



Saint Henry's/Reichardt Dumm in Richmond township

"Grave Happenings," is a collection of member contributed articles written to keep everyone advised of recent and on-going preservation activities, BCAGP needs, and incidental graveyard related material.

We are always looking for items of interest and are open to suggestions on future content.

Permission to reprint any materials herein is granted provided they are printed in their entirety and that BCAGP's author is cited.

Letter from Les

Les Rohrbach – President

Whenever I visit a graveyard I go without great expectations. The graveyards BCAGP spends time in are those that have been neglected. Nature making inroads is normal. In late February I visited several graveyards to prepare for our spring work schedule.



Kauffman graveyard in Maidencreek township

My first stop was the Kauffman graveyard in Maidencreek township. Some descendants had these walls rebuilt in the 1990s. BCAGP had the iron gate sandblasted, repainted, and rehung on a new steel support structure in 2015. We have not been here since 2021. At that time new owners had just taken over the farm. They requested that we not work on Sunday. Since most of our workdays are on Sundays it never fit with our work plans. This year we have a Saturday workday planned nearby so a visit seemed justified. I approached with a bit of trepidation since 2 1/2 years in the open exposed to the sun gave nature the opportunity to create a mess for us. To my amazement it was fine. Obviously, someone has been caring for the graveyard. I assume it to be the new owners, the Hostetter family. Thanks to

them.

My next stop was the Reichert/Dum (St Henry's) graveyard in Richmond township. We have been targeting this site for a Ground Penetrating Radar study and had done a cleanup here last fall. The brush we had collected was left inside the graveyard because there is no place outside the graveyard to put it. We can burn it in the adjacent field but that must be done before planting begins. After we burn it, the graveyard will be clear for the GPR to take place.



Reichert/Dum (St Henry's) graveyard in Richmond township

(Continued on page 3)

Finally, I headed to Hereford township and the Fetterolf/Bittenbender graveyard. After BCAGP rebuilt the walls in 2016/2017 a descendant living in Coatesville has been maintaining it. While he remains a BCAGP member I have not heard from him or knew if he had continued his maintenance. I wanted to see whether BCAGP should plan a work-day for it. The snow was deeper than the other two graveyards. As I approached I could see the graveyard had been recently visited by deer. No ground was showing, but no bushy growth was protruding through the snow. That was enough to tell me that someone worked here last year.

My trip turned out to be very satisfying. My fear of seeing nature winning again was unfounded. All graveyards were in reasonable shape, and two were that way because of concerned locals or descendants. Exactly what BCAGP hopes for all graveyards.



Fetterolf/Bittenbender graveyard in Hereford township

Current Projects

During our Annual Meeting that was held on January 21, 2024 a number of projects have been authorized ! Thanks to the kind donations that the organization has received these graveyards will be improved in the 2024 year!

Schneider, Oley - \$12,000 was previously authorized to repair left wall in 2023, an additional authorization was made to increase to \$17,500 to complete the project.

DeTurk 2, Oley – \$14,000 to do one wall at Deturk #2. Likely the western wall.

Kline/Close, Exeter - \$400 Authorized to have ash trees removed. The gate hinge rusted/broken, and will be needing repair.

Potential Projects

In addition to the above we will try to continue to battle the Johnson grass that has encroached a number of the graveyards. We have approached New Castle Lawn and Landscape to analyze best approaches for the effort; but our expectations are that the cost will be higher than what we have spent last year. While we would like to treat all of the impacted graveyards it may be deemed too expensive to even treat one of them. Currently, Johnson Grass is present in the Nein, the Schneider, the Keim, and the Hechler Esterly Graveyards.

