



# GRAVE HAPPENINGS

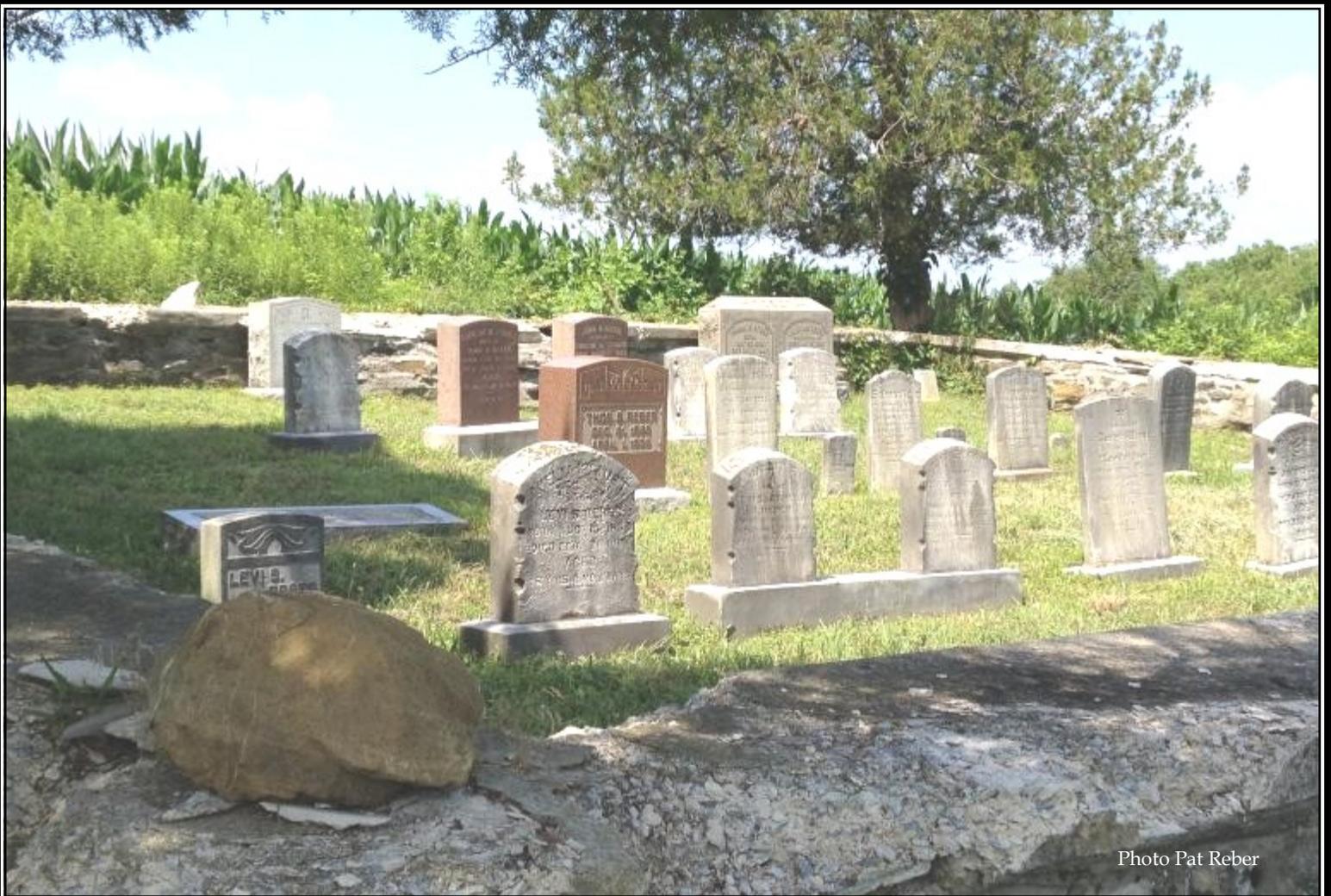


Photo Pat Reber

**Contributors Staff/Photos  
this issue**

- Donna Bailey**
- Betty Burdan**
- Karla Hummel**
- Les Rohrbach**
- Pat Reber**
- Keith Schaffer**
- Anne Wagner**



**Work has been progressing at the Reber burial ground in Penn Township. At this time funds have been raised for the rear and the adjoining portion of the entrance side. See page 2 for more, written by one of the last Reber descendants to have lived on the land, Pat Reber.**



Reber Cemetery gate no longer used

# REBER

## Pat Reber

Having lived the summers of our childhood on the **Reber farm**, my sister Barbara, brother Dean and I have a special connection to this burial spot. The farm was held by the family for 225 years, starting in 1763 when Valentin Reber (1742-1818) started assembling the land, parts of it from Thomas and Richard Penn. His son Johannes (1775-1860) and daughter-in law Salome (1776-1850) were the first to be buried in the Reber Cemetery, indicating that it was likely Johannes built the graveyard. The last burial was in 1942.



