

GRAVE HAPPENINGS



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Photos this issue

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The Hemmig/Kurtz burial ground in Kenhorst has captured the attention of our Archivist, Sean Brown. This orphaned graveyard nestled between homes and a community playground has not been cared for in many years. What little we have seen is hidden under the brush and trash. See page 7 for Sean's initial research into the history of this early family.



HOCH



We have authorized the expense to complete another wall at the Hoch Burial Ground in Fleetwood, thanks to funds we will be receiving from the Jacqueline Nein Trust. If you are a Hoch descendant, we need your help to fundraise for this costly restoration project! This wall will take up the bulk of our 2019 budget.

December 2nd: **Les Rohrbach, David Schlegel and Ron Smith** went out in the rain rather than cancel a work party for the 2nd time. They were able to clear the Jean Bertolet and the Guldin in Oley. The weather has not been helpful with graveyard work this year. We cannot get to every one, every year, but we try to at least get in enough to keep them from being overgrown to the point where you need chainsaws enter.



Finding the Jonathan Rickenbach Burial Lot

Betty J. Burdan



Finding a private graveyard may begin with word-of-mouth, an old newspaper article, the letters "GY" found on a 19th century Atlas map, or a clause in an old deed. Once found, the search for the current land owner or the owners of nearby tracts begins. When a graveyard appears as an exception in a deed it means that when the property was sold, the graveyard was not part of it. There may be a separate deed for it, but with no deed it becomes what we call an "orphan graveyard." Initially the families look after them, but descending generations move away, or grow smaller and smaller, until no one is left to be the caretaker.

The Jonathan Rickenbach Graveyard is just such a case. It was found on two 1860s Atlas maps. The Rickenbach homestead of 120 acres 16 perches was established along the banks of the Schuylkill River in 1772. By the year 1900, 5 generations of Rickenbachs had called it home. There was a 2-story stone dwelling and for 93 years a large barn stood nearby. Somewhere behind that barn was what Jonathan identified in his will as the Rickenbach burial lot, or the family graveyard.



The homestead remained in Rickenbach hands until 1923. Sold out of the family, it changed hands quickly and became ripe for development. With a small tract sold here and another there, the homestead acres dwindled. At least 3 separate deed chains have been found with the exception to the burial lot, making it difficult to identify exactly which of the smaller tracts it was actually on. Jonathan described it as enclosed by a fine stone wall, but gave no hint of how large it was, how long it had been there, or who was actually buried in it. Even though it was once part of the homestead and then excepted from many tracts, none of the meets and bounds mentioned a course by or around a graveyard.

John Rickenbach died June 20, 1855, leaving the homestead to his son Jonathan on condition Jonathan paid his siblings their share. Rev. T. T. Jaeger recorded burying John in a "private cemetery." John's wife Elizabeth died March of 1842. Both may be buried in this graveyard. Jonathan's first wife Maria (Phillips) died young at age 30 in December of 1840 and is buried at Gernant's Cemetery. Earl Rickenbach, not yet 2 years old and Cyrus Rickenbach, age 9, both sons of a Jonathan Rickenbach, died in 1845 and are not at Gernant's. Jonathan himself died 1882 and his second wife Anna died in 1902. They are buried at Gernant's Church Cemetery, which may have signaled the end using the burial lot for family burials.

The actual names of those who rest in this Rickenbach are lost to time, perhaps languishing in an old family Bible or family accounts book somewhere. No record has surfaced to date. The wall is gone as are any standing tombstones that may have been there. Tombstones described as Moravian style, which would be flat and flush with the ground surface, may still be there - covered by more than a century and a half of Mother Nature's compost.

