

Reber Gate Report

Article by Pat Reber

The Reber Reunion in 2025 decided to rescue the Reber Cemetery gate from oblivion. The work to relocate the structure from a dangerous curve to the actual cemetery started in August 2025 and is expected to be finished this spring.

The "gate" to the Reber Cemetery is a mystery in many ways.



"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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First, it wasn't really a gate that anyone in living memory recalls ever passing through on their way to the cemetery. It sat a good quarter of a mile distant from the actual cemetery, on a dangerous curve of the Irish Creek Road near Bernville.

Second, we are not sure who built it. BCAGP's stone mason Keith Schaffer estimated that the stone style called "Ribbon pointing" and other elements of the stonework indicated late 19th or early 20th century. The lettering on the sign could not be matched to that period by the artisans who worked this year on its replacement. The only photo we have of the gate in its full length is from 1938, from the Norman and Elsie Reber Family archives.

Third, when BCAGP answered a call by the Reber family in 2009 to visit the cemetery and advise on how we might rescue the cemetery's collapsing, crumbling walls, the organization spied the gate along the road hidden amidst overgrowth. They found it unique to Berks County. Might the family be interested in preserving it?

In fact, until 2025, the Reber family had not been interested. They worried that clearing away the brush and saplings that had started to claim it would advertise the cemetery. The family and the current farm owners did not want to welcome unknown visitors and vandals. In addition, the family was more focused on rescuing the cemetery itself. We accomplished this from 2019 to 2022 with financial backing from BCAGP and the family. The cemetery is the last resting place of about 40 family members, from 1850 to 1942.



With that project finished, family members were able to turn their attention to the fate of the gate. We debated various options, including relocating the structure to the cemetery; getting historic recognition to preserve it where it was; and letting it continue to disintegrate. We talked to the farm owners, who are not members of the family but who have strongly supported the cemetery rescue and help with mowing and maintenance. After consulting with them, the Reunion reached the conclusion that the most effective solution was to relocate the stone portal with the sign and gate up to the cemetery. In fact, there was little left of the rest of the wing walls to relocate, as they had largely collapsed.

We turned to BCAGP to help us administer this project. It would be totally family-financed, but we trusted the association to receive our donations and disperse them as needed. We realized this would be extra work for BCAGP and have tried to compensate with our own contributions to its work elsewhere in the county. As an incentive to donors, Ronnie Reber, great grandson of Lewis Reber who was the blacksmith at the Reber Wagon Works in the early 20th Century, is creating gate miniatures.

The firm RS Mowery from Mechanicsburg was chosen to do the work with its small project team. Work commenced in August 2025.

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STEPS ONE AND TWO: AUGUST 2025

Removal of the metal swinging gate between the stone pillars and lifting off of the big white sign – which read “To Reber’s Cemetery”. (Some Reber along the way had added an apostrophe “s” to the Reber name – an anomaly caught by the project artisans whose mission was to restore the sign to the 1938 version.) The gate was anchored in the stone at two places on either side and could not be simply lifted off the pegs - a construction intended to prevent theft of the metal gate. This required drills and saws. One of the crew found a red cone that had fallen off from the top. In the 1938 image, the cones are difficult to see because they are white. But you can see the red cones in a more recent photo. Some of the foliage had to be cleared away to lift off the sign, but in keeping with the owners’ request, attempts were made to preserve as much of the foliage as possible. The two objects were transported to Mowery’s artisan team for restoration (the gate) and reconstruction (the sign.)

STEP 3: The cedar tree next to the cemetery entry passage was removed and the roots ground down. Keith, who is managing the stonework, was able to advise that the roots grew straight down and did not extend under the newly restored cemetery wall because he had rebuilt those very walls. The Mowery crew then excavated to the frost level and poured the two cement foundations for the two stone pillars about 5 feet away from the entry passage.

