

GRAVE HAPPENINGS



The **Federolf– Bittenbender** family burial ground in Hereford Township is half way to having the walls restored! When it comes to such a large burial ground, we have to make decisions on how much we can do. We started with half the front. Then some donations came in so we started the other half. We went out on a limb and did a second wall this fall in the hopes it generates enough interest for people to contribute. The final pointing will be done when the weather gets warm again. If you want to see this project through to the end **WE NEED YOUR HELP!**



Originally the farm was bought by Peter Federolf sometime after he immigrated about 1730. His son Johannes and his son-in-law Christopher Bittenbender inherited the 400 acres. Peter's wife, Anna, was born Rothermel. Some call this the Federolf-Bittenbender-Rothermel for that reason. As with most historic family burial grounds, we will never know exactly how many are buried there, and who they all are, but we know this couple and their children are here. The stones are quite stunning and the masonry of the walls is unique.



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Contributors Staff/Photos

- Mike Angstadt
- Betty Burdan
- Karla Hummel
- Les Rohrbach
- Keith Schaffer
- Neil Scheidt
- Paul Schuman
- Anne Wagner
- Rodney Wagner



KAUFFMAN

Last year we received a \$600.00 grant from Wal-Mart thanks to Patrick Hehr and the Wal-Mart distribution center in Pottsville. The very large stone in the Kauffman burial ground was down in a hole and no longer in the base a few years ago. It was much too heavy to be properly set without a tripod. We had a tripod fabricated with the money from that grant.



BEFORE AND AFTER PICTURES OF THE SIDE WALL BITTENBENDER BURIAL GROUND.



YOUNG -



Don Dickerson, Dick Warmkessel, George Siegel, Charlie Miller and Keith Stunz (who also provided the pictures) are the new caretakers for the Young-Kissling burial ground and the Ritter burial ground. They are members of the St Lawrence camp of the Patriotic Order of the Sons of the American Revolution.

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Ritter



LETTER FROM LES

On October 11, Anne and I had the opportunity to testify before a Pennsylvania House subcommittee concerning graveyard access. The focus of the hearing was the denial of access to the Rock Church graveyard just north of the Twin Valley school complex. The hearing was reported on by among others the Reading Eagle and Channels 8, 43, and 69.

The land containing the Rock Church cemetery was sold by the church to a private individual in 2002, and was resold in 2010 to other private owners. In 2014 these owners transferred title to an LLC which they control. They have erected a wire fence around the unwallled portion of the graveyard and placed private property signs on the wire. Access has been denied and visitors threatened with prosecution. The owners have said they will prevent burial of those who were sold cemetery plots. Over Memorial Day visitors to the graveyard were filmed by the owners.

While Rock Church is not an historical family graveyard, the issues are similar to some we face. BCAGP generally relies on the decency and cooperation of landowners, the great majority of whom support our efforts. Legal action is not a remedy we would pursue, but we would use laws to buttress our arguments to gain access to a graveyard.



The discussion during the hearing yielded interesting comments, as least for my non-legal background. A representative of a PA cemetery association stated that purchase of a cemetery plot conveys the right to inter, but does not change ownership of the land. One lawmaker thought the Rock Church situation was similar to a landlord-tenant relationship. If a landlord sells a building, the lease of a tenant remains valid. Don't access and burial rights remain if a cemetery is sold?

The lawyer for the families affected had reviewed PA statutes. Her testimony indicated that PA's laws were written in different eras and it is unclear how they apply at this time. For instance, PA statutes specify rules church cemeteries must follow. However, do the rules carry forward if a church cemetery is sold to a private individual? This remains in the air.

My feeling is that distinctions in regard to for-profit, church, family graveyards, or any burial ground are irrelevant. If a site is recognized as a burial ground, there are common expectations. If these expectations are not embedded in laws, they should be. Ideally, the legislature will modernize and simplify the laws. My take from the hearing, however, is that a narrow focus to solve the specific Rock Church scenario is more likely.

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.



Every now and then, something goes really easily and falls right into place. The story goes back to when an unknown retired teacher was rumored to be the person who was taking care of the Young-Kissling burial ground in Exeter Township. This man was doing such a good job that, when the burial ground was not tended, it was noticed right away. Not only noticed, but it was noticed by someone that really cared to make sure it was taken care of. BCAGP often does not know when a caretaker is unable to continue. Usually people just start to notice the weeds are not cut. We can't be everywhere, so it doesn't always come to our attention.



