



GRAVE HAPPENINGS



Each year we team up with the **Oley High School Future Farmers Of America** under the guidance of Jeremy Deysher to clean up approximately twenty Oley area family farm burial grounds. Last year was cancelled due to covid 19 and this year we had to reduce the number of students due to social distancing on the buses. It was a fabulous day and I can never say enough about how hard these Agriculture students work! We are beyond thankful to the teachers and drivers and students for coming out again this year! Oley High School can be proud of this program.

(See picture highlights on page 9)

Contributors Staff/ Photos this issue

- Karla Hummel
- Les Rohrbach
- Keith Schaffer
- Paul Schuman
- Lara Thomas
- Anne Wagner
- Rod Wagner

Schmidt

We recently had the opportunity to visit the Schmidt burial ground in Maxatawny Township. To our delight, we made some real accomplishments there.

Like other families in Berks, the Schmidts married into neighboring lineages. In this case, there is evidence that the Hermann/Sassamans became part of the Schmidts, with some land from the Hermann/Sassaman homestead becoming Schmidt property.

“Schmidt” is the German version of “Smith,” but we have no specific knowledge that the family was involved in that occupation once they emigrated to Maxatawny.



There was also a Klein and Leibelsperger who became Schmidt wives.

We each have our own reasons for participating in BCAGP, but I can speak for myself and some others when I say that we truly enjoy the thrill of discovering missing tombstones, footstones, broken pieces and the like. When it came to our recent visits to the Schmidt burial ground, we found all of those!

The site is on a mound with stones facing in essentially every direction. As we worked on restoring the site, we made each tombstone face east, as was the custom. It isn't clear if the site was vandalized or if, at some point, most of the stones were moved by heavy farm equipment, but it is certainly challenging to determine the proper locations for stones.

Oddly enough, we even found tombstones in layers beneath the surface. Jonathan died in 1816 at the age of 22. We found and pulled up his stone when we arrived. Shortly thereafter, through no intent of my own, my probe hit another tombstone *beneath* Jonathan's – that of his sister, Elizabeth, who died in 1804 at the age of 6.

We stopped work when a sudden, frigid rain hit our location, but there is a great deal more to do!



Karla Hummel
2nd VP BCAGP
BerksEpitaphs@gmail.com



Veteran Focus:



Those of you who follow us on Facebook know that several members and volunteers have spent time working at the private burial ground known as the Rothermel Deturk/DeTurck in Muhlenberg Township. The oldest known burial there is the subject of this issue's veteran focus, Daniel Deturk.

Daniel Deturk was the eldest surviving son of Johannes "John" Deturk and Deborah Hoch Deturk of Oley. With at least 9 surviving siblings for his father's farm, it is understandable that adult Daniel moved away and started his own holdings in what was then Alsace, now Muhlenberg Township.

The Deturk family was originally French Huguenot and Daniel married into a family familiar to readers... the Levans, also originally Huguenot. In fact, Daniel's wife Catherine (born 1746, passed 1819) was the first cousin of Captain George Kemp's

wife Susanna Levan Kemp from the Kemp Burial Ground in Maxatawny.

Unfortunately, Daniel and Catherine lost their first child after marriage, but Susanna followed in 1773. It is likely that Daniel knew that his wife was pregnant with another child when the Colonies announced the separation from Great Britain, but it did not stop Daniel from answering the Pennsylvania's General Assembly's call to form militia known as Associators.

There is documentation of an August 24, 1776 letter sent to then Captain Deturk instructing him to march his company to New Jersey with guarded baggage wagons and that "the men are to be restrained as much as possible from drinking too much strong liquor or committing the least insult on the inhabitant of the places through which they march"! Evidence leads some historians to believe that his unit also helped in Battle of Long Island, August 27, 1776, with General Washington. Unfortunately, many military records from the Revolution have been lost and can be contradictory. Efforts to supply troops to General Washington when Congress had no money to pay for them meant "flying camps" of militia were often loaned out to the Continental Line and then might be moved back again or reabsorbed into another battalion.

What is known that his daughter Catherine was born December of 1776. Serving in the Revolution meant no other children until 1782 and Deborah, then Sarah in 1787, with finally Maria in 1789. Daniel Deturk had two prosperous farms plus a home with a lot in Reading from which he collected a good rent.

A successful man who protected his country made sure to protect his family. Only 48 years old at his passing, his will of July 1791 takes care to dictate that proceeds from rent are to be set aside to guarantee schooling to read and write for all of his daughters and that it not be deducted from their inheritance. Knowing that his young now wealthy daughters would be attractive to "gold diggers," he instructed that if a daughter "marries a worthless man" and it appears to the executors that "he will spend or run through with any Estate or Money he might receive as Husband," the executors were to take that daughter's portion and instead divide up equally amongst the other sisters! He also sets a different guardian to each daughter to prevent favoritism and directs they receive their portion at age 21 regardless of marital status.

