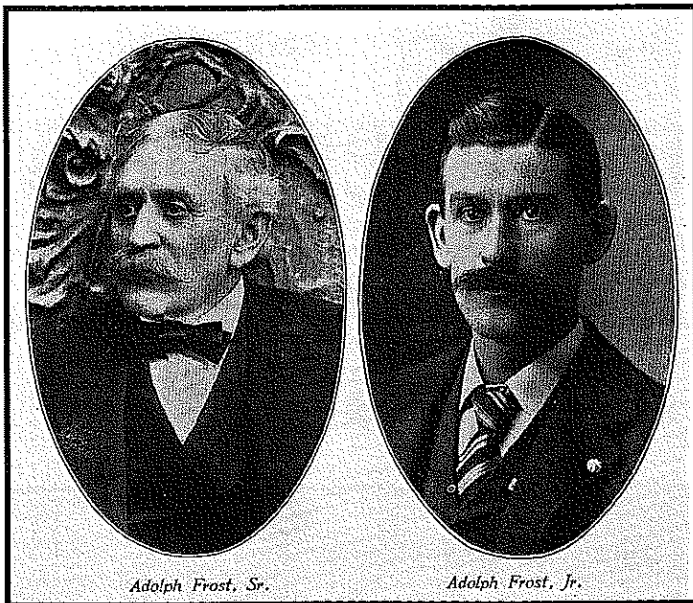
becoming disabled he was discharged from the army and came to America.

Following a 7 week and 3 day sailing ship voyage he landed in New York in December of 1857. He started out on foot for a German settlement in New Jersey and after many hardships reached his destination. Hired as a farmhand, Mr. Frost eventually became superintendent of Thomas Stillman's farm and country home in Plainfield, New Jersey. Along with farming, he learned the floral business.

While in New Jersey he became acquainted with his employer's cousin, Miss Fannie Maxson of Scott, Cortland County. Their wedding took place in December, 1864. The following spring he began gardening for the Schermerhorns at "The Hedges," a Homer showplace (today's 90 South Main Street). The Frosts' only son was born in 1866.

In 1868 Mr. Frost made a steamship trip to Germany because of his father's death and on his return became superintendent of the Cortland Rural Cemetery. At that time the primary responsibilities were maintaining and improving the grounds and performing burials. He drew a monthly salary of \$50 from May through October each year and supervised two hourly laborers. The hourly workers earned nearly as much as Mr. Frost each month, so it is presumed that part of his

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compensation included housing in the superintendent's residence at the cemetery.

Since the cemetery was in its early years, much of it was still wooded, and the Frosts' family cow was pastured on the grassy spots. Mr. Frost kept a small greenhouse on the cemetery grounds where today's chapel is located. There was no sidewalk at all on Tompkins Street; there were a few scattered houses; split rail fences marked off both sides of the street and kept the cattle off the street.

About that time the old Cortland State Normal school was being built on the grounds of Cortland's municipal graveyard (today's Courthouse Park). Workers exhumed the bodies and moved them to Cortland Rural Cemetery for burial. Adolph Frost, Jr. remembered as a boy "seeing several hundred boxes each with a headstone attached, piled up in the yard awaiting burial in the new cemetery."

After five years of cemetery employment, Mr. Frost wished to be in business for himself, with year-round employment and income. He resigned the superintendency and built a home and greenhouses across the street from the cemetery entrance.

He operated a florist and nursery business at 109 Tompkins Street for many years. Mr. Frost named it the "Brain Bridge Conservatories." The reason for the name was that "his brains carried him over the bridge from poverty to prosperity." Other properties associated with the Frost family at various times included 97, 101, 105, 107 and 113 Tompkins Street.

In the early days of the business floral pieces for funerals consisted of loose flowers; Mr. Frost is credited with making the first floral designs in Cortland. Potted plants were in great demand for Victorian homes. Graves were lavishly covered with seasonal flower beds. Large urns decorated homes

and cemetery lots.

According to a 1908 advertisement the firm offered greenhouse and bedding plants, pansies, and cut flowers. It manufactured rustic work. Floral designs were a specialty. The telephone number was 242.

After a battle with asthma, typhoid fever, Brights disease and heart trouble, on April 29, 1909 Mr. Frost enjoyed his breakfast and lunch and took a ride with his son. He died suddenly later that afternoon leaving his son Adolph as his only close survivor. The funeral was held at his home and was "very largely attended." John Evans sang Mr. Frost's favorite hymn, "Saved by Grace." The floral pieces were especially beautiful, with designs from all the local florists. Interment was in the Cortland Rural Cemetery, "... on a hillside within a few feet of the spot where he first commenced business in Cortland and where he will be near his loved ones ..."

Mr. Frost was remembered as "a man of original ideas which he expressed in an original way. He was always cheerful and humorous . . . He was liberal in his dealings with others and he enjoyed the respect of everybody who knew him." "He was kind and faithful and true to those he loved, and gave the best there was for them."

ADOLPH FROST, JUNIOR

Adolph Frost, Jr. worked in the floral business for some 70 years, beginning alongside his father and serving as his business partner. He married Margaret Liddell of Taylor in 1885.

The 1910 Cortland Standard Business and Industrial Edition touted the business as "a recognized center for the best, freshest, and most appropriate cut flowers and floral designs for weddings, funerals, banquets and social receptions all seasons of the year."

