

BCAGP Rescues Sunken Grave at the Reber Cemetery

By Pat Reber

Photos courtesy of Marshall Lytle, Anne Wagner, Debbie Walker



Amelia K (Faust) Reber, who died in February 1903, had rested nearly a century in the Reber graveyard undisturbed until the earth over her grave collapsed this year. She had died young, at age 48, two years after burying two of her three children.

Katie May, 15, and Robert, 11, had died within 10 days of each other in April 1901 and are buried next to their mother. Was it flu or diphtheria or some other fatal illness which swept through families those days? We don't know. But the graveyards of Berks County tell these stories if you look closely enough.

Sometime this October, the earth over Amelia's grave gave way. The Lytles, current owners of the old Reber farm in Bernville, sent us a photo to alert the family and ask for guidance about how they could help. Soon after, my cousins Louise Knight and Debbie Walker, and Debbie's daughter-in-law Kate, sent me the same pictures of the hole.

The sinkhole needed professional evaluation, they noted, and BCAGP came to the rescue. On the day before All Hallows' Eve, BCAGP's Keith Schaffer and Anne Hummel Wagner took a

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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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Our newsletters are archived online on our website in full color

Contributors Staff/Photos this issue:

Meredith Goldey, Karla Hummel; Les Rohrbach; Keith Schaffer; Lara Thomas; Anne Wagner, Pat Reber, Gary Koenig

truckload of purchased dirt up to the graveyard. Keith could stand almost knee deep in the hole. He had been concerned that it could be the beginning of a channel leading down to the newly-rebuilt lower wall of the graveyard.

But when they began working, they found it was fortunately localized to the grave site.

They were intrigued that this grave, like others they've rescued, was lined with bricks.

"That's the first thing I noticed, and that goes along with our long-held theory that they lined the graves with brick," Anne texted me. "And it appears that there was slate on top probably protecting the wood of the coffin from ground water."

It appeared that the slate might have cracked in half and made a V, she wrote.

"That was quite bizarre to see down into the grave and to be able to see the brick and the slate so clearly," Anne added.

Keith had to fetch a second load of dirt to finish the project on Halloween day. The family is grateful to Keith and Anne and the BCAGP folks who supported this rescue. We are relieved that this collapse did not happen during July's re-dedication of the cemetery and its new walls built by Keith, when we had some 60 people walking through the graveyard.



And we are happy that Amelia's rest will no longer be disturbed. Her husband, Levi Reber (1859-1927), outlived her by 24 years and is buried on the other side of her from their children. Levi may have grown up on the farm, which was owned by successive Reber generations from 1770 to 1999.

The one surviving child of Amelia and Levi was Lizzie, who married Amendon Darius Strause in April 1903, just two months after her mother died. They had one son, who died at age 32 within a year of her husband's death. according to the invaluable research of the Berger Sisters on the website Strausstown Roots. Lizzie lived to age 97 and died in 1979, a widow of 43 years. She is buried in the Saint Thomas Cemetery in Bernville.

To all our readers and members, we wish you the best to come in the New Year and remind all that you don't have to be a member to make a donation to BCAGP as a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit!

Letter from Les

Les Rohrbach – President

Photo Credit Carol Aulenbach, Marie Maly and Michelle Lynch



On October 29, Lara Thomas and Karla Hummel, BCAGP officers, gave a presentation on 'Do No Harm' tombstone maintenance and repair. It was given under the auspices of the Longswamp Township Historical Society at the Christian Congregation Church and St Paul's Union Cemetery in Mertztown. The Historical Society did a very commendable job of spreading the word as individuals from about half a dozen cemeteries were present.

As mostly an observer I was impressed by the quality and depth of the presentation. Karla has been a member of BCAGP for over ten years. She was discovered wandering around a snow covered Lobachsville cemetery and invited to join BCAGP by a deceased former member who was taken by her graveyard interest during far from ideal conditions. Lara has been a member since 2019.



