



Grave Happenings



BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

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BCAGP
Berks County Association
for Graveyard Preservation



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

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





Keim

Across from the Keim Homestead on Boyer Road is a small cemetery in need of repairs. Stay tuned as Keith Schaffer again works his magic to transform it to the way it would have looked many years ago. We noticed at the annual Day of Caring clean up two years ago that the rocks from the wall were starting to fall inside. We wanted to fix it all before it becomes a bigger project. You should see the finished project in the January 2016 Grave Happenings.



Barbara Griesemer.

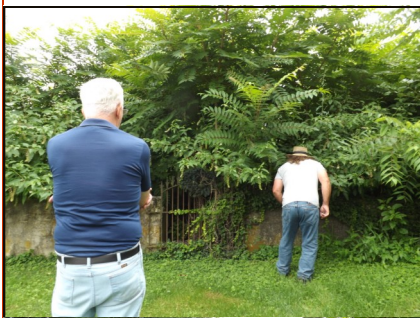
Wife of Valentine

Daughter of Jacob and Magdalena Keim

Sept. 12, 1751- Jan. 18, 1825

There are many burial grounds that do not have a regular caretaker. You don't need to wait for us to have a work party to help. If you have spare time and want to get some exercise keeping a burial ground maintained, there is always something to do. Some have family members that keep them in order, some have property owners who keep them in order. Many have occasional helpers but not regular, and many have absolutely no one that cares enough to even take down the weeds. We (BCAGP) do not own any of these.

They do not belong to us. We fill a void when needed but we don't, and can't, do it all. We try to keep accurate records of who owns the property that is the access to the burial ground, and which ones are taken care of and which ones are orphaned. So if you have one in mind you would like to "adopt" we can help guide you in making the connections you need for access. If you have none in mind, we can find one for you that either is your ancestors' or in your locality. We have some that have a caretaker now but that caretaker could use help and we can provide you with contact with that caretaker.



Our first visit to the Hoch burial ground in Richmond township left me speechless. It was clear this was not going to be an overnight job!



Between group clean ups and David Schlegel taking over maintenance, we can finally see what the inside holds. We did one stone cleaning treatment as well.

Something I found unusual in a family burial ground is that the graves of Benjamin and Susanna Hoch seem to have been cemented over.



Although for years the burial ground was overgrown to the point you couldn't get in it, I found it touching to see someone left flowers at the graves



of Benneville and Susan Hoch. The granite matching stones are certainly not the originals of the couple who died in 1883 and 1904.

Thanks to David and his efforts, someone could actually get in to place those flowers.

The cemetery is crumbling, and it needs a lot of work if it will survive the next century. Finding descendants or interested parties to work on fundraising is no easy task. The wreath on the gate and the flowers at the grave tell us there is someone out there.



Every burial ground I have been in has that certain grave that attracts my attention. In this burial ground it is Annie Hoch, whose stone is in almost perfect condition but laying flat on the ground. She was the daughter of Benneville and Susan Hoch and died at the age of 12, April 1, 1882.



According to the Reading Eagle, April 1, 1882, She died after being set on fire at the Stony Lane School, after volunteering to take out the ashes. Annie died a week later from her injuries.

*Anne Wagner
awagner615@aol.com*



LETTER FROM LES

A graveyard that has received attention from BCAGP is the Herman/Sassaman in Maxatawny township. I use that name because it is the name given to it in the book BCAGP published in 1999 on Berks County graveyards. It might just be called the Sassaman graveyard because the story is that the Herman's were disinterred and moved elsewhere. In a deed of 1937 the graveyard was excepted from the surrounding land. Betty found a descendant of these heirs in Minnesota this year.

A retaining wall was built/rebuilt in the 1990s, but BCAGP members active in that effort are gone. Since BCAGP resumed activity in the 2008-2010 time frame, this graveyard has received sporadic maintenance. It was an easy site to access being in a corner of property owned by a one time member of BCAGP. He did no farming on the three sides of the graveyard that he owned and used the land for storage.

Some large portions of table top tombstones laying outside the graveyard were obvious, but where they belonged was not. We found no records and no one we talked to could help us. Anne sought old pictures of the graveyard which we hoped would give insight, but no replies came in. We planned eventually to move these back inside the graveyard.

