

# Grave Happenings

## BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

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

Check our web site for meeting dates

PO BOX 3707  
READING PA 19606

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**BCAGP**  
Berks County Association  
for Graveyard Preservation



Don't forget to check our facebook for updates and more photos!  
Check the [www.bcagp.org](http://www.bcagp.org) website for internet edition newsletter archives.



## Keim

The Keim burial ground on Boyer Road has had a three wall facelift! The cement covering was removed and repairs that were needed were done and the wall re-pointed. Members of the Keim family association took up a collection and sent us a generous contribution towards the work and we financed the rest from grants given to us by the Jacqueline Nein Trust. Work like this is expensive, but we can work with families to preserve the burial ground for hopefully at least our lifetime and many years to come.



Simple repair of the stone of Susanna Hock who is buried in the Hoch family burial ground on Bertolet Mill Road in Oley.



There are many burial grounds that do not have a regular caretaker. You don't need to wait for us to have a work party to help. If you have spare time and want to get some exercise keeping a burial ground maintained there is always something to do. Some have family members that keep them in order, some have property owners who keep them in order. Many have occasional helpers but not regular, and many have absolutely no one that cares enough to even take down the weeds. We (BCAGP) do not own any of these. They do not belong to us. We fill a void when needed but we don't and can't, do it all. We try to keep accurate records of who owns the property that is the access to the burial ground, and which ones are taken care of and which ones are orphaned. So if you have one in mind you would like to "adopt" we can help guide you in making the connections you need for access. If you have none in mind, we can find one for you that either is your ancestors' or in your locality. We have some that have a caretaker now but that caretaker could use help and we can provide you with contact with that caretaker.

## Rothermel

Repairing sections of the wall at one of the Rothermel burial grounds is on the "sooner rather than later" list. Curious cows who stand by the gate are sure to get in if this isn't put back together soon. