

Relocating the Reber Gate: 2025/2026

BY PAT REBER



Above, L-R: Rachel Bonhall; Cindi Bonhall; Faye Urban; Keith Schaffer (stone mason); Ronnie Reber; Diane Reber; Steve Bonhall, Debbie Huey Walker (front), behind her Ann Summy and Scott Moyer; Rob ??? LAST NAME PLEASE ; Nancy Spangler; Lisa Reber Yates; Rickey Walker; Earl Moyer; Alex Belida; Pat Reber; Alan Boshart; Louise Knight; Logan Boshart; Laura Sedor; Doris (Sunderland) Ziegler; Dan Sunderland.

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"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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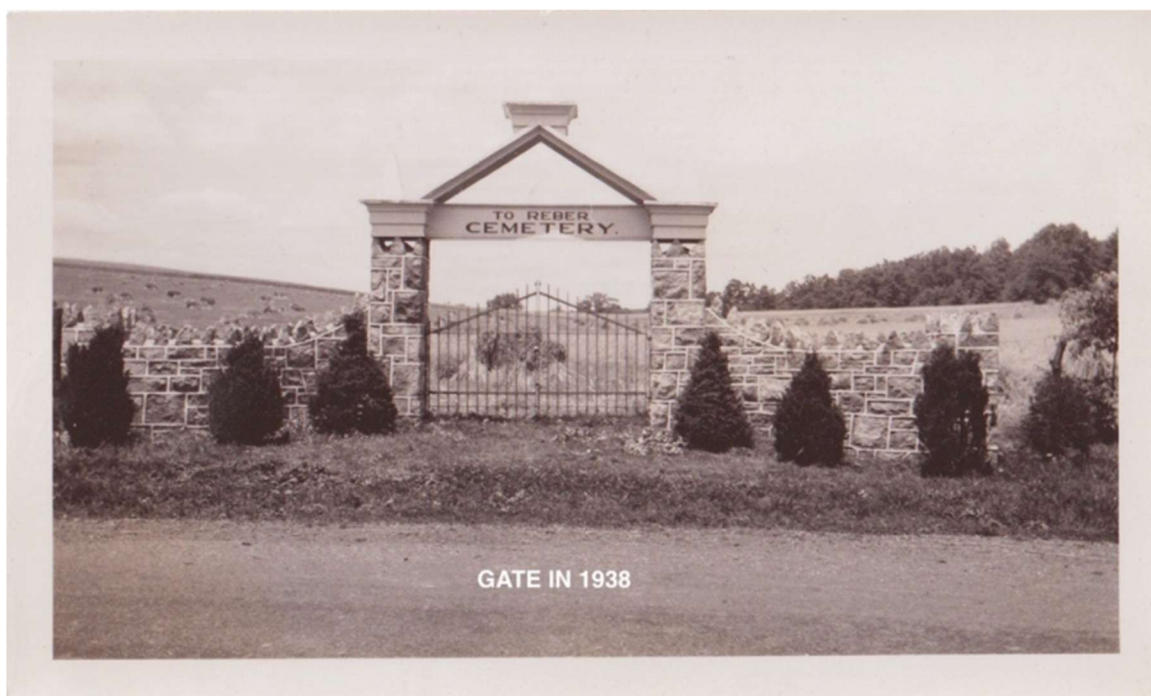
Relocating the Reber Gate: 2025/2026

BY PAT REBER

After rebuilding the walls of the Reber Cemetery in Bernville from 2019 to 2023 with the support of BCAGP, the Reber family undertook a second ambitious cemetery project in 2025 and 2026. Family noted with alarm the near total collapse of an old stone gate to the cemetery. Only the two pillars and the sign were still standing, obscured by saplings and brush. The low extended walls on either side were nearly gone. The gate was located on a dangerous curve on the Irish Creek Road. No one in living memory recalled ever going through it to get to the cemetery, which is located about a quarter mile distant up the hill and out of sight from the road.

In its day, the gate was a thing of some grace and beauty, as you can see from the only good photo we could find, taken in 1938 by Elsie Markey Reber. It wasn't even known which Reber had built it and when, likely more than a century ago.

Over nearly eight decades of meeting, the Reber Reunion often discussed what to do with the gate. Local historians found it unique and worthy of saving. But the downside of restoring it there on the curve was that it could invite unwelcome visitors to the cemetery. Maintenance or restoration would be expensive. The Reunion always supported the opinion of whoever owned the farm at the time, which was to allow nature to reclaim it.



