



# Grave Happenings

## BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

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Newsletter: contact Anne Wagner

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

Check our web site for meeting dates

PO BOX 3707  
READING PA 19606

### Special points of interest:

- Ohlinger
- Hechler Esterly
  - Deturk
  - Knabb
- "Doing the Deed"
- Veterans Highlight
- Annual report from Les

**BCAGP**  
Berks County Association  
for Graveyard Preservation



## Ohlinger

Work at the Ohlinger burial ground in Ruscombanor township continues as the front wall is rebuilt and large rotting trees are professionally removed. Smaller trees and brush were taken out by volunteers. Two veterans of the war of 1812 are buried here along with other members of the Ohlinger and Keller families. Now is the time for family members to raise the funds to enable us to continue to work to restore this historic burial ground. We got it started, but without contributions ,this graveyard can not be completely restored.



*Volunteer Chelsea Korn cleans a tombstone marking the grave of Jacob Keller, and removes broken branches from the storm.*



## Knabb

Work on the tombstones is going to be a long process as stones are dug out of the dirt, leveled, reset and repaired. This will commence again in Spring , a few stones at a time till it is all complete.



# Hechler Esterly



The work has begun! The jungle of trees is gradually being cut and stacked for removal, (during the months that vehicles are allowed to drive in). We can see many places that will need masonry repairs. Our objective to start, will be to prevent further deterioration of the walls by removing the trees and bushes that are pushing the stone wall.

It is now clear so



family members can visit and clean up their ancestors final resting place. We will now start to accept contributions toward the masonry repairs and will keep you posted on the progress. The tombstones have

had an initial biocide treatment and in Spring we will do further cleaning. This is the first clean up that we are aware of since 1976.



*Illustration of what damage trees can do to stone walls*



## LETTER FROM LES

Greetings! BCAGP had a productive year again in 2011. While much of the year followed the pattern of prior years, new members and volunteers allowed us to expand our activities. In addition to our efforts to improve the appearance of graveyards, we engaged in deed research and gave a number of talks. As always, we did just a fraction of what could be done. Nevertheless, with the people and resources available to us, we feel much was accomplished.

As in 2010, we tried to diversify our work among numerous townships and among graveyards. A new hardwood fence was installed at the Kutz graveyard in Maxatawny township. In stone work, we continued our practice of not building all 4 walls of a graveyard at once to limit the time and money expended at any one location. In 2011 we built 1 wall from scratch at the DeTurk 2 graveyard in Oley using on site stone. Work will probably be completed in 2011 to build 1 dry (non mortared) wall at the Ohlinger graveyard in Ruscombmanor township.

This year we began examining stone walls that were worked on previously with an eye toward performing maintenance now that will preserve and extend the life of past work. The walls at the Nein graveyard in Oley township were patched and stone caps were installed to help preserve the walls. Walls at the Kauffman graveyard in Oley were repaired, including a bellied out section that was rebuilt. The top of the wall at the Spohn graveyard in Greenwich township was chiseled out and re-pointed. All walls at the Levan site in Oley were patched, billet holes for attaching a wooden cap were cleared of rotted wood and the billet base cemented to prevent water seepage. All walls were re-pointed and the caps repaired at the Barnet/Peter graveyard in

Maidencreek township.

In addition to the numerous trees that we cut, we had large trees removed by a professional tree service at the Ruppert graveyard in Rockland township, the Barnet/Peter graveyard in Maidencreek township, and the Kauffman graveyard in Oley township.



We conducted group cleanups at the Breidenstein graveyard in Cumru township, the Kauffman graveyard in Oley township, the Herman/Sassaman graveyard in Maxatawny township, the Ohlinger graveyard in Ruscombmanor township, and the Reichert Dum (St Henry's) graveyard in Richmond township. Our effort at Reichert Dum completed work begun in 2010. This is a large graveyard that had profuse trees, vines, brush, and day lilies growing inside and along the perimeter. The largest trees were cut in early 2011 and several return maintenance trips were made to prevent the growth from reestablishing itself. Members did individual cleanups at the Bertolet 1, Kauffman, and Schneider graveyards in Oley township, and the Kutz and Kemp graveyards in Maxatawny township. We again sponsored the Oley High School Day of Caring in May. Thirteen graveyards in the Oley School District were weed whacked and cleared.

