

Grave Happenings

BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(EMAIL ADDRESSES ON THE WEBSITE)

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WWW.BCAGP.ORG

Check our web site for meeting dates

PO BOX 3707
READING PA 19606

Special points of interest:

- Ritter
- Hechler Esterly
- Keim
- 2013 Officers
- St Henrys/Reichardt Dumm
- Bertolet

BCAGP
Berks County Association
for Graveyard Preservation



Ritter

The Ritter burial ground which was “adopted” by John and Sharon Carmello last year will be getting caps. Although capped walls is not a necessity it greatly prolongs the life of the walls. BCAGP rebuilt the walls many years ago but it was not completed with caps. One of the original members of BCAGP left the Jacqueline Nine Trust which is our primary source of income and her ancestors are buried in the Ritter burial ground. This is on our 2013 project list and the materials have been purchased.



Keim



Phase one complete. The wall that was collapsed has been repaired and a new opening for access created. More to come but our primary objective was to get that collapsed wall stabilized.



The January newsletter is a little more challenging because over the winter months we are not as active. A few years ago we decided to put out a newsletter in January in lieu of a letter to remind everyone that **membership dues are due**. Membership includes the Grave Happenings newsletter.

If you have been receiving the newsletter but have let your membership expire you may be removed when we go over the distribution list. Come Spring we will be back in full work mode and will be posting work parties on facebook and sending out group email. Please be sure to include your email address on your membership form so we can let you know of upcoming events.



Peter Schlegel died in 1907 and his granite tombstone sits alone in the woods at the end of his families former property on Houck Road in Fleetwood. From the house, it is a good walk to where his body rests yet a

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Military Affairs		RECORD OF BURIAL PLACE OF VETERAN	BERKS County	
NAME Schlegel, Peter R.		DATE OF BIRTH 68 11-9-1838	DATE OF DEATH 11-2-1907	
VETERAN OF Civil		SERVED IN WAR ARMY (<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>) NAVY () MARINE CORPS ()		
DATES OF SERVICE 8-3-1861 to		ORGANIZATION (S) Co.G.70th Regt. 6th Cav.	RANK Private	
CEMETERY OR PLACE OF INTERMENT Private (Schlegel Farm)		LOCATION Ruscombanor Twp., Berks Co., Pa.		
LOCATION OF GRAVE IN CEMETERY		HEADSTONE Granite		
SECTION LOT NO.	RANGE GRAVE NO.	GOVERNMENT () COUNTY () FAMILY ()		
INFORMATION GIVEN BY R.S. Dotterer (Grave Registrar)		REMARKS		
DATE 11-7-1934				

new flag is placed once a year by someone dedicated to honoring our military veterans. Peter Schlegel was a Civil War veteran and it is said that his horse was shot out from under him. According to the records he served for 3 years. When he died at the age of 68 he was a truck farmer and left a widow and three children living at home. Schuyler Brossman, a Rehrersburg area historian said in 1967, that Peters son planned to move his body to a cemetery where his wife is buried, however to our knowledge that has never been done and the granite stone remains.

“Grave Happenings” is a collection of articles provided by members of our Board about recent and on-going activities. We are always open to your suggestions for 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

Quite often when BCAGP initiates a project, concerns unique to the graveyard surface. They commonly fall into several categories. Our work at the Hechler/Esterly graveyard in Exeter township this year provides a window into how our approach is affected.

Hechler/Esterly was in the news several years ago because the landowners would not permit access, and after several decades, the graveyard had become quite over-run. After one of our members discovered that an easement existed providing for access and with help from the Berks County Office of Veterans Affairs, which had an interest because of the Revolutionary War veterans buried there, the landowners agreed to honor the easement.



Whenever landowners are reluctant to allow BCAGP to work on a site, we are in a delicate situation. We need their cooperation. **We want their support.** We certainly do not want to access a graveyard in a way that is disapproved by the landowners. The easement gave the landowners the right to define the path to the graveyard and to change it if they desired. The path we were asked to take was somewhat roundabout and up a steep hill. Nevertheless, it got us to the graveyard and allowed us to do our work.

The Hechler/Esterly landowners related the story of a cleanup done decades ago, well before BCAGP's existence, in which debris was left strewn in their field. Unfortunately, we have heard similar stories elsewhere. BCAGP does not necessarily know about prior events, but they most definitely color the reception that we receive. For BCAGP to be effective, we try as best we can to ameliorate historical legacies that greet us. Fortunately, most landowners have not had negative experiences and we find people who are concerned for the graveyard and offer their help. For instance, in the past year, landowners/farmers have burned the debris we have generated in at least 3 cases.

One concern that we did not face at Hechler/Esterly was the landowner's desire to preserve trees. While trees may enhance the appearance of a graveyard, eventually they damage walls or tombstones. Given the size and location of some trees, we required a professional tree trimmer with a bucket truck, and given restrictions in the easement, the bucket truck was only allowed at Hechler/Esterly for 2 months in the spring and 2 months in the fall. So, while tree removal was not an issue, the timing of professional tree removal certainly was. We had to be sure the pro cut the trees in the window allowed.

Given the years of neglect at Hechler/Esterly, our cleanup led to a very large accumulation of woody debris, and given the history the landowners related to us, a touchy question of what to do with it. Exeter Township is a no-burn township, so we did not pursue the possibility of burning. Hauling the debris away would have required an unthinkable number of trips. Our solution was to rent a wood chipper and spend several days chipping and shredding. This proved to be quite satisfactory. Not only did piles of debris disappear, but an abundance of mulch was generated and spread around the inside and outside of the graveyard giving an attractive appearance and hopefully subduing some of the growth that would have otherwise occurred. Even the landowners were complimentary. This was most satisfying. We hope the landowners become less apprehensive and more willing to cooperate as we continue our work.

Hechler/Esterly illustrates issues that BCAGP encounters in various degrees at most graveyards. First is the simple question of how we get to the graveyard. Then the historical legacy, positive or negative, influences how we are received and how we proceed. Trees may threaten some part of the graveyard, but landowners may be reluctant to have them removed. Finally, there is waste, normally organic, that often needs removal. How we deal with each of these ultimately determines how successful we are, and how we are received when we return.

Les Rohrbach is President of BCAGP and very active in both the organizational aspects and the hands on "down and dirty in the graveyard" activities of the group. Les travels from Pottstown to his "roots" in Berks and is an avid hiker and genealogist.

The question has come up on several occasions as to why we do not work in the many neglected church cemeteries around the county. Probably the simplest answer is that we have our hands full with the historic family burial grounds that there is no way we assist with them all. We have made exceptions before. And, if we had more help, we could make more exceptions. Permissions are another factor as well, as it is very difficult to figure out whose permission we need to do what we do. It isn't that we are not interested in the Old historic church burial grounds, because we really are. We just have to draw the line somewhere because there are literally hundreds of historic cemeteries in bad shape.

There is a category that I like to call "Defunct Church Burial Grounds". This includes the burial grounds where a church or meeting house once was but is no longer. This is an area with which BCAGP could eventually become involved with enough help and support. St Henry's fits that category, however it once was a private

family. There is a cemetery with a decaying church building with a lot of Bolich's in it, and a Snyder cemetery in Albany township that fit that category, but they are not considered historic by PA law because there are planned or have been burials within the last 50 years. The Zion Church in Bern Township is no longer there but the burial ground remains which various neighbors look after. The Old Welsh Baptist burial ground in Reading is another sad story in need of



Old Welsh burial ground known also as Barnhart Adams

loving care. The St Paul's Mission Church in Union Township looks like it hasn't been maintained for years and appears to be abandoned but the grass seems to be being mowed regularly. We visited one in Robeson Township that the church may have burned down. What remains is the cemetery and a stone saying the church name Bethel EV Church.

Why do we have so many burial grounds in such bad condition? Probably because no one knows whose responsibility it

really is to maintain them. Some the grass gets cut but little stone maintenance gets done. Whose job is it to pick up the stone that is lying on the ground and repair or reset it? The bottom line is that if your family member's stone is lying on the ground, if you don't make the move to get it up, no one else is going to. There are few cemeteries that will keep up on stone maintenance when they can barely get enough help to get the grass cut. Civic organizations with manpower to spare really could be a huge help to struggling cemetery associations.

In the case of cemeteries such as Aulenbach's in MT Penn where recently vandals went through and toppled many stones throughout the cemetery, donations are needed. If you would like to volunteer or can donate toward replacing tombstones at Aulenbach's, call 610-468-7879. Or call Crime Alert Berks County if you have information about the vandals at 877-373-9913.

If you know of a "defunct Church Cemetery" please drop me an email with the details for my list. It may be one I don't yet have listed.

Anne Wagner is 2nd Vice President of BCAGP.

(awagner615@aol.com)



Albany Township. Cemetery behind

Doing the Deed

Searching old deeds for details and establishing a chain of title can be tedious, but every once in a while you come across something so very interesting, it is well worth doing. Such is the case of George Shorter, reported to be a run-away slave who made his way, to the woods of Fancy Hill above Earlville, sometime in the late 18th, early 19th century. With him was his best girl Lizzie. Here they settled and lived peacefully among their white neighbors. In due time, other run-away slaves joined them to form a small community of huts in the Earl Woods. This was reported in a 1937 news article in the Reading Eagle. What part was legend and what part truth became the quest here.

Confirmation of a George Shorter and others was found in Deed Book 32 page 416, September 17, 1822, where Ellis Lee of Exeter and his wife Mary sold to Jacob Redich, Benjamin Brown, Mathias Garret, William Moor, Joseph Henderson and George Shorter, all of Earl Township, 1/4 acre "for the sole and only use of a burying ground for the Methodist Society and for no other interest or purpose whatsoever."

It was reported as a Colored Methodist Society in the 1937 news article, which also reported 50-60 burials. There were no carved headstones, only large field stones with crude letters scratched on them. Later some unknown person, unaware it was a burial ground, removed many of the stones, leaving little evidence and a void where the burial ground was. No mention of this Methodist Society has been found to date.

Sometime later this small black community ran into difficulty. Fearing they would be found and sent back to slavery, they disbanded, most of them leaving for parts unknown. Only George Shorter was found again, when on November 28, 1838, he purchased a small farm and wooded tract of 4 acres 21 perches, also in Earl. This is recorded in Deed Book 45 page 545, and was purchased from Solomon Custer of Amity.

George Shorter died in 1849, leaving a will recorded in Berks County saying that his real estate should be sold, by his executors, Samuel and Abraham Hill, for the benefit of his wife Hannah. The will was written January 1, 1844, witnessed by Thomas and Ellis Lee and sworn to on Feb. 9, 1849, which was long before the Civil War and freedom.

I George Shorter of Earl Township, in the County of Berks and State of Pennsylvania, being weak in body, but of sound mind memory, and understanding, do make and publish this my last Will and Testament in manner and form following, to wit

The land was actually sold in 1852, but that deed was never recorded. The sale was found as a recitation in Deed Book 142 page 28, October 4, 1879, where it was stated that Samuel R. Hill, Executor of George Shorter, had sold the tract on April 7, 1852, to John Weiss of Earl. The tract became part of the Worman Hotel tract in Earl, when it was sold in 1852. In 1881, after the death of John Weiss, the tract was sold to William W. Weiss.

Hannah, George's widow, remained in Earl, according to the 1850 census. Her household consisted of Lila Shorter age 90, born in Africa, Hannah Shorter age 65, also born in Africa, and Elijah Shorter age 24, born in Berks County. Their race was recorded as black. Elijah is reported to be George Elijah Shorter, son of George Shorter, who moved to New Castle, Delaware by 1860, where he had a wife Emaline and children Mary and Harriet. Here he remained and in the 1880 census, he was recorded to have been born in PA, while his father was born in Virginia and his mother in Delaware. He never attended school and could not read or write. Given the information found in the

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Hechler Esterly

Work is ongoing on the last two walls.

