

Grave Happenings

BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION



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READING PA 19606

BCAGP
Berks County Association
for Graveyard Preservation



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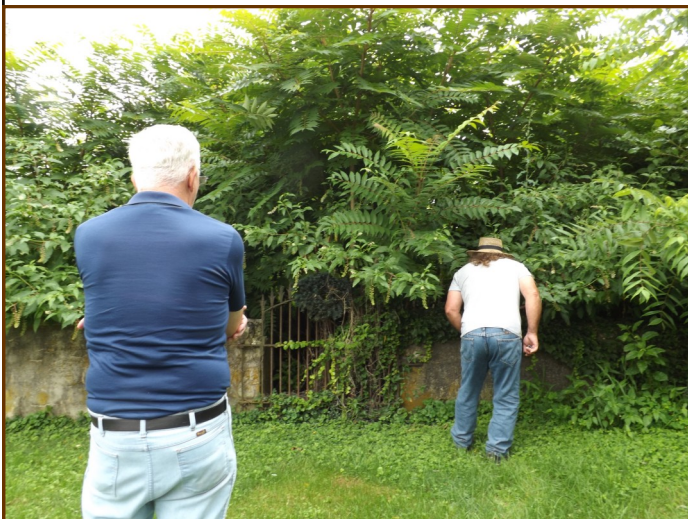
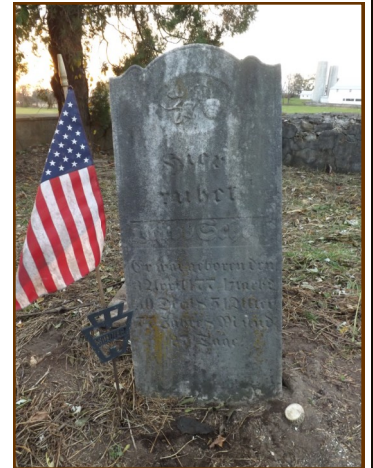
Hechler- Esterly



Over the last two years, we have been able to complete the restoration of all 4 walls. A little finish and clean up is needed when the weather permits, but the major masonry wall work is done!

Hoch

Although visible from the road, if you know where to look, most people pass and never realize this pioneer graveyard is sitting along 662 in Richmond Township. Tucked between two houses and a cornfield, lie the graves of the Hoch family, which include veterans, Jacob Scholl and Benjamin Parks who were in the Revolutionary War. Last month David Schlegel, Les Rohrbach and Keith Schaeffer went in and battled the jungle to clean out the burial ground, so we could see what was inside. This month a mystery person placed a nice new Christmas Wreath on the gate!



Several years ago the family teamed up with us at the Brecht—Bright burial ground to finance an iron fence to replace the old battered one. Since then, Ed and Nancy Graczyk have been tending the burial ground several times a year. It is amazing how much growth can invade the burial ground in one season. Most of these are in such remote areas that they are difficult to access for maintenance. Nancy and Ed have established a good relationship with the adjoining property owners to gain the access needed to get in there with tools to work.



Ed Graczyk, husband of Nancy, uses the heavy equipment to clear the weeds.



Nancy Lounsbury Graczyk, descendant of those buried here rakes the grounds



Rickenbach

Several years ago Zach Beatty chose this burial ground for his eagle Scout project. Over time, the growth blocked access as no one is regularly caring for it. Last month Rob Stanish who is also an Eagle Scout gave it a go over and it is again accessible. Thank you Rob for all your help!



LETTER FROM LES

Reviewing 2013, BCAGP continued much as it has the last several years. One difference was that we were not asked by any group to undertake significant work at any graveyard. We did provide assistance to the Sassaman family which initiated repairs at the Herman Sassaman graveyard in Maxatawny township, but that work was performed under their direction and at their expense. Thus, our work centered on projects begun in prior years. We continued three masonry projects.

- ✓ At the Ritter graveyard in Exeter township, a slate cap was added to the walls and re pointing was done where needed. Corrections were made so that the large immovable iron gate could be opened and closed.
- ✓ At the Hechler-Esterly graveyard in Exeter township, rebuilding of the 3rd and 4th walls was completed.
- ✓ A second wall at the Keim graveyard in Pike township was rebuilt.

