

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.



Hechler Esterly



The third wall is complete! We expect the last wall to be started in the fall. Please continue to send your contributions toward this project!

Special thanks to Neil Scheidt and Keith Schaffer for their work clearing the weeds recently!

Ritter



John and Sharon Carmello worked hard last season to keep the weeds under control. Their efforts have made it possible to get in without fighting the Sumac this year so the walls can be worked on. The walls have been repaired where needed, the gate now works properly, and slate caps are installed to prolong the life of the stone walls.



We are often asked to look at a graveyard to offer our insight to what is needed to restore and preserve. We had been to the Rothermel burial ground before and although the walls are falling, it was always nicely mowed and seemed tended.

So when the Rothermel Family Association officers contacted us about their family burial ground on W. Walnut Tree Drive, we made some time. The group is hoping to restore the burial ground of their ancestors.

We always try to talk to the neighbors when we do a visit for information gathering, as there is usually a lot of good background information to be learned. After photographs and measurements were taken, we went for a walk in the neighborhood.

Some time in the future, I am sure you will be hearing more on the Rothermel graveyard, as we meet with association/family members. But for now I want to talk about someone who is NOT a family member and is NOT a property owner of a family burial ground.

We discovered from neighbors, that at least for several years, it was neighbor Stanley Deeds, that has been lovingly caring for the burial grounds of the Rothermels'. From Stanley's window, he can see the burial ground and has made it his project when he saw it was not being

tended. Stan never sought payment or attention, but his neighbors knew exactly who was tending the graveyard.

Stanley was thrilled to hear the family wants to do work on restoring it! He is not alone. Although this is the Rothermel family's, it is also part of their neighborhood.

When the Rothermel farm was subdivided and sold for the Walnut Manor development, this cemetery was written into the subdivision plans, with an easement for access and maintenance.

In a deed recorded in 1941, sellers provided that the Rothermels have the right to the graveyard and the "party of the second part" (the buyer) shall have no right whatever to the enclosed graveyard. (DB 863 p 441)

And so, this PA Historic Burial Ground is nestled amongst houses in a nice development in Maiden creek Township. You can see it from the street if you know where to look. The original Rothermel home/farm with some acres is a short walk away. Even though the Rothermels have moved from the farm, the burial ground is protected under PA Historic Burial Grounds laws, but really has also been protected by the neighbors, especially Stanley. Thanks Stanley, and thanks to all the "Stanley's" who just "step up" and volunteer to help preserve our history with no fanfare or reward.



Anne Wagner awagner615@aol.com

LETTER FROM LES

You may recall that my article in our last newsletter dealt with the families associated with the Barnet/Peter graveyard in Maiden creek township. The Peter part of this name comes from Abraham Peter who married into the Barnet family and his descendants. I had the opportunity in early June to attend the Berks County Historical Society's fundraising dinner at the Pook farm in Oley township. The Pook farm was first established by Engel Peter prior to 1720, Engel being Abraham's great grandfather.

An incredible restoration, which was recently profiled in the Berks Country section of the *Reading Eagle*, has been performed at the Oley farm by two of our members, Ron and Debra Pook. This farmstead was in a very dilapidated state. Now the homestead, the farm buildings, and even the stone walls surrounding the garden cannot be more attractive. When the Pooks first acquired this property, BCAGP began work in the graveyard which was likewise in much disrepair. Trees were threatening tombstones and had already destroyed walls. BCAGP removed the trees, leveled the ground, planted grass seed, and rebuilt the rear wall. (See our January 2010 newsletter online.) Later the Pooks rebuilt the other three walls and had a lovely wooden cap placed over the walls at their own expense.

Engel Peter had one son, Abraham, who married Maria Hoch in 1742. The one room, 1747 home on the farmstead may have been Abraham and Maria's 'new' home though Engel lived till 1754. Abraham had one son, Daniel, and three daughters. Abraham's sister, Catharine had become a Moravian with the Emmaus congregation and this may have brought Daniel into contact with Magdalena Romig, whose family from the Macungie area also belonged to the Moravian church. Daniel and Magdalena were married and their initials and 1804 appear on the date stone on the Pook's home of today. Daniel had two sons and four daughters.

