



GRAVE HAPPENINGS



BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

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WWW.BCAGP.ORG

Check our web site for meeting dates

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READING PA 19606



BCAGP
Berks County Association
for Graveyard Preservation



Contributors/Staff/Photos

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Don't forget to check our facebook for updates and more photos!

Check the www.bcagp.org website for internet edition newsletter archives.



Williams



David Schlegel has been taking care of the [Williams burial](#) ground in Maiden creek Township for some time now. Keith fixed the corner before it all started to collapse. This is the grave of William Williams, who was a veteran of the War of 1812. No others are buried here as far as we can find. This information was noted in the deed in a section about the easement being reserved. Although not owned by Giorgio Mushrooms, the only way to access it is through their property, and we thank them for their co operation.

Rothermel Maidencreek



[Rothermel](#) descendant Russ Delp is spearheading a project to put the wall back together. James and Steve Kline are helping as well. This is a huge burial ground and all walls are shot. Other descendants including Tara Rothermel Druckenmiller's family have pitched in on grass cutting. If more family members could connect and work together it would be a big help toward long term care. For many years a neighbor lovingly took care of this due to its neglect. Now there are family members on board again, and we will keep you posted!

RICKENBACH



The Rickenbach burial ground off Cross Keys Road in Bern township, was given a nice clean up thanks to Mike Creel . Years ago, this was restored by Zach Beatty for his Eagle Scout project . It has been years since anyone has worked on it, and the brush surrounding it made entry impossible. The tombstones inside need to be repaired again as the initial repair done as part of the Scout project didn't hold. To repair the stones the weather needs to be warm enough so this will likely be a spring job. This small burial ground has no regular caretaker and volunteers are wanted! Mike took several days to get this all finished so we can get in to do the work needed.

*In case you have not noticed, I love showing before and after pictures! **The Keim burial ground** which is across from the Keim Homestead on Boyer Road, is a good example of a preventive approach to restoration.*



When we took the kids from Oley for the clean up in May, we noticed the stones inside were starting to fall in. Since this is a smaller sized burial ground, we decided to get it done before the cost became 3 times more to restore. From the outside it didn't look too bad, but the inside all around, was ready to fall in soon.

The cost was roughly \$8,000 and that was a full repair and re pointing all the way around inside and out. Some sections had to be torn down and rebuilt and others just needed to be chipped out and re pointed, and the cap re done.



The stones were treated twice with biocide and they look fabulous!



Keith also built up the ground in front of the wall and leveled it off, so it will be more stable to walk on. With all that work done, what more could it possibly need? That would be a caretaker. This burial ground has no one looking after it. It gets the once a year clean up by the kids from Oley High School on our Annual Day of Caring, and that is about it. It isn't large and wouldn't take much time. Do you know a Keim family member to share this with? There are pictures of the restore on our facebook in the [Keim](#) album.

*Anne Wagner
awagner615@aol.com*

LETTER FROM LES



I am returning to the **Herman/Sassaman** graveyard in Maxatawny township to elaborate on and speculate on a unique feature found here. A retaining wall runs along one side of the graveyard on the property boundary. I know of no other private graveyard with a retaining wall or one that is on a property boundary.

The history of the retaining wall is murky. None of our current members were involved in 1999 when BCAGP paid for work on the retaining wall. Text from a Sassaman Family Newsletter of the time mentions piling up and resetting retain-

ing wall stones. Apparently the wall had existed and was in some state of disrepair.

In my previous column, I mentioned two table top tombstones that are here. These are also unique. I have seen similar tombstones in cemeteries, but not in family graveyards. The table tops are horizontal markers consisting of multiple pieces. I am estimating dimensions from memory to help describe their appearance. From a 2' x 6' stone laying flat on the ground, six square stone pillars 16-18" in length and 3-4" per side stand vertically to support an engraved 2' x 6' stone which is placed horizontally on top of them. This is a horizontal setup that logically becomes more unstable as the slope of the ground on which it lies increases.

Looking at the land, there is a moderate downward slope toward the property boundary. There is nothing unusual about this. Some graveyards are steeper. Presumably when the table tops were placed here, the slope of the land was not considered an obstacle. Is it possible that over decades erosion or settling of the ground reached a tipping point where the table tops became unstable?

Documentation exists that in 1876 Rev William Helffrich had his grandparents and father disinterred and moved to a church cemetery due to the neglect of this graveyard. Were the table tops moved for the disinterment? Did disruption to the ground caused by this activity contribute to destabilizing the table tops? Was the retaining wall built to establish a level base to ensure the table tops' stability?