In his will Jonathan said the burial lot shall remain forever be reserved and cared for by his heirs. The heirs provided a route of ingress, egress and regress to the burial lot both for visitation and to keep it in good repair. Those heirs were Jonathan's 11 surviving children. Five by his first wife Maria (Phillips): Rebecca married James Gambler; Levi married Caroline Ahrens; Elmira married John Haines; Emanuel; and the son Reuben who went west after the Civil War and was never heard from again. The children of his second wife Anna (Kistner): Aaron married an Amanda; Salome married Llewellyn Berndt; Sarah "Sallie" married Samuel Kurtz; Silas Martin married Mary Ringler; John Benton, married a Elizabeth (Boyer); and Edwin K. who married Ellen Roth.

If there are Rickenbach descendents out there somewhere who know about the family graveyard, we'd love to hear from you. It deserves to be well documented, if not located and restored.



Letter from Les



On November 4 we planned cleanups at the Klein, Reber, and Bright/ Brecht graveyards all in the Bernville area. The Stump graveyard was on our list in case we had extra time. It was an unusual day in that we were joined by Wayne Kline and Pat Reber, two descendants who each traveled more than 2 hours to join us. It is rare that a descendant takes part in a workday.



Pat's father was the last Reber owner of the land where her family graveyard is located. Wayne had ancestors buried in all three graveyards. Both had sprayed poison ivy in late summer so we did not have active poison to deal with.

Thanks to Wayne's earlier effort, the Klein graveyard did not require extensive work and we completed there in about one hour. The inside of the Reber graveyard was in similar condition, with moderate length grass to be whacked. However, as Pat had warned us, outside the walls more effort was needed. Particularly, 2 large cedar trees had been planted by her grandfather at the corners of the rear wall. The branches were covering the walls and vines were growing high into the cedars. Clearing this took the rest of the morning. As we were close to finishing, Dave said he would complete the job here so the rest of us took off for the Bright/Brecht graveyard to see what future efforts would be needed there.

On our way to the graveyard we met the landowner for the first time. Fortunate that we did, because the graveyard was hidden behind high poke weed and other 4 to 6 foot high growth making it almost invisible from the farm lane we were on. Plans to defer the work for another time were blasted away when our ladies declared they were not leaving till some work was done. Luckily the inside was not nearly as bad and the landowner joined in and worked with us. Still, we spent close to two hours here. We left with the graveyard clearly visible and quite presentable.

Right: Cleanup morning! Ron Smith, Dave Schlegel, Wayne Kline, Karla Hummel, Sean Brown, Les Rohrbach, Paul Schumann, and Pat Reber (missing from photo, Kelly Koop).



Then, to put an exclamation point on what was a bright, clear, colorful fall day, we stopped for a view from the top of a hill across much of what was once Bright/Brecht farmland and woodland to hills in the distance near Blue Marsh. Finally, the landowner took us across fields past the historic Bright/Brecht homestead. A great way to finish the day!

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.



November 8th our board was invited to attend an event at the Oley Fairgrounds sponsored by the Limekiln Camp of the P.O.S. of A. This Camp has been around since 1874, and as early as 1916 they had 330 members. Since membership has been declining, they made the painful decision to sell their building, liquidate their assets and merge with the St. Lawrence Camp.

*They invited 16 non-profit groups to a social event/program, where they distributed their remaining funds. BCAGP was one of those groups. Although they were focusing on groups serving OLEY, as this was their location, they included us as well as we work on more historic burial grounds in Oley than in the rest of the county. Each check was different and some groups received up to \$15,000. **Our check was for \$1,000.00**, which is a nice donation and will help us for the start of another year! Also invited was the Oley High FFA who is our partner each year for Day of Caring under the guidance of Jeremy Deysher. The Oley American Legion was also there, and they are the group that hosts our meetings at their meeting hall.*

Last year the St Lawrence Camp of the P.O.S. of A. adopted the Ritter and the Young/Kissling burial grounds and it has really helped to know that we don't have to worry about them as much. We did extensive wall rebuilding at the Ritter, but the grounds had no current caretaker. The P.O.S. of A. is NOT the same as the Sons of the American Revo-

