

Grave Happenings

Spring

BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(EMAIL ADDRESSES ON THE WEBSITE)



LES ROHRBACH, PRESIDENT 610-323-1703
 ANNE WAGNER, VICE PRESIDENT 610-926-5036
 KEITH SCHAFFER, 2ND VICE PRESIDENT 610-689-5164
 PAUL SCHUMAN, TREASURER 484-529-8682
 KARLA HUMMEL, SECRETARY

Gail Hesser
 Ralph Lorah
 Betty Burdan

Ellis Adams
 Cynthia Jimenez

Newsletter contact: Anne Wagner

WWW.BCAGP.ORG

Check our web site for meeting dates

PO BOX 3707
 READING PA 19606

Contributors/Staff

Betty Burdan
 Karla Hummel
 Les Rohrbach
 Keith Schaffer
 Anne Wagner

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.



Letter from Les

For as obscure and lost old graveyards frequently are, their legal and financial heritage is just as murky. As we have mentioned previously, as deeds are researched, we sometimes find provisions excepting a graveyard itself from the surrounding land. Sometimes the owner of the graveyard is identified clearly, other times it is implied that a new owner will be identified in another deed, which may or may not have been executed, and may or may not have been recorded.

This can play out with family associations that no longer exist. We have discussed this when working on the Bertolet 1 and Hechler-Esterly graveyards. Likewise, we (meaning Betty Burdan) found an exception in a 1937 deed pertaining to the Herman-Sassaman graveyard in Maxatawny township.

This exception identified specific members of a family. Betty may expand on this story sometime, but my point is that she also, incredibly, found the only descendant from this deed exception living in St Paul, Minnesota, again demonstrating how time blurs ownership of a graveyard, not only to the local community, but to the actual owners themselves.

Another manner in which obscurity develops involves money set aside for maintenance. Just this year we have been in discussions with trusts set up for the Bernhard Adam and Fix/Gerber/Bitting graveyards in Reading. Fortunately, some conscientious employees at Wells Fargo are aware of the trusts and BCAGP, and have contacted us from time to time about funds that are available. Unfortunately, the amount of money in the trusts especially at today's interest rates, and trust restrictions limiting payouts to their earnings, reduce their benefits. Nevertheless, a landscaper will probably be able to be paid this year for 2 cleanups at Bernhard Adam, a large site. Also, Neil Thomas and the Odd fellows, who have done a marvelous job at Fix/Gerber/Bitting (visible from Route 422 near Lancaster Ave) for several years, will be reimbursed for some of their expenses incurred over the last 3 years.

BCAGP has been in discussions concerning another small trust to benefit the Hechler-Esterly graveyard. Trusteeship has been passed from one person to the next. Little was possible because the property owners prevented access for decades until a few years ago. The current trustee wishes to reimburse BCAGP for some of the expenses we have incurred at the site and terminate the trust. We hope to effect this transfer in March.

These are trusts we know about. Are there other trusts that have been lost or are being ignored? Remember when you pass a deserted old graveyard, not only might the graveyard be vanishing, but knowledge of its ownership, access, and money that may exist to keep it could also be passing away with it.



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.

The Red Stones

You'll find numerous references in BCAGP newsletters and photo captions to the biocide D-2 and how it cleans biological growth off even the most porous tombstones, leaving them more protected, readable and closer to their original white color. Yet, in a few graveyards, you'll find carefully engraved stones that nothing will ever whiten. In fact, when cleaned, they often darken. These are the red sandstones. They stand out in any setting because of their color - but even more so when you realize that most are fully inscribed on BOTH sides. Even more interesting are the inscriptions themselves, at least some of which seem to have been dictated by the deceased as instructions to their kin!



The 1909 "Soil Survey of Berks County, Pennsylvania" (Geib, Worthern, et al) described, in more detail than I'll ever willingly re-read, how the southern portion of the county has bedrock of "New Red sandstone" from the Triassic Era. That formation provides stone, soils and conglomerates of a "deep Indian red," much of which has metamorphosed into a weathered gray atop the well-known limestone base of the area. Thus, we know there had been a local supply available for use in these heavily inscribed tombstones.