In the meantime, we had occasional discussions with the Sassaman Family Association, which has had an active interest in the graveyard for many years. Unfortunately, its leaders and active members are located out of state - Arkansas, Oklahoma, and elsewhere. We met with some members of the Association when they were in the area for a family reunion in July 2013. They expressed the desire to direct restoration efforts for the graveyard, but the lack of proximity is a hindrance, and except for cleanups that BCAGP did, no other work was done.

The situation changed dramatically in the spring of 2014 when the landowner died. Not long afterwards, one of our members visited the site and found a building and everything else removed. Instead, the graveyard was completely surrounded by crops with no access path. The new owners already owned the land along the 4th side of the graveyard.

BCAGP waited till crops were out, then had a work trip in early December to preserve what was there, especially what we knew was outside the graveyard. We found those tombstones moved and on a pile with other stones next to the graveyard. We did a cleanup, leveled ground, filled ground hog holes, and decided on locations to move the tombstones from the pile. Since we would need a monument mover to move the tombstones, we also planned to straighten an obelisk that is leaning inside the graveyard. Before searching for a monument mover, we contacted the landowners to get their approval. We were told winter crops were planted and that we could not enter.

Our intent is to contact the landowners again this fall to find a time when a monument mover will be allowed in to the site. If not, we will be doing what we can as the situation allows.



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.

Fetterholf/Bittenbender



A Sunday morning crew went out to tackle the Fetterholf/Bittenbender burial ground in Hereford Township. Despite hitting an underground yellow jacket nest that stopped inside work for a bit, the inside was cleared. Keith and David started at the entrance and gave us a way in, while Les and Paul attacked the outside perimeter. Once inside, Mike and his daughter Kathryn, and Karla worked on brush. Fred and Randi Fonseca came out for their first clean up despite Fred being in a leg cast! Fred is a Fetterholf descendant and was looking forward to helping. He plans to go back to work on his own. Kathryn and I worked on cleaning tombstones which

you can see on page 9. Betty Burdan did quite a bit of research on the deed and the burial ground and came up with some cool things including correspondence from 1972 between a Fetterholf family member and Raymond Keibach regarding the tombstones readings he did in 1941. At that time he only found 7 tombstones with inscriptions but believed there were 15-20 burials.



Doing the Deed

In the last issue, I covered the last of the terms in the Deeds Research Glossary I developed. I have also attempted to cover many of the most general questions that may crop up when doing research in any courthouse across the state and even the country. Certainly there are facts that I haven't uncovered, questions I haven't answered and there is still much to learn.

My best advice is to talk to the folks at your local recorder of deeds office, they can best answer your location specific questions. They will be happy to share their knowledge with you and likely give you much help with your research. The people I've encountered were very happy to explain how things work in their office, what their job is and advise me on how to find what I was looking for.

If anyone has any questions on text included in a deed or topics connected with deeds or deeds research, feel free to write and ask. I will see if I can find anything to help you out.

Betty J. Burdan <bjburdan@dejazzd.com>

The Berks Community Foundation manages funds that are set up by people for specific purposes. If you are looking to set up a trust for your family burial ground, this is a good route to follow. Other trust funds over the years have ended up lost and closed due to inactivity. We receive money every year from the Carrie F Knabb Trust towards maintenance and repairs, with the Schneider/Snyder being the priority. This year we received \$800.00. You can also add to the Carrie Knabb fund as well. The Berks Community Foundation manages small trusts so you can set one up without being a millionaire. Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation Fund of Berks County Community Foundation is another way to finance for longer term.

You can contact them at : Berks County Community Foundation

237 Court Street Reading PA 19604

610-685-2223

www.bccf.org

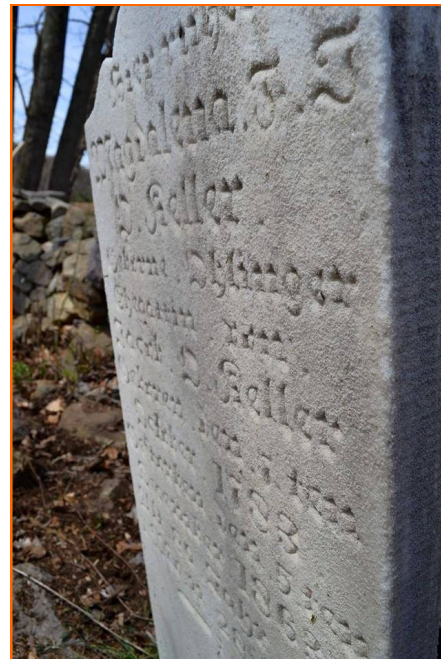
Set In Stone

Karla Hummel

In our last article we discussed the surprising amount of imported marble tombstones in local historic graveyards. Far more expectable is the use of limestone.