*lution. I had that confused when I talked about their involvement in the past. They are the **Patriotic Order Sons of America**. It is really sad that an organization that is family-friendly and community-oriented had to close due to declining membership.*

The whole time I was sitting there, I wondered if that will be in our future with BCAGP. Our membership is a small, mostly senior-aged group of people and the amount of those that actively help is limited. We get excited when we find younger folks who show some interest because we need to involve young people for long-term continuation of the organization. The Limekiln Camp of P.O.S. of A. had a 145 year run! I remember when the local Jaycees folded and often think of what a loss that was to the community.

The Nein Trust, which is the primary source of funding for our larger projects, is getting lower and soon we will only be able to do some basic maintenance unless other funding sources are found. We also need to draw out the descendants of those buried to encourage them to fundraise and/or help with the grounds keeping.

*What we do can sort of be divided into categories. We have the larger, more costly work such as stone walls, fences, tree removal and tombstone repair. Then we have grounds keeping, tombstone cleaning, tombstone resetting and things like that. We also have the record keeping, the research and the communicating and sharing with those who are interested. And we now have a growing need for fundraising. But what we need the most is **MEMBERS** because when an organization has members, the rest will fall into place! RIP Camp 221 of Limekiln P.O.S. of A. Thank you for what you have done for the community and sharing with the community groups. Good luck to the members who are merging with the St Lawrence Camp.*



*Anne E Wagner, VP
awagner615@aol.com*

How Your DNA Can Help

To research another graveyard outside Berks County, I have been learning a new tool to put in the growing arsenal for research: genetics. DNA has become a growing tool in genealogy for the last decade. People are having their DNA analyzed and then using GEDmatch.com to compare their DNA to find distant relatives, re-connect and collaborate.

Questions arise in historic graveyards about who is related to whom and how. Sometimes there is a family rumor about genetic diseases. DNA can help answer that.

Using GEDmatch and cross-referencing with the National Center for Biotechnology Information at the U.S. National Library of Medicine, I can compare DNA from living persons and their cousins and then create a profile of ancestors who died 100+ years ago without ever digging them up. This is quite alluring and intensive, but I need DNA to perform the research.

For my research please, if you have ever had your DNA tested, let me know. If you are already on GEDmatch, please share with me your kit number and how you are related to persons in family graveyards.

I will keep all genetic and personal information strictly confidential and private. It will not be shared anywhere on-line. Personal data will be kept in a password-encrypted folder only available to authorized researchers.

If you have not had your DNA analyzed, please consider it. Kits are moderately priced.

Questions and comments always welcome.

Sean Brown

BCAGParchivist@gmail.com

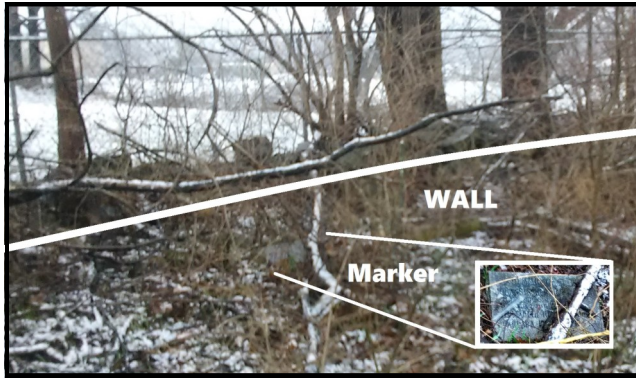


Happy Holidays. BCAGP is currently trying to gauge interest in working with families to assist them with applying for grants to the benefit of their family graveyards' preservation. If your family graveyard needs some work and you are interested in taking the lead to assist in applying for funds, BCAGP has members willing to advise and assist with the process. For details, please contact BCAGP board member Mike Angstadt at

kkiaserdrago@yahoo.com.