Daniel Deturk's careful work and patriotism still can be seen by us now, 230 years later. Thank you to all who have helped and continue work to maintain the grave of this veteran.

Lara Thomas
Secretary, BCAGP

Letter from Les

This spring initiated a possible change in emphasis for some BCAGP workdays. For more than a decade workdays have primarily been cleanups, fight with whatever has grown and leave the graveyard presentable. That is where our attention has been. Often, little time was left to do anything else. After years of attacking the annual growth, the effort required during return trips has lessened. Member suggestions that we deal with tombstone issues have become practical.

This spring one workday was focused on tombstone related work - straightening and positioning standing tombstones, searching for tombstones underground and extricating them, and leveling tombstone bases. We did not stand any tombstones on their bases, but doing that in the future was the purpose of leveling bases.

Sometimes tombstones are standing but are crooked or have sunk into the ground, possibly by a foot or more. Other times they are laying over. They may be partially visible underground or completely hidden. Sometimes a base is exposed but the tombstone that should be sitting on it is missing. Sometimes a member's intuition says one must be in a certain location.



Carefully probing in the area where an underground stone potentially lies can lead to its detection. Then, continued careful probing to identify the stone's edges and to uncover it follows. Rocks and roots do their best to complicate removal. Eventually, we succeed. Sometimes the stone is found in pieces. While we may have thought we got dirty during other cleanups, working from our hands and knees to extract tombstones proved to be even dirtier.

Properly positioning the tombstone becomes another challenge. While we know how the stone faced when laying there or when extracted, what if that position or orientation does not match its apparent base or the orientation of other tombstones? What if there are multiple tombstone orientations in the graveyard? What if our finding

disagrees with the historical record?

We learned that tombstone work will be slower, that extricating tombstones is meticulous. Our probing concentrated on spots where we expected a high probability of finding something, but this is a fraction of the actual graveyard. How widely we choose to search will vary. For many graveyards multiple trips would be needed before we are satisfied.

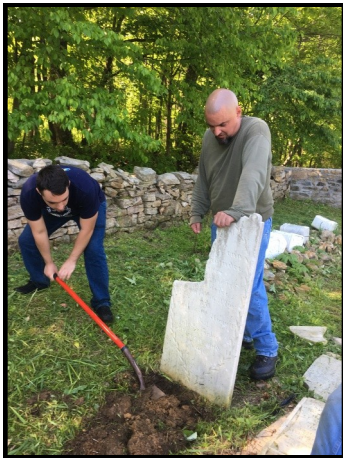
Dedicated work on tombstones is a new step for BCAGP toward returning a graveyard to a more historic look. Many have few stones standing and much vacant space. Leaving a site with more tombstones upright and straight, reduces the sense of abandonment and projects a greater feeling of vitality, of a graveyard as it once was. We will never know the historic look, but each stone found, stood upright, or straightened takes us a step closer.



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.

It's been a busy Spring with BCAGP! We had a fabulous Day of Caring 2021 along with burial grounds that are relatively new for us to work in along with the ones we routinely are in. We have a few new members which, is a nice way to start the new year.

Sadly though we have lost another of our BCAGP family. Michael Angstadt brought new life to our group with fresh ideas and he showed us some better ways to do

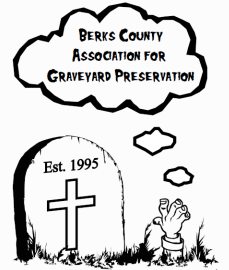


Mike and his son at the Bittenbender

things. He asked to not be placed on the board again for the 2021 election, but we hoped he would soon find the time to come back out with us. Sadly, shortly before Memorial Day, he passed. His family also participated in our work and I wish

to express my sympathy to the Angstadt family. I will miss not having Mike to reach out to when I need a brainstormer. Anytime I needed to know how to find something out, he was the guy to ask. When I would come up with "ideas" Mike figured out how to make them happen. One thing that we wanted to do but didn't

get around to was a humorous shirt with one of the new logos that he was instrumental in us getting. I had the idea a few years back to have a logo contest because we needed a fresh logo. (see Volume 13 Issue 1) Mike found a technical school to have the contest with. The logo we selected as the official logo (by Brandon Charles) is the one you see on the newsletter. However there was also another that we all really liked, which was more humorous, with a Zombie hand reaching out from the grave calling for us created by Erik Fernandez. We kept that for special occasions. Mike wanted to have shirts printed with that logo and the words "We know where the bodies are buried." When he first presented that idea, we giggled and giggled. At some point I WILL be getting that shirt made up! RIP Mike!