On a typical headstone there are dozens of characters; but on the red stones, we find hundreds. If you plan to chisel ornate figures such as the German *Gebrochene Schrift* (broken script) which includes the lettering that we now call *Fraaktur*, sandstone offers a clear advantage in that it is neither dense nor hard. Hence, it was the choice for those whose tombstones would carry not only the dates of life's events, but also a personal message from the departed.



Schadel stone along the road
in Maxatawny Township

While it was easier to carve, there was an obvious disadvantage to using the red sandstone. It is sedimentary rock: it erodes faster and more easily than most other stones we find in cemeteries and burial grounds. I have found several sites where the sides of the tombstones which face into the prevailing wind have been wiped nearly clean and are impossible to read, yet the other side of each stone still displays the original text. The red stones at the Hoch DeTurk Schenkel graveyard spent decades underground and their messages have been stripped from the surfaces by the encroaching roots of trees and even small shrubs. I have also found references that churches, such as Zion's (Spies) Evangelical Reformed Church Cemetery in Alsace Township, recorded and removed the red sandstone markers in the early-mid 20th century because they were illegible and crumbling.

It is evident that we need to record the red sandstones in Berks historic graveyards! We have the data (names & dates), but we must read and record the complete story left for us on the red sandstones - and we have the perfect place to start, the Wiedner.

Karla Summel

As I see it

Betty Burdan

In the years I have been privilege to the workings of the Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation (BCAGP) I have learned much. I learned that while it looks like we are a relatively rich little organization by many standards, with tens of thousands of dollars in the kitty, we are actually not so rich. At BCAGP, there are two kinds of funds held by the organization. There is the Restricted Use Funds and the General Operating Fund.

The Restricted Use Fund is just that, restricted. Thanks to the generosity and forethought of Jackie Nein, there is trust money available to restore and preserve graveyards, through the Nein Trust. In addition to the Nein Trust there are those thoughtful and generous people, who have an interest in specific graveyards. It might be their ancestral family graveyard, one that is in their backyard or near it, or one they have fond memories of. Whatever their reason, they have contributed funds earmarked for a specific graveyard. However, these funds are restricted to use in preservation and restoration only.

The General Operating Fund is used to maintain and promote the organization and generate new members. Those members become the volunteers who provide the labor to do the work we do. In order to continue that work BCAGP must continue paying operating expenses from a source other than the funds restricted to graveyards.

With so much work to be done in the graveyards, we have had little time left over to conduct fund raisers. We welcome anyone with ideas and time to conduct fund raisers, but our current membership is kept busy with the work of restoration and preservation. We rely on membership fees and the generosity of those who contribute to our General Operating Fund, and not the restricted funds, to cover operating expenses.

When BCAGP decides which graveyard will become their next project they take many factors into consideration. Need is top on the list. Extent and cost of work needed comes next. Available volunteers, the skills they offer, an interest by third parties is a part of the equation.

For the most part, work is done by volunteers but, some repairs need to be done by professionals and can become very costly. Much of the equipment used in cleaning up a graveyard actually belongs to the members. BCAGP has a very small amount of equipment they maintain, but the rest belongs to the members, who pay for their own gas and maintenance. To cover the restoration and preservation expenses, we use whatever funds which may have been contributed specifically for that graveyard, if any were, and the balance comes from Nein Trust.

Jackie Nein, the founder of the original organization, who established the Nein Trust, did so because she wanted to see this work continue after she was gone. We at BCAGP today wish to continue doing that work. We can only continue if we pay the operating costs of BCAGP. Those operating costs include a small cost to conduct meetings, but primarily to keep the members, interested parties and the public informed, via our newsletter and presentations. In this way we hope to grow the membership and volunteer base, to get more work done.