Hemmig/Kurtz

Sean Brown



The Hemmig/Kurtz is in very sad shape. This is what happens to a graveyard when no one is around to attend to it.

It is first mentioned in 1797 in a deed from Samuel and Catharine König to George Hill which excludes eight perches "which long since has been and still are kept for" a burying place. Samuel had inherited the land from his

father, also named Samuel. It is quite suggestive that while there is no Samuel König headstone recorded there, there is a footstone "S. K." without a headstone to match and the son is the first to exclude those eight perches; his mother Anna had died recently as well.

George Hill sold the land to John Bitting.

The younger Samuel's brother-in-law was Jacob Kurtz and owned the adjacent land. It was John Bitting and Jacob's grand-nephew, John Kurtz, that agreed to use the burying ground as a boundary between properties. Over the years it grew beyond its original eight perches--to about sixteen. It remained in the Kurtz Family until 1947. The border was never defined beyond the eight perches. Any later deeds are not covering the subsequent eight perches.



The heirs of Henry Kurtz sold the land to the Borough of Kenhorst for use as a public park. And it is a very nice park with a graveyard tucked into its corner.

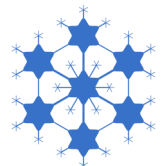
Sort of.

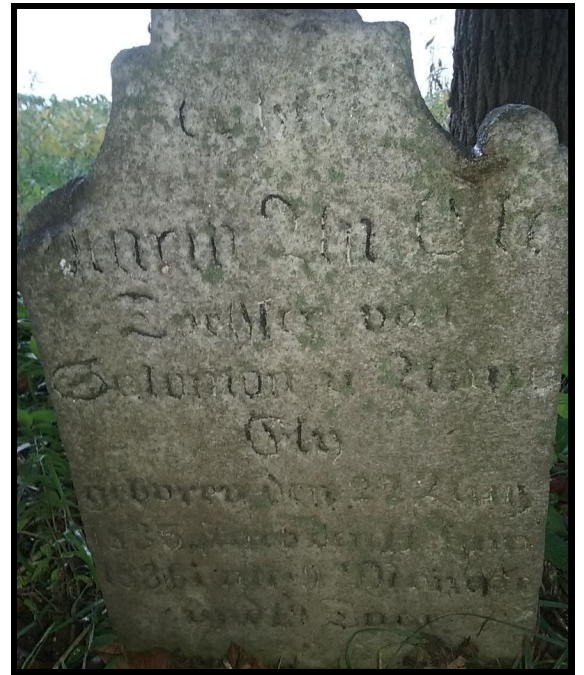
On the other side of the fence, the Saint Nicholas Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Cemetery is the property owner; their deeds show they clearly do not own the Hemmig/Kurtz parcel.

Surrounded by the crumbled remains of a wall, there is a headstone broken off at the ground. A marker placed by the Hemmig-Hoshouer Family is placed to the side, now hidden in a thicket of brambles. The neighbors are using the area as an alley, and refuse has been dumped there.

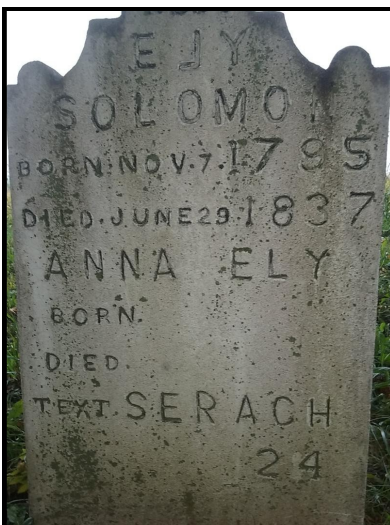
Around 1949, John H. Zeigler described it as "mostly full." We know of 31 persons actually buried in this graveyard (including the mysterious S. K.) Nine are children under 5. Some have been disinterred and reburied elsewhere.