A pleasant development for us this year was new members who sought graveyards to care for on their own. This had occurred years ago, but we have not recently had volunteers for individual graveyards. We extend our thanks to Paul Schu-

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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.

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mann who adopted the Barnet/Peter graveyard in Maiden creek township, to John and Sharon Carmello who maintained the Ritter graveyard in Exeter township, and to Karla Hummel who adopted the Nein graveyard in Oley township. Karla geared her work to the Nein reunion, which met locally this year, and provided the returning descendants with an especially attractive site. Paul undertook a seemingly futile task of searching for pieces of vandalized tombstones at Barnet/Peter, and, in fact, found many. He along with Karla and Anne Wagner did an unbelievable job of fitting the pieces together so that much of the stones for the individuals believed to be the 4 oldest burials here have been assembled.

We repaired and reset tombstones at the Knabb graveyard in Oley township and the Schlegel graveyard in Richmond township. Tombstones at these locations also received biocide treatments which, over time, kill the mold and fungus that discolors tombstones, frequently restoring the original color and sometimes improving the legibility of the stone to the point that new information can be deciphered. Biocide does not harm the stone, but is expensive, and we use it selectively.

We made presentations to the Schlegel reunion in June, the Oley American Legion in July, and the Leesport Historical Society in September. The BCAGP display at the Berks County Courthouse, down the hall from the Registrar of Wills Office, was updated for the first time in many years.

We met with the Berks County Department of Veterans Affairs, and it coordinated a community service cleanup at the Bernhard Adam graveyard in West Reading for us. Its influence

*(right) Les removes tree branches in the Kauffman graveyard located in Oley.*

with the Berks County Commissioners and the publicity generated by a descendant who was denied access to the Heckler Esterly graveyard in Exeter township finally permitted us to visit this graveyard after decades. We plan to begin work there over the winter.

Another new member, Betty Burdan, has volunteered to lead an effort to research deeds for sites containing graveyards. We are not sure where this will lead, but more knowledge is always good. Betty along with Paul and Karla were added to our board this year. Karla has replaced Karen Brown as Secretary and Anne Wagner will assume Karen's duties as newsletter editor. Karen was having difficulty finding sufficient time to fulfill her duties as well as she wished, but we hope to continue to see her on occasion. We thank her for many years of service.

The Nein Trust has continued to be our primary source of funds, and we have to express appreciation to BCAGP's founder, Jackie Nein, whose foresight has allowed us to continue in her footsteps. Without the trust, our efforts would be severely curtailed. We thank you for your contributions and welcome your participation. If you have an email address, please be sure that we have it. You can send it to [bcagp@bcagp.org](mailto:bcagp@bcagp.org). We use it to communicate upcoming meetings and the online availability of our newsletter.

Thank you and best wishes in 2012.



## Doing the Deed

Recording a transfer or sale of land in the Recorder of Deeds office in Berks County is optional. If the buyer and seller create and sign a legally binding and witnessed agreement of transfer or sale, it is a legal sale. Mention of unrecorded transfers can be made years later, explaining how the current seller came into possession of the land and that they have the legal authority to sell it. A title search determines the state of a title (indenture or deed), including liens, encumbrances, easements, exceptions and mortgages effecting the property. This kind of search creates a chain of title. It is usually done to inform prospective buyers of all details on the land they are thinking of buying.

In Pennsylvania, the chain of

title is a history of successive, recorded and unrecorded, conveyances of land beginning with William Penn and/or his sons and continuing up to the present owner. The search begins in the tax assessment office to determine who the current owner is and the particulars of the tract. From there you work, deed by deed, back to the Penns. A complete chain of title can provide copious amounts of historical and genealogical information on the tract and the people who have owned it. Land passed down from parent to child, may not always be recorded at the time of the actual transfer. Deeds recorded at later dates can include a very detailed description of previous unrecorded transfer, naming individual family members involved through the generations.