The items below are currently being discussed as additional projects that will be requiring funding:

- Guldin, Oley - repointing the walls
- Hunter/Kemp, Oley - repairs to all 4 walls
- Rothermel 1, Maiden creek - rebuild left side of front wall
- Keim, Pike - tombstone straightening/repairs.
- Knabb, Oley - tombstone straightening/repairs

SET IN STONE

Karla Hummel

When our graveyards were established they weren't the meticulously trimmed and manicured sights that many of us imagine. They weren't mowed or weed-wacked but instead were simple grass plots, perhaps scythed occasionally. In some cases there may have been wildflowers or plantings. We still find yucca at some sites, anecdotally placed like living hex signs to ward off evil spirits or witches.

Today we face irritating challenges. What was once a welcoming grass patch is now frequently a bramble and sapling ridden plot, burr laden and filled with Johnson grass, necessitating repeated cleanups. We revisit the same burial grounds only to find them overgrown each time. We would like to eradicate all those plants, but how? For several years now we have been discussing the idea of ground covers. A low-lying ground cover that could be walked on occasionally would solve two problems. First, it would help choke out other non-wanted plants making cleanups considerably easier. Second, it could grow around tombstones, making it unnecessary to use weed eaters against the stones, potentially damaging the marble or sandstone.

We have spoken with landscaping companies, nurseries, and agencies like the Penn State Extension seeking appropriate actions to take. Based on our discussions, we reached out to the FFA at Oley Valley High School,

asking them to start from seed in their greenhouse a crop of creeping red thyme. To our delight, they have accepted. We will then plant the spreading perennial thyme around the tombstones in one or two select burial grounds. These will be sites that we can easily access to provide water and care for the first few months after planting. Future sites may be significantly more complex for starting young plants, but at the very least we will have tried!

We have a few graveyards that have been overrun by Johnson grass. This sorghum was introduced as an inexpensive fodder but proved invasive and even potentially poisonous as forage to both cattle and horses. It spreads by both rhizomes and seeds (which can survive a decade) making it difficult to eradicate. It grows well above 6 feet tall and has thick stems, much like corn stalks. It takes hours to remove and destroys weed eater blades (string trimmers are useless against it). Once it is cut, we need to find ways to remove the refuse or the seeds are free to spread. Last year we paid a landscaping company to spray it in two sites. We must wait for this year's growing season to see if it was effective. We welcome any suggestions if you've had experience with removing Johnson grass.

Our goal is to find ways to keep these burial grounds looking their best without having to return again and again to the same sites to battle overgrowth.



Johnson Grass at the Hechler Esterly in Exeter Township

February is Black History Month. BCAGP has documented the existence of Berks having almost 300 historic burial grounds in the past. Yet of those, less than 5 are reported to have been for black residents. In a time of segregated burials and a black presence in Berks going back to the mid-1700s, there should be scores. Poverty does not allow for the purchase of marble tombstones and we know that fieldstones are so easily mistaken, moved, lost. Enslaved people and even most free people of color would not have been able to afford a burial as we recognize it now.

Ten years ago, we shared the story of a remarkable man who provided a place of burial for people like himself. Let's take a moment to remember him.

Veteran Highlight

Isaac Cole

by Karla Hummel

Over 180,000 black men fought for the Union in the Civil War, predominantly as members of the United States Colored Troops (USCT). Although BCAGP's mission to preserve and maintain our historic graveyards does not extend to church properties, the fascinating nature of one such cemetery leads us to look at the life of one interred veteran.

Isaac Cole, veteran of the Civil War, lies buried at Mt. Frisby AME ("Six Penny Colored") Cemetery, now a private property owned by his direct descendants. That much is certain. The documentation of his life, however, is a curious muddle of misdirection!

It has been variously suggested that Isaac was a runaway enslaved man, or a former enslaved man... or alternatively was born a free man. That covers all the options!



Presumably born in around 1824, the 1860 census shows his birthplace as Pennsylvania; the 1870 census lists Maryland, and the 1880 again states PA. Moreover, while his initial enlistment form records Hofford (sic, Harford) County, Maryland, this was transcribed on the Muster and Descriptive Roll as Stafford County (which doesn't exist).

Suffice it to say that no matter his origin or status, Isaac Cole led a successful life that included working for Hopewell Furnace (which was surrounded by hundreds of acres of woodland recognized as a prime setting in which runaways could hide, work, and earn savings en route north).