Daniel's oldest son was Abraham, his youngest was Solomon. Two of Daniel's sisters had married men from Maiden creek township, and this may have brought his son Abraham into contact with Susanna Barnet, whom he married. Solomon married Margaret Yoder. A strong Yoder connection was begun as Solomon had a sister who married a Yoder, and two of Solomon's children married Yoders. Apparently, Abraham and Solomon were both working the homestead when Abraham died relatively young at the age of 45 in 1824. His Reading Adler obituary identified him as residing in Oley. Since his father died in 1818 and his mother in 1820, he was presumably living in the 1804 home. A picture on display during the Historical Society dinner showed a date stone on one of the houses on the property. If I remember correctly, it had an 'SP' and other initials with the year 1825. This would have been Solomon.

We can guess that Abraham's family later moved to his wife's family's home (Daniel Barnet's) since she was an only child and it was likewise a sizable, prosperous farmstead, with Solomon taking over the entire Oley operation. Because he appears to have been living in Oley, it is interesting that Abraham was buried in the Maiden creek graveyard. There are few readable tombstones in the Peter graveyard. Daniel and Magdalena are there, as are two of their daughters. The only other readable stone is for the wife of one of Solomon's sons. Likely, Engel and the first Abraham and their wives are also buried there. Solomon and his wife are buried in the Salem Church graveyard in Spangsville.



Left: 2008 Peter family burial ground



Right: 2013 Peter family burial ground

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.

In Memory of Benjamin Sously AND Tom Clauser

Last year we told you about the trip up the mountain to find the burial place of Benjamin Sously, with Tom Clauser as our guide (see archives :April 2012 Grave Happenings). We promised Tom we would fix the stone he had been protecting , and we made good on that promise in May. Sadly I must say ,it was a little too late for Tom .

Keith packed his supplies and hiked to the spot to do what was promised, as soon as the weather was right for curing. When he came back we attempted to contact Tom,



only to find he had died suddenly, in January of this year. Who would ever have guessed that just months after Tom showed us the location he would himself be in his grave? Tom had even offered to “wheelbarrow the supplies up” so Keith didn't have to haul supplies so

far. Tom was an avid hiker and bird-watcher and we were looking forward to getting to know Tom, as a new member to BCAGP. Going through my previous emails and remembering conversations with Tom, I recalled him wondering why Benjamin hung himself. I feel bad now that I joked

and said :“The man had 11 kids isn't that reason enough?”. I hope Tom has the an-



Jim Brett, Marlon Dietrich, Karla Hummel, Tom Clauser and Aubrey & Keith Schaffer at the grave of Benjamin Sously. (photo by me)

swers to his question and has met the man whose grave he tended so caringly. This was a devastating and unexpected loss for Tom's grown children and grandchildren. Tom was so full of life!

Had we not found Tom when we did , we never would have found that spot where Benjamin became part of Albany Township history. So ,when we remember Benjamin Sously, we should remember Tom Clauser, as well. Tom told me he felt “a connection” to Ben and I believed him. In my mind ,Ben and Tom will be connected as part of this Albany Township historical story.

Anne Wagner

“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.

Doing the Deed

Researching deeds anywhere is an education all of its own. If you really want to get into plotting some the tracts described in the deeds, you will encounter there are some math facts that are vital. Following here is a list of measurements I've collected that will be of value if you choose to get into sketching tracts. There are also some very good computer programs that can do the job. They can be a bit tedious to enter all the data accurately, but will draw the picture for you.

Measurements

Acre - is a unit of measure, 1 acre is equal to 43,560 square feet. A square enclosing one acre is approximately 208 feet 9 inches on each side or 12.65 perches.

1 acre is also equal to the following customary units:

66 feet × 660 feet (43,560 square feet)

1 chain × 10 chains (1 chain = 66 feet = 22 yards = 4 rods = 100 links)

1 acre is approximately 208.71 feet × 208.71 feet (a square)

4,840 square yards

160 perches where a perch is equal to a square rod (1 square rod is 0.00625 acre)

10 square chains

4 rods

A chain by a furlong (chain 22 yards, furlong 220 yards)

1/640 (0.0015625) square mile (1 square mile is equal to 640 acres).

1 perch = 16.5 feet, 1 square perch = .00625 of an acre.