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But after the successful rebuilding of the cemetery walls, there was renewed interest. The gate was part of Reber heritage and should be rescued. The Reunion decided in 2024 to explore possibilities. In 2025, we supported a plan to relocate it up to the cemetery. The current farm owners also supported the idea and the architectural plans.

We knew we would be raising the money on our own, but asked BCAGP to administer the donations as a neutral party and they agreed. We realized it entailed a lot of work on the organization's part, and are grateful that they were able to do it. More than 30 family members came forth with their offerings, encouraged by the offer of Ronnie Reber to craft a souvenir model of the gate for all donors.

Work began in August 2025, and the farm owner himself used his front loader to lift off the sign so Keith could start dismantling the pillars.

During 2025-26, the first pillar was reassembled, as shown here. After some delays caused by bad weather and hunting season, Keith finished the reassembly in the spring of 2026. The small artesian staff of the Mowery Company of Mechanicsburg carried out refurbishment of the metal gate and the wooden sign, and also dug and poured the foundations for the relocated pillars.



At the 80th annual Reunion of the Jonathan G and Clara Reber family in July 2026, we celebrated completion of the gate project. We were happy that Les Rohrbach, Lara Thomas and Paul Schaffer could join our reunion gathering at the Mohrsville Church of the Brethren. Afterwards, we travelled to the cemetery, where Keith and Ann Hummel Wagner of BCAGP also joined us.



At left, L-R: Cindi Bonhall, co-president Reber Reunion; Ronnie Reber and his wife Diane; Les Rohrbach, kneeling, president, Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation (BCAGP); behind him, Paul Schumann, BCAGP treasurer; Keith Schaffer, BCAGP mason; Lara Thomas, BCAGP secretary; Laura Sedor, Dan Sunderland, Pat Reber, steering committee; Lisa Reber Yates, Reunion co-president. At right, sitting on cemetery wall: Logan Boshart, Nancy Spangler, Earl Moyer.

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Keith Schaffer (center), the stone mason who took down and reassembled the stone pillars in 2025/26, receives a special model of the gate to commemorate his work on the gate and on his rebuilding of the cemetery walls from 2019 to 2022. Ronnie Reber (left) used his craftsman skills to create this model and smaller ones for all the donors. Dan Sunderland (right) led the Reunion with his ideas to rescue the gate from oblivion at its former location on a dangerous curve of a local road. Photos courtesy Lisa Reber Yates

Upcoming Fall Workdays!

Watch our Facebook page and your emails for more details and directions.

BCAGP has a good-sized membership base, but we will always value new hands in the graveyards.

Just what is involved in cleanups that you might enjoy?

- Using weedwhackers, loppers cut the vegetation back.
- We remove all of the trimmings to a pile outside the wall or load it for transport.
- We then examine stones and take inventory of needed repairs to stones or walls.
- We conduct searches for broken pieces.
- We clean the stones with D/2
- Repair stones

Please bring work gloves and tools with you but if you forget we normally have a few extra.

Some suggested tools are: Weedwhackers, Rakes, Shovels Loppers and Clippers.

Saturday, October 24 Cleanups at the Kirby graveyard in Maidencreek and the Hoch graveyard outside of Fleetwood

Sunday November 1st Herbein and Knabb graveyards in Oley.

Saturday, November 7 Cleanup at the Kauffman graveyard in Oley

Friday, November 27 Cleanup at the Hechler/Esterly graveyard in Exeter

Letter from Les

LES ROHRBACH – PRESIDENT



I am a person who likes to see things get done so for several years I have been gritting my teeth. In 2023 we authorized repairs to a long wall at the Schneider graveyard. Soon after that we had a DeTurk descendant come to us with a proposal to redo a family graveyard with the family providing the funds for the work. BCAGP would rebuild stone walls to the extent that stones were available, a black fence would be installed where stones were not available for the wall, and landscaping would be done to the floor of the graveyard. Well, this is ideal. A descendant desiring to care for the family graveyard and willing to pay for it. So I and BCAGP had no hesitation about deferring the Schneider wall to have the DeTurk project undertaken.

Then, in the early stages of the DeTurk project, the Reber family came to us with a proposal to move and rebuild an overgrown historic now deteriorating entranceway to their family graveyard. They too would pay for the entire cost but wanted BCAGP to oversee the effort. Hallelujah, a second family taking charge of their graveyard and paying the cost. However, they had a target completion date they were working toward and more outside parties needing coordination. So now not only was the Schneider wall waiting on the DeTurk project but the DeTurk project was waiting on the Reber entranceway.