This is my theory at least, that the retaining wall was built so the ground could be leveled to create a relatively flat surface for the table tops. Unfortunately we know none of this. When was the wall initially built? When did the table tops collapse or were they disassembled? Was there and what was the plan to restore the table tops. We are left with pieces and a puzzle to be speculated upon.

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.

WARTZLUFT

Keith went in and dug up and reset the tombstones



KUTZ

Karla Hummel



Recently a Kutz descendant came from Oregon expressly to trace her roots here in Berks County. Prior to arriving, Jarusha Kutz scheduled meetings with representatives of historical and heritage societies, and with extended family members, supplementing those with knocking on doors of farm houses that her research showed may have been owned by ancestors. She arranged with BCAGP to spend several days working in the Kutz graveyard, along Hottenstein Rd. Some of us were able to join her in her quest at the site – to find any remaining unearthed tombstones, to identify locations of graves, and to determine if there had ever been a perimeter wall.

We arrived to find that Johnson grass, over 6 feet tall, had taken over most of the site since Spring. It is nearly impossible to kill by conventional means, so we set about pulling it & its rhizomes, clearing about 1/2 the site the first day. The farmer very kindly agreed to haul away the massive debris piles!

In the course of the work we did not find any “new” tombstones, but did find several possible field stones, none with inscriptions. We used both extensive probing and dowsing in the search for any perimeter wall, but found no indications that there has ever been one. Along the northern edge of the fencing we found a vein of quartz, which perhaps contributed to the original selection of this site as a graveyard.

In addition, we confirmed the location of the grave of Maria Kutz. While removing the Johnson grass we discovered the intact grave liner – a brick & mortar cover – exactly in line with the headstone that was found, repaired & reset just a few years ago.

Ms. Kutz is continuing her research and we expect to have her visit Berks again soon.





Schaeffer

This month starts repair work on the Schaeffer burial ground in Fleetwood. David Schlegel has volunteered to maintain the grounds. More information to come in upcoming editions.



The [Schaeffer](#) burial ground was worked on many years ago by BCAGP. At that time, volunteers were used for much of the work, and we have found much of that work needs to be repaired on the front wall.



BITTENBENDER

Family member Fred Fonseca has started the fundraising for wall rebuilding at this Hereford Township burial ground. We are going to get started on half of the front wall. This is large so a full restoration is going to need funding. If you want more information on the history of the [Federolf/Bittenbender](#) we can put you in touch with Fred! In the meantime you can send contributions to us marked for the Bittenbender burial ground. This will be a huge project. This is amazing stonework which we hope to preserve.



Reserving the Family Graveyard

By Betty J. Burdan



Grim Graveyard, Maxatawny Township

Before church yards and before the word cemetery was coined to label a public burying place, families had to bury their departed loved ones somewhere. That somewhere was the family graveyard, usually tucked away on an untillable piece of the family plantation. It was up to the family to set the land aside, establish the graveyard, protect it from encroachment, putting a wall around it and then maintaining and reserving it for future generations.

Reserving these family graveyards was often by word-of-mouth as the family plantation was passed from generation to generation. If the property left the family, a reservation or subject-to clause was sometimes written into the deed. This clause said the family reserved the right to bury their dead in the graveyard and also the right to access the graveyard for purposes of upkeep and visitation. These reservations were legally binding and should be included in all future deeds. If not included, a good title search should find it for any potential buyers.

Sometimes, the larger property was sold with newly surveyed boundary lines that excluded the graveyard from the land sale. In these cases they often reserved an access route, an easement or right-of-way, or simply a binding agreement that all future land owners would allow access. This too should be carried on all future deeds.

Sometimes a will included an item reserving the family graveyard forever for their descendants. Such a reservation was found in the will of Joshua S. Grim (b. Nov. 15, 1803 d. May 9, 1882).

Item: I also order and direct that the family burial ground on the said devised farm is to remain forever a place of burial for the interment of the Grim family, with full privilege to them or any of them to bury therein and have a right of way to pass and repass to and from the same, and that it be kept in constant repair and be enlarged whenever necessary for the purpose of burial.

While a reservation such as this is legally binding when in the deed, it is not likely to be binding to anyone but the heirs, when it is written in a will. The consensus is that this

kind of reservation is binding to descendants only and ends when the property is sold out of the family.