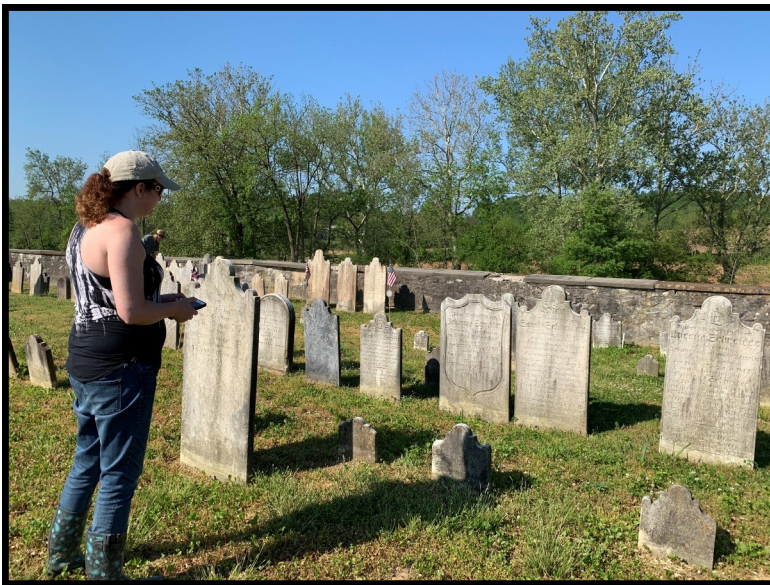
Mike and his daughter at the Barnet Peter

*Anne Wagner
VP BCAGP*

Kelchner



Jacob Kelchner, grandson of **Bud Kelchner**, is a descendant of Jacob Kelchner 1760-1823, a veteran of the Revolutionary War. His grandfather has been caring for the burial ground for decades now & when we first met him the tombstones were no longer standing. This is a difficult one to access and we appreciate his dedication! With his guidance, other family members have also cared for this sacred family ground. Located off School Road in Fleetwood, it was the farm of Matthias Kelchner. Thank you Jacob for your work and dedication!



Over the years we have done a lot of work on the **Schneider** burial ground in Oley. It's simply huge and the cost to redo the walls is very high. We have done spots and we have done one entire wall over a ten year period of time. The wall that is right behind the tombstones is now

beginning to crumble. The opposite side has sections falling in. This is the one with the most veterans in the Oley area and also the largest. If we are going to be able to help, then we need YOUR help!





We had a small but effective group at the **Deturk/Rothermel** just before Memorial Day. The focus was on clearing the edges around the walls and searching for tombstones that have been out of place for decades. **Lance** and **Joe** were new to the group and a valuable asset. The **Leon** family has been volunteering to care for the burial ground since they moved in the neighborhood and we wanted to make it easier to maintain. This will be a tedious task to locate enough pieces to put the stones together. **Karla Hummel** and **Lara Thomas** recently completed tombstone preservation classes from **Jonathan Appel**, a well known preservationist and teacher. If anyone has photos from prior to when the stones were destroyed, it would help greatly. We have begun the task of trying to match bottoms with tops.



FINAL REBER WALL



The final wall is almost done. This was an expensive project that we could not have done without the financial support of Reber family members with the leadership of Pat Reber. For us to continue our work we still need your donations! Thank you to all who contributed and especially to Pat Reber for bringing the descendants together!



We still have no new information on the Kemp Burial Ground. There is a court hearing in August which may give us more information on the fate of the Kemp. We will keep you posted when we learn anything. Thank you to Juli Winkler for

donating a drone to be used to help in mapping out the burial ground.





Oley Day of Caring



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 board meeting of BCAGP will be Sunday July 18, 2021 at 2PM at the Oley Legion Hall. The meeting will likely be outside under the pavilion. Members are invited to attend.



Congratulations to Oley High School Graduate **Tyler Swett**, the recipient of the 2021 Jacqueline Nein Award! Tyler was chosen from the Oley Day of Caring Volunteers as this year's awardee!



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 - 2021

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 _____

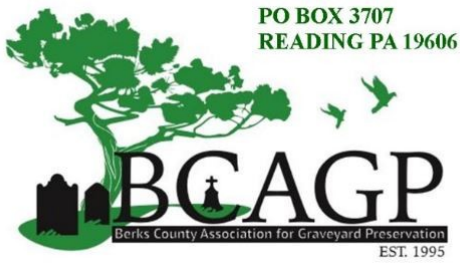
Mail Checks to: B.C.A.G.P., PO Box 3707, Reading, PA 19606

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
for meetings times



WWW.BCAGP.ORG

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

Karla Hummel, 2nd Vice President 610-987-9569

Paul Schumann, Treasurer 484-529-8682

Lara Thomas, Secretary 610-914-5534

Ed Gensemer * Ron Smith * Keith Schaffer * Gary Koenig * Marvin Stamm

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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