As time passed on every agenda I prepared for a BCAGP meeting I saw the inactive Schneider wall clashing with my proclivity for wanting work to get done. In addition, in February 2025 we authorized repairs to the Klein/Close graveyard for damage caused by a fallen tree. This too sat without progress. I reconciled my unhappiness with these stalled projects with the knowledge that other desirable work was being accomplished and BCAGP funds were not being used.



Finally, as summer 2026 ends, the Reber entranceway was dedicated at the end of July and both the Schneider and Klein/Close projects have completed. The final step at the DeTurk waited for the heat of the summer to pass and will be completed shortly if it is not already complete. I breathe a sigh of relief, but at our last meeting I had the surprising question to ask 'What do we do next?', it had been years since that question was relevant.

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I conclude by shifting to another topic. When I visited our accountant to collect our 2025 tax returns she informed me of a new Pennsylvania reporting requirement. The Department of State, because of Act 122 passed in 2022, requires all types of businesses to file a new report in the name of 'transparency and accountability'. The information requested on the new report is already provided to the Department of State on our BCO-10, our yearly tax report. It took me about 3 hours to work my way through the steps to successfully file our report, and every business in the state has to do this. Wouldn't it be easier if one arm of the Department of State just talked to another?

Meet our newest Board Member - Brian Walbert

Brian has spent his entire life in Lehigh County, just a short stretch from the Berks County line. His career has been shaped by hands-on work—from crop farming and auto mechanics to auto body repair—before ultimately finding his place in carpentry and home building. Alongside his trade experience, Brian carries a deep passion for history and conservation, reflected in his active involvement with the Upper Milford Historical Society and other local groups.

Recently, Brian furthered that commitment by completing the prestigious **Jahn's Cathedral Stone Certification Workshop**, a rigorous three-day program known for its demanding standards. "I felt it was important to fully understand the products available to repair and conserve the old tombstones we come across," he shared. With Jahn's extensive line of specialized materials and its ability to create custom formulations, the training offered exactly the depth he was seeking.

Brian's new certification strengthens our ability to preserve historic markers with skill, respect, and long-lasting materials. We're proud of his achievement—and grateful for the expertise he brings to every project.



Welcome Brian!

Veteran Focus

Christoffel Bittenbender

LARA THOMAS—SECRETARY

Usually, I choose a veteran to research based on a cemetery/burial ground/graveyard that we have recently worked in. Our focus this time came about in reverse. A descendant contacted us via Facebook Messenger and then email, asking if we could take some time to work in the Federolf Bittenbender family burial ground in Hereford Township.

The stars aligned. While the Federolf Bittenbender (hereafter rendered as FB in this article) does not have a significant number of marked tombstones, it does have one for Christoffel Bittenbender, his wife Magdalena Federolf Bittenbender and one of their sons. Christoffel's tombstone was leaning and Magdalena's had a large piece that was broken off but possible to repair. We were asked to do what we could to straighten and repair.



Early in October we took advantage of the lovely weather. Knowing that a few local individuals, including another descendant and researcher, would be interested, Brian Walbert, Nancy Lewis and I set to work. Afterward, I researched.



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 Description: Birth Record of Christopher Bittenbender, Born Oct. 1, 1750--copy of original from Winterthur Museum in Delaware.

Christoffel Bittenbender was the son of immigrant Johan Conrad Bittenbender and Anna Maria Rothermel. Conrad immigrated in 1738 and in 1750 took land warrants out in what was then Bucks County and is now Monroe. When Christoffel was only 7, his father was killed by natives. Records are in short supply for the next few years but the farm appears to have been held by his mother until a 1774 court document records Christoffel's one brother asking for the land to now be divided. When the courts said that it could not be equitably divided, the eldest brother declined to purchase it from the siblings. Christoffel did. It appears he soon sold it and moved to Berks, in the area of Longswamp township. He might have been already working as a blacksmith; iron was mined in this area. Records can be tricky, as Stoffel is named after his uncle, who lived in the portion of Northampton County that would become Lehigh County. He would also later have a nephew of the same name.

But it was also a time of political turmoil and in the summer of 1776, Stoffel voluntarily joined the 1st Battalion Flying Camp of Northampton County under Captain Timothy Jayne. No pension record survives for Stoffel, but they do for others of his unit. From them, we know that he fought at the Battle of Long Island. His commanding officers and most of his unit were captured in the retreat. Several weeks later, they were released as part of exchanges between the forces. Stoffel is not mentioned by name.