*At our September meeting, some new faces were present. **George Siegel** and his wife, **Joanne**, came to tell us that they had already done a clean up, and the group George is a member of will maintain it! **The St. Lawrence Camp #230, Patriotic Order of the Sons of the American Revolution** have stepped forward!*

This is the kind of support we love to have! A whole group that will take responsibility so that we know it's taken care of makes it so much easier for us to plan. We are volunteers as you know,

and just can't do it all ourselves.

And so, the story gets even better! At our November meeting, two men from the group came to tell us they will also take care of the Ritter burial ground, which is close by!

Our organization -- to be clear -- does not own any burial ground. We step in to fill a void where there is no one taking responsibility. We try to keep track of which burial grounds need help and which already have caretakers. We knew the Young-Kissling was being taken care of well for many years by "someone" that we never got to properly thank. We have been supplementing at the Ritter with occasional clean ups by members since the last caretaker was unable to continue.

Things usually slow down for the winter. When spring is getting closer, and we need to figure out which cemeteries we can get to, we will be very thankful to groups and individuals who have adopted a burial ground or two.



Anne Wagner
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LEIBY



The headstone and footstone for Esther Hannah Leiby were reset back in the bases. The stones had been just leaning against the wall before. The stone was also treated with D-2 biocide and is very readable now!



GEHR



The Gehr burial ground is located in Maxatawny Township near the Kutz burial ground. The fence had been rotting over the past few years. The before picture was taken by Jarusha Kutz Waggoner in 2015 when she was exploring Maxatawny Township and her roots. Keith Schaffer happened to drive by recently and noticed the new fence. We believe the owner of the home, or the tenant, put it up themselves and it looks really nice. This is the burial place of Balthaser Gehr who was said to be "a man of influence" in the Revolution. Thank you to the person responsible for their preservation efforts.

Finding Johannes Cronrath

BCAGP member, Neil Scheidt, spends his spare time climbing the Scheidt family tree, looking for those ancestors who seem to be hiding. Neil knew his great-great grandmother, Anna (nee Weil) Cronrath (b. April 12, 1807 d. October 21, 1891) was buried in Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church Cemetery in Dryville, but, he did not know where her husband Johannes Cronrath (b. March 30, 1799 and d. May 25, 1862) was buried.

The Cronraths, aka Krumrath, Conrath and Conrad, were long term residents of Rockland Township, being there as early as 1790. The homestead today is a 72 acre tract complete with a substantial stone home (built in 1824) and outbuildings. According to Anne Wagner, BCAGP's graveyards expert, the 72 acres also contains a Cronrath/Conrad graveyard. Unfortunately there is only one readable tombstone left but fortunately it is for Neil's missing Johannes.



A before view of the graveyard



An after view of the graveyard

Anxious to see and finally record the burial place of great-great-grandpa Johannes, Neil headed to Rockland Township. Armed with an approximate location based on BCAGP research and tax parcel maps, Neil found the 72 acre tract pretty quickly. The graveyard was not so easy to find. It wasn't far off the road, but was hidden behind and under much overgrowth, with only small portions of its stone wall visible.

Neil decided to take on the task of clearing out the weeds, scrub trees, debris and restoring the graveyard to at least a recognizable state. He called for volunteers and on Monday October 3, Neil, Les Rohrbach, Karla Hummel and Keith Schaffer met at the graveyard for what they thought was going to be a quick and easy clean up.

By the end of the day, all agreed they had seriously underestimated the task. The team persevered, doing an excellent job, which included relocating and resetting Johannes' tombstone. It had been found leaning against a wall, but now stands where it belongs opposite his footstone.



Johannes' tombstone at wall



Johannes' tombstone reset in place



Fallen wall to be repaired

Future plans for the Cronrath, approved by the BCAGP Board, will be to repair and restore the sections of the stone wall that have fallen to time.

By Betty J. Burdan
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 Photos by Neil Scheidt

SET IN STONE

WHEN THERE ARE NO STONES....