BCAGP again sponsored Oley High School's Day of Caring, visiting more sites with more students than in recent years. This is a great activity because it keeps growth under some type of control, at many more graveyards than BCAGP would be able to get to on its own. BCAGP conducted group cleanups at the Kauffman graveyard in Maiden creek township, and the St Henrys (Reichert/Dum) and Hoch graveyards both in Richmond township. Members also worked individually at a number of sites.

While we thank all of our members for their financial contributions, we continue to receive most of our financial support from the Nein Trust, established by a BCAGP founder, Jackie Nein. As we are member driven, our accomplishments are largely based on the time our members devote to graveyard activities. Several new members participated in various activities in 2013 and offer hope that we can expand on our activities next year.

At the same time BCAGP, being an organization that most often attracts retired folk, lost the services of 3 people who actively supported us. John Carmello, who vigorously maintained the Ritter graveyard for several years, found the aches of age too much to continue in that role. We thank him for the time he contributed to us and wish him the best. We mourn the passing of Carl Zettlemoyer, a long time active member of BCAGP who owned the property where the Herman- Sassaman graveyard is located. Just this summer, Carl was standing in the raised bucket of a front end loader wielding a chain saw, to cut branches from a tree at that graveyard. We also lost Tom Clauser a relatively new member who discovered the Benjamin Sously tombstone in a wooded area of Albany township.

Looking ahead to 2014, we have two new projects on the horizon. One is replacement of the falling supports for the large iron gate at the Kauffman graveyard in Maiden creek township. The second is a repair/replacement of the cap at the Bertolet 1 graveyard in Oley township.

Thanks for your support in 2013. Have a happy 2014.

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.

People often ask me how I became interested in graveyards as though it is such a strange hobby or interest to have.

The truth is, there are many people I have encountered who absolutely LOVE cemeteries and burial grounds, and for many different reasons. There are online groups and facebook groups like "[Cemetery Explorers](#)" where thousands of like minded people from all over the country check in and exchange information. Some are looking at the art in the monuments, and some are looking at the historical or genealogical aspect. Some like the peace and serenity a burial ground emits, and some are straight up looking for the ghosts and the spirits. Then there are the people like me, who can check off "all of the above" but add to that, the strong desire to show respect to the human being who once lived, regardless of their lack of ability to afford huge monuments.



old recycled junk sign

I first found BCAGP when I discovered Potters Field in Cumru township. For those that don't know, it is one of the county burial grounds for the indigent, the unclaimed and the unidentified. It is a grassy lot with no markers and a

miserable excuse for a sign stating that it is a county cemetery, located at Rick and Cedar top roads. I had hoped this preservation group could help. It was then, I learned about what makes a burial ground historical and about different types of cemeteries and where responsibility rests. I knew nothing of family burial grounds before finding BCAGP. And so it began for me.

The county burial ground is full of interesting stories, most very sad and some puzzling. Records

over the years have been lost and then recreated and lost and found again. The full burial records are still among the missing.

Over the years I have searched for [obituaries](#) for those that are known to be buried there. In addition to poor, who couldn't afford a burial, there are murder victims, foster children, state school residents, babies, and the unknown. There is even a man whose obituary stated he was one of the original 3 stooges! (See Paul Dewees; Feb. 28, 1972 Reading Eagle obituary)

This year the county Coroner decided to [exhume](#) the bodies of two unidentified girls, who were murdered and left at French Creek State Park in 1968. To find the bodies in the [unmarked field](#), they first had to [find the burial records](#), which listed names and spaces. Then they had to use [ground penetrating radar](#) to find the start points and mark the spots. The exhumation made news, and people once again became interested in "Potters Field." I knew this was again time to ask the county to do something to show some respect in their own cemetery.