Half wall to portal

Until the last 15 years or so, the walls held up. But the uphill wall started sagging downhill, endangering some of the tombstones in the upper row.

Thanks to support from BCAGP and their amazingly skilled mason Keith Schaffer, the wall has been rescued. In June, Keith started dismantling the old wall, saving the few blocks of brown sandstone/quartz that were still usable and ferrying new limestone for the project. He finished in late September, working through searing heat, often under a tarp for shade.

Keith dug deep to secure the two levels. More of the wall shows inside the cemetery, while much less shows outside (Photo 2 shows the drop). This was a meticulous engineering task! He built another half wall around one corner halfway down to where the portal opens; and partway around the other corner. To ease the pressure of rainwater behind the uphill wall, Keith installed small PVC pipes at ground level perpendicular to the wall.



During my monthly trips up from Maryland to kill poison ivy, I watched Keith dig deep to increase stability, move stones like pieces of a puzzle, pound with his hammer to get just the right shape, run a line to keep things straight and search for just the right thickness of stone. It was a voyage of discovery, as he uncovered buried gravestones and puzzled over inscriptions.

The Reber family is deeply grateful to BCAGP for helping to rescue this last foothold we have on ancestral land, to which we are deeded perpetual access.

Photo left: Keith calls the pile of stone behind him "junk rock" that came out of the wall and is unusable.



Keith was always measuring and stringing new lines





Photo 1 shows view of the finished wall



Fitting the puzzle together



Photo 2 shows the two levels that Keith had to engineer to stabilize the wall



Photo taken 9/22/19 Keith Schaffer

## Letter from Les

2019 marks the return of BCAGP to the Reichert/Dum graveyard in Richmond township. It began its existence as a family burial ground for the Reicherts who were Catholic. Apparently the locale became something of a center for Catholic activity because in 1822 three acres were sold to the Roman Catholic Congregation of Richmond Township. A church was built and named St Henry's.



The graveyard also became known as St Henry's. The church was disbanded in the 1870s. Stones from the church were said to have been used to build the wall around the graveyard.

Responsibility for upkeep to the graveyard was given to the trustees of St Mary's Church in Hamburg. Through the decades that followed responsibility was moved about till it now resides with the Allentown Diocese. As Karla reported in 2014, we thought our efforts going forward would be limited because the Diocese had lost track of the site and agreed to resume maintenance.

This was after BCAGP had spent considerable time clearing the site, in particular tree of heaven and honeysuckle strewn with vines in 2010 and 2011. We checked on it again this year and discovered that no upkeep had been done for several years. Newspaper accounts of the Diocese's financial difficulties and its intent to promulgate substantial staff cuts suggests the appearance of its workers here is not likely.



We expect our springtime cleanup, which only covered about 30% of the large graveyard with the least amount of bushes and vines, will have to be followed by multiple trips this fall. Of interest to me will be to see how successful Karla's springtime efforts to kill the tree of heaven were. Once everything is cut to the ground, BCAGP will resume scheduling periodic cleanups to prevent a repeat of the current situation.

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.



***Membership** this year has been fabulous! We have had more members in 2019 than any year since this group's inception. Since we are all volunteers, and no one gets paid to administer this organization, we may not always get your financial acknowledgements out as quickly as we probably should. That does not mean we do not appreciate your support because we truly do.*

*You will notice that the membership form in the October newsletter is dated for 2020. This is why: We have a policy of our membership year running January thru December. It is too time consuming to try to come up with a system to process and track staggered memberships that come in at all times of the year. We notice that a lot of people do tend to join during fall, and to only let their annual membership run a month or two doesn't feel fair. So from October 1st on, that membership will be credited to 2020 rather than the current year.*

*The dues have not changed since 1995 and there is no intent to do so any time soon. We would rather more people join and support us at a lower price, and keep an eye on what we do and donate more if they can, when they like what they see!*

*People often wonder what they can do as members if they are not able to physically work on burial grounds. My answer to that is that you can help FIND people that CAN physically work on burial grounds with us. If you can do some research and track down those descendants who are able bodied and can get their*



*family members active, your help would be most appreciated.*

*If you can be a liaison to connect family members to BCAGP and keep them abreast of clean ups and fundraising issues that is just as valuable as working in the burial ground. Many of you have adult kids and grandkids that can actually do the work if they are led.*