Together and individually they have taken the initiative to learn about tombstones and tombstone repair and maintenance. They have searched for information on the internet, found experts in the field, watched YouTube videos, and attended training sessions in and out of state. All of this has been done on their own and at their own expense. We at BCAGP hear that they were here or there, but the presentation they gave at Mertztown exposes the depth of the knowledge they have acquired which is reinforced when they get into the cemetery and skillfully demonstrate actual repairs.



Other members of BCAGP have seen the same abilities during our work trips. As we have tended to graveyards on a more regular basis and the cleanup effort needed has lessened, Lara's and Karla's concern for tombstones has diverted more focus onto tombstone straightening and repair. Often today we are not only cutting grass and cleaning up but picking out one or more tombstones to align, straighten, or repair. Tombstone repairs that we do require some combination of preliminary probing, careful digging,

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several people to lift, move, and clean the stone, time to prepare the mix to perform a repair, applying the mix, then appropriately supporting the fix until it has time to cure. Thus, each tombstone may be an effort all by itself.

Lara's and Karla's tombstone work also illustrates BCAGP's member driven dynamics. As volunteers, there are no orders coming from on top. Each of us individually pursues our interests and we support one another as we go about our graveyard activity.

Doing No Harm

Karla Hummel – Secretary



BCAGP is often contacted by individuals or other organizations who are interested in applying tested and proven methodologies to improve the conditions of their own family, community or church graveyards. Tombstone cleaning, resetting and general repair are frequently of interest. Since we are a 100% volunteer group, we obviously cannot provide in-person or hands-on demonstrations in response to each such request, but we do offer information and instruction by phone or email.

On October 29th, we expanded our outreach with the opportunity for anyone to join us for a presentation followed by a hands-on work session. At the invitation of the Longswamp Historical Society, led by President Marie Maly, we (Lara Thomas and I), supported by other members of BCAGP including our President, Les Rohrbach, met with interested participants at the Christian Congregation Church and St. Paul's Union Cemetery in Mertztown. According to Michelle Lynch of the Reading Eagle, who wrote a very comprehensive and informative article about the event, more than half of the attendees were associated with local church graveyards.



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Our theme was “Do No Harm” and covered the practices we have learned from training sessions with the Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities at Rutgers, the LimeWorks.us workshop center, Robert Mosko (a regional professional in conserving and restoring grave stones), and Jonathan Appell (a nationally recognized leader in tombstone preservation). After an hour’s discussion of stone types, reasons for deterioration and local commonalities, we all moved outside to the cemetery to identify those topics covered in our slide show. We walked several rows of the site to observe stone conditions such as sugaring and delamination, as well as damage including toppling of stones due to iron pins placed at the time of original placement. The initial activity was how to dig up, lift and reset a tombstone. We then facilitated the repair of a stone with broken iron pins and were joined by participants in repairing a broken stone. Participants had the opportunity to use shovels, probes and prybars to find and lift stones. A basic kit was shown, including hydraulic lime mortar, specialized epoxy, marble chips and dust, masonry hand tools, D/2 and Orvus. General hardware was presented emphasizing that resetting can usually be accomplished using equipment from your garage or cellar.

Only best practices were used and we emphasized what particularly not to do as well. As social media continues to frequently show hobbyists, veterans groups, genealogists and others working in graveyards, we often see methods used that are unsafe and damaging to the stones. This presentation aimed to provide both “Do No Harm” practices and the confidence to use them.

Join us in the field!

BCAGP has a good-sized membership base, but we will always value new hands in the graveyards. Just what is involved in cleanups that you might enjoy? Everyone simply assumes the job they are comfortable with!

- Using weedwhackers, loppers cut the vegetation back.
- We remove all of the trimmings to a pile outside the wall or load it for transport.
- We then examine stones and take inventory of needed repairs to stones or walls.
 - We conduct searches for broken pieces.
 - We clean the stones with D/2
 - Repair stones

Les will send out emails with full details and they will be also be posted to Facebook.