St Henry's /Reichardt Dumm

On the coldest and windiest day of November , Keith, Paul, Neil and Les worked on the graveyard. It was way too cold for me (Anne) so I was just the photographer. This is a huge graveyard that was probably once a private burial ground and then later a Catholic Cemetery which was later abandoned. The 3.56 acres that the church and the graveyard occupied was sold to Jacob Hoch in 1872. At this time the church was still standing, according to the deed. Later historians say that when the church was dismantled the stones, including the date stone, were used to build the wall. The trustees of St. Mary's RC Church in Hamburg were the grantors in 1872, and they were charged in the deed with building a "substantial wall" around the graveyard, using the money received from the sale of the property. They were also charged with the task of keeping the wall in good repair forever. These stipulations were included along with permission for St. Mary's to enter onto the property for the purpose of up-keep, in an 1877 sale to Catherine Madera and the Adam S. Rothermel deed that followed. Successive deeds did not include these exceptions. It is unknown if a new agreement was reached or why St. Mary's discontinued maintenance of the graveyard.



(Continued from page 6)

census we might assume that George Elijah was the son of George Shorter and his best girl Lizzie. Perhaps Lila was George's mother or an aged Aunt. Hannah apparently was a second lady in George's life. Although no evidence of Hannah's death was found, we might assume that her death triggered the sale of the farm in 1852.

Today, the burial ground is lost in the woods of Fancy Hill. Presently no one could be located who knows exactly where it was or is, who could lead us to it. If there is anyone out there who can, please be in touch.

This incredible piece of Berks history, documenting that a run-away slave burial ground existed in Earl and that a black run-away slave's will is recorded in the Register of Wills office, is only one example of the history to be found while researching old deeds.

Betty is an accomplished genealogist and researcher, who maintains an extensive personal library of historical documents . We are pleased to have Betty on our board .

[Betty Burdan](#)

bjburdan@dejazzd.com.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Don't forget to check our facebook for updates and more photos!
check the www.bcagp.org website for internet edition newsletter archives.



2013 membership dues now due. THANK YOU for your support!

Board Meeting will be January 13
2PM Oley Legion Hall Oley PA Members are always welcome

Kauffman

We scheduled a work party at the Kauffman burial ground in Maiden creek township because we knew that a tree branch was down from a storm. Les, Charlie, Neil, Karla and Anne cleared the graveyard and removed the branch. We realized when we got there no one had a chainsaw, but the property owners were happy to loan us theirs. There is a monument



that fell down which will have to be taken care of but the other stones were luckily unharmed.



ELECTION OF OFFICERS 2013

Les Rohrbach , President

Paul Schuman , Vice President

Anne Wagner, 2nd Vice President

Karla Hummel , Secretary

Cynthia Jimenez, Treasurer

No other persons indicated an interest or willingness to serve and no others were nominated. The slate was elected as presented. Additional Board positions will be appointed as needed.

Berks County Democrat,
Boyertown, Pa
December 4,
1915

BODIES BURIED NEARLY 200 YEARS RE-INTERRED TUESDAY

In a little private cemetery, on the old Ehst farm, above Gabelsville, now owned by John Reifsnnyder, rested the remains of the first members of

BODIES BURIED NEARLY 200 YEARS RE-INTERRED TUESDAY

In a little private cemetery on the old Ehst farm, above Gabelsville, now owned by John Reifsnnyder, rested the remains of the first members of the Ehst family who came to America, the oldest buried about 200 years. Seven of the bodies were disinterred this week and buried on the Mennonite cemetery, Boyertown. The bodies were those of Nickolaus Ehst and his wife Faronicka, who were the first of the family in America, having come here nearly 250 years ago; John Ehst, grandson of the first-named, and his two wives, Elizabeth and Ann Maria, and their two children John Ehst junior and Anna Ehst. The gravestones will be cleaned and re-placed on the new resting places of the deceased here. There was little left of the bodies or the coffins.