As per the will, Catherine, wife of John Siegfried and daughter of Joshua S. Grim, had first chance at purchasing the family plantation. This she did paying her siblings and other heirs \$9,000. Twelve years later she sold the property to Garrion Guilden. Garrion's wife was Sarah Derr, the daughter of Sarah (Leiby) Derr. This Sarah (Leiby) Derr might have been the same Sarah Leiby, named as an heir in Joshua S. Grim's will. She was described only as Sarah Leiby, "who I am now raising."

Garrion and Sarah Guildin owned the plantation for 22 years. It next went to his daughter Mary (Guldin) Deisher, wife of Frank Deisher, who owned it 27 years. The Guldins sold to Philip and Ellen (Leibensberger) Mertz. The Mertzses owned it for 52 years. They sold it to their two daughters Donna and Grace in 1995. In 2004 Grace sold her half interest to Donna and her husband, who are the current owners.

The questions here are: 1) was the Sarah Leiby, who was raised by Joshua S. Grim, a descendant; 2) was she the same Sarah Leiby who was the mother of Sarah Derr and mother-in-law of Garrion Guildin and 3) were Philip and Ellen Mertz related to the Grimms. To date I've found no connection between the Mertzses and the Grimms, but that doesn't mean it isn't there it may mean I haven't found it yet. Philip was the son of John A. and Emma (Hummel) Mertz, while Ellen Mertz was the daughter of Daniel and Amanda (Shaffer) Leibensperger.

G 1882
Last Will & Testament
of
Joshua Grim
Proved May 31st A.D. 1882
and Letter Testamentary
in common form were
granted unto John C
Siegfried Thomas H. Leisher
& Charles Lichtmuller
the Executors in the will
named, having first being
duly qualified thereon,
on the 9th day of May
A.D. 1882 at 3-30 A.M.
Rec'd in Vol 111 Page 547

RAUSCH

We had a nice clean up party at the [Rausch](#) burial ground in Hereford Township in November. There was cleaning up, tombstone re setting, tombstone uncovering, tombstone cleaning, exploration and checking against the records. No party for us would be complete without some dowsing so of course we did that as well! One unusual thing we found was a single stone for the father, with the names of his dead children on the back. They all died within a short time and one tombstone was used for all which was not a common thing back then. Les, Keith, Dave, Ed, Mike and his daughter Kathryn, Karla, Anne and Maryann had a nice morning and got a lot done for first time there. We will likely be back in spring!



KLEIN

The very large dead tree has been removed by a professional and we will be talking about wall repairs at future board meetings. There are several sections that are falling on the inside. This is the most odd shaped burial ground, as its on a slope. Wayne Kline and his family have been working on it and have started the fundraising for repairs. When we actually get working in there we will show and tell you more! You can find more pictures showing the odd shape on our facebook in the [Klein](#) album.



Before Cleaning with D-2

This is a burial ground where the biological growth has saturated the tombstones. A few treatments with D-2 will get the stones readable again so they can be photographed and documented. We have cleaned stones in burial grounds that were so bad they were not in the earlier readings that we look to as our guide. This hand carved fieldstone VATER is an example of how a stone can look just plain until its cleaned. According to Wayne Klein, the early documentation does say this stone is here, but it hasn't been readable for many years. Wayne tells us that VATER is Elder George Klein, Elder of the Northkill Congregation and the German Baptists, and first Elder of Little Swatara Congregation. He also administered to the Oley congregation and maybe more.



After Cleaning with D-2

I found a good website finally that can illustrate safe practices for cleaning tombstones and I refer you to this, because it is good, and includes links. It's a non profit heritage preservation group that deals with museums and libraries.

<http://chicora.org/cleaning.html>

Hunter/Kemp



With the weather being so nice for December we pulled together another Sunday work detail at the burial ground of Colonel Daniel [Hunter](#). It turned out to be very cold and only a few braved it for the clean up. Les, Keith, Paul, David and Karla did an outstanding job! This burial ground generally only gets a once a year clean up by the students from Oley at Day of Caring. This clean up will make it easier at Day of Caring and more can be done that day.

We will be doing more work going forward here and will keep you updated. Hopefully at Day of Caring we can get holes filled and some tombstones re set.



**PLEASE DON'T FORGET MEMBERSHIP DUES RUN FROM JANUARY - DECEMBER
PLEASE SUPPORT US IN THIS MISSION WITH YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES, CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GENERAL FUND AND CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARD SPECIFIC GRAVEYARDS. THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

Our next meeting will be 2PM February 21st at the Oley Legion hall.
This is the annual General Membership Meeting.

Reminder: Grave Happenings is a mixture of mail out and internet editions. All of our newsletters are online in full color at www.bcagp.org.



[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 - 2016

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*