

Grave Happenings

BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

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Newsletter: contact Anne Wagner

WWW.BCAGP.ORG

Check our web site for meeting dates

PO BOX 3707
READING PA 19606

Special points of interest:

- Ohlinger
- Hechler Esterly
- DeTurk
- Sousley
- Hoch DeTurk Schenkel
- Wartenluft

BCAGP
Berks County Association
for Graveyard Preservation



Ohlinger



The Ohlinger graveyard was so grown over we couldn't even get in without a chainsaw and tools last year. The front wall was rebuilt this year and several trees that were not healthy were professionally removed before they did damage. There are two more walls totally on the ground and the left wall is partially standing. Without further contributions for this graveyard the restoration cannot continue.



Overgrown graveyard prior to our first work party

Peters

In 2010 we cleared out and refurbished the inside of the Peters Graveyard in Oley and funded the rebuilding of the rear wall. This year the property owners of the land that the Peters Burial ground sits upon, continued the work by contracting for more walls to be rebuilt. We thank the Pook family for their dedication to preserving the Peters family historic burial ground!



Levan



The stone is delivered for the caps which will be set later this month. That will complete the Levan (Oley) wall restoration. Please continue to send your checks if you are a LeVan Descendant.

Hechler Esterly



BEFORE



NOW

The graveyard has been cleared and the front wall is being repointed and repaired. This is a HUGE project. All four walls need repairs and there is still a lot of work to do inside. This is a costly project and we need contributions! See the transformation take place on Facebook. This is the burial ground of two Revolutionary war veterans and their families. Our goal is to put this back to as close to its original condition as possible. As far as we know 1976 was the last time this was cleaned up and worked on.



LETTER FROM LES

Our basic mission requires people who are willing to get into graveyards and get dirty. We need to contest Mother Nature continuously. For the past three years we have held group cleanups at several sites in the spring and at other sites in the fall. Usually the graveyards we address in this way have been neglected for a number of years and the focused attention of a larger group brings some degree of temporary control to the site. After the group effort finishes, someone has usually been able to return at least once in succeeding years to prevent conditions from becoming too bad.

Our recent growth in membership, though small, has brought some pleasant enhancements to this practice. Last year, new members asked for and were gladly given sites to maintain. We supported them with encouragement and supplies. In all cases, the graveyards remained more presentable through the year than would have otherwise been the case. Each volunteer confronted unique situations and developed personal goals for enhancing the site. It was surprising and rewarding to watch the developments.

Flowers were planted around the perimeter of the Nein graveyard and Johnson grass (It grows to 6 feet and is

difficult to kill) was removed. Probing at the Barnet/Peter graveyard yielded numerous finds of pieces of broken tombstones under-



ground, and significant portions of tombstones were able to be pieced together. At the Ritter graveyard, our volunteers chose to attack the stumps left from a 'sumac forest' and most have been removed. These sites will continue to be maintained this year. In addition, we will have volunteers to give focused attention to the Hoch/DeTurk/Schenkel graveyard in Oley township, the Hill graveyard in Earl township, and the Kauffman graveyard in Maiden-creek township.

We appreciate and thank our volunteers who have chosen to participate in our mission.

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.

"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 are granted provided they are printed in their entirety and that BCAGP's author is cited.

Sousley

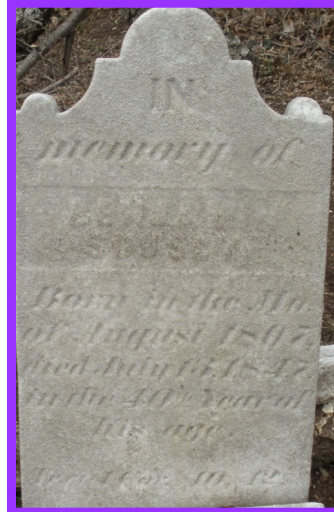
When Tom Clauser stumbled upon the tombstone of Benjamin Sousley in 1977, he would not have envisioned that in 2012 he would be taking part in preservation of the historic burial place near Hawk Mountain. The marble inscribed stone was covered in brambles and face down.