Please consider joining BCAGP as an individual member, family member or business member. Membership is open to anyone, anywhere and we have many out of county and even out of state members. Support our efforts with whatever contribution you may be able to make to the General Operating Fund, or to a graveyard you may have an interest in. There are still many graveyards that need attention. We need your help to continue the work of respecting our Berks County ancestors and forefathers.



The **Kauffman** burial ground in Maiden creek needed some gate work. The posts were rotting and the gate was damaged. This gate as you can imagine was very heavy. Not too many places do this work, so it took a while, but the gate was removed, repaired, sanded and painted. New posts were fabricated out of iron rather than wood and it was all re hung.



Weidner



Over the Winter, Keith put up a greenhouse with heat, so he could work all winter. John Frantz took the picture below.



The Message "Hidden" on the Back

In setting priorities for reading and recording all the information from the red sandstone monuments, serendipity smiled on us, because the Weidner graveyard in Oley has 2 such stones that we've never been able to read – until now. The backs of these 2 stones are normally just a few inches from the wall so we cannot access them, but with that wall of the Weidner torn down for repairs, we have!

These are the headstones of Tichicus Weidner (1721 – 1799) and his wife Anna Maria (1732 – 1791), & the back of each is completely engraved!

Although Anna Maria's headstone is clean and exceptionally well preserved, it has proven to be rather difficult to decipher because of spelling, syntax, punctuation, and changes in word meanings. The definitive translation eludes us, a literal recording would be:

Du ich will euch dann befehlen: Der sich euer vater
Do I want you as I command: That he your father

nent der die thränen Pfligt zu Zählen, Dem sein hertz
expresses that the tears Cares in Number, That his heart

vor liebe Brent deine der wird euch in eurem leyd.
from love burns yours that shall you in your suffering.

Trosten auch zu seiner zeit, An den ort, da ich bin
Consolation also at his time, At the place, that I am

führe und mit höchster Klarheit zu zieren
carried and with highest clarity to adorn.

Remove the verbiage of old Germanic grammar and we are left with a concerned wife's final message to her children. In summation – This is what I expect of you:

Your father's tears are shed because his heart is broken and he shares your suffering and loss. Comfort each other. Find consolation in that here and now, I am being elevated to a state of grace.

The translation of Tichicus' stone, which was once broken in half, is more straightforward even though 2 full lines are lost due to the old repair. Despite that, we can see he was a pious man who sought to comfort his family, beginning with "Klagt nicht ihr meine Lieben und thut euch nicht betrüben dann ich geh euch mir vor," meaning "Lament not my dear ones, and do not grieve that I have gone before you."

After the repaired section, Tichicus ends with "wird ich auferstehn wie Shriftend von den Bunden des Todes ist erstanden als dann will ich euch wieder sehen" expressing his belief that "I will be resurrected, as it is written, when the bondage of death is lifted, then I will see you again."

When Keith rebuilds the wall, these stones' messages will again be hidden.

I'm certainly no expert in old German with its random spellings, different nuances, and stilted syntax, and would welcome assistance from any of you with recording & translating these and all the other Berks red sandstones!



Karla Summel

Readers Asked



Bittenbender
Hereford Township



Tombstone inscriptions as recorded in Epitaphs

- Bittenbender
 Christophe August 1, 1750-June 30, 1835 ages 84 1029
 Magdalena w/o Christophe March 6, 1755-August 10, 1831 aged 76 5 4
 Elisabeth d/o Jacob & Susanna Jan. 23, 1834-Sept. 13, 1835 aged 1 721
 Emma Linda d/o David & Elizabeth July 5, 1848-May 17, 1850 aged 1 10 12
- Found in previous reading, no longer standing:
 Bittenbender
 Christoffe s/ o Christophe & Magdalena d. Dec. 11, 1797 aged 2 8 8
 d/o Jacob & Susanna August 13, 1814-Sept. 7, 1814 aged 24 days
 Daniel (no dates) "Sleep then in quiet grave until the Resurrection Day"



Peter Federolf, the Immigrant of this family, bought the land in Herford Township. According to his will he left it to his eldest son Johannes and his son-in-law Christopher Bittenbender.