*Obviously with a small group of active members, we cannot do more than a sampling of burial grounds each year. Our group clean ups are designed to get people started so they are comfortable on their own adopting a graveyard special to them. We also have a bit of fun and get some exercise in the process. It's a social activity, in a natural setting with like minded people. We welcome everyone!*

*We also have multiple people who have adopted burial grounds and can use help on a regular or semi-regular basis. If there is a burial ground you want to help with but do not want to take the lead, we can connect with you someone like Neil Thomas who takes care of the Fix/Gerber /Bitting or Irving Gring who takes care of the Barnhart/Adams. Both are closer to the City of Reading vs. the more rural ones where its often a hike to get into.*

*If your family is taking care of a Berks County historic burial ground and we have not had pictures or an update lately please let us know!*

*Anne Wagner  
VP BCAGP  
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Les Rohrbach and Anne Wagner were the guests of **George Meiser IX** on **The Passing Scene**, televised on BCTV. You can watch the replay on the website of BCTV in the archives. **The Passing Scene** is a monthly program and covers a wide array of history and related topics in Berks County. You can watch the program on your computer or on your TV if you are in the local viewing audience. The show airs at 9PM the first Wednesday of every month.



Archives are on the website at <https://www.bctv.org/>



## "THE PASSING SCENE"

News & Views of Old-Time  
Reading & Berks

<https://www.bctv.org/video/berks-county-association-for-graveyard-preservation-8-7-19/?>



**Gary Koenig** worked at the burial ground of his ancestors, located in Bern Township, on the property of Peacock Bridge Kennels. Helga Bensing, who is the property owner, had been caring for this as time permitted. Gary's father and mother cared for it for many years before his father's death. This is an example of fabulous co-operation! The Koenig burial ground has the most amazing hand carved stones.



# SET IN STONE

We often discuss our use of the biocide D/2 in cleaning tombstones. It is *THE* recognized, tested, accepted product for removal of biological growth whether those be lichen, mosses, molds or other forms. More about that – why we use it and our preferred methodologies (there are as many recommendations as there are professionals in the field) -- in future issues.

There are stones which simply cannot be fully cleaned with D/2 because, rather than hosting living organisms, the stones are just plain dirty. D/2 kills biological growth but it doesn't remove common grime. Fortunately we don't often have to deal with exceptional residue such as would be found in a highly industrial area; for example, a site near coal burning or long-term productive smokestacks.

So what does one do with crud, oily deposits and other schmutz? Remember the first rule of working with tombstones: **First Do No Harm**. Unwarranted

scrubbing or brushing does just that. Hence, cemetery historians, broad-based graveyard research groups and those responsible for national sites have experimented with various cleansers and cleaners, and we have followed their studies closely.

The best solution has proven to be one that is applied for several *very* diverse uses. It is called Orvus. If you have antique lace, doilies, antimacassars, or even historic stitched samplers, you may know Orvus as the go-to resource to safely cleanse and brighten such delicate linens. If you have horses, you may know the product as a paste that can be used as a very gentle equine shampoo, especially effective in whitening manes and tails.

Or, you can use it to clean tombstones!

BCAGP is just beginning to experiment with this product. I've used it quite successfully by applying some of the watered-down paste with a very, very light goat hair brush and rinsing with water. I've tried it on some stones that were previously successfully treated with D/2 and found that they lightened.

We'll keep you informed as we continue our own research!



Karla Hummel  
2nd VP BCAGP  
Berks Epitaphs@gmail.com

**Neil Thomas** is still looking for helpers at the Fix/ Gerber/ Bitting. It is too large for one person to keep up. Even if you are willing to occasionally help do a clean up, we can put you in touch! This is along the River Trail off RT. 10 near Queen City Diner. If you have an organization that might want to help even a one time clean up Neil can use your help!



It has been a decade since we have worked in the **Grim**. We will be having a work party October 20, 2019 at 9am, and invite you all to come help! If you have any questions please send a message or call Les Rohrbach. The approximate address is 81 Kern Road, Kutztown. Check with our Facebook for more details.



Below: Photos by Donna Bailey of Grim after clean up.



The Veteran flag was placed on gate due to the inaccessibility to the tombstone. Spotted Lantern Flies are gathered all over the trees.



Above: photos by Donna Bailey of the current condition.

