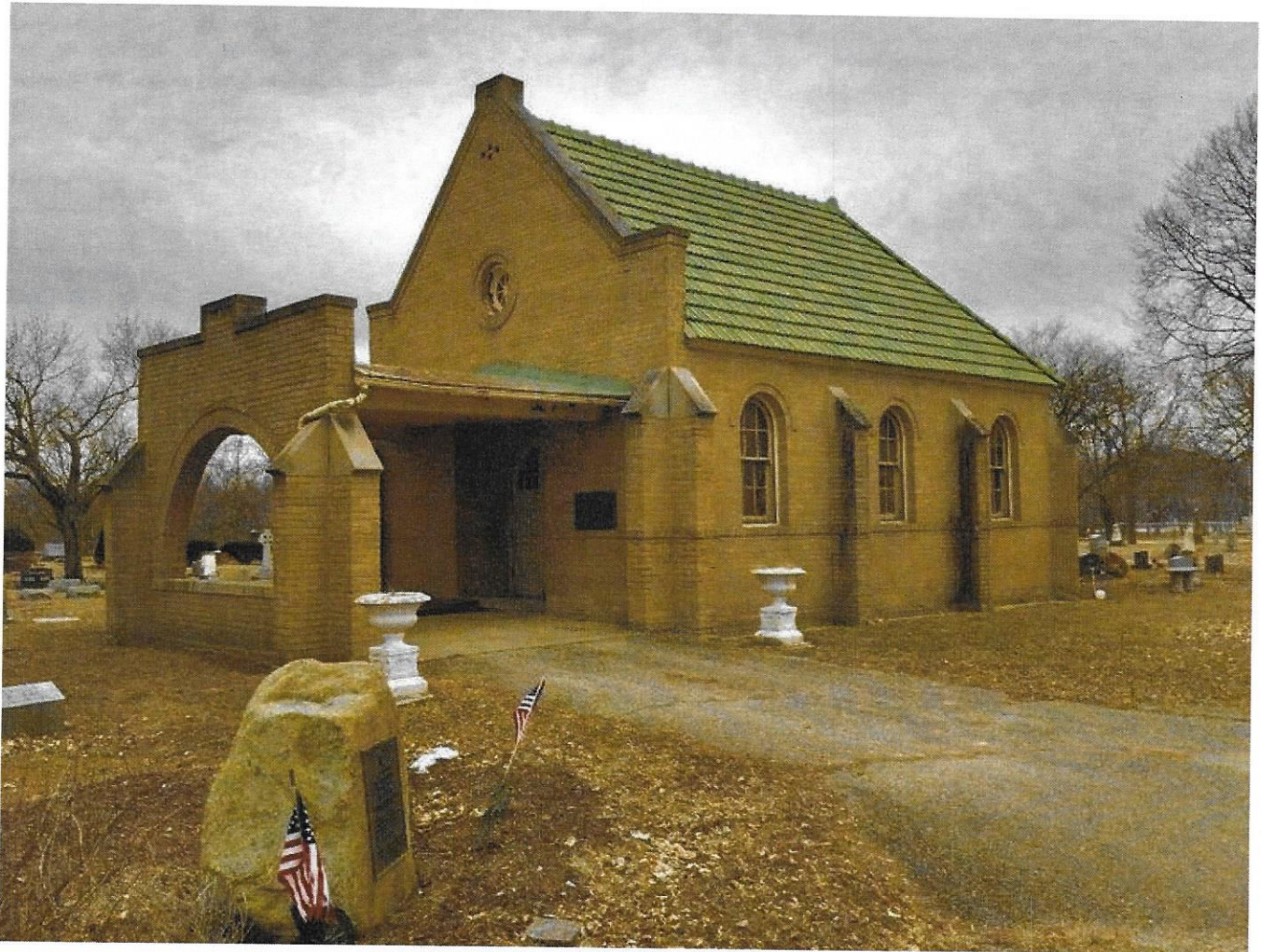


Restoration is goal for son's tribute chapel to his mother

Funds being raised to preserve Ottawa cemetery building

By Charles Stanley, for The Times
May 10, 2019



For The Times | Charles Stanley

Caption

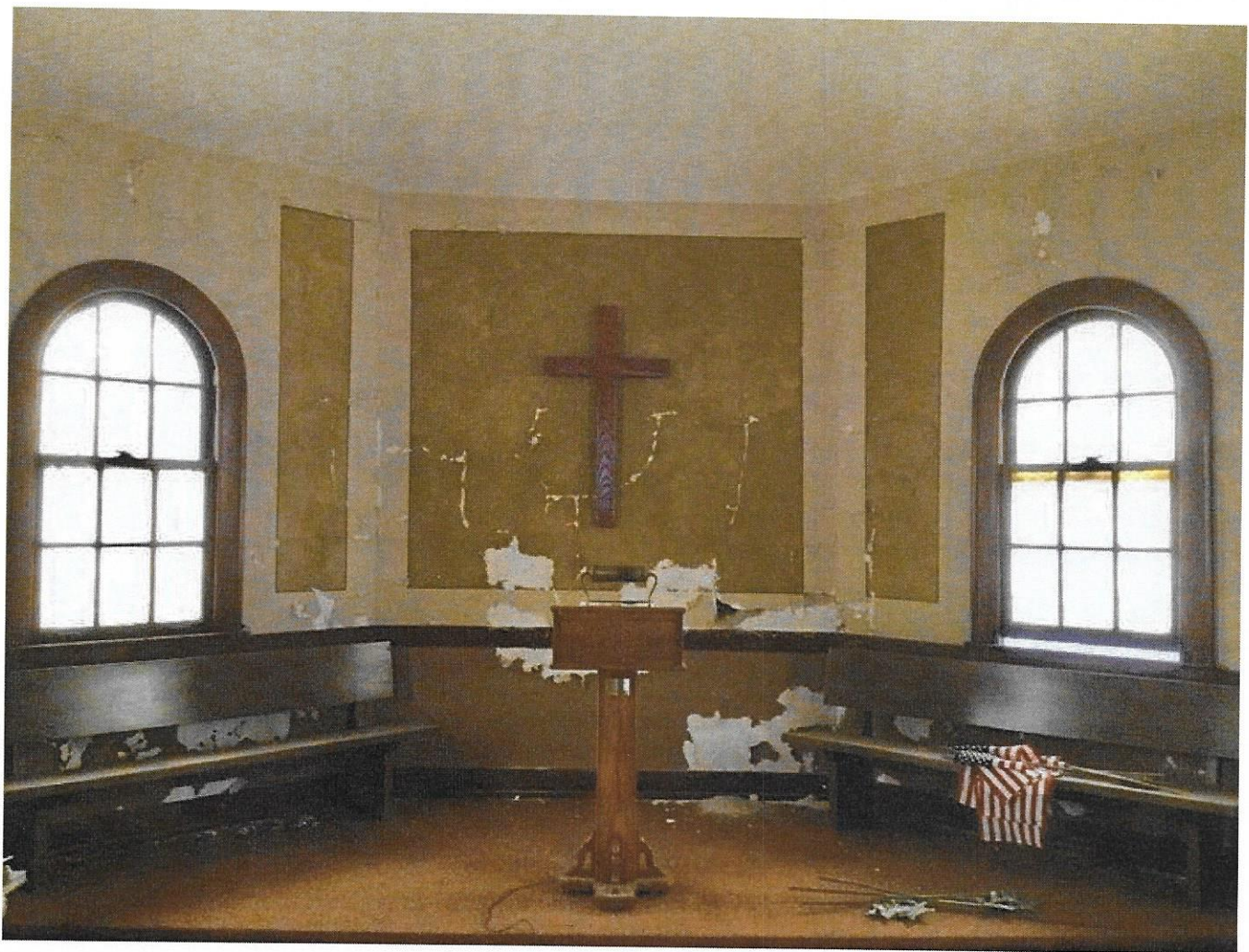