Through word of mouth that we were looking for someone that knew where the grave was located (thanks

Jim Brett) we found Tom. After Tom cleared the area so that the stone was visible, we met and walked the 15 minutes it takes to get to the spot.

The stone, broken and no longer set in the ground, is still very readable. Facing The Pinnacle, with Owls Head to the side, where an ancient apple orchard stood, Benjamin is said to have hung himself from an apple tree. It was there he was buried with a most spectacular view!



Benjamin was born August 1807 and died July 1847. He was 40 years old. According to various records he had at least 7 children. It is difficult to tell because various versions of names appear to be the same child. After Benjamin's death his wife,

Esther, married his uncle George Zettlemeyer.

What caused this young father to take his life is anyone's guess. This is an important part of Albany history and we will help Tom to preserve the site that has become dear to him. It is a marvelous spot for bird watching and enjoying nature on this State owned land. I believe Benjamin thought so too.



Anne Wagner is 2nd Vice President of BCAGP.

(awagner615@aol.com)

Please remember that most of the funding we are given is for specific graveyards and specific uses. We still need contributions for things like insurance, office supplies, newsletters, postage, accountant fees, and miscellaneous expenses that are not directly related to graveyard maintenance. Our volunteers have been using their own gas and much of their own equipment when going to work on graveyards. If you can't physically help, can you please send a check for general fund use?

Doing the Deed

When doing a title search, you will run into many words and phrases that are legal terms describing the state of the property. Two of these terms are testate and intestate. A person who dies leaving a last will and testament, naming an executor died testate. The person who dies without leaving a will is said to have died intestate.

In Berks County in the case of an intestate death, where there is real and personal property to dispose of, a representative, family member or even a creditor may file a petition in court to settle the estate. The petitioner informs the court of the death, identifies all legal heirs, lists the assets and debts, requests that a valuation be made of any real property in order to dispose of that real property. The petition will also ask the court to appoint a person to administer the estate. The administrator acts much as the executor would, except all activity must first be approved by the court.

The court then appoints "twelve good men" to view and value the real property and determine if it can be divided among the heirs without spoiling the whole. If the property can be divided, each of the heirs is asked to accept or reject parts of it. If the property cannot be divided, it is offered to each of the heirs who may wish to purchase the whole. The debts are then paid and this heir will pay the other heirs their rightful share of the balance and obtain a release from each heir, to complete their deed.

If none of the heirs accepts the tract as a whole or any divided parts, the court will order a sale of the property by public sale or vendue. The court sets a date of sale and the administrator is required to advertise the public sale according to law. The sale is conducted by the sheriff of the county and the heirs may accept or reject the highest bid. If the bid does not reach the estimated value, there may be a second sale or the heirs might seek a private buyer.

This process, of public sale, brings into play the "Sherriff's deed." These are deeds recorded in the Sheriff's Docket, and often not recorded in the Register of Deeds office. Deeds, issued by the Sherriff in this way will be cited in successive deeds, but the title searcher will need to locate that deed in the Sheriff's Docket to continue a title search and chain of title.

Berks County Recorder of Deeds, Fred Sheeler, is doing a great job putting their deed images on line. The Sheriff's Deeds are not yet on line, but a request to do so may help get them on line. Contact Sheriff Erick J. Weaknect, at <sheriff@countyofberks.com> to make that request.

Betty Burdan
bjburdan@dejazzd.com.

Betty is an accomplished genealogist and researcher, who maintains an extensive personal library of historical documents. We are pleased to have Betty on our board.