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ASSOCIATORS AND MILITIA.

Thomas Brink, July 9, 1776.
Casper Miner, July 9, 1776.
Thomas Welds, July 9, 1776.
Henry Mack, July 9, 1776.
Thomas Collins, July 9, 1776.
William Fish, July 9, 1776.
Samuel Vandermark, July 9, 1776.
Elias Ott, July 9, 1776.
David Miniger, July 9, 1776.
Michael Rhode July 9, 1776.
William Johnston, July 9, 1776.
Alexander Carnegie, July 9, 1776.
Aaron Lile, July 9, 1776.
Thomas Ross, July 9, 1776.
Archibald Borlin, July 9, 1776.
Robert McNeely, July 9, 1776.
Edward Barr, July 9, 1776.
John Cower, July 9, 1776.
Stoffel Bittenbender, July 9, 1776.
John Taylor, July 9, 1776.
Joseph Westfall, July 9, 1776.
Samuel Dingman, July 9, 1776.
William McCarty, July 9, 1776.
John Vannatton, July 9, 1776.
Morris Swartwood, July 9, 1776.
Moses Curtrile, July 9, 1776.
Cornelius Jacobs, July 9, 1776.
Philip Taylor, July 9, 1776.

Mustered then in Captain Jayne's Company, one Captain, three Lieutenants, four Sergeants, four Corporals, one Drummer, one Fifer, thirty-three Privates.

The above is a true copy of the original Muster Roll in my hands.

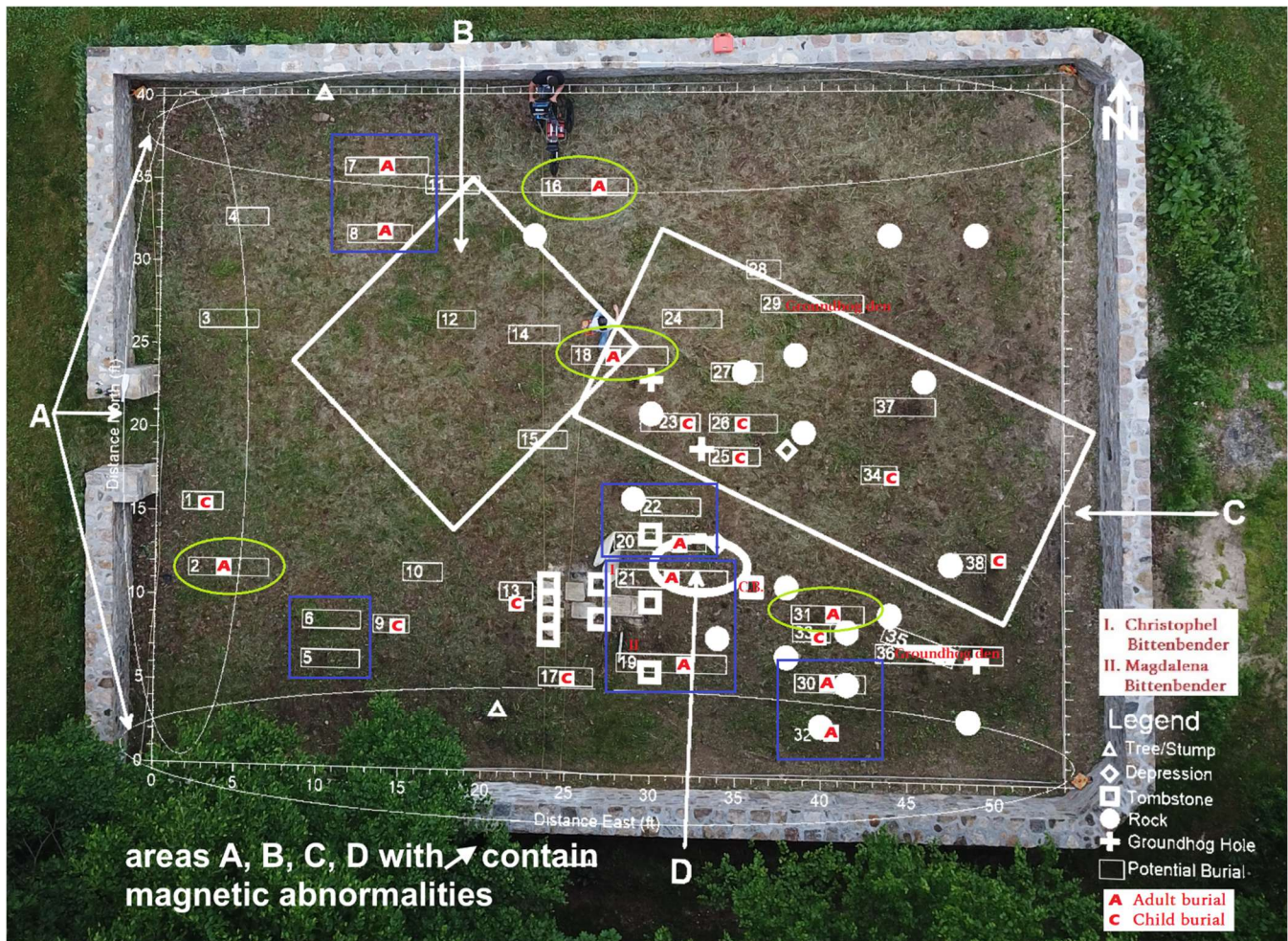
JONA. B. SMITH.

