

# Grave Happenings

APRIL 2011

BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION  
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## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Family burial grounds, rights and responsibilities
- Family Reunions
- Graveyard Updates

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for Graveyard Preservation



## THE FAMILY BURIAL GROUND, RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITIES SUBMITTED BY BETTY BURDAN

In the days prior to public cemeteries and in some cases before burial grounds were established by churches, there was the private family burial ground. Once established they became sacred places, entitled to reverence and respect. Family members and descendents, were not only buried there, but shared in the responsibility of caring for these sacred spaces.

Peter Rothermel, patriarch of the Rothermel clan in Maiden creek and Richmond Townships, made this clear by writing a burial permit which he recorded in the Berks County Recorder of Deeds office, saying "... Peter Rothermel by signing this indenture obligates himself and his heirs not to suffer or allow any other person or persons [to] bury or enter in or on the said [grave]yard if and unless by consent of both parties or their heirs of any of the said parties or their heirs, should [any] refuse or neglect to assist in repairing said Grave Yard then they shall forfeit all his or their right of burying in or on the said Grave Yard forever thereafter"

The heirs of Peter Rothermel, made certain no one would forget the Rothermel Burial Ground existed nor the family forget their responsibility to keep and care for the resting place of the ancestors. Upon Peter's death his heirs wrote specific instructions into the deed of transfer, reminding all of their right and responsibility saying "[the heirs]...do hereby reserve for themselves the sole right for burial on the graveyard ...and also for repairing and cutting weeds" and "the said graveyard is not to be removed by purchaser or subsequent owner."

Not all, and far too few, family burial grounds were documented it his way. As the decades passed, they were plowed under and forgotten. Those that remain often fall to neglect and disrepair as descendents moved away from the family homesteads. It is the mission of the Berks County Association of Graveyard Preservation, to locate and restore as many of these family burial grounds as is possible.

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## UPCOMING FAMILY REUNIONS

### Levan Family Reunion

The Levan Family Reunion will be held July 2011 in Numidia PA. The reunion is usually held the third Sunday in July. Please contact Ellis Adams—fradam59@comcast.net for more details if interested in attending.

### Nein Reunion

July 30th is the date of the Nein Family Reunion.

### Sassamen Reunion

Plans for a Sassamen Family Reunion, which will be held in Berks County, are underway for the year 2012. The reunion has been held in different states over the years, so this is a great opportunity for local descendants to attend a reunion without travel burdens.

### Schlegel Family Reunion

The Schlegel Family Reunion is scheduled for June 18, 2011 at 1:30pm. The location will be in Fleetwood, PA at Fleetwood Park.

## REICHARD /DUMM, RICHMOND TOWNSHIP

Clean-up involving brush burning and tree removal is in process at this location. Volunteers also recently cleaned tombstones and filled groundhog holes.



History: <sup>1</sup>The earliest confirmed interment, Michael Reichert, occurred in 1807. In 1822, Frances Hopp and Adam Reichert designated approximately 3 acres to the Catholic Congregation of Richmond Township indicating, “for the sole purpose of a chapel, school house, and burial ground”. <sup>2</sup>Afterwards, this site became the graveyard for parishioners at St. Henry’s Catholic Church until 1871. In 1872, at the direction of the Archbishop of Philadelphia, the land was sold to Jacob Koch.

“The deed specifies that the proceeds of the sale were to be for the use and benefit of St. Mary’s Hamburg and to erect a good and substantial wall around the graveyard of said church...and to keep the wall forever in repair”<sup>3</sup>

## Citations:

<sup>1</sup>Nein, Jacqueline B. Texter, Joan. Jimenez, Cythia.(1999). Epitaphs: Handbook of Historic Family Graveyards, Berks County PA Epitaphs: A Publication of the Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation. (2002, October). Volume 7.

<sup>2</sup>Berks Co. Deeds Vol 32 pp. 553-555

<sup>3</sup>Berks County Deeds Vol.237 p.604 and Fink, Leo G. (1936). Old Jesuit Trails in Penn’s Forest. pp.156-166. New York, New York.

Research and material for the above history provided by Edward H Quinter (1997).

## DETURK #2, OLEY TOWNSHIP

BCAGP has just completed rebuilding the wall at the DeTurk graveyard in Oley Township.



History: The DeTurks were Huguenots who settled in the Oley Valley in 1712. The DeTurk Homestead, including the ancillary house built in 1767 which was restored by the Historic Preservation Trust Of Berks County, is an example of early colonial architectural styles.<sup>4</sup>



The historic marker placed at the DeTurk Homestead, Oley Township (left).

Citation:

<sup>4</sup>Pendleton, Philip (1994). Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years: 1700-1775 Birdsboro PA. (Volume 28). Publication of the Pennsylvania German Society.

## KAUFFMAN, OLEY TOWNSHIP

We organized a work party Sunday March 13th in Oley at the Kauffman Graveyard. In addition to volunteers clearing this grave site of weeds, two trees needed to be removed to prevent damage to the wall and tombstones.



Volunteers cleared weeds at Kauffman graveyard (left)  
Damage to the wall surrounding the graveyard (below)

Authorization was granted to repair a section of the wall that is deteriorating. The wall is scheduled to be mended within the next few weeks. BCAGP is able to contribute the funding for one section of the wall to be fixed but there are other sections that need repair and contributions are needed.



## KUTZ, MAXATAWNY TOWNSHIP

BCAGP recently authorized the installation of a new fence for the Kutz graveyard. The new fence consists of locust posts and hardwood rails.



Other exciting news to report is the finding of James Alfred Martin Reifingers buried stone. Anne Wagner, BCAGP 2nd Vice President, uncovered the stone while resetting a tombstone at the Kutz graveyard just recently.



BCAGP looks forward to another Day of Caring scheduled for May 19th.

## OTHER GRAVEYARD ACTIVITY

- ✍ Weidener, Oley Township—Grass has now been planted
- ✍ Nein, Oley Township—General clean-up
- ✍ Herman/Sassamen, Maxatawny Township—General clean-up

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### OUR MISSION

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.



If not a current member, please join us while we continue the work begun by so many before us. Or if you do not wish to be a member at this time, but are interested in contributing support for a specific graveyard, please indicate that graveyard on the form below.

MEMBERSHIP FORM - 2011

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

Please check our website [www.bcagp.org](http://www.bcagp.org) for meetings times

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.

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