VETERAN HIGHLIGHT

BY KARLA HUMMEL

Colonel Daniel Hunter

Apr 8th is the 270th birthday of Daniel Hunter, whose gravesite along DeTurck Rd in Oley is tended annually on the Oley High School Day of Caring. Colonel Hunter's accomplishments in the 6 years harrowing years of 1776-82 were remarkable & substantial. He commanded the 1st Battalion (Berks East) with 8 companies, and became the area's Regimental Colonel. While seeing battle at both Trenton

and Brandywine, he also held the unenviable position of Militia Paymaster at a time when thousands of unpaid men returned from duty with only a slip of paper, signed by their commander, to document their earnings. A



true patriot, Hunter was a representative in the PA Provincial Congress, the Constitution Convention, and the General Assembly of PA. This Berks leader died in 1783, at the age of 41.



Karla Hummel is a BCAGP Board member, and former US ARMY Air Defense Artillery Officer

Hoch DeTurk Schenkel

Four trees mark the corners of the Hoch DeTurk Schenkel - the only high points in a large field of crops. While 12 inscribed stones are on record, only 9 were visible when Epitaphs was written. The site seems forlorn and isolated even though it is only a dozen or so yards from busy Route 662 in Oley.



In January, although the site was covered in sharp, clothes-snagging brambles, the dense green weeds that cover the ground in warm months were gone, so I had a rare view of the site—barren. But beneath brambles in the sunny center of the graveyard, I saw a rectangle of moss. Why *there*? Gently removing the moss revealed the answer: red sandstone! A full day of cautious excavation exposed the headstone, sunken straight down. Sadly, while there is decorative edging, roots, the inscription is gone.



Left: 6 pieces of newly discovered stones (the whiter piece is still dirt covered).

Right: A sandstone in the Keim graveyard, dated 1786, with an inset of a newly discovered Hoch De-turk Schenkel stone.



We have no record of these early stones!

Later, 6 broken pieces of sandstone were found. No words are visible, but the pattern clearly matches that of a stone in the Keim burial ground, so we estimate the date as ~1780-95—possibly those of the original landowner, Martin Schenkel, and his wife. Yet to be found is the stone of their child, Johannes.



Above: The stones of infants of Levi & Joseph Hoch again stand with those of their parents.

There were still 3 recorded stones missing. By visualizing a line from the headstone of mother, Elizabeth Hoch, to the newly reset—thanks to Keith Schaffer—red sandstone, I found the deeply inscribed headstone of her infant son, Joseph (1828, age 2 months, 8 days—noted incorrectly in Epitaphs) and Anne Wagner found that of Levi (1816, age 1 month). Each was lying flat, 6”-8” underground.

The most recent find, thanks to a groundhog hole, is a footstone reading SAH. The site includes 2 infants with those initials (Sarah Ann and Sarah Anna Hoch). By matching the style, size and location of the footstone, we determined it to be that of Sarah Ann (1840-41). The marble stones recorded in Epitaphs are now all in place.

By Karla Hummel

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Ritter graveyard (Exeter) has been adopted by John and Sharon Carmello. All the years of debris that has been accumulated has been hauled out by Les and Gail and the site looks wonderful!

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



May 10th the staff at the Exeter office of Keller-Williams will be working with us at the Schneider Graveyard in Oley for their annual volunteer day.

April 22nd at 2pm at the Oley Legion Hall is the next BCAGP Board of Directors meeting. Members and others are always welcome!

Are you a descendant of those buried in these forgotten family burial grounds? We can only do so much with the volunteers and resources we have. It is the responsibility of the family members to maintain their ancestral burial grounds. We can assist you but we can't do it all! Contact us if you have any concerns or questions and we will try to help you with a maintenance plan.

Remember there weren't perpetual care packages at the time our pioneers were buried on their land. Taking care of the family burial ground is a wonderful opportunity for a family reunion! The following are some tips to help get you started:

- ✓ **Make a facebook for your family burial ground to help contact other family members and to keep in touch to coordinate maintenance**
- ✓ **Take up a collection at your family reunion toward long term maintenance**
- ✓ **Split up family branches of your tree and take turns throughout the year on a schedule**
- ✓ **Maintain a good relationship with the current property owner of your ancestors' homestead**
- ✓ **Involve your children because the duty will be passed to them someday**
- ✓ **Consider leaving funds in your will in trust for**

maintaining the burial ground after you are gone.