Commissioner [Christian Leinbach](#) has now assured me, that a new sign will be erected with the help of Berks County Prison, and something will be put there to mark off the known graves, since the radar mapped them out so nicely. This makes me very happy! I realize that it is not reasonable to expect the entire cemetery to have proper markers, but there needs to be something to indicate that these people are here. It is part of our history and these people mattered!

I know there are many more people that share our interests but just haven't found us yet. We hope through [social networking](#) we can reach more people who will help us with our mission! You can help by talking to others and spreading the word about what we do.

Anne Wagner



This page contains hyperlinks for use while reading online

Mount Frisby AME Church



The Mount Frisby AME, also known as The Six Penny Colored Church, is on the way to Hopewell Furnace in Union Township.

The church was built in 1856 by former slaves. The stone church building is now a garage. The burial ground has a new fence around it supplied by Union Township.

In our book, which lists the Berks County historic family burial grounds, we list this as well, under the name Cole. John and Barbara Cole own the property now, and John is the great grandson of the Isaac Cole who is buried within. He also has been the caretaker for many years, preserving not just his own family history but a significant historical site for all of us as well.

It is said that this church was a stop for the underground railroad and this burial ground is likely the resting place for some slaves that were on their way to freedom. Many of the graves are marked simply with field stones, some with carving and some plain. Many graves are unmarked. It is also the resting site for two civil war soldiers, Isaac Cole and James Jackson.

In the very near future we would like to work with John to get tombstone readings and information on whatever burial records can be obtained. This is probably one of the very few historic burial grounds in Berks County that could be eligible for a PA historic plaque, yet we know little about the people buried here.

If you have more information on who is buried here please contact me at : awagner615@aol.com

The AME Mount Frisby Church
Founded in 1856



James Jackson Died July 6, 1896
Veteran of the Civil War



Research notes from Betty Burdan:

Isaac married Annie, believed to be Annie Bodely, daughter of Aquilla Bodely of Robeson Township, who was the same Aquilla Bodely he purchased land from in 1856. Isaac and Annie had 8 children: Alfred B. (b. a. 1855); Rachel (b. a. 1858) Howard (b. a. 1860); Clara B. (b. a. 1862); Charles (b. a. 1866); Arthur (b. a. 1868; Emma (b. a. 1871) and Katy (b. a. 1874 d. 1891).

In 1856, at the age of 32, Isaac Cole purchased 2 acres 115 perches in Union Township from Aquilla and Catharine Bodely, that would pass down through his family to the present. It is reported he was a founder of the Mt. Frisby AME Church on Geigertown Road in 1856, where he rests in the graveyard. This has never been confirmed by any documentation.

Veteran Highlight By :Karla Hummel

Isaac Cole



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 descendents. 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 slave, or a former slave... or alternatively was born a free man. That covers all the options!

Presumably born in 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 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

Doing the Deed

Anyone who has ever read an 18th century, 19th century and even some 20th century deeds, can see that in many of them, very little was left to chance. A deed may include a complete chronology of transfers, all the way back to the original Penn grant, describing how that land came to be in the hands of the current grantor. A deed may outline how and when the land was transferred down through the family, generation to generation, father to son or sons, or from a deceased person to other heirs. It may include a two, three, or even four generation list of descendents.

Often it was the eldest son who inherited the land, or at least he was given first chance to buy it for a certain sum. Money he paid for the land would become part of the estate for the heirs to share-and-share alike or certain sums might be designated to be paid to specific children on a set schedule at a set rate of interest. The other heirs would then give written releases to their sibling, saying they received payment as required. These releases may or may not be recorded.

A father may transfer his land to a son while still living, with the agreement the son would care for the parents for life. The terms of transfer were sometimes written in the will of the deceased and then quoted in the deed of transfer. If there was no will, the heirs had the right to claim the land by descent. In this case they petitioned the court, saying the father had died, asking the court to appoint a number of good men from the community to survey, appraise and partition the land, so that it could be "taken" or "adjudicated to" the heirs at the appraised value. If the heirs failed to accept ownership of the land, or any part of it, it could then be sold at public or private sale to settle the estate. The terms of these kinds of transfers would then be included in the next deed written.