STEP 4: Keith worked through September and October to take down the stone pillars, transport the stones up to the cemetery and rebuild one pillar before the weather turned cold. In one photo, you can see his tracking system. His work day was limited through hunting season to protect his safety. He plans to return to the project as soon as spring weather permits.



Veteran Focus

Christian Barkert

Lara Thomas – Secretary



In an unusual turn of events, BCAGP was at the Rothermel Family Cemetery (also known as Rothermel 2) in Walnuttown twice already this spring. A visit in March did some clean up and took the time to repair the tombstone of Anna Deisher Rothermel. A visit in April was a success due to the very kind help of John and John senior Koinski taking down a very dead tree that was causing damage.

During the second visit, I had a chance to take a closer look at the tombstone of veteran Christian Barkert who died in 1840. Alternate (and copious) spellings exist among even

his own children including Burkert, Burkhart, Barckert, and Burgert. Spelling was suggestive and variable in a time of lower literacy rates and no formal form of identification other than perhaps a fraktur taufschein birth/baptismal certificate.

Christian was the American born son of immigrants Heinrich Burckhardt and his wife Anna Margareta Wanner. His baptism was recorded at Zion Moselem, in Richmond Township in 1751. We don't know much about his parents other than they dutifully had several children besides Christian all baptized Lutheran at either Mertz Church in Rockland Township or Zion Moselem, Richmond Township. It is unlikely they were Catholic as some genealogies list, as the nascent St. Henry's was close by yet all the children show up in Lutheran records.

In 1776 at the age of 25, Christian joined an experimental militia unit in the early years of the Revolution. Known as a Flying Camp, he committed to serving at least 6 months, to quickly follow the orders of General Washington. The Flying Camp was to "fly into action" wherever Washington might need to fill a weakness or back up a battalion.

As many of us know, Washington had to deal with



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overwhelmingly unprepared troops and lost battle after battle in the early months of the war. One notable one was the Battle of Long Island in New York, the first major engagement after the Continental Congress declared that thirteen American colonies were independent. The fledgling American forces were forced to evacuate from the strategic port of New York by overwhelming numbers of British and Hessian forces. The Flying Camp had been sent into New Jersey and then to support Washington's retreat through White Plains and Knightsbridge, NY. One can only imagine what an impression this would have made on a young man from Berks County. When his six months ended, he was honorably discharged.

His service was not over. In May of 1777 he reenlisted, this time as ensign in a standard militia unit, the 7th Company, 2nd Battalion Berks County Militia under Captain Huy. At this point in history an ensign was responsible for carrying the flag, a dangerous position. In the confusion of battle, troops look to follow the flag of their unit. To have the flag fall was a disgrace and could lead to confusion so ensigns were often a prime target of the enemy.

His time serving under Washington was also not over. Christian spent the winter of 1777 with thousands of others soldiers and General Washington. Do you remember your history? What was famous about the winter of 1777 in Pennsylvania?

We know Christian survived this second term of service. We don't know his official discharge date. In fact, we are very lucky to know these exact places he served. Christian Burkert is one the few Revolutionary War veterans who has a pension file.