His success was such that Isaac purportedly donated

(Continued on page 6)

the land for Mt. Frisby AME Church in 1856, when he would have been just 32 years of age. However, neither the 1860 nor 1876 maps of Berks County show him as owning that land! Instead, his holdings were south of what is now the Cole family's property.

We do know that Isaac Cole, at age 40, enlisted in the Union Army, specifically assigned to Company H, 32nd Regiment, USCT, in February of 1864 - at a time when colored troops earned less than their white counterparts. One suggestion is that Isaac enlisted as a substitute, paid by a white man to serve on his behalf, a not uncommon practice.



Isaac was mustered into Company H at Camp William Penn in Philadelphia, and from there was ordered to Hilton Head - now of course known as a resort island - and then to Morris Island, South Carolina. After operations against nearby Charleston, in just 3 months, the regiments saw action in Boyd's Neck, Charleston Camp, Devaux Neck, James Island and Honey Hill, in support of Sherman's "march to the sea". Additional action in Potter's Expedition, Dingle's Mills and Statesboro followed, with occupying actions in Camden, Boydkin's Mills, Beach Creek and Denken's Mills completing the 32nd's engagements. On August 22, 1865 (4 months after General Lee's surrender), after these significant accomplishments in only a year and two months, the 32nd Regiment was mustered out, and Private Isaac Cole returned to Berks County.

Even in death, the confusion of documenting the life of Isaac Cole continues. His tombstone notes in his service in the 22nd Regiment rather than the 32nd, and although primary sources cite his death as 1889, the engraving clearly reads

1890.

sources:

The House Divided Project of Dickinson College, essay by F. Hebblethwaite, Park Ranger, Hopewell Furnace NHS, 2010.

NAACP, Reading Branch, #2289, article by Misty Doane, 2005.

"The Underground Railroad", Historical Review of Berks County 23 (Fall 1958).

Also see: <http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/grandreview/2010/04/19/isaac-cole/> for more information

Clean-ups!



Thank you to member Wayne Kline who spent some time working on the Klein/Kline family burial ground in Jefferson Twp, north of Bernville.



March 17th — Hechler Esterly in Exeter Township. Board Member Keith Schaffer manning the string trimmer.

Future Farmers of America Kutztown Area Highschool

Thursday , April 25th

We are excited that we are going to be partnering with the Future Farmers of America from the Kutztown Area Highschool for a day of volunteering to visit several locations in the Kutztown Area!

The burial grounds that will be visited have not yet been determined.

We are hoping to build another good relationship similar to the Oley Area FFA and the work we do in Oley in the Spring each year.



Join us in the field!

BCAGP has a good-sized membership base, but we will always value new hands in the graveyards. Just what is involved in cleanups that you might enjoy? Everyone simply assumes the job they are comfortable with!

- Using weedwhackers, loppers cut the vegetation back.
- We remove all of the trimmings to a pile outside the wall or load it for transport.
- We then examine stones and take inventory of needed repairs to stones or walls.
 - We conduct searches for broken pieces.
 - We clean the stones with D/2
 - Repair stones

Les will send out emails with full details and they will be also be posted to Facebook.

Please bring tools and work gloves with you.

Some suggested tools are: Weedwhackers, Loppers or Clippers, Rakes, Axes, Shovels

“What does it say?”

Lara Thomas – Secretary

One of the most common things we are asked (and that we ourselves ask) when looking at a historic tombstone in Berks County is “what does it say”? This is not always as simple to answer as we might like. The later the tombstone, the more likely it is to be in English and easily read. However, a majority of our historic tombstones are in either German, Pennsylvania German (Pennsylvania Dutch) or something in-between. Even now, PA German is not a uniform language with a uniform spelling. Tombstones were carved by individuals with varying degrees of literacy and they also made mistakes. Adding to the problem is the weathering of the stones, and details that have been lost or damaged by lawn tools, etc. Sometimes several of us must brainstorm a bit to agree on what exactly is carved.