## REST IN PEACE, OR NOT?

### BETTY J BURDAN



CYRUS WAS BORN IN 1849. RAISED IN BERKS COUNTY, HIS FATHER, ABRAHAM, WAS FIRST A SHOEMAKER THEN A FARMER. WHEN GROWN, CYRUS MARRIED JULIA AND THEY HAD THREE SONS. HE FOLLOWED HIS FATHER INTO FARMING, OWNING A LARGE DAIRY FARM IN BERN TOWNSHIP. BUT, CYRUS SUFFERED FROM ILL HEALTH AND BOUTS OF MELANCHOLIA. HE GAVE UP HIS LARGER FARM IN FAVOR OF A MUCH SMALLER ONE. TO ADD TO HIS TROUBLE, HE WAS BEING CHARGED UNDER THE PURE FOODS STATUTES WITH WATERING DOWN HIS MILK BEFORE IT WENT TO THE MILK DEALER. A HIRED HAND WAS READY TO TESTIFY THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY SEEN CYRUS DO JUST THAT.

A HEARING WAS SCHEDULED FOR 10:30 A.M., SEPTEMBER 7, 1905, TO DETERMINE THE FACTS. CYRUS DIDN'T MAKE IT TO THE HEARING. AT 8 A.M. THAT MORNING HE WENT TO THE BARN SUPPOSEDLY TO TEND TO HIS CHORES. AT 9:30 A.M. HIS SON WENT TO THE BARN TO JOIN HIM. THE SON FOUND CYRUS HANGING FROM A RAFTER IN THE BARN. HE WAS CUT DOWN, HELP WAS SUMMONED BUT IT WAS TOO LATE. CYRUS, AGE 59, DISTRAUGHT BY HIS TROUBLES, HAD TAKEN HIS OWN LIFE.

THE FUNERAL WAS SIMPLE, CONDUCTED FROM HIS HOUSE NEAR THE CACOOSING HOTEL. TRAINS WERE MET, SERVICES WERE HELD AND THE CORTEGE PROCEEDED TO THE BERN CHURCH CEMETERY WHERE CYRUS WAS LAID TO REST. HE DIED INTESTATE AND HIS WIDOW SOLD THEIR SMALL FARM AND MOVED IN WITH HER SECOND ELDEST SON, WHERE SHE REMAINED UNTIL HER DEATH ON NOVEMBER 6, 1944 AT THE AGE OF 94.

THE SETTLEMENT PAPERS ON CYRUS' ESTATE DECLARE \$30.00 WAS PAID TO B. AMMARELL FOR A PROPER TOMBSTONE WHILE ANOTHER \$5.50 WAS PAID TO A. D. MITCHELL IN JANUARY OF 1907 FOR INSTALLATION OF A TOMBSTONE. ON MARCH 2, 1907, AS WORKERS WERE DIGGING A FOUNDATION FOR A TOMBSTONE, AT OR NEAR CYRUS'S GRAVE, THEY HAD OCCASION TO EXCAVATE CYRUS' GRAVE. THE NATURE OF THEIR EXCAVATION OR WHY THEY DID IT WAS NOT REVEALED, BUT WHAT WAS REVEALED WAS THAT THEY FOUND THE CASKET AND THE BODY OF CYRUS WERE NOT IN THE GRAVE.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF CYRUS AND HIS CASKET WAS NEWS THAT TRAVELED FAR AND WIDE. NEWSPAPERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY CARRIED THE STORY. WHERE WAS CYRUS? GRAVE ROBBING WAS NOT UNHEARD OF IN 1907, BUT IT HAD BECOME RARE. WAS IT GHOULS WHO DUG HIM UP, STEALING THE CORPSE TO SELL FOR MEDICAL DISSECTION OR FOR OTHER CLANDESTINE PURPOSES? WAS IT THAT CYRUS HADN'T REALLY DIED AT ALL AND NO ONE WAS EVER BURIED IN A CASKET IN THE GRAVE DUG AT BERN CHURCH CEMETERY? OR COULD IT BE THAT CYRUS' UNHAPPY LIFE AND ENDING MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO REST IN PEACE.



# 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.

Next Meeting of the Board of BCAGP will be at the Oley Legion hall October 27 at 2PM. As always, members and interested public are invited to attend.



We welcome Lara Thomas on our board as our new Secretary!



Lara will be replacing Sean Brown as our secretary for the remainder of his term. Sean died shortly after being elected, and Lara has graciously offered and we accepted. As a new member, Lara has been getting up to speed quickly and we look forward to having her as part of our board!

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**BCAGP**  
Est. 1995

BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

# 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 - 2020

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

If you prefer to NOT receive a mailed copy of the newsletter, and only view it online please check here .

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](http://www.bcagp.org)  
for meetings times





PO BOX 3707  
READING PA 19606

[WWW.BCAGP.ORG](http://WWW.BCAGP.ORG)

## BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

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**Lara Thomas, Secretary 610-914-5534**

**David Schlegel \* Michael Angstadt \* Ed Gensemer \* Ron Smith \* Keith Schaffer**

Newsletter contact: Anne Wagner

"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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