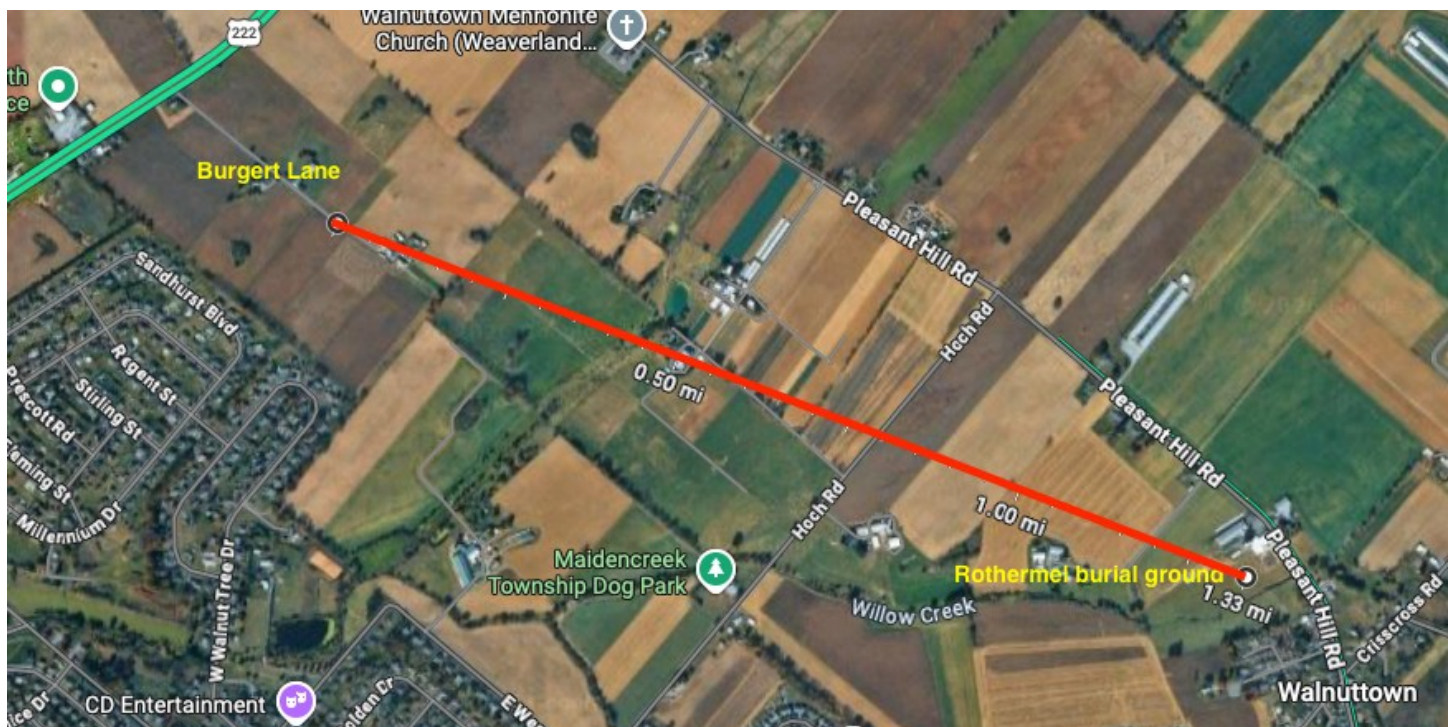
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On file (and luckily scanned see image on Page 7) with the National Archives in Washington DC are thirteen pages of affidavits and statements taken in 1834, by Christian himself and several friends and neighbors, attesting to his service. He admits he has no proof or physical record of his time in the Flying Camp but meets the conditions for an “invalid” pension of \$66 based on the time in New York.

Included in the file is a letter from 1891. In it, a descendant states the facts I have shared here and asks for more information about when Christian was discharged the second time. Did he serve through the remainder of the war? Did he serve up until Yorktown? Unfortunately, no answer is included, nor could I find one.

We do know that he returned home to marry twice. His first wife Esther appears to have died soon after the birth of their second child, a daughter also named Esther. Christian and his wife Anna Barbara Hains had several children together, including sons Johannes and Solomon who farmed near them. We don't know when Barbara died either, as neither of his wives have marked graves. I was also unable to find a copy of any probate or will documents.

After walking the Rothermel burial ground, I had another question. Why was a Burkert in a Rothermel burial ground? His wife was a Hain, not a Rothermel. His children are buried in church graveyards and cemeteries. Rothermels served as well, but that isn't a basis to be buried with them. It wasn't until I was stuck in traffic on Rt 222 that I noticed a small road leading back in the direction of the Rothermel burial ground. It was Burgert Lane. While we have no proof, this is an excellent clue to the location of the original Burkert farm and



homestead. A review of the layout of the Rothermel burial ground allows for plenty of room for Christian's parents and both of his wives to be buried near him.