The chapel at the Ottawa Avenue Cemetery was paid for as a tribute to Elise Bastien by her son, John Bastien, a wealthy grain dealer. Dedicated in 1926, the building, now closed, needs restoration.



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Caption

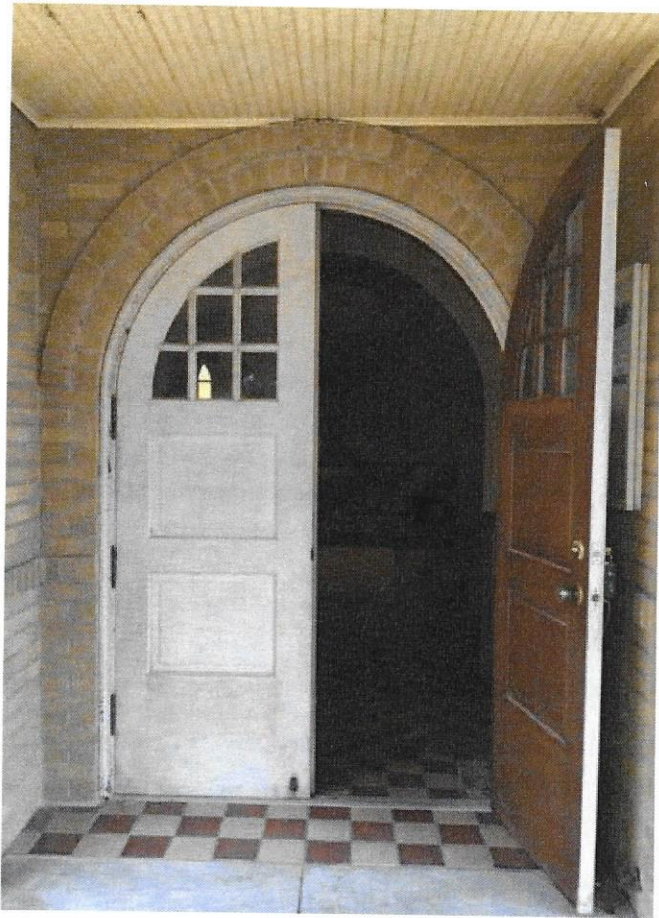
A plaque at the chapel.



