

# GRAVE HAPPENINGS



## OLEY VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL ANNUAL DAY OF CARING



Left: Hollie Bower cradles a box turtle found in the Ohlinger burial ground, and keeps him in protective custody until the work is finished.

See more on Day of Caring on page 8.



### Contributors

### Staff/Photos

- Mike Angstadt
- Kathryn Angstadt
- Sean Brown
- Betty Burdan
- Karla Hummel
- Les Rohrbach
- Keith Schaffer
- Paul Schuman
- Anne Wagner
- Rod Wagner







 **BREIDENSTEIN**



**BCAGP**  
Berks County Association  
for Graveyard Preservation

For outstanding community service, particularly to the Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation, the group Jackie Nein was a founder of

**JACQUELINE B NEIN AWARD**  
Presented to:  
**NATE GULDIN**

Presented on behalf of the board and this association with our deep gratitude for caring about the history of our county, and those long buried beneath the grounds.

Leslie Rohrbach, President  
2017

Anne Wagner, Vice President  
Keith Schaffer, 2nd Vice President

Board members: Ed Gossemer, Michael Augstadt,  
David Schlegel

Paul Schuman, Treasurer  
Karla Hummel, Secretary

**Congratulations to:**  
**Nate Guldin**  
our **2017** recipient of the **Jacqueline Nein Award** for a senior who participated in **Day Of Caring.**





# SET IN STONE



The Herbein graveyard in Oley was in need of a work party. Our band of volunteers descended on the site as corn was being moved from the silo to a waiting tractor trailer, and the farmer was nearby fertilizing the surrounding fields. The site is on a slope, and most of the tombstones were leaning precipitously downhill – a dangerous situation for both the stone and visitors. It is surprisingly easy for the tall, thin stones to break when stressed, and some of these would soon have snapped at ground level. The thicker red sandstones were also tilted, exposing the inscriptions to the brunt of the wind and rain.



I'd like to think it was experience that led me immediately to the stone of 9 month old Benneville Herbein, buried completely underground, but it was my usual dumb luck. Happily, we could uncover and reset it that day.

**RESETTING** is a matter of considering the size, material, condition, and location of each individual stone, and determining what is needed to return it to its original placement as safely and as permanently as possible.

*Unfortunately, this was often done in the past by pouring concrete into a hole & jamming the stone into the wet cement. This will seriously impact the stone's condition over time, as well as causing upheaval as the ground freezes and thaws. We'll discuss current methodologies in future editions of this newsletter.*



Since the Benneville Herbein stone is that of a child, it is (as is typical) a small stone. It was intact and lying flat, so I could carefully dig down 6" or so and lift it out. Once the rest of the row in which it belonged was reset, we dug a hole deep enough to insert the stone without covering any of the inscription (many



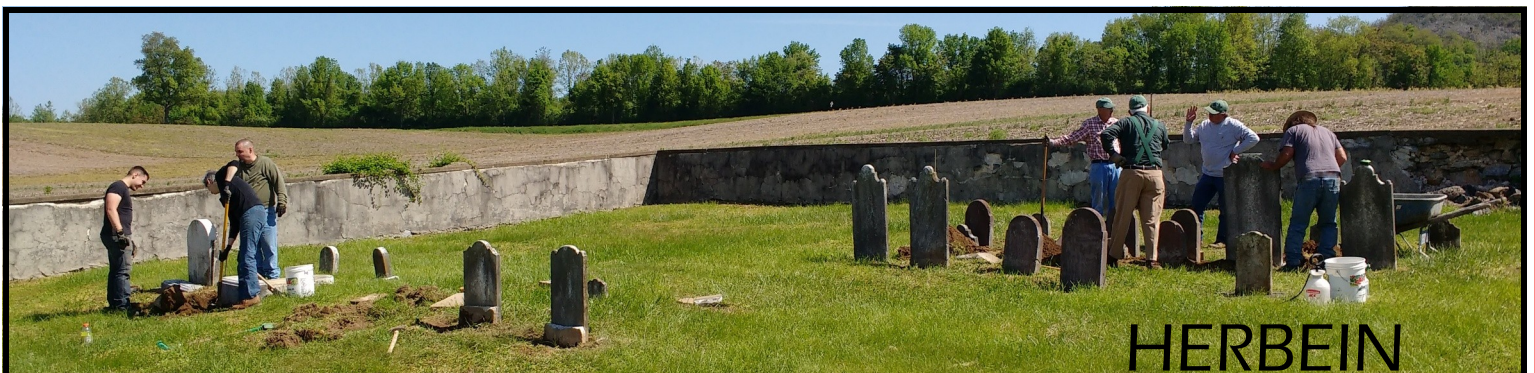
tombstones have a notch or outcropping to identify the point of ground level). Using a simple method of supporting it with rocks, dirt, and rock screenings (each layer tamped repeatedly), we set the stone – plumb and level as Keith has taught us.