When Christian's family placed his tombstone, they included unusual words immediately under his name...Ein Revolutionary Soldat. This was a man whose family was proud of his service. How can we not be also proud, especially now, 250 years after Christian Burkert first volunteered?

State of Pennsylvania
County of Berks

On this twenty first day of January, One thousand eight hundred and thirty four, personally appeared before the Hon. Matthias S. Richards Esq. one of the Judges of the Court of Common Pleas of the County of Berks Christian Barchert of the Township of Richmond in the County of Berks and State of Pennsylvania, aged eighty-two years and upwards who being first duly sworn according to Law, with on his Oath, make the following declaration in order to obtain the benefit of the act of Congress passed June 7th 1832. -

That he entered the service of the United States under the following named Officers, and served as herein stated

He enlisted in the Year One thousand seven hundred and seventy six in the Company of Captain Jacob Stauffer, and Regiment of Colonel Henry Stauffer he was at that time a resident of Allentown Township, in the said County of Berks. He served in the said Company, in what was called the Flying Camp, as a Corporal, for the full term of his enlistment which was six months. The Company marched from Reading through Lancaster, New York, Long Island, White Plains and Kingsbridge. He was engaged in the battles of Long Island and White Plains. After the term of his enlistment had expired he was honorably discharged. Post Vute and Stephen Beldy were the Lieutenants of his Company. He cannot recollect the names of any regular Officers other than those of General Washington and Lord Stirling.

He has no documentary evidence of his said service.

He hereby relinquishes every claim whatever to a pension or annuity except the present, and declares that his name is not on the pension roll of the agency of any State, or if any only on that of the agency of the State of Pennsylvania.

Sworn to and subscribed the day and Year

Christian Barchert

as aforesaid before
Matthias S. Richards
Judge of Berks County.

mark

We John Knooke a Clergyman, residing in the Borough of Pottstown and John Dwyer a Justice of the Peace residing in the Township of Richmond in the said County, hereby certify, that we are well acquainted with Christian Barchert who has subscribed and sworn to the above declaration, that we believe him to be eighty two years of age; that he is reputed and believed in the neighborhood where he resides to have been a Soldier of the revolution, and that we concur in that opinion.

Sworn to and Subscribed, the 21st day
of January A.D. 1834, before the under
signed, one of the Justices of the Peace
in and for the said County of Berks

Mat. Donagan

John Knooke.

John Dwyer

Letter from Les

Les Rohrbach – President

I have a potpourri of topics for this quarter's newsletter. To begin, we have been offered and accepted the opportunity to have a table at two springtime festivals. The first occurs on May 23 at the historic Keim Homestead on Boyer Road in Pike township. The festival runs from 10 to 5 and is being run by the Oley Valley Heritage Association. There will be one or more walks to visit one of the Keim graveyards that BCAGP has restored. This will be through an uneven, minimally maintained, potentially muddy field. Our second spring festival will be at the Berks County Parks Americana Fest at the Heritage Center on June 20 from 11 to 4. Here we find the Deppen graveyard which was moved in preparation for the Blue Marsh Lake project. Visit us at one of these events.



Keim

This spring we have lined up the Future Farmers of America clubs from Oley, Kutztown, and Brandywine high schools to repeat graveyard work they did for us last spring. Over these three one day events close to 30 graveyards will have a variety of maintenance activities performed.

We plan to continue our attack on Johnson grass at four graveyards this year. Last year showed noticeable signs of progress in some graveyards, disappointing results in others. I am especially interested to see how much comes up this spring in the graveyards that did show progress. I am looking for much thinner growth this year. Overall, I am hopeful with better timing of the treatments that we realize gains everywhere.