Please bring tools and work gloves with you.

Some suggested tools are: Weedwhackers, Loppers or Clippers, Rakes.

Veteran Focus – Lawrence Drescher

Lara Thomas – Secretary



VA Markers at Trexler

Those of you who follow us on social media or have already read Karla's article on the October presentation we did with the Longswamp Township Historical Society know that we spent some time in Longswamp Township and Mertztown this fall. I'll admit, I hadn't been to this part of the county much previously. While in the area, Marie Maly of the Historical Society took me to see the Trexler family burial ground, which is less than a mile away. St Paul's Cemetery Association kindly acts as caretaker making sure the grounds are well maintained and veteran flags are maintained, etc. Well, little did Marie or I know that would start me on trying to solve a mystery.

Located toward the front of the burial ground are four modern veteran markers provided by the Veteran's Administration. Unusually, they were not next to the original stones, but all in a row. I went to match them up and began my preoccupation with Lawrence Drescher.

One VA marker oddly had no dates. I could find the stones and dates for all the others. Conrad Drescher had a lovely marker with decorations and carved urn into the stone. I could see Conrad's son's stone nearby, also very expensive. So, it seemed like Lawrence was related... but poor? Did he have just a field stone? I checked and found no field stones. The next step was the computer to find out what I could about Lawrence.

Who were these Dreschers? Well, Anne Wagner and Karla Hummel can tell you the number of oddly spelled names this family has had. Frustrating! I texted them quite annoyingly. But I did find records.

Lawrence, also spelled Lorentz (Germanic), Larence, Lorens, and Lorenz, has had his family name morph over time. Drescher might be Droesser, Dresher, or Trescher. Conrad seems to have preferred Dröscher when shakily signing his name. The one time I found Lawrence's signature, he signed his name with an "x" meaning either he was too weak, or unable to write. Tax and Exoneration lists from the 1770s and 1780s consistently show Conrad Drescher/Drescher living next to Lawrence and not far from Phillip Drescher for many years. In fact, their property had the same number of acres and almost identical number of cattle, sheep and horses. They were taxed almost the same rate. Philip Drescher is recorded with almost three times as much property.

Church and legal records show that Johann Philip Droscher/Drescher and his wife Maria Charlotta immigrated from Germany and had a prosperous farm and two sons, Conrad and Lorentz. They also had a daughter, Anna Maria, who would later marry into the Kegley/Kögly/Voegle/Vögele/Fegely family. Remember, spelling is subjective and not at all standardized at this point of history. Anna Maria's son Peter would become a prominent man in the borough who ends up in the probate records and guardianship records of both Conrad and Lawrence. Conrad specifically calls him a friend. Peter signed his name as something approaching Köglie but on the SAME document the clerk spells Peter's name as Fegele.

In 1772, Lawrence marries Elisabeth Kögli. I do not know if this is the same Kögly family as his sister's new family, but this was a small community in the 1700s. Lawrence's family soon grows with two daughters. Lawrence and his wife act as baptismal sponsors for sister Anna Maria Fegely's newborn Peter in the summer of 1776. The Revolution is not far away.

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We can't tell exactly when, but records survive from Captain Charles Crouse's company under Major General Daniel Udree's 2nd Battalion. Both Conrad and Lawrence were paid for service from 1777 to 1778. Major General Udree and his men fought at the Battle of Brandywine. This key piece of information matches the Veteran's Burial, even though the burial card does not list Lawrence's date of birth or death. A review of the Pennsylvania Archives shows no other Lawrence's in Longswamp or the neighboring areas. This links the veteran Lawrence of the VA memorial to the family tree I was building.

The Battle of Brandywine, while only one day long, had more soldiers participating than any other battle of the Revolution. The British had already taken New York City and moved to take Philadelphia, then the capital of the 13 Colonies. General Howe's soldiers, in addition to Lt General von Knyphausen's Hessians were well disciplined and pushed the young Continental Army into retreat when they tried to stop the advance into Philadelphia. Philadelphia fell two weeks later. It must have seemed devastating to the Drescher family, especially as Phillip had come here from Germany to escape the turmoil of Europe's wars, poverty, and strife.