The United States Geological Survey recognizes over 40 units in Berks County, predominantly from the Triassic, Jurassic, Ordovician, and Cambrian Periods, with mind-bogglingly detailed descriptions of the stones' colors, textures, crystal patterns, angularities and conglomerates. What is obvious to even the casually curious eye is that the majority of the formations in Berks are composed of limestone, sandstone, dolomite, and/or shale. Of these, limestone was most often chosen for tombstones because it was readily available in white(ish) tones, sufficiently large slabs, and easily engraved.

I have little doubt that a geologist could take samples from nearly any tombstone and deduce which formation it came from. BCAGP volunteers, as we visit and work in local burial grounds, and especially as we clean stones, routinely recognize differences in the limestone markers. Some are visibly whiter while others have yellow or gray tones. Other



may have different textures, with noticeably larger granules or sediment. The edges of the stone may show layers or laminae. Each of these features has impact upon how the stone has weathered.

Color is an indicator of what minerals are embedded in the sediment, each of which may alter the stone's reaction to other conditions, such as acid rain. Texture involves both the size &/or shape of the sediment or crystals, and the density or compression of the material. Lightly touch a tombstone that has loosely compacted, large, granular pieces, and they will often crumble. A tightly compacted stone of fine grains will better withstand touch, wind, and other forces. And layers in the stone, when subjected to repeated freezing and thawing of moisture, will flake away – often in large pieces, removing valuable engraving from the epitaph.

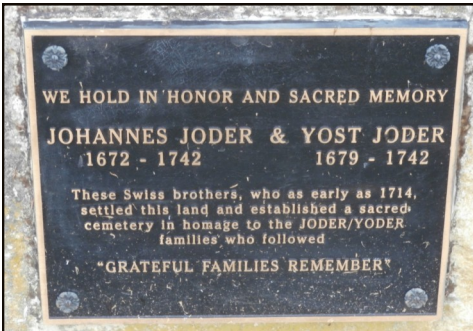


For detailed information about the geology of Berks County, visit the USGS Mineral Resources page at <http://mrdata.usgs.gov/geology/>





The neighbors in Bern Township near the Zion Cemetery put together a newsletter and brought neighbors together to work on the cemetery all through their own contributions. Phil Whitmoyer has been in contact with BCAGP over the years and has cared for this cemetery. Phil, along with Dr. Ken Lord, Charlie Albright, Ken Roberts, Larry Bernet and Matthew Lord, removed the old fence that didn't hold up well and replaced it with piers and a chain link barrier. This is a church cemetery where the church is no longer. We have many of these in Berks County and thankfully these neighbors care!



The Pleasantville Cemetery (A.K.A. Yoder Family Burial Ground) has been maintained by Yoder family members its whole existence. Although right in the middle of crops, there

is a nice access wide enough for a vehicle to get in if needed for maintenance. Although technically this is not a historic burial ground by PA standards because of more recent burials, it certainly is rich in history.



Tombstone cleaning



15 year old Kathryn Angstadt carefully cleans the tombstone with D-2 biocide in the Fetterhoff/Bittenbender burial ground. D-2 is a biocide that most preservationists recommend to safely clean tombstones. It does not work instantly but over time removes the biological growth that appears as black on the tombstones. Please never use soaps or bleach on tombstones. D-2 is used by the US Dept. Of Veterans Affairs has been using it for care of their stones. You can learn more here: <http://www.d2bio.com/>

LETTERS FROM THE HISTORICAL OF
LISSER - LIESER - LEESER FAMILY
 nicht dasz beste Land ? aber dasz beste Wasser ?
 RAYMOND E. KIEBACH
 R. D. 4
 READING, PENNA., 19606 U. S. A.
 7 October 1972.

Mrs. Gertrude Fetterolf,
 [Redacted Address]

Dear Mrs. Fetterolf:

This is in reply to your letter of Oct. 4th. as

The burial plot on the old Samuel Bittenbender farm/written by me in my note book at the time it was visited by me in May 1941 in company with a relative of mine who lived in Seisholzville, and who had grown up in the neighborhood.