Deppen

We are also pursuing a new avenue to deal with difficult growth that is a yearly headache in some graveyards. Rather than grass which cuts easily with power tools these various plants give us a struggle to get them cut to ground level. In some cases manual cutting is needed. In others we need to cut multiple times from top to bottom before the plant is at ground level. Some are pickers which

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grow high enough that the tops fall over touching the ground. This creates a protective barrier when accessing where the plant comes out of the ground where we want to cut it. For the past two to three years we have spent some time, especially with our student assistants, digging roots out so as not to be dealing with their regrowth year after year. This year we are investigating having some graveyards sprayed once just to hopefully knock out some of the troublesome stuff and ease maintenance requirements at least in the short run. This is for now a one year experiment to see what benefit we get.

Thank you to the Koinskis!

John Koinski who is the property owner of the Becker/NorthKill Amish Burial Ground donated his time, equipment, and expertise to the removal of a long dead tree from the Rothermel Family Burial Ground in Walnuttown. Dead branches were falling and damaging stones. Thank You to you and your team!



The Pennsylvania Chapter of the Association for Gravestone Studies Spring Meeting – May 2nd at the Berks History Center

Our own Secretary Lara Thomas will be the host for the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Association for Gravestone Studies Spring Meeting. Please join her on Saturday, May 2nd, for at the Berks History Center, 940 Centre Avenue, Reading, PA 19601

Registration is free, but a \$5 donation would be appreciated. A box lunch can be ordered for \$15

Program for the Day

9:00-10:00 am, Check-In, Coffee, and Conversations

10:00-12:00 am, Research Presentations

- Lara Thomas: Welcome & Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation
- Fred Kelso, "Awakenings in Stone: Late 18th Century Pennsylvania German Funerary Art Depicting an Enlightened, Mystical State of Consciousness"
- Ed Snyder, "The Challenge of the Abandoned Cemetery"
- Joy Giguere, "A Controversial 1925 Dallastown Funeral"

12:00-1:00 pm, Lunch

1:15 pm: Charles Evans Cemetery Tour & Exploration

REGISTRATION LINK: Please visit the link to register. <https://forms.gle/RyCGcH4fCx1zeaL17>

The association would appreciate advanced registration in order to get an accurate headcount for refreshments and handouts, but we welcome walk-in on the day of the meeting. (although we will not be able to provide late registrants with lunch).

QUESTIONS?: Contact Steven Burg sbburg@ship.edu or Lara Thomas thomas_lara_a@yahoo.com.

Our Mission

The mission statement of the BCAGP as a nonprofit association is to preserve and maintain historic Berks County graveyards in 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.



BCAGP Meeting

will be held on Sunday, April 26th, 2026
at 1 PM

at the Oley American Legion on DeTurk Rd
and Route 73 in Oley.

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 - 2026

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email _____ Phone: _____

Save a tree! Please e-mail me the newsletter.

\$ _____ Individual Annual Membership, \$15

\$ _____ Family Annual Membership (residing in same household), \$25

\$ _____ Municipality or Business Annual Membership, \$35

Additional Donation Earmarked for:

\$ _____ General Fund

\$ _____ Burial Ground _____

\$ _____ Municipality _____

\$ _____ Total Amount Enclosed

Date: _____

- **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.



<http://bcagp.org>

Mail Checks to:

BCAGP

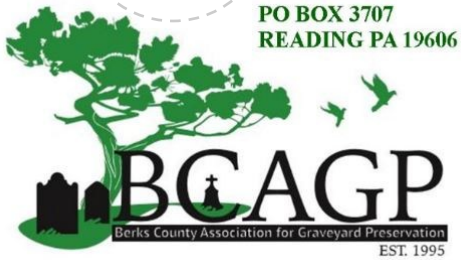
PO Box 3707

Reading, PA 19606

Now you can pay dues, or make donations via [PayPal!](#)

Donate Now
Via PayPal!





It is that time again! Renew your membership for 2026 now!



<http://bcagp.org>

WWW.BCAGP.ORG

Check our web site for details for scheduled clean ups, meeting dates and for internet edition newsletter archives in full color!

BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

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Newsletter Contact: Meredith Goldey (Mergoldey@gmail.com)



Don't forget to check our Facebook and Instagram for updates and more photos.