Along with the two Mr. Frosts' photographs was a flattering description of the business. It was described as the oldest florist business in Cortland. Their hanging basket specialty was mentioned. Mr. Frost, Sr. was credited with having invented the rustic work used in this part of the country, and "there is no other part of the State that has so much of this work as the City of Cortland." In fact, close examination of a 1911 photograph taken in the Cortland Rural Cemetery reveals a rustic work piece, perhaps a bench, present on the Frost cemetery lot.

By the 1920's Adolph's son Dann began working with him in the business. Its name was soon changed to "Frost, the Florist."

A Post Standard clipping dated December 1, 1935 showed Adolph Frost in his greenhouse holding a cyclamen plant. He was a tall man wearing bib overalls and a shy smile.

The article alluded to Mr. Frost's deep abiding faith in his country, his church, his friends and in nature. His robust health and "plentiful stock of humor" were noted.

When Mr. Frost died in 1939 he had been a widower for many years. He had kept busy with his work and, presumably, the many memberships mentioned in his obituary—several Odd Fellows lodges (past noble grand of Vesta lodge and past chief patriarch of Elon Encampment); member of the Orientals and the Rebekahs; Cortlandville Lodge 470, F & AM; Loyal Order of the Moose; the Maccabees; and the First Presbyterian Church.

Mr. Frost was remembered for having "a master's knowledge of plants and flowers." The garden and growing beautiful plants were both his hobby and his life's work.

The family held Mr. Frost's funeral at the Cortland Rural Cemetery chapel, with burial on Lot T-18. The Odd Fellows were in charge of the commitment service at the grave. While there are three granite tree stump gravestones for others buried on the Frost lot, sadly there is no monument marking Mr. Frost's gravesite . . . except for those unique marble letters spelling "F R O S T" on the hillside overlooking his home and business.

AFTERWORDS

Mr. Frost's survivors included his son Daniel; two daughters, Ethel Moffett of Morrisville Station and Miriam Pendleton of Forest Home; and 18 grandchildren and great grandchildren. According to the will, the business could not support more than one family; therefore, Daniel inherited the business, money, greenhouses, storehouses and two dwellings. The two daughters received life insurance proceeds.

Daniel Frost continued the business until 1944, when it was sold to Palmer, the Florist. The address listed on the deed for Daniel at that time was Oklahoma. 109 Tompkins Street continued as a retail location through the years as Reynolds Flower Shop, Sanders Ski Shop, and finally Chip's Kandahar Ski Shop until it became residential in 1989.

Sources:

Cortland City Directories

Cortland County Atlas of 1876

Cortland County Historical Society files

Cortland Standard Industrial Edition, 1895

Cortland Standard Business & Industrial Edition, 1910

Deeds and will, County Clerk's office

Frost Jr. interview, Syracuse Post Standard, 12/1/1935

Frost Jr. obituaries, Cortland Democrat and Cortland Standard

Frost Sr. obituaries, Cortland Democrat and Cortland Standard

READERS . . .

Please come forth!

As the Cortland Rural Cemetery approaches its 150th anniversary we are soliciting your personal memories of the cemetery or its inhabitants, including the Frosts; pertinent photographs; a biography of anyone interred here; or memories of Tompkins Street.

Write about your parents or grandparents, sisters or brothers, children or grandchildren, neighbors or friends. A few words or a narrative will be welcomed. Help preserve our precious history.

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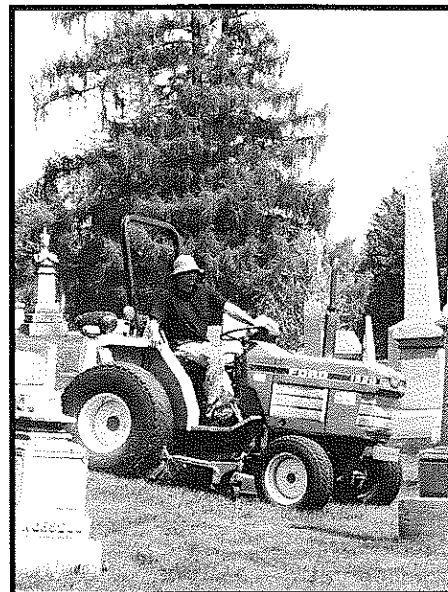
Mr. Thomas Williams

Chapel Improvements and Cremation Niches

Our reconstruction of the porte-cochere (covered entranceway) to the historic Chapel is almost done with some road work remaining for next spring. The interior of the Chapel now features cremation niches where cremated remains of your loved ones can be permanently interred. The Cemetery will be expanding this feature over the next several years. If you are interested in purchasing a cremation niche, please contact the Cemetery at 607-756-6022 for details.

ROAD REPAIR

We want to continue to do road repair work in the Spring of 2002. In both 2001 and 1999, the Cemetery Foundation was able to fund repair of several different sections of roads, with your donations, which made a noticeable difference in the appearance and ease of travel in the Cemetery. Road repair work is quite expensive and we still need to raise at least \$5,000 to do more work in 2002. While there are many worthy organizations which need our support these days, we ask you to please continue to help us financially too.



Needed

The Cemetery is looking for a used golf cart and a computer or two. The computer should have at least a Pentium 2 processor or equivalent. Your contributions are tax deductible.



Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation

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