When out in the “wild” and looking at tombstones, you might not have folks with whom to brainstorm, so here are some helpful words and phrases for when you are trying to read old tombstones.

| Family relationships | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Bruder | brother |
| Enkel, enkeln | grandchild, grandchildren |
| Ehegatte von | female spouse of |
| Eheweib von | wife of |
| Ehestand | state of marriage |
| Enkel, Enkelin, Enkeln | grandson, granddaughter, grandchild, grandchildren |
| Gatte von | male spouse of |
| Großvater/ Grossdaadi | grandfather, |
| Großmutter/ Grossmutti | grandmother |
| Kind, Kinder | child |
| Kindes, Kinder | children |
| Mutter, Mudder | mother |
| Relict | widow or widower (actually the use of an archaic Latin term) |
| Schwester, Schweschder | sister |
| Sohn | son |
| Tochter | Daughter |
| Urenkel(n) | great-grandchild(ren) |
| Vater, Vadder | father |
| witwe, witwer | widow, widower |

| Adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, misc. | |
|--|--|
| am, an | on |
| ehemal | formerly (as in late wife of) |
| einmal | once |
| erste, zweite, dritte | first, second, third |
| geborne, eine geborne | was born, née (maiden name) |
| heilig/heilich | holy |
| ohne | without |
| sein, ihre | his, her |
| selig/seelich | blessed |
| uneheliche | unmarried |
| von | from, of |
| zeugte | used as we would “begat” or fathered/gave birth to |
| viele Kinder zeugen | to beget many children |

| Pronouns | |
|------------------------|---|
| Er/sie/es | He/she/it (nominative case) |
| sein(e)/ihr(e)/sein(e) | his/hers/its (genitive or possessive case) |
| ihm ihr/ihm | to/for him/her/it (dative, indirect object) |
| ihn/sie/es | him/her/it (accusative, direct object) |
| Sie | they or a formal "you" |
| Ihre | their |
| Ihnen | to them |
| Sie | them |
| diese, dieses, diesem | this |
| sich | self (reflexive) |
| unsere | our |

| Nouns | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Gebeine | bones, remains |
| Gemeinde | congregation |
| Heilige | saint or saintly person |
| Kirche | Church |
| Leichentext | funeral text |
| Lied | song or hymn |
| Mitglieder, Mitbruder, Mitschwester | member of congregation, brother/sister in congregation i.e. brother/sister in Christ |

St. Henry's/Reichardt Dumm

The few board members beat the rain on March 9th to tackle the pile of debris left from last fall. The cover photo shows how it is all cleared and ready for the Kutztown University Geology Physics class to come to do ground penetrating radar this spring.



Board member Ed Gensemer tending the burn pile at St. Henry's/Reichardt Dumm.



Board members Ed, Anne, Lara and Marvin tending the fire at St. Henry's/Reichardt Dumm.

Our Mission

We strive to preserve and maintain the historic Berks County graveyards in Eastern Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Historic Burial Places Preservation Act (1994) provides for the preservation of historic burial places, tombs, monuments and gravestones and imposes penalties for violations. Research supports the existence of over 300 historic graveyards in Berks County of which approximately 120 remain with some sort of visible surface evidence. The BCAGP is working aggressively to preserve these historic grave sites for future generations.

Oley High School Day of Caring!

Monday, May 13th

BCAGP will once again be hosting the Future Farmers of America from Oley High School for their annual Day of Caring! The burial grounds in and around Oley Valley that maybe be visited are:

Bertolet 1 – Bertolet 3 – Bieber/Lesher – Conrad – DeTurk 1 – DeTurk 2 – Gulden 2 – Hoch
Hoch/DeTurk/Shenkel – Hunter/Kemp – Kauffman – Keim-Pike – Keim-Rockland – Kinsey – Lesher –
Levan – Nein – Ohlinger – Peter – Schneider – Weidner – Weiser/DeTurk



Come out and visit our booth at the Kutztown Folk Fest!
June 29th to July 7th

Orwigsburg Historical Society
BCAGP Presentation
June 20 at 7 PM
109 East Mifflin St, Orwigsburg

St Paul's Community Clean-up Day

Saturday, April 20th

Some of you may remember a seminar we did in cooperation with the [Longswamp Township Historical Society](#) St Paul's Union Cemetery in Merztown last year.