Bud Kelchner with his son and grandson maintain the Kelchner burial ground



Nancy Graczyk and her extended Brecht-Bright family members

Wartzluft

The Wartzluft burial ground contains the graves of 3 family members: Daniel, Catharine and Jacob. It originally had stone walls, with lilacs lovingly placed around the graves. But for many years, it has been completely overgrown and extensively damaged, with headstones tilted and leaning, foot stones entirely missing, and the walls collapsed.

On March 31st our *initial* work party labored with chainsaws, shovels and axes to remove 8 truckloads of debris. The effort required to do so was substantial. After cutting down most of the invasive lilacs (whose roots had shifted and toppled the grave markers), loading the wood onto a volunteer's truck, hauling it to and unloading it in a designated area provided by Bell Trucking, work could begin on the stones.

There was one footstone visible, and another was found peaking out beneath a heavy root. A further search revealed a 3rd. Unfortunately, the stones were sunken over a foot deep, with roots wrapped tightly around them on all sides. Hand tools were used to dig out the heavily shale-laden soil and carefully cut through the tough roots — a several hour process. Then the 3 stones were reset in finely crushed limestone.

While the work completely thus far has been quite considerable (and *strenuous*), there is MUCH more to be accomplished. More shrub thinning is needed to even reach the walls! The headstones, sunken a foot or more, need to be reset— a job requiring several “durable” volunteers. The ground must be leveled and then the walls fully examined to determine their original construction. Then sufficient funds must be raised and

If you wish to donate to this restoration, please use/copy the attached form and designate the “Wartzluft”.



Above: **BEFORE**—shrubs fill the site

Below: The same locale **AFTER**



Abraham Deturk Burial ground (Deturk #2)



The completed wall (2010) is visible in the background of this photo of the DeTurk 2 burial ground. The restoration of the 2nd wall is beginning! More photos and information coming in our next issue.

Crudely carved fieldstones



Levan (Maxatawny Township)



Folk (Ruscombmanor)



Ohlinger (Ruscombmanor)

Often fieldstones were used to mark the graves as an economical solution. We can find carved or not carved in most historic burial grounds. Often they have sunk below the ground.



Kline Close (Exeter)

Koenig (Bern)



*Hagenbuch
(Albany)*

Watch for Sandstones in an upcoming issue!



Help Solve a Mystery

Reading Eagle, Reading, PA July 23, 1875 - Hamburg —On the farm of Daniel Nies, Upper Bern, an enclosed lot contains a number of graves. Who is interred here, no one seems to know, and the memory of the oldest inhabitant is lacking the elasticity to tell. That "hobgoblins," "spooks," and nocturnal visitors here assemble, we were in younger days informed.

The article here was in the July 23, 1875 Reading Eagle. It describes a burial ground in Upper Bern Township on the Daniel Nies farm. This farm was in a section of Upper Bern that later became Tilden Township. The burial ground pre-dates Daniel's ownership, as even the oldest inhabitant cannot recall who is buried there. This Daniel Nies had a wife named Magdalena and sons named Roseberry and Reuben. His

farm contained more than 200 acres, which was owned by Magdalena, the widow of Daniel, in 1886. It does not appear to be the Becker burial ground in Tilden as those headstones are clearly marked and easy to tell who is buried there. Where is this burial ground and who did it originally belong to?

Betty Burdan
bjburdan@dejazzd.com.



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.

JOIN OR DONATE TODAY!

If not a current member, please join us in preserving and maintaining our historic graveyards. 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. We also appreciate contributions to the general fund.

MEMBERSHIP FORM - 2012

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

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