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Caption

The inside of the Bastien chapel at the Ottawa Avenue Cemetery.



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Caption

The entry doors of the Bastien chapel at the Ottawa Avenue Cemetery.

Restoration of a devoted son's tribute chapel to his mother is the goal of the Ottawa Avenue Cemetery.

But community help will be key to the effort.

Born in Rothan, France, on Dec. 22, 1833, Elise Nitchelm arrived in the small town of Ottawa with her parents in 1849, the year after the Illinois & Michigan Canal was completed.

She married J.B. Bastien on March 22, 1851, when she was 17. She and her husband, a tavern owner and wine importer, had two daughters and a son, John.

After she died in her house on Main Street at 1:30 a.m. on July 5, 1904, she was identified in her obituary as "one of Ottawa's oldest and most respected residents... Mrs. Bastien was much loved by her friends for her unselfish and amiable disposition and kindness of heart."

She was buried at Ottawa Avenue Cemetery.

In 1925, her son, John, paid to have a handsome brick chapel built at the cemetery in his mother's honor. The chapel was dedicated in August of 1926.

John Bastien could well afford the gesture. By that time he was a wealthy grain dealer in Chicago.

A 1953 interview with Bastien, then 90, in the Tampa Bay Times, a Florida newspaper, identified him as the Chicago Board of Trade's oldest active trader and one of the biggest corn buyers on the board.

"Bastien acquired his fundamental knowledge of grains on an Illinois farm near his native town of Ottawa, where he worked for three years after leaving school," the article says. "Later he was employed by the American Express Co., first in Ottawa, then Galva, Rock Island, Freeport and Lincoln. In 1891 he arrived in Chicago and obtained a job keeping books for his brother-in-law, who was in the grain business. Eventually he went into business for himself.

"He was known as 'the scavenger,'" the article says.

" 'I'd buy anything as long as there was a dollar in it,' he explained.

"About 40 years ago, he related, the first car of soy beans came to the Chicago market.

" 'Nobody knew then what a soy bean was,' he recalled. 'The commission man went up and down trying to peddle the lot, but he couldn't get a bid. Finally he came to me. "Bastien," he says. "You've got to buy this." Says I, "I don't know anything about it." '

" 'Well, we sat down and talked it over and I called up the elevator superintendent out in Chicago Lawn. "Have you got room for a car of soy beans?" I asked him. "What the dickens is that?" he asked.

" 'I finally offered 87 cents a bushel for 1,200 bushels, and do you know, I carried that stuff two years before there was a market. I finally sold it for chicken feed and made \$200 on it.' "

Bastien and his wife, the former Nellie Paulson, of Harvard, lived during the winter in St. Petersburg, Fla., and in the summer at Wolf Lake, Mich., near Muskegon. They had no children.

For decades the Bastien chapel served the cemetery during bad weather as an alternative location to graveside services. A carriage porch allowed the casket to be unloaded. Inside

there were benches, and a coal stove kept visitors warm. Originally, there also were a men's and a woman's toilet that drained to the Illinois River. Eventually they were converted to an office and a furnace room for a new gas furnace.

Ottawa Avenue Cemetery at 1601 Ottawa Ave. was established in 1847 by George Norris as the Ottawa Cemetery. In later years its name was changed to the Ottawa Avenue Cemetery and the grounds were expanded and developed into its current park-like setting.

The cemetery is neither private or government operated. Rather it is a community cemetery run by a volunteer board of trustees. The annual operating costs now run close to \$60,000 a year, said Chuck Sanders, the board president. Approximately \$40,000 of that covers mowing the grounds and trimming around the grave markers.

Annual revenue comes from a trust fund, which provides about \$20,000, with the rest coming from lot sales, burial fees and care funds.

"We just barely make it," Sanders said.

Desirable improvements, such as restoration of the Bastien chapel, cannot be afforded, he said.

The chapel was last used in the late 1990s, Sanders believes. A decade ago the restoration cost was estimated at \$50,000, Sanders said.

The roof is in good shape, but amateur tuckpointing on the exterior brick veneer and rotting window frames have allowed moisture to penetrate and damage the interior walls.

Sanders hopes the restoration project will attract tradesmen and material suppliers.

He also is mounting a fund drive, and personally matching the first \$5,000 in donations dollar-for-dollar.

Sanders said the match is in honor of his cousin, the late William F. Sanders, and his wife Joan, both of whom are buried in the cemetery. William Sanders was president of the First National Bank of Ottawa and treasurer of the Ottawa Avenue Cemetery Board.

Donations to the project must be designated specifically for "The Chapel Fund," otherwise they must be placed in the cemetery trust account.

Donations may be mailed to the Ottawa Avenue Cemetery, 1601 Ottawa Ave., Ottawa, IL 61350. The cemetery has a website at ottawavenuecemetery.com. Sanders can be phoned at 815-993-8109.

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