St. Paul's Cemetery Association is planning on another community clean up and we applaud them and their efforts. If you are free, please give them a hand.

Work will include: Reportioning small grave markers; fill in sinkholes and low areas; Sweep and clean grave markers; spread grass seed; trim and clear overgrown property borders.

Bringing your own tools will be a great help! For example: String trimmers, shovels, lopping shears and hand trimmers, leaf and garden rakes, brooms and whisks.

Complimentary Food and beverages will be available!



BCAGP Board Meeting

Sunday, April 21st, at 1 PM

Oley American Legion
12 Deturk Rd
Oley, PA

JOIN OR DONATE TODAY!

If you're not a current member, please join us in preserving and maintaining our historic graveyards. If you do not wish to be a member at this time but you are interested in contributing support for a specific graveyard, please indicate that graveyard on the form below. We also appreciate contributions to the general fund.

MEMBERSHIP FORM - 2024

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Save a tree! Please e-mail me the newsletter.

\$ _____ Individual Annual Membership, \$15

\$ _____ Family Annual Membership (residing in same household), \$25

\$ _____ Municipality or Business Annual Membership, \$35

Additional Donation Earmarked for:

\$ _____ General Fund

\$ _____ Burial Ground _____

\$ _____ Municipality _____

\$ _____ Total Amount Enclosed

Date: _____

- **Membership runs a calendar year (January to December).**
- Membership dues paid after October 1st will be applied to the next membership year.
- This form is also available on our website in the internet edition of the newsletters which can be printed.
- The official registration and financial information of Berks County Association of Graveyard Preservation may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.
- Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation is a registered 501 (c) (3). Please check with your tax advisor as to the deductibility of your contribution.

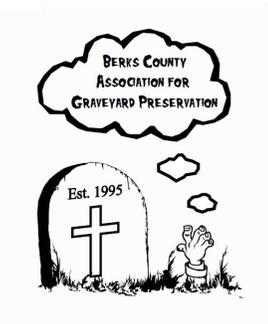
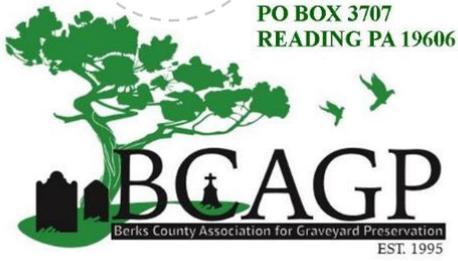
Mail Checks to:

BCAGP

PO Box 3707

Reading, PA 19606

Now you can pay dues, or make donations via [PayPal!](#)



WWW.BCAGP.ORG

Check our web site for details for scheduled clean ups, meeting dates and for internet edition newsletter archives in full color!

BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

Officers and Board of Directors

| | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| President: | Les Rohrbach | 610-850-1855 | lesrohrbach@gmail.com |
| Vice President: | Gary Koenig | 610-780-1583 | dkbucs@aol.com |
| 2nd Vice President | Karla Hummel | 610-987-9569 | BerksEpitaphs@gmail.com |
| Treasurer | Paul Schumann | 484-529-8682 | schu2112@msn.com |
| Secretary | Lara Thomas | 610-914-5534 | thomas_lara_a@yahoo.com |

Other Board Members at large:

Ed Gensemer; Meredith Goldey; Keith Schaffer; Ron Smith; Marvin Stamm; Anne Wagner

Newsletter Contact: Meredith Goldey (Mergoldey@gmail.com)



Don't forget to check our Facebook and Instagram for updates and more photos.