A complete title search can lead to wills, sheriff sales, a record of death dates, can identify the children and their spouses and any stipulations for use of the land or parts of it. These stipulations, or exceptions, can identify a particular burial ground, its care and use for future generations and describe access to the burial ground. This is what BCAGP looks for in deeds searches. The objective of BCAGP is to identify, document and preserve the burial grounds out of respect for those who created them and for their descendants.

Betty Burdan

[bjburdan@dejazzd.com](mailto:bjburdan@dejazzd.com)

*Betty is an accomplished genealogist and researcher, who maintains an extensive personal library of historical documents. We are pleased to have Betty join our board this year.*

## VETERAN HIGHLIGHT

BY KARLA HUMMEL

### Official Headstone Symbols for Veterans' Markers

From 1879-1903, the officially issued headstone of Civil War (Union forces) and Spanish-American War veterans included a re-

cessed shield, within



Daniel Esterly (Heckler Esterly)

which the veteran's name appears in bas relief in an arch, above the abbreviations for his unit. Beneath the shield, his birth and death dates may be engraved. No other information was authorized on the stone. Other markers,

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## Deturk#2, Oley Township

A second wall will be started late winter. Most of the rock was taken away many years ago, (not by the current property owners) despite PA law that prohibits removal of walls, fences, tombstones at a historic graveyard. Unless someone has matching rock



to donate, this will complete the wall restoration project. Contributions toward this project have not come close to the cost. If you are a descendant of Abraham DeTurk please send your check today!



*Please remember that most of the funding we are given is for specific graveyards and specific uses. We still need contributions for things like insurance, office supplies, newsletters, postage, accountant fees, and miscellaneous expenses that are not directly related to graveyard maintenance. Our volunteers have been using their own gas and much of their own equipment when going to work on graveyards. If you cant physically help, can you please send a check for general fund use?*

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such as those of Revolutionary War veterans replaced in those years, also included the recessed shield.

Prior to this, the official marker was a wooden headboard. Public sentiment & economic con-

siderations (nearly 300,000 wooden markers needed to be replaced about every 5 years –at \$1.23 each at the time!) led to the markers being carved in stone.

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



Sergeant Harry Deem (Fix Gerber)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

The newest edition (volume 19) of “The Passing Scene”, written and published by George M Meiser IX and his wife Gloria Jean Meiser (who are members of our group), includes the Kirby Graveyard in Maiden creek Township. Also the Winter 2011 *Berks County Historical Review* included the Barnet Peter Graveyard also in Maiden creek. Both are available in the Gift Shop of the Berks County Historical Society!

Almost two dozen complete deed searches have been done this year, leading back to the original family that is buried in the burial ground, and some going back further. Thanks to Betty Burdan’s diligence and expertise we can share this with descendants and those who own the property the burial ground sits upon.

The next board meeting of the BCAGP will be February 12th at 2PM at the Oley Legion Hall. All are welcome to attend.

## Out in the Field

By: Karla Hummel

Warning: Graveyards can be addicting. I know that from experience.

I joined BCAGP simply to learn more about the graveyards I routinely drive past, like the Hoch and Weidner located opposite each other at the intersection of Hoch and Bertolet Mill Roads in Oley. I was astonished to learn how many other sites were nearby. So my first lesson was simple: **keep your eyes open**. Look for a copse of trees in the middle of a cleared field or for a single evergreen in the midst of a crop, and always look uphill from an historic homestead. Visually searching for previously unnoticed graveyards as I motored along the roads of Berks County became a game, a habit, a challenge. I was hooked!

While some graveyards are recognizable from the road, finding others can be an adventure. The

BCAGP book “Epitaphs” is an invaluable aid but, even when utilizing its information, the locations of some sites may be considerably less than obvious. By participating in the annual Day of Caring I was able to visit many graveyards in just a few hours. Joining in BCAGP site cleanups introduced me to other sites. Now that I know their locations, I can return to those graveyards at my leisure – after I complete Lesson #2: **always request the property owner’s permission beforehand** (unless there is an established public right of way access). You can contact BCAGP via Facebook, email or phone to get the contact information about the property owner. Tromping through a backyard, into crops, or over private property without permission is neither legal nor wise.