A little trivia here, a football field, with end zones is approximately 1.32 acre

As you read a deed some of the words you will encounter require only common sense to understand. But, you will find terms you are not familiar with that you need to look up and define. I have been developing my own glossary of words and terms, that I found in the various deeds, indentures, grants, conveyances and other documents I've encountered. Below is part A and B, of some terms you may find useful.

Bear in mind this is only a guide. They are my own interpretations and they do not qualify as legal definitions or

descriptions and should not be taken as such. They are merely intended to assist the arm chair researcher in understanding the language used in deeds written by their ancestors. Terms may vary from county to county or state to state. This is an ever-growing glossary and is not all inclusive. Watch for sections C-Z in future newsletters

A-B in My Glossary of Terms

Administrator - A person appointed to handle the affairs of a person who has died intestate or without a will. A person who manages the estate of a person who left no executor

Adverse possession - a method of acquiring complete title to land against all others, including the record owner, through certain acts over an uninterrupted period of time as dictated by law

Alienee - A person who has a hold or claim or encumbrance upon the property, such as mortgage holder or a guardian for underage children who have a vested interest in the property

Annuity - a fixed sum payable periodically, subject to the limitations imposed by the grantor, generally a right bequeathed, donated or purchased to receive periodic payments; often as a life estate

Appurtenance - Attached to something else; in the law of property, it refers especially to a burden (i.e. easement or covenant) and benefits or burdens the owner.

Assignee - a person to whom a property is transferred to for a specific purpose, such as payment of debt or to sell for payment of debts.

Assignment - The transfer of an interest in a right or property from one party to another. Known also as a Deed of Assignment.

Assignment in trust - A transfer by a debtor to a creditor in trust to apply to the debts of the assignor

Bequest - A gift by means of a will in personal property

Being part of - When used in a deed it means that the current tract being described was only a part of or a partition of an original larger tract.

Being the same as - A phrase used in deeds to introduce and describe the prior transaction that gave the current owner the right to sell or transfer the tract of land.

Bond - A promise or guarantee given by the owner of real estate to convey the same upon payment.

Bounds - Each deed will contain a description of the tract being sold, at some level. The bounds, also known as the Meets and Bounds, may identify the names of persons owning adjacent, or bounding, tracts of lands. It may also contain the compass direction and length of lines outlining the tract, as well as descriptions of corner points. (i.e. a stone corner, oak tree, corner of other land, steel stake, etc.).

[Betty Burdan](#)

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Congratulations to Matthew Beekman , our 2013 Jacqueline Nein Award recipient!



Matthew has gone out with BCAGP several years on Day Of Caring, and was excited to come again this year. What he didn't know , was that he would be the recipient of the Jacqueline Nein award on graduation night, at Oley High School! Matthew was featured in a January issue of Berks Country, for his FFA involvement and was quoted at that time saying that his favorite FFA activity was going out for Day of Caring with us.



Left: Matthew waves as we start the day.
 Right: Matthew and his father at Oley High School after a long day cleaning up burial grounds.

Veteran Highlight By Karla Hummel



Berks graveyards are the resting places of many veterans- including men whom we celebrate on July 4th– patriots who originally enabled the freedoms that we now enjoy. Yet we include in this newsletter an article about how an Eagle Scout must labor to make the markers for these graves more “theft resistant”. Apparently their value as scrap metal outweighs their symbolism. Tombstones erode, tree roots topple walls, iron fences rust, headstones fall, and weeds cover untended ground; but those are the consequences of relentless natural phenomena. Theft is not.

Over a decade ago, Pennsylvania strengthened its laws. No longer did someone need to be apprehended while actually *stealing* veterans’ markers (most commonly the upright bronze flag holders). Now they could be arrested for attempting to *sell* the memorials – with more stringent penalties. Perhaps I’m editorializing here because I’m writing on Father’s Day and, as are many of yours, my father’s grave is entitled to bear our flag. While creative efforts will surely slow the trafficking in stolen veterans’ markers, it seems to me a desecration that we are forced to use cement and PVC to protect the dignity that was so hard-earned.

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

We are still seeking information on who has been caretaking at the Jean Bertolet burial ground on Blacksmith road in Oley! Someone has been mowing and we don't know who! If you are that person or know who that person is, please contact us!