The Name "Potter's Field"

Two millennia ago, the term "potter's field" referred to land consisting of soil that was not suitable for agriculture. That was the land used by potters as a source for clay. "Potter's field" became forever linked to the graves of the unknown, unidentified, or indigent because of the Biblical reference in the New Testament. After the remorseful Judas returned his ill-gotten pieces of silver to the priests, he committed suicide. Since the money was thus tainted, there was a question of what should be done with it. The final result is found in Matthew 27:7, "So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners."

In the early 1900s, the National Retail Monument Dealers held a convention in Milwaukee. One of the speakers was a Mr. S. B. Duffield, who reminded his fellow tombstone makers,

"...bear in mind that the mistakes of the doctors are buried, while ours remain in view till eternity..."

Mr. S. B. Duffield in an address to the National Retail Monument Dealer's convention, Milwaukee

Unknowns in our burial grounds

BCAGP does not maintain the potter's fields of Berks (although members have assisted in finding lost grave marker numbers and other searches), but we do work with many graves of unknown persons. Some are marked by fieldstones that bear no inscriptions. Some may have once had wooden markers. Others are completely unmarked graves. Many of the small burial grounds of Berks have such sites. We simply do not know who these people were. Travelers? Neighbors? Servants? Unless we discover information in the form of old documents, we shall never know.

Are these graves?

In addition, many or most burial grounds have what appears to be "extra space" – unused plots. Ground penetrating radar would be ideal to prove the existence of used versus open plots, but at a cost of \$10,000 and up, plus training, THAT won't be happening soon! It would be wonderful though to be able to at least map every unmarked grave in these sites.

We use good old-fashioned dowsing to determine where there are graves. Fortunately, we have BCAGP 2nd VP Keith Schaffer who, in addition to being our superlative stone mason, is a Trustee of The American Society of Dowsers, Inc. , with us! When I was first introduced to dowsing, I was very, very skeptical. Let's face it, I'm an academic. If it isn't argued in academic literature, I find it dubious; BUT, after Keith put the dowsing rods in my hands & sent me out to experiment, I was amazed at the results and the accuracy! Join us for a cleanup and we'll happily give you a chance to try dowsing, too!

KARLA HUMMEL

BerksEpitaphs@gmail.com



RICKENBACH



The Rickenbach burial ground was the subject of an Eagle Scout project many years ago. The project ran a bit later than expected and the stones were repaired in weather that was a bit too cold and the repair didn't hold. Keith went back out and repaired the stones again and hopefully they will last a long time now. This is a small burial ground in need of a regular caretaker, located in Bern township along the railroad tracks on Cross Keys Road. The fence could use another coat of paint if anyone is up to the task.



SCHNEIDER

The gate that has been on the Schneider burial ground for decades had deteriorated to the point that it was no longer useable. Thanks to **Fred Fonesca** there is a new replicated gate to take its place! Its signature cross cut into the wooden slat was not left out. Fred did a fabulous job and we expect this to last a long time.

Coming in Spring, repair work on the rear wall will be begin. Because this is such a large cemetery we have been "piece-meal-ing" repairs as needed. We decided to do a full wall and go from there - perhaps one wall at a time.





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.

The next meeting of BCAGP will be February 19th at 2PM at the Oley Legion Hall. This will be the annual membership meeting. Nominations have been taken for Officers and Board positions to be voted on at the February annual membership meeting. Anyone interested in nominating a person can still do so up until the day of the meeting by contacting Karla Hummel at: BerksEpitaphs@gmail.com or by calling 610-987-9569

Reading Eagle, Reading, PA
May 29, 1879

George E. Schaeffer vs. Henry Geiss and Susanna Geiss, administrators of Catharine Gehr, deceased. Action to recover \$245.44 alleged to be due for providing meals for those attending the funeral of Catharine Gehr. Deceased was buried, according to the request which she made during her last sickness, in the family graveyard on her farm in Oley township. The plaintiff, who was tenant on the farm, furnished the funeral dinner, of which, according to the testimony, some 300 to 400 persons partook. About 100 horses were fed on the same occasion. Against plaintiff's claim was an offset of \$190 for rent due and taxes which the tenant, according to the lease, was required to pay. The jury rendered a verdict in favor of the plaintiff for \$50.44.





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 - 2017

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 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.

*Please check our website www.bcagp.org
for meetings times*

BCAGP

Berks County Association
for Graveyard Preservation



PO BOX 3707

READING PA 19606



WWW.BCAGP.ORG

Check our web site for meeting dates



BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

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"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.

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