There is still work to be done at the Herbein graveyard. Two bases must be leveled and their exceptionally large stones reset upon them.



**KARLA HUMMEL**

[BerksEpitaphs@gmail.com](mailto:BerksEpitaphs@gmail.com)





## LETTER FROM LES

The sigh of relief you hear is the result of finally having the monument work at the Herman-Sassaman graveyard completed. BCAGP has been discussing this for the 9 years I have been a member. It began with asking where the table top bases that were outside the graveyard belonged. Requests in this newsletter and elsewhere yielded no answers.

The years passed. Finally, after the prior landowner died and the new landowner moved the bases so he could farm much closer to the graveyard, we thought delay was no longer possible. To preserve what we had, the bases needed to be moved as soon as we could arrange for it.

That began a search for someone capable of moving the large pieces. There was no interest of businesses we contacted until we contacted Pete Pellicano of Dohner Memorials. Pete was quick to look at the job and quite willing to take it on. He had concerns about what equipment would be best used, but in the end he successfully completed the job without disturbing the farmer's field. Many thanks to Pete.



The table top bases are now positioned inside the graveyard. The broken top pieces containing the inscriptions that we still have now rest on the bases above the surface of the ground. The top pieces had been laying flat inside the graveyard but were beginning to sink into the ground. This is not the original look but the top pieces are broken and many pillars upon which they rested are broken or missing. They marked the graves of Jacob Sassaman (1764-1826) and his wife Maria (1762-1844).

The effort included straightening the obelisk naming Carl G Herman (1793-1863) and Hesther Herman (1791-1851) his wife and the daughter of Jacob and Maria Sassaman. To add to the mysteries of this graveyard, while digging to get under the obelisk, a separate tombstone for Hesther Herman was found underground. A similar stone for Carl G Herman, uncovered by BCAGP during a clean up several years ago, lies on the adjacent wall. Were these stones intentionally buried when the obelisk was put in place?

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.





Spring was a busy season for BCAGP volunteers! We had, in addition to Oley Day Of Caring, several work parties and multiple projects in play. We had a few new volunteers with boots on ground, literally. United States Marine Corp. Corporal **Darius Angstadt** came home on leave from Okinawa,

Japan and came along with his dad to help! We thank him for his service in more ways than one.

At the Breidenstein, **Angel Dotterer**, **Kelly Koup** and **Jim Vrano**, were all new to our work party and seemed to enjoy the day. The highlight was when a flying squirrel's nest was accidentally disturbed and **Karla Hummel** and **Ed Gensemer** fabricated a nest holder out of a hat and rehung it! We are finding **Mike Angstadt's** new weed trimmer to be a good tool as it really made quicker work of the bad stuff, so there was more time to pull weeds around the tombstones. **Kathryn**, Mike's daughter came along, with **Les Rohrbach** and **David Schlegel**, and we had a great day! **Kelly** actually said she LOVES pulling poison ivy! We are going to love having **Kelly** around! (see page 2)



The Herbein needed serious tombstone resetting and will need some repairs going forward. In preparation for wall repair, a crew went in to

straighten some stones that were about to fall at any moment. **Keith Schaffer** supervised proper re setting and the crew did what could be done at

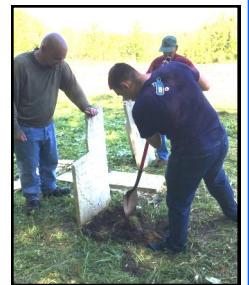


this time. **Irv Gring** who tends the Barnhart-Adams joined as well as **Ron Smith**. **Mike Angstadt** brought along his son Cpl. **Darius Angstadt**

to join **Les Rohrbach** and **David Schlegel** to make it a good size crew! **Karla Hummel** even discovered a new stone! (see page 3)