Is anyone interested in purchasing a used Billy Goat Outback Brush Hog mower from us? We purchased it several years ago and decided it was too bulky for our use. Serviced at Ed's Small Engine Repair and currently in storage. \$500 or best offer, you pick up. As is.

Contact any member of the board for more information or to arrange to see it.



- ✓ Model #82DB BC002401HE
- ✓ 11.0 Honda 8.20 hp engine
- ✓ Electric starter and pull starter
 - ✓ 24 inch blade width
 - ✓ Weighs 300 pounds

Callum Smith's Eagle Scout Project was to make the flag holders a bit more theft resistant and straight, by cementing the holder into PVC pipe, and burying the pipe deeply into the ground. This was an idea that Barry Kauffman from Alsace Cemetery has been implementing, and we liked it! The majority of the private historical family burial grounds will be done by Callum and his team.



Callum Smith at the Ritter burial ground.

The Importance of Volunteers by: Betty Burdan

While many of the private burial grounds in Berks need major clean ups and repairs to bring them back to their former glory, some only need a little loving care to make them a place of reverence and beauty.

Over time subtle changes take place in even a well cared for burial ground. The ground shifts and these very old, fragile tombstones sink or lean. Groundhogs move in, building their underground condominiums, creating ugly brown mounds of ground with gaping holes. Straightening the tombstones and removing these unwanted underground residents, requires a gentle, caring hand to get the job done. Just such a task was undertaken at the Fritz Burial Ground in Douglass Township, Berks County, last year when Eagle Scout candidate **Austin Robison** submitted his proposal to his scout leaders. His project was approved and work began. Slowly but surely he captured and relocated a small colony of groundhogs and then, ever so gently, filled and leveled the mounds they left behind. Next he worked to straighten the fragile tombstones, some that have stood in the Fritz for well over 100 years.

Straightening an aged tombstone is not a matter of yanking it up and replanting it. Special care needs to be taken to insure there will be no damage to the tombstone. Old tombstones often extend into the ground as deep as the tombstone is tall. This is down-on-your-knees, hands on work, that requires time, patience, and accurate calculations. Providing a firm foundation around the tombstone is tedious work, but, when done right, the tombstone will remain standing for the next 100 years.

All this, and more was accomplished by Austin as he completed his project. Tombstones once looking like a row of drunken sailors were transformed into straight and tall soldiers. The graveyard surface, with its rolling lumps and bumps of groundhog housing, became a level surface looking more like a well cared for lush green lawn, than the rolling hills of Pennsylvania. The wrought iron fences are no longer rusty, but were sanded and dressed with a fresh coat of paint to preserve them for years to come. There is now a diagram of burial locations posted at the entrance to help visitors find their ancestors.

The work that is undertaken by BCAGP needs many hands. BCAP thanks the Eagle Scout candidates, such as Austin Robinson and Callum Smith, volunteers from Keller and Williams Realty, and the Oley Valley students who participate in Day of Caring. They are all vital components to the results achieved. BCAGP couldn't do it all without them. So, if you have the urge to volunteer some time and a little elbow grease you are welcome to contact BCAGP and let us know.

View of the Fritz Burial Ground, Douglass Township, Berks County



Day of Caring 2013



2013 Day of Caring brought more kids and more work done! Three buses rolled, and we finished everything on our list. Some tombstone resetting was done as well this year. **Thanks** to Oley High School and the teachers and students who went along. See all the pictures from all three groups on our facebook page!

Burial grounds worked on for 2013 Oley Day of Caring

Schneider	Hoch -Deturk -Shenkel	Peter
Bertolet	Deturk #1 and #2	Hoch
Gulden	Ohlinger	Weidner
Nein	Beiber- Leshner	Hunter- Kemp
Hoch -Bertolet	Leshner	Weiser –Deturk
Kauffman	Keim #1 and #2	Levan

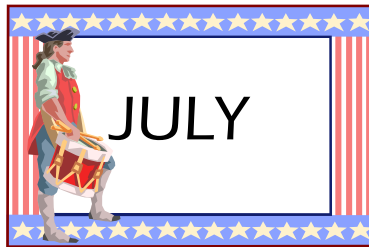
A second wall on the Keim burial ground will be started soon!

[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 descendant **and** a court order for the purpose of "repair or replacement, reproduction or preservation and display in an accredited museum."



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 - 2013

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*