Reaching a graveyard on foot is not always straightforward. Some lie close to paved roads, but others are accessed only with a bit of exertion or fortitude. Hence my third lesson:

**Wear the right clothing.** Consider what you’d do for brief hike in unknown woodlands. Sturdy shoes to walk on uneven terrain and step through water or mud are essential. Long tough pants will take you thru weeds and brambles. Keep gloves and a hat handy – just in case.

The most important lesson when “out in the field” is common sense – especially if visiting a site on your own. **Be safe.** Bring your cell phone. Let someone know where you’ll be.

Kauffman (Oley)





People have often asked me, "What is your favorite graveyard?" I really hadn't given it much thought until we were asked by the Nein Trust managers to come up with a list of which graveyards we will concentrate on as the funds run out. And I wonder what criteria should be used if we can only maintain a specific number of the more than a hundred historic graveyards in Berks County. Do we try to prioritize them based on historic value or the number of burials inside? The amount of work they take to maintain? Perhaps the ones with the most living descendants inquiring deserve top spot? Do we consider which ones are the most visible to the general public? I personally like the "orphans". The graveyards that no one seems to care about—the most neglected. Others prefer the ones along the road that you can see as you drive by. It is impossible for me to pick a

single all-time favorite. Today's favorite might not be next month's favorite or next year's favorite. But today I am liking the Wartzluft in Perry Township. Picture a tiny graveyard with three marble stones sinking into crater holes and surrounded with overgrown lilac bushes. It sits



in the middle of a farmer's field with a crumbling stone wall along Dreibelbis Mill road. Stories of Indian burials on the farm have been passed down through the Dreibelbis and the Wartzluft/Wartzluft families yet no one seems to know exactly where they may be located or who they may be.

Daniel Wartzluft moved to

the farm in Perry Township in 1833. He farmed and operated the grist mill that was later known as the Dreibelbis mill. Daniel and Catharine (Delp) had at least ten children. Their son Jacob is buried with them. The Wartzluft farm stayed in the family until Catherine Wartzluft mar-



ried Cleopas Dreibelbis. From there, the Dreibelbis name continued until Lloyd sold it to Bell Trucking. In the deed, Lloyd made doubly sure that access to the graveyard was legally assured. Now to make it nice again.... Who wants in?

*Anne Hummel Wagner*

BCAGP has reduced our costs of mailing and printing newsletters by publishing every other quarterly newsletter in an online edition which can be viewed in **full color** on our website at [www.bcagp.org](http://www.bcagp.org). If you are a paid member and have no access to the Internet please contact us and we can print one for you. We had the choice to cut down the newsletters to twice a year or to put two on the Internet so we decided to give the web newsletter a try! The pictures look so much better in color (which would be cost prohibitive to do in our newsletter). Look for an Internet version in April, a printed version in July and another internet version in October. If you haven't already done so, please check out last quarter's October 2011 newsletter, which has some really great photos!



The stone of Johannes Breidenstein (Cumru) 1862 is ornate and unique. None other in the graveyard has such interesting carving.



David Grim 1864 (Maxatawny township)

### Did you know?

In the Bashore graveyard (Bethel Township) almost all the stones have the same small carving at the top.



Sarah Weidner 1874 (Oley township)

(Watch for Crudely carved fieldstones in an upcoming issue)

When we aren't working on graveyards we do research and field questions, often from descendants who are working on their genealogy and have discovered their ancestor's burial spot. To make it easier to share information we have a FACEBOOK page with 100 albums of graveyard pictures for you to access. The pictures are of various stages of historic work in progress, and finished jobs. Please find our Facebook page and "LIKE" it so we know you're out there! It takes a lot of work to document these graveyards to share with you, and we want to make sure you know the Facebook is there. Just search our name and find the page. We also periodically post work parties for you to join us and other information.

(<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Berks-County-Association-for-Graveyard-Preservation/150047911461>)

# 2012 membership dues are now due!

## Please support our work and join our cause.



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 not a current member, please join us in preserving and maintaining our historic graveyards. Or if you do not wish to be a member at this time, but 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 - 2012

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

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