Berks County Democrat, Boyertown, PA
December 4, 1915

the Ehst family who came to America, the oldest buried about 200 years. Seven of the bodies were disinterred this week and buried on the Mennonite Cemetery, Boyertown. The bodies were those of Nickolaus Ehst and his wife Faronicka, who were the first of the family in America, having come here nearly 250 years ago; John Ehst, grandson of the first-named, and his two wives, Elizabeth and Ann Maria and their two children, John Ehst Junior and Anna Ehst. The gravestones will be cleaned and re-placed on the new resting places of the deceased here. There was little left of the bodies or the coffins.



Jacob Rothermel buried in the Rothermel burial ground in Maiden-creek township has an unusual stone



Nathaniel Bertolet

Son of John and Husband of Mary A Bertolet

Born Sept. 13, 1828 died Jan. 6, 1893

According to a notice in the Reading Eagle Jan. 11, 1893, Nathaniel's funeral was well attended. He was well educated and "one of the best violinists in the area". He was 64 years old.

Thanks to Betty Burdan for finding this interesting piece of history

Bertolet #3 Oley

When Mike Matlock said "I am going to have the best cemetery in Berks County," he wasn't kidding.

When Mike bought the Bertolet farm (aka Digitalis Farm) in Oley two years ago, he said a major attraction to him was the historic cemetery on the property. Many years ago BCAGP rebuilt the wall and have been passively caretaking over the years. Mike had trees removed that were pushing the wall and has done a major overhaul on the interior grounds. Now to make it easier to access **Mike is putting a road straight into the graveyard!** Obviously improvements like that are above our scope

when trying to look after more than 100 burial grounds so this is really an above the call of duty contribution to the graveyard. Mike also said: "BCAGP makes a worthwhile contribution to berks county to preserve our historic treasures and I am happy to help and be a member." We thank Mike for his dedication to our mission!



[Historic Burial Places Preservation Act \(PDF\)](#) of April 29, 1994 (P.L. 141, No. 22)

This Act defines "Historic burial place" as "A tract of land that has been in existence as a burial ground for more than 100 years wherein there have been not burials for at least 50 years and wherein there will be no future burials or listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission."

It further states that municipalities may not use eminent domain to take a historic burial ground for an alternate use. PHMC approval must be given before a burial ground is taken for "public use." If the burial ground is taken for public use, then the burial ground authority must preserve a record of what was removed. This record must be sent to the county and PHMC.

Furthermore, this Act also stipulates that the following actions are illegal: the removals of a fence, tomb, monument, gravestone, or fragment. These actions are legal only if the object(s) is being removed with consent of the owner or descendent **and** a court order for the purpose of "repair or replacement, reproduction or preservation and display in an accredited museum."

So there is the short version. The summary if you will. But there is so much more. It also goes on to address issues of destruction. We generally think of destruction as intentional vandalism. But destruction can be much more. Keep in mind, when landscaping around a graveyard that things grow and roots do damage. Plowing too close can cause damage as the ground supporting the wall is removed and it shifts the base. Unhealthy trees with limbs hanging often break tombstones when they fall. If you allow your animals to have access to the graveyard and they do damage you are responsible for that damage! The biggest cause of stone walls falling are roots and/or trees pushing them. So many historic burial grounds were illegally destroyed over the years that it is very important to preserve the ones left. Please help us with our mission to preserve and protect the remnants of the burial grounds. This isn't easy work!



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.

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 - 2013

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

\$ _____ Annual Membership, Individual \$15 Family (residing in the same household) \$25

\$ _____ Annual business or municipality membership, \$35

\$ _____ Donation earmarked for the *Association General Fund*

\$ _____ Donation to be used for the _____ gravesite

\$ _____ Donation to be used in _____ municipality

Total Amount enclosed _____ Date _____

Mail Checks to: B.C.A.G.P., PO Box 3707, Reading, PA 19606

Membership runs a calendar year January to December. Membership dues paid after October 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.

Please check our website www.bcagp.org

for meetings times