Peter's wife was Anna Rothermel. The burial ground is large with only a few tombstones standing. We have been in there for a couple cleanups over the years but have not done other work as of yet. At one time, the Hereford Township Historical Society approached us about working on it and they organized a scout troop to clean it up, but nothing substantial has happened yet. There is a Rothermel Family Association that is linked to this burial ground as well as 3-4 others in Berks County. Peter and Anna are said to be buried there. Peter and Anna had a son Peter and he is thought to be buried there as well as his family. This burial ground is noted for the interesting stone work and pattern. The back corners are angled as you can see from the picture above.

Doing the Deed

Determining the actual size of a tract that is being sold in a deed can be a complex proposition, leading you down a winding path. When a deed is written for a tract of land, there is not always a new survey made of the tract. The person writing the deed will simply repeat the description from the previous deed. That description may go back to a deed from many deeds before it. The writer of the previous deeds may not give all the meets and bounds, directions and distances, but will only give a list of property owners that bound the tract on each side.

If at any time part of the original tract was sold off, there will be an exception written into the deed describing what was sold. These are often called "out-lots." The description of these out-lots may contain the date, the grantor, the grantee, the size and the deed book and page, where that deed was recorded. If anyone of the parts is not included, like the size of the out-lot, you need to go to that deed to discover how much of the land was sold to determine how much is actually left.

The out-lot deed will describe the tract as "part of" a larger tract, reciting the original deed. To determine the current size of tract, where parts have been sold, you have to do the math. An original deed for a tract of 150 acres, where there were 3 tracts of 10 acres each sold, will now be only 120 acres, even though the description of the tract being sold still says it is a 150 acre tract. Sometimes the size of the out-lot is not in the original deed and not in the out-lot deed. In that case you will have to look for a deed where the grantee in the out-lot deed sold the tract and hope they included a size there.

Following the path of deeds to determine the precise size of what is being sold is not for the faint of heart. If you are buying a tract, it requires a professional title search company to get the job done, which is required when obtaining a mortgage. The title search company will follow the chain of deeds and hopefully create a current description of the tract. This is important to you and the tax assessment office to make certain you are paying taxes on what you actually own. This description may or may not be written into any new deeds, but it certainly should be.

For genealogical or historical purposes, you can continue on your own. Always document your path in detail. Note the deed book, page number, grantor, grantee, size and exceptions in chronological order. Read and re-read the deeds in the chain of deeds for any details you may have missed. In the end you may learn that the little 40 acre farm your grandfather owned, was once a grand plantation of 500 acres owned by an ancestors. It may have had a grand mansion house on it, tenant houses, and any number of mills, blacksmith shops, places of business or even the family graveyard.

Deed Glossary Terms

Probate Court - The court that administers the proper distribution of the assets of a decedent, adjudicates the validity of wills, enforces the provisions of a valid will, prevents malfeasance by executors and administrators of estates, and provides for the equitable distribution of the assets of persons who die intestate, by granting a letters of administration giving judicial approval to the personal representative to administer matters of the estate.

Public Vendue - It is a legally advertised public sale, conducted for the purpose of selling or disposing of the real and/or personal property of an individual. The Orphan's Court often issues an order for public sale of the real estate of a deceased persons who died intestate, in order to settle the estate among the heirs and/or debtors.

Quiet Title - an equitable action to determine all adverse claims to a property. It is a suit in equity to obtain a final determination as to the title of a specific piece of property. The court will determine the ultimate right of ownership.

Quitclaim - a deed which conveys or declares only the right, title of interest which the grantor has, which does not require the grantor to pass a good title. It transfers any interest the grantor of the quitclaim may have on the tract of land to the grantee.

Release - The act or written document whereby, some claim, right or interest is given up to the person against whom the claim, right, or interest could have been enforced.

Recitation - A reference to a source of legal authority, used in referring to a previous deed, prior owners, prior date or dates of transfer, location of record, often prefaced with "being the same as" or "whereas." The citation is where you will find the previous deed information to use to search for that deed. There will not always be a citation, in that case you will have to rely on the Index of Deeds to find the Volume and page number.