That next deed might be written when the administrator or executor of the estate transferred the land to the new owner or it could be in a much later deed. The recitation of ownership might be outlined in a deed several generations removed from the original owner, when the land left the hands of the family. The later deed might include, in detail, the various generations the land passed through, identifying the owners along the way, when they died, who their heirs were and who got it next.

A goal, of immigrants to Pennsylvania, seemed to be to own as much land as they could possibly afford. When they died, the land would be passed on to their children via hereditary succession. There is much genealogy and family history to be learned from deeds, do not discount them as a source for family history. They can sometimes be the most accurate and only record of fathers, mothers, widows or widowers, sons, daughters, marriages, death dates, grandchildren or even great-grandchildren.

Glossary Part III

Easement - A right, created by an express or implied agreement of one owner of land to make lawful and beneficial use of the land of another. An easement is an inchoate privilege connected with land and is not an estate or fee.

Enfeoff - descriptive word for a transfer of land or property that gave the new holder the right to sell it as well as the right to pass it on to his heirs as an inheritance

Et al - Abbreviated form of "et alli," which means "and other/others." Used when two or more persons are transferring a tract to or from.

Et Vir - Latin phrase meaning "and husband"

Et Ux - Abbreviated form of "et uxor" which means "and wife" for the purpose of wills and other instruments which grant or convey.

Exemplification - An attested exact copy of a document under signature and seal of authoritative office.

Exception - Special terms of sale or limitations set within the deed. Exceptions are carried in successive deeds, and can be dowers, right-of-ways, water rights, right of ingress, egress, or regress, mortgages, and special provisions for family burial grounds or use of the land.

[In] Fee - Describes absolute ownership of an estate in land. It is not used to describe a quality of a title to an easement, or other appurtenance.

[In] Fee Simple - A freehold estate of virtually infinite duration and of absolute inheritance free of any conditions, limitations, or restrictions to particular heirs. Also known as Fee Simple Absolute.

Executor/Executress/Executrix - A person who is appointed in the will of a deceased, to carry out specific directions concerning disposition of the estate. Executor is masculine. Executress/Executrix is feminine.

Executed - Fully accomplished or performed; leaving nothing unfulfilled; signed

Execution - Carrying out the court's judgment, decree or order

Fieri facias - Abbreviated *fi. fa.* is a writ of execution after judgment obtained in a legal action for debt or damages

Grantor - The person, party of the first part, who is selling or granting property to another

Grantee - The person, party of the second part, who is purchasing a property from another.

Hereditaments - Anything which can be inherited, including real, personal or mixed property. Rights connected to any property such as easement or rent. For example, the right to use water flowing across one's own land is not an easement but is a hereditament.

Hereditary Succession - the passing of title according to the laws of descent..upon the death of an ancestor without a valid will affecting the property inherited. Also inheritance, descent and devise.

Betty Burdan
bjburdan@dejazzd.com.



The Schlegel burial ground in Fleetwood is one of the few that remained as part of their family farm in Berks county. Sadly the time has come for the sale of the property. The monument that was visible from the main road through Fleetwood in front of the farmhouse, has been moved to the burial ground. The burial ground is not part of the property sale and will remain in the care of the Schlegel family members.



Reading Eagle, Reading, PA
May 31, 1909

PROVISION FOR FUTURE CARE OF CEMETERIES

The unsightly brush-grown old burying ground is a saddening feature of many a rural neighborhood, and will be a long time in evidence, but there will be no increase of these neglected resting places of the dead if a law passed at the recent session of the Legislature is rigidly enforced. It provides that hereafter no charter shall be granted to a cemetery company unless it contains a provision that said company be required to set apart a sum equal to at least one-tenth of the gross amount of funds derived from the sale of lots for the perpetual care and preservation of the grounds and the repair and renewal of the buildings and property.

The next meeting of BCAGP board will be January 12th at 2PM at the Oley Legion Hall. All are invited to attend.

Dues for 2014 are now due. Membership year runs from January to December. Please support our mission and become a member and/or a donor.

While the majority of pioneer family burial grounds belong to the families of those buried, we found an interesting exception. Contained in the will of Michael Feick Sr. was an interesting paragraph.