How we got there and where it is located do not remember. The note book *Account*, says, "it is near Seisholzville and not far from the Berks-Lehigh County line."

The plot, as written in my note book, was 60 feet x 45 feet, enclosed by a stonewall that was in need of repairs. There seemed to have been 18-20 burials, but found only seven tombstones with inscriptions.

Before receiving your letter I had not known that it had been a Fetterolf farm, and only wrote what my relative told me as I am not a native of the vicinity.

It seems to me that the burial plot was on that portion of the farm that was willed to the son-in-law Christopher (Christoffel) Bittenbender.

If Mr. Clinton Moyer could not find the burial plot, maybe it isn't there any more. It is entirely legal to lay down the tombstones, and cover them up, and to fill in any depressions. Grass can then be grown on the plot, but it is not permitted to plant a garden or dig for a foundation for a building.

These are the tombstone inscriptions as I copied them at that time:

Christoffel, Sohn von Christoffel und Magdalena Bittenbender. Starb den 11 December 1797. Alt 2 Jahre, 8 Monat und 8 Tage.

memory of
 Denkmal für Christoffel Bittenbender, geboren den 1 August 1750, starb den 30 Juni 1835. Alt 84 Jahre, 10 Monat und 29 tage.

Daniel Bittenbender. Foot marker, "Schlaf sonst im stillen Grabe bis zum aufenstehungs Tage." (No tombstone found).

Daughter of
 Hier ruhet Elisabeth, Tochter von Jacob u. Susanna Bittenbender. Geboren den 23 Jan. 1834. Starb d. 13 Sept. 1835. Alt 1 Jahr, 7 mo. und 21 Tage (DB).

Son of
 Christoffel Bittenbender (OVER)

Fetterolf -2
 7 Oct 1972.

Hier ruhet Emmalinda, Tochter von David u. Elisabeth Bittenbender. Geboren den 5 Juli 1848. Gestorben d. 17 May 1850. Alt 1 Jahre, 10 Mo. und 12 Tage.

Daughter of
 Hier ruhet eine Tochter von Jacob u. Susanna Bittenbender. Geboren den 13 August 1814. Starb 7 Sept. 1814. Alt 3 Woche und 4 Tage.

Denkmal für Magdalena Bittenbender, Ehefrau des Christoffel Bittenbender, geboren den 6 März 1755, starb den 10 August 1831. Alt 76 Jahre, 5 Monat und 1 Tage.

Mr. Moyer mentions also about the Bittenbender ore mine. Of these mines I have no information or data. My knowledge consist of these mines just what I read in the history books. There are Bittenbenders living around Seisholzville and Huffs Church, it may be possible that they could give you a very detailed account of them, because they surely heard older members of the family talk about them. If my recollection is correct some of these mines were still in operation in the early 1900's.

Yours truly,
 Raymond E. Kiebach

I boxed out the address for privacy reasons. This is a letter from Raymond Kiebach who was known in Berks County for his tombstone inscriptions. In the early 1940's he went to as many cemeteries as he could, and recorded what stones he could read. This correspondence was shared with us by a Fetterolf Family member and included in the research by Betty Burdan on the Fetterhoff/Bittenbender burial ground.

The Weidner Burial Ground In Oley has been completely restored!



The final phase of the restoration is complete and it looks fabulous! Thank you to John Frantz who owns the property this sits upon for his help and co-operation. Please send your contributions marked for the Weidner on Bertolet Mill Road, so we can replenish the money spent, to work forward. There are still many more to go.

In July we received a \$750.00 grant from the Walmart Distribution Center In Pottsville! Thanks to our member **Patrick Hare** , who works there, we were guided to fill out the application, and we received the money. The grant application was to purchase a tripod hoist to assist in leveling and repairing tombstones and/or biocide for cleaning. We are currently investigating tripods. The ones we looked at were twice that amount, so we will be re-evaluating our options to see what is available.

We wish to express our condolences to the family of Betty Bennyhoff our longtime member who died in July. Betty's family listed BCAGP as who to contribute to in lieu of flowers and we thank them for thinking of us in their time of sadness. Betty was a dedicated researcher and genealogist.

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.

Our next meeting will be October 25th at the Oley Legion hall.



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*