Lawrence's contributions do not end with his active service. The archives show Lawrence, Conrad, and their father Phillip paid extra taxes to support the war effort (Register of Property of the Inhabitants of Berks County for Raising the Supplies) in at least 1779. In 1781, Lawrence's aging father Phillip is recorded as at the rank of sergeant guarding the Hessians at the Reading prison camp.

Life after the Revolution went on. The 1790 Federal Census records for Longswamp are not alphabetical which makes it likely that they were compiled by location, traveling from home to home. Phillip Drescher is not amongst the names of the heads of household. But Lawrence, his brother Conrad, and their various sons-in-law are all in a row. Perhaps Phillip is living with one of his sons. Perhaps he has passed. There is no known marker for Phillip or his wife, nor probate record.

Lawrence begins to show up in church records again. No longer as a sponsor for baptism or witness of a marriage, but as having taken communion. The brothers are still inseparable; Conrad's name is also on the list. Sons and sons-in-law are also marked as present. The records are those of the Zion Lehigh Church, in Alburdis, about four miles away.

In 1817, Lawrence faces the death of his son Johannes. Perhaps this brings his own mortality to mind, for Lawrence records his own will, stating that he is weak of body but sound of mind. His brother Conrad is one of the witnesses. He leaves his Bible, clock, two beds, a stove, seven chairs, several pots, two cows, all the pewter, and all his books to his wife, Elizabeth. Everything else seems to go to his remaining son Samuel due to an agreement they made in 1811, the details of which are not listed but referred to in the will. No mention is made of any other heirs. Then, the will is probated on November 23rd, 1819. Lawrence has passed away.



Tombstone for Conrad Drescher at Trexler Burial Ground

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I gathered enough evidence to show that Conrad Drescher, son of Phillip, of the Trexler burial ground was a documented veteran and buried there with a substantial expensive marker. I documented evidence that he had a brother, Lawrence, son of Phillip, who was also a veteran and of similar financial means, but no marker at the Trexler. My next step was to look for alternative resting places.

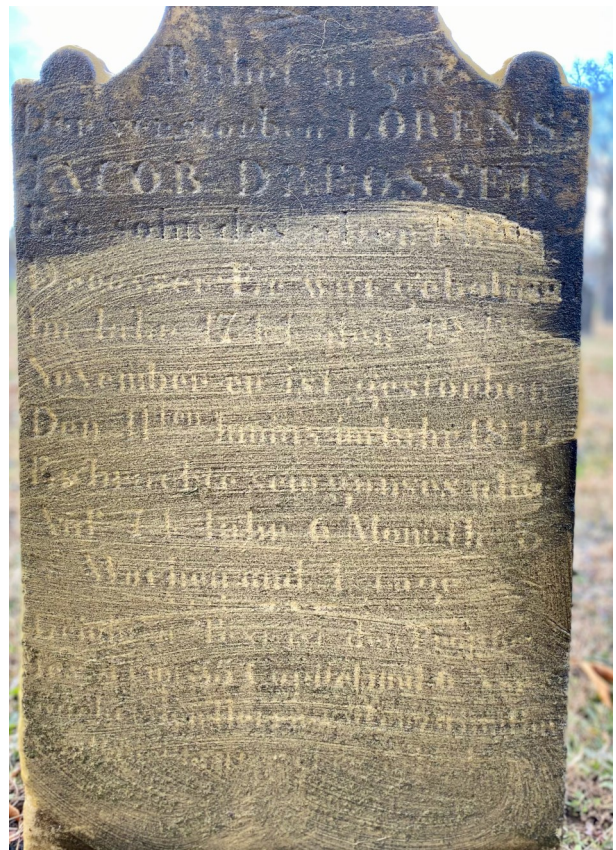
Other Drescher descendants believed he could be buried at Lehigh Zion in Alburtis. There is a Find a Grave entry for a Lorens Jacob at that cemetery but the stone was very difficult to read, and the picture was not at all clear. D/2, soft tampico brush, and water in hand (well, in the trunk of my car) I traveled to Lehigh Zion cemetery.

