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After three of his daughters died, in the 19th century, Nicholas Ludlum of Jamaica, Queens, built a chapel to honor their memory.

A Father's Tribute to Three Dead Daughters Is Restored

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

There were once — but far too briefly — three sisters from Jamaica, Queens.

Cornelia Maria Ludlum was born in 1824 to Sarah Ann and Nicholas Ludlum. She died less than a month after she turned 13. Mary Cecelia Ludlum was born in 1827. She died not long after her first birthday. Mary Ludlum Cass died in 1835, at age 20.

It is not necessary to imagine how profoundly the deaths of three of his four daughters affected their father, for there is a three-dimensional testament. Soon after Mary Cass died, Nicholas Ludlum built a somber memorial on the edge of Prospect Cemetery — called the Chapel of the Sisters — with rugged stone walls and delicate stained-glass windows.

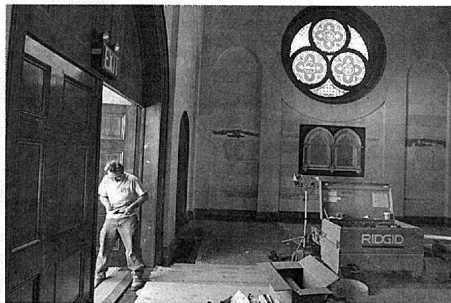
“Weeping may endure for a night,” proclaimed one of many palliative inscriptions on the chapel walls, this one from Psalms, “but joy cometh in the morning.”

What came in the 20th century were vandals. They used the windows for target practice. They toppled and defaced gravestones. They set fires in the four-and-a-half-acre burial ground, which dates to the 1660s.

But this month, with the return of the newly restored windows capping a \$790,500 rehabilitation, the Chapel of the Sisters has at last regained its dignity.

“We’re here at the ‘joy in the morning’ portion of this program,” said Cate Ludlum, the president of the Prospect Cemetery Association of Jamaica Village and a relation of the Nicholas Ludlum family, despite the different spelling. (She does not know the exact line of descent.)

The next phase of the chapel’s existence may be the liveliest yet. One possible user is the jazz department at York College, said Peter Engelbrecht, the director of planning, design and capital projects at the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation. The



The chapel was vandalized in the 20th century, and with help from many sources has undergone a long, costly restoration.



The restored entrance to the Chapel of the Sisters.

chapel stands at the edge of the York campus, on 159th Street between Archer and Liberty Avenues.

The development corporation sponsored the chapel rehabilitation with the cemetery association and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The architects were Cutsogeorge Tooman & Allen of Manhattan. The stained-glass restoration was by the Gil Studio of Brooklyn. The general contractor was Fame Construction of Queens.

Financing came from eight institutions, including the office of the Queens borough president, Helen M. Marshall, and the state’s Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

As Ms. Ludlum told the story, many Ludlums and Ludlams are descended from three brothers who came from Matlock, England, in the 17th century. One descendant was Nicholas Ludlum, who lived from 1799 to 1868 and had a hardware business in Manhattan, she said.

Ludlum bought three acres of land next to Prospect Cemetery in 1856, to expand the grounds and provide a site for the chapel. It is not known whether he hired an architect, but the building is surprisingly substantial and sophisticated for what was then a rural setting. It is about 40 feet by 40 feet, with an exterior of gray schist, trimmed in brownstone.

The doorways employ bold arches in a robust Romanesque Revival style that is more typically associated with buildings from the late 19th century. There are memorial plaques inside to the Ludlums, to three of their four daughters and to their son.

After decades of inattention, concerted efforts to revitalize the

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cemetery began in 1999, by groups including the Prospect Cemetery Association, composed of people whose forebears are buried there. The association assumed it was the owner of the property. “There was never an inkling the place belonged to anyone else,” said Ms. Ludlum, who cared for the cemetery personally, working with her husband on such chores as patching the chain-link fence.

When a title search was required for financing, however, Mr. Engelbrecht learned that the cemetery had been taken by the city in 1953 for nonpayment of water taxes, he said, and was now controlled by the Department of Parks and Recreation. That added another party to the effort. Emergency roof repairs were made and a steel fence was built along the perimeter of the cemetery. Then, attention turned to the chapel.

Daniel J. Allen, one of the restoration architects, said that no attempt was made to render the interior pristine. “We didn’t want to overrestore it,” Mr. Allen said. “We didn’t want to turn it into a fiberglass reproduction of itself.”

An exception to that rule were the two three-lobed rose windows, which were reconstructed using as much original glass as possible. Five of the six lobes featured symbols of Christianity: an alpha and omega, an anchor, a fish, a lamb and a pelican.

But vandals’ rocks had shattered so many pieces that the restorers could not even figure out what image the sixth lobe contained. “We wanted to bring in a female figure, because it’s the chapel of the three sisters, after all,” Mr. Allen said.

“And so Gil Studio whipped us up an absolutely lovely lily.”