Those interred include Adam Gramling who died in 1852 (whose will bequeathed \$50 to Isabella Zaurns once she turns 21 and everything else to his friends Catharine Hoyer and Sarah Daume (housekeeper) for as long as they live. George and Mary Moyer and their son George are among those buried here. Members of the Kurtz and Hemmig families, as well as Deiters. Zebulan Burkhard died 3-Apr-1827 at age 45, and that's all I've been able to confirm.





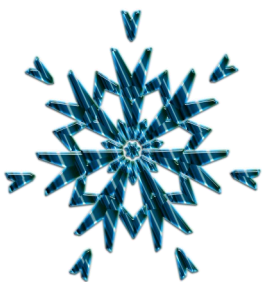
A quarter of a mile down an unpaved road, hidden in a copse of trees, the Ely burial ground isn't a place you'd easily stumble upon. With our time and efforts expended at numerous other sites, this graveyard hasn't been visited by BCAGP in quite some time. I found it nicely mowed though -- thanks to the continuing efforts of family members from **Dexter Auto LLC**, a nearby business, who've taken it upon themselves to adopt this site! The Ely Family were immigrants, German Quakers. Sadly, our records indicate that most tombstones in this burial ground were removed by a former property owner. Why!?!



Above left: The last line on the tombstone of Solomon Ely (1795-1823), whose wife Anna has no final inscription, says SERACH 24. This shows the Bible text from his funeral -- Sirach, Chapter 2, Verse 4. That reads, "Accept whatever happens to you. Even if you suffer humiliation, be patient."

Many historic tombstones bear information regarding such texts, often with the Old Testament book's name in Latin rather than German.

Karla Hummel



SET IN STONE

Perhaps the most common shape of tombstones - both head & foot - that we encounter here is the shouldered tablet, also called tripartite or three-lobed. These have a raised center with "shoulders" on either side. The size of the center and the outside riders are usually comparable, but some are more elongated or snubbed. Most shouldered tablets are set directly, and hence deeply, in the ground and are only 1 1/2" - 3" thick. These stones are easily broken at ground level, and we find both center arches and shoulders broken as well.

*Right: Stones at the **High/Hoch, Cumru**. Note that shoulders on the left-hand stone and stone in background are partially broken.*

*Far right: The unusually elongated shouldered headstone of Adam Jung in the **Young/Kissling, Exeter**.*



*Above: Curved headstones in the **Herbein, Oley**, have broken metal rods & are off their bases.*

There are simpler forms, standard or domed, having curved tops. These may be of the same thickness as the shouldered stones, but others are much thicker, in the range of 4" - 6". These are found either set directly into the ground, flat on a base, or with metal support rods inserted. For us, often thicker means better, as such stones are less likely to break at ground level; however, thicker means heavier and weight produces its own challenges to restoration or preservation.

Red sandstones were more likely to have been carved with curved tops and are thicker than local standard. They are also more likely to be inscribed with symbols, or completed in bas-relief.

We'll discuss flat-lying markers & obelisks in the next newsletter.

*Left: **Nein, Oley** showing both shouldered & simple curved tombstones, as well as shouldered footstones -- all common in BCAGP's purview.*



KARLA HUMMEL

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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.

Our membership years runs January to December. Dues for 2019 are now due. We appreciate your membership and support for what we do. We can't exist without your help!



Officers and the board will be elected at this meeting. Nominations for officers and the board can be made by emailing our Board Secretary, Karla Hummel, at BerksEpitaphs@gmail.com. Candidates for officers or board members must be members for a minimum of 6 months



Dave Reinhard, the superintendent at Berks Memorial Gardens took care of placing the new marker he personally took care of obtaining for Daniel Barnet. We are fairly certain that is the burial spot of Daniel based on the broken pieces matching up with a buried base. Big Thanks to Dave for taking care of this.

(See volume 13 issue 4 for more info on this)

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 - 2019

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





PO BOX 3707
READING PA 19606



WWW.BCAGP.ORG



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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