Release of Dower - legal documentation declaring that the dower on any tract of land has been satisfied and therefore no longer in effect and thereafter shall not be written as an exception in future deeds.

Residue - Remainder of land or funds which remain upon the settlement of an estate, after all debts have been paid and directives in a will satisfied.

Right of Way - An easement for passage or access upon or across the lands of another.

Betty Burdan
bjburdan@dejazzd.com

When there is an organization that consists of volunteers, many formalities such as showing gratitude seem to be missed from time to time.

We don't have a paid staff to make sure every dot is dotted and J is crossed. We have many people who from time to time do what they can to help, and we also have people who devote a considerable time to the mission. People don't "check in" with us and they certainly are not obligated to do so, but there are many who are out there helping in either a large way or a small way. There are some burial grounds that several families have adopted, and are cut by whoever gets there first when it needs it, and some that have no one. Some are tended by property owners, some are tended by family members, and some are tended by people who just want to help.



Then we have others who have devoted a considerable part of their life to this cause. We recently in a "secret" meeting of the board, decided to

award our Nelson Farr Award, to three that fit this category. We haven't given it for a few years, and we thought it was appropriate to play catch up, by honoring Ralph

Lorah, Cynthia Jimenez, and Gail Hesser all at the same time.

The extreme weather put a glitch to that, as the ladies were not in attendance at the February meeting. Their certificates had to wait for the next month.

There is no monetary attachment to this award. It is a mere certificate, that just shows our appreciation. All three have been with this group from the start. All three have held offices all along the way.

When we focus a report on certain burial grounds, we like to try to work in information about who is tending it, if we have that information. Often that changes from time to time.

Everyone that helps in some way is important to our mission! We appreciate every bit of help you can give. It wouldn't get done without the help of many. Thank you everyone.



Anne Wagner
awagner615@aol.com

There will be a work party to work on the OHLINGER burial ground in Richmond Township, Sunday April 19th, at 9:30 AM. If you need directions please contact Les Rohrbach.

The next meeting of the Berks County Association For Graveyard Preservation will be April 26th at 2PM at the Oley Legion Hall.

Russ Delp came to our meeting with friends who are interested in restoring the Rothermel burial ground on Walnut Tree Road. After the meeting, some of us took a field trip to the burial ground and had an impromptu dowsing lesson.



Keim

The trees that were damaging the wall have been removed. There is a small section that was not accessible to work on due to the tree, that needs to be done, as well as one side wall. There are two Keim burial grounds on the same road.

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."



The Grave of Mary Hoffmaster who died Jan. 5 1893, is one of hundreds of tombstones damaged by vandals.

Aulenbach's Cemetery Vandalism

Aulenbach's has once again been vandalized. If you are able to help monetarily or physically, please contact : Sandy Stief, 610.468.7879

Aulenbach's Cemetery
2050 Howard Blvd
Reading, PA 19606

[Http://sandystief.wix.com/aulenbachcemetery](http://sandystief.wix.com/aulenbachcemetery)

If you have information on this crime please report it! This is another of a series of senseless crimes that can be stopped by reporting when you see suspicious activity.

<https://www.facebook.com/AulenbachsCemetery>

Aulenbach's cemetery is one of the first area public cemeteries in Berks County. It is located between Reading and Mt Penn. As you can imagine perpetual care was not something that was thought about back in the beginnings of cemeteries like Aulenbach's and Charles Evans.

It is a non-profit cemetery that is operated with tons of volunteer hours, spearheaded by Sandy Stief who does every phase of this operation personally, and sometimes alone. Her group of volunteers are heartbroken when vandals attack as they did again recently. They pushed over hundreds of stones, so make no mistake, this is no accident. Although BCAGP does not work on larger owned public or church cemeteries, we have a great interest and great sympathy for what they are dealing with. Berks Crime Alert is offering a reward for information that will catch the vandals. In the meantime Aulenbach's needs help putting them back together. If you can help please do!

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 - 2015

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