And there he was. "Here resting in God, the deceased LORENS JACOB DREOSSER a son of the alien Phillip, born in the year 1744 the 19th of November and died the 11th June 1818 having reached the age of 74 years, 6 months, 5 weeks and 1 day." There is wording under this but even with water, cleaning and waiting a bit on the D/2, I will have to return to be able to read the rest. Adjacent to the grave is daughter Elizabeth and her husband George Walbert, relationships also proven in the tree I compiled. A tombstone for "Elisabeth Drescher wife of Lorentz" is nearby. It all matched up. Here is the actual grave of the veteran Lawrence Drescher of no dates.

Lawrence is a lesson in the importance of proper record keeping, not making assumptions (even though the brothers were always together in life, they were not buried together) and taking the best care of the remaining graves we have. I will be working on getting the actual grave the recognition Lawrence deserves. His true grave is in Lehigh County, but his service, and the service and sacrifices of his family deserve proper recognition.



Lorens Jacob Dreosser stone before treatment with D2



Lorens Jacob Dreosser stone during treatment with D2

Various shots of the workdays completed this fall!
Thank you to all of our volunteers!



Kaufman in Oley



Nein



Hunter/Kemp in Oley



3 Descendants of Daniel Esterly



Deturk Shenkel in Oley

Frantz burial ground in Tulpehocken

In September 2022 the Frantz burial ground was hit by an uninsured motorist and suffered extensive damage to the wall and broke a tombstones.



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 2023 BCAGP Annual Meeting will take place at the Oley Legion Post 878 in Oley (corner of Legion Dr and Deturk Rd) on February 19th, 2023 at 2pm. The agenda will include the budget for the upcoming year and election of officers.

Current nominations for officers are as follows: Les Rohrbach as president, Gary Koenig as first vice president, Karla Hummel as second vice president, Paul Schumann as treasurer, and Lara Thomas as secretary. Additional nominations will be accepted at the meeting prior to the vote.

This meeting is open to the public.

Don't miss out!

Many people have mentioned that our emails are being sent to their Junk Mail or SPAM folders! Please take these steps to be sure that you are receiving our emails appropriately. If an email from Berks County Assn for Graveyard Preservation <bcagp@bcagp.org> is in your Junk mail or Spam folder; right mouse click and mark as "Not SPAM" or "Not Junk. Add Berks County Assn for Graveyard Preservation <bcagp@bcagp.org> to your trusted contact list.

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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 - 2023

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Save a tree! Please e-mail me the newsletter.

\$ _____ Individual Annual Membership, \$15

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

\$ _____ Municipality or Business Annual Membership, \$35

Additional Donation Earmarked for:

\$ _____ General Fund

\$ _____ Burial Ground

\$ _____ Municipality

\$ _____ Total Amount Enclosed

Date: _____

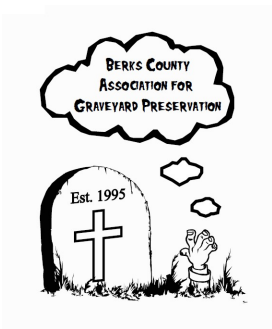
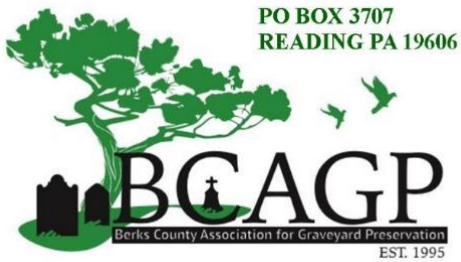
Mail Checks to:

BCAGP

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.



WWW.BCAGP.ORG

Check our web site for meeting dates and for internet edition newsletter archives in full color!

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