The next few years brought babies and taxes on a modest farm, listing him as blacksmith or yeoman (farmer).

In 1783, Stoffel is documented as serving under Captain Valentine Haupt in the 7th Company of the 3rd Battalion of the Pennsylvania Militia, containing Berks County men. I was not able to find any records of activity for this unit in my brief research. Others might have more.

In 1784, his father-in-law Peter Federolf died and left Stoffel 100 acres of his estate, including what we now know as the FB family burial ground. This burial ground is Peter Federolf's likely final resting place although no inscribed marker remains.

BCAGP benefited from Kutztown University's geophysics program performing ground penetrating radar as well as a scan for magnetic signatures in 2018. Their analysis showed over 30 possible graves. Iron ore was mined on this farm as well and is a likely cause of some magnetic findings.



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After five daughters, Stoffel and Magdalena had a son. Named after his grandfather Conrad, he would go on to inherit the farm as their final child, Christoffel, named after his father, only lived to age two. Stoffel's land remained in the family, passing from generation to generation until 1908.

Decades passed and his wife Magdalena died in 1831 at age 76. Only four years later, Stoffel also passed, aged 84. With the standards of medicine and care of the 18th century, years of smithing and two terms of service in the Revolution, it is a remarkable lifespan. His obituary was published in the Reading Adler (Reading

Readinger Adler. | Tuesday, Jul 21, 1835 | Reading, PA | Issue:2012 | Page:3

Starb—am 30ten Juny, in Hereford Township, dieſer County, Chriſtoffel Bittenbender, in einem Alter von 84 Jahren, 10 Monaten und 29 Tagen.

Eagle), simply stating "Died - on the 30th of June in Hereford Township this County, Christoffel Bittenbender at 84 years, 10 months, 29 days". While his taufschein, the Pennsylvania decorative document that recorded births and baptisms, states he was born October 1, 1750, his tombstone lists August 1, which is supported by the obituary.

His will was written in 1812, years before his death, perhaps during a period of illness. From it we know there was also an apple orchard on the farm, sufficient money in both cash and equity to bequeath all his daughters cash legacies as well as make special provision for his daughter Margaretha. Margaretha might have had a handicap of some type as the will states she is to have free residency of the farm for the rest of her life if she does not marry. She would have been 26 at the time of the document and not the youngest daughter. She was buried at Huff's Church in 1862, having never married.

Son Jacob married and had children of his own, burying at least two of his children in the Federolf Bittenbender family burial ground, as well as a granddaughter. Perhaps there was additional comfort in knowing these children were resting with their grandparents, great grandparents, and others.

Surely Stoffel Bittenbender would be satisfied to see family be buried on the farm he strived to build and prosper. He may have never dreamed the impact of his service. But his tombstone and veteran's marker ensure it will not be forgotten.



The next meeting of the Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation will be held on Sunday, November 22nd 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 currently 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.

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>

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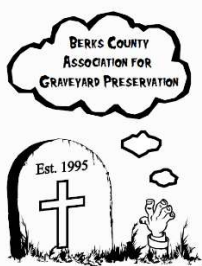
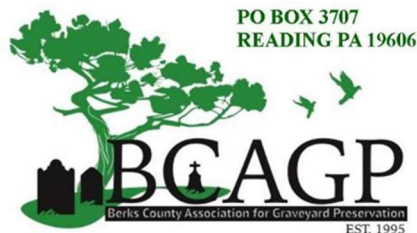
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Check our web site for details for scheduled clean ups, meeting dates and for internet edition newsletter archives in full color!

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