Further, I have set aside 40 square rods of my land as a family burial ground. Which all future owners of this land must keep in good fencing and free of weeds, etc. Then the new owner, whether male or female shall have the right to bury therein any person they choose.

Joanne Dillman and her mother Melanie Anderson already took it upon themselves to be the caretaker of the burial ground when they bought the property. Little did they know that they also have the right to be buried there should they chose. The problem would be to determine if there is in fact empty space. While most family burial grounds appear to have empty space, the absence of a tombstone does not make that necessarily true. Many burials are unmarked and the truth is that many are already full. The most accepted way to determine where burials are is the use of ground penetrating radar. Unless there were excellent records kept of the burying ground, empty space alone does not indicate open plots.



Joanne and Melanie have been caring for the burial ground out of their respect and love for the history of the land. This new research reveals that they are also respecting the wishes of Michael Feick Sr as well and becoming part of this burial grounds history.

Hannah K Levan 1818-1905



[Reading Eagle - May 17, 1905](#) [Browse](#)

OLEY.

Funeral of Mrs. Hannah Levan.

The funeral of Hannah, widow of Daniel H. Levan, was held from the residence of her only daughter, Mrs. Susan DeTurk, widow of Mahlon DeTurk, on Tuesday afternoon, and was largely attended. Rev. Joseph Specht, of Allentown, founded his discourse on Psalm 90:14. Rev. Isaac S. Stahr, pastor of Frieden's Reformed congregation, assisted. The remains reposed in a metallic coffin. Ellis Y. Weidner was funeral director. The bearers were John G. Deysber, Daniel Eberhart, Abraham K. DeTurk, Robert Gift, Lewis M. Hafer and Henry S. Dellecker. Among those present from a distance were the following: Mrs. Alvin Reichert, Miss Annie Lease, Mrs. Obadiah Youse, Mrs. Jacob Deysber, James Kaufman, Morris D. Schaeffer, Mrs. James Merkel, Mrs. Solomon Peter, of Reading; Mrs. John Fegley, Boyertown; Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Kaufman, Yellow House; Daniel Kaufman, Yellow House; Mrs. Horace Rothermel, Mrs. Deborah Rothermel, John D. Kaufman, Nathaniel Merkel and wife, of Fleetwood; Mrs. Heyman Bertolet, of Altoona; Mrs. Daniel P. DeTurk, Mrs. Charles S. DeTurk, of Griesemerville; Isaac Manwiller and wife, David Manwiller and wife, Webster Brown and Mrs. Amelia Brown, of Pricetown, Mrs. Evan Hechler and Mrs. James M. Manwiller, of Stony Creek Mills.

FLORAL TRIBUTES.

Among the floral tributes were a bunch of white carnations from daughter, Susan DeTurk; 87 carnations from her grandchildren, Harry L. DeTurk, Peter P. Levan, Frederica L. DeTurk, Mrs. Webster Cleaver, nee Mary P. Levan and Hannah P. Levan. Interment in the burial ground on the Levan homestead, owned by Jacob K. Levan.

Reading Eagle, Reading, PA
May 11, 1905

LEVAN—In Friedensburg, on the 9th inst., **MRS. HANNAH K. LEVAN**, aged 87 years, 2 months and 26 days.

The relatives and friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend the funeral, without further notice, from the residence of her daughter, Mrs. Mahlon DeTurk, in Friedensburg, Oley township, Berks county, on Tuesday afternoon, May 16, 1905, at 1 o'clock. Services at the house. Interment on the old Levan homestead burial ground, 2 miles from Friedensburg.

Hannah K. Levan Born Feb. 13, 1818 and died May 9, 1905. She was the Widow of Daniel H. Levan, and her daughter was Susan DeTurk widow of Mahlon DeTurk. Hannah was buried at the "Old Levan Homestead burial ground in Oley".

Plans are in the works to repair and re set her stone. In the last few years BCAGP repaired the graveyard walls and installed caps.



[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."

"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.



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 - 2014

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*