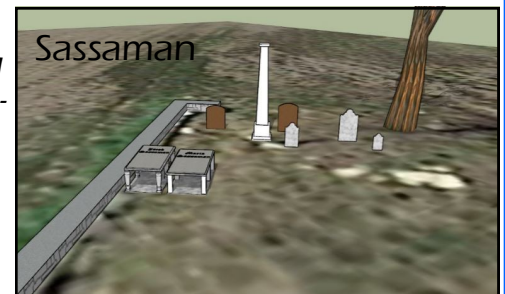
The Rauch could not be seen under the high plants that were growing. It is a shame to cut them, because they really do keep the weeds down, however you can't find the majority of the tombstones under their leaves. **David**, **Mike**, **Les**, **Darius** and **Ron** and I braved the ticks to give it some care. (see page 6)

The same crew also went into the Bittenbender that same day and cleaned up and reset a stone. It really was nice to have a young strong Marine for the day. (see page 10)



There is another project that has been going on, that we will show you in more detail at some point down the line. **Mike Angstadt** and his friend (and our newest member) **Sean Brown** from Florida are working on

something a bit different. Using complicated computer enhancement software, and old aerial imagery, they are attempting



to give us an idea of what various graveyards looked like before the tombstones were stacked up against trees or buried underground. This is really fascinating, and preliminary results are proving to be pretty sweet!

**Anne Wagner**  
**Vice President**  
 awagner615@aol.com





# RAUCH



# SCHNEIDER



Keith Schaffer is rebuilding the rear wall at the Schneider burial ground. This is very large and will take a lot of money to repair to good shape.



## Legend, Folk Lore, Faded Memories and Truth by Betty J. Burdan

In addition to caring for known graveyards in Berks County, BCAGP looks for graveyards that have not yet been discovered and documented. This includes walks to and through suspicious crosies, and sorting through legend, folk lore, faded memories and truths. It is not unusual for someone to be in touch saying "I remember seeing a graveyard, when I was a child..." or "My father told me of a graveyard years ago..." They add an approximate location and or a time frame. From here we go into research mode using every resource and trick we know to prove or disprove the existence of a graveyard at or near that location.

So it was with the Rutter graveyard in Douglass Township, Berks County. Those who told of the graveyard didn't know if it was a family graveyard or a slave graveyard. The Rutter Mansion in Douglass is reported to have been a part of the Underground Railroad. It is entirely possible that not all slaves survived the journey and were buried along the way. Unfortunately if secrecy was maintained these slave graves would not be marked. All that would be left of such a graveyard would be legend and folk lore handed down through generations and ever aging, faded memories.

Since slave movement was greatest just before and during the Civil War, it was important to know who owned the Rutter Mansion and iron plantation between 1845 and 1865. In March of 1844, the 352 acre Rutter plantation was sold to Joseph Bailey. Joseph Bailey next sold it to his son John L. Bailey and Comely Shoemaker. Next in line of ownership was James B. Bailey. The Bailey family was still in charge in 1899 when they filed an application to operate a mill. The conclusion here is any Underground Railroad activity on the Rutter plantation was at the hands of the Baileys, not the Rutters.

In 1907, the Rutter plantation was returned to Rutter hands. However, it was bought by a David Rutter of Chicago, who was not a descendent to the Douglass Township Rutters. The Chicago David Rutter purchased the plantation with its mansion house as a gift for his wife, Mary Elizabeth McMurtie Rutter, to be used as a summer home. By coincidence, Mary Elizabeth could trace her collateral ancestry to a David Rutter of Pottstown.

In January of 1916, a deed of trust was executed, giving the

property and fine mansion to their son William McMurtie Rutter. The estate had grown by then to 550 acres through purchase of adjoining farm land. Mary Elizabeth lived there with her son William and his wife Lucia Osborne Ford, of Chicago, until her death in 1933. William was the last Rutter to own the Rutter plantation. He sold it to another gentleman in 1940 who sold it to the Allegheny East Conference in 1946.

Following the directions found in *A Genealogical Guide to Berks County Private Cemeteries* and the word of mouth from locals who had seen this "graveyard," a plot was located. It did contain 3 Rutter tombstones. To our surprise they looked very new and all three bore death dates in the 20th century. The earliest birth date was 1883. The stones were for Peter Rutter (1915-1989), Lucia Ford Rutter (1883-1938) and Nancy Comstock Rutter (1916-1983).

Lucia Rutter had explored the grounds and discovered a secluded spot high on the hillside, where she could look across the Manatawny and see the mansion. It became her favorite get-away spot and she named it "The Point". Upon her death, William felt it was only fitting that part of Lucia should rest forever in the place she loved so much. After her cremation in 1938, William is said to have scattered some of her ashes at The Point. No marker was placed on the site at that time.

Peter Rutter, son of William and Lucia, lived in the mansion until 1934 when he went off to college. Peter and Nancy Comstock Rutter had three sons, Stephen, Matthew, and Jeremy. In 1984, the three brothers visited The Point, their grandmother Lucia, loved so much. They decided it would be the perfect place to memorialize their grandmother Lucia and their parents, Peter and Nancy. Son Matthew ordered the memorial stones, including one for his father, for when his time came.

In 1985, with much effort Stephen, Matthew and Jeremy dragged the tombstones through the woods and to The Point. The engraving was added to Peter's stone after his death in 1989. This information here was received directly from Peter and Nancy's sons, Jeremy and Stephen Rutter.

If this were the Rutter Graveyard spoken of, the truth is, there is no Rutter graveyard as there are no bodies buried at The Point. All that is there are 3 modern memorial stones, placed there 32 years ago.

Betty J. Burdan

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Peter Rutter (1915-1989) Moral Physical 31  
I am the Pater Familias [*patriarch of the family*]



Nancy Comstock Rutter (1916 - 1983)  
She was a good provider



Lucia Ford Rutter (Dec. 8, 1883-Jan. 25, 1938)







# RICKENBACH



Thanks to **Andre Eisenheart**, **Ben Bower**, **Brandon Colon**, **Christian Flamer**, **Anthony Maggiaro** and of course **Anthony Funez**. It was a lot of work just to get to the fun paint part!

**Anthony Funez**, a senior at SV high school, put together a crew of friends. Over several weeks they cleared the brush, scraped the fence and primed and painted! They did a fantastic job! Supplies were donated by **Karla Hummel** and **Home Depot** and we thank them for their contributions. The Rickenbach fence was done years ago as an Eagle Scout project by **Zach Beatty**. We appreciate the help we can get from locals who wish to keep it nice. Every now and then it becomes overgrown and needs a good cleaning up. Thanks also to **Maryann Dierolf** of Home Depot in Wyomissing, who assisted us in getting the donation of paint and supplies.

# BITTENBENDER



side wall complete

TWO WALLS DONE, TWO WALLS TO DO YET



Side wall needing rebuild





## Our Mission



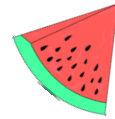
We strive to preserve and maintain the historic Berks County graveyards in Eastern Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Historic Burial Places Preservation Act (1994) provides for the preservation of historic burial places, tombs, monuments and gravestones and imposes penalties for violations. 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.

- ✓ The next meeting of BCAGP board will be June 25th , 2pm at Oley legion. As always, members are invited to attend.

May 2017 clean up at the **Bittenbender** burial ground in preparation for final pointing on the wall that was just repaired and re pointed. This is located in Hereford Township and still needs a lot of work. Pictured are (L to R) : David Schlegel, Ron Smith, Les Rohrbach, Mike Angstadt and CPL Darius Angstadt.







# 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 - 2017

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 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*





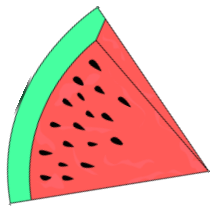
# BCAGP

Berks County Association  
for Graveyard Preservation



PO BOX 3707

READING PA 19606



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

Check our web site for meeting dates



## BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

### OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(EMAIL ADDRESSES ON THE WEBSITE)



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DAVID SCHLEGEL

MICHAEL ANGSTADT

ED GENSEMER



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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Check the [www.bcagp.org](http://www.bcagp.org) website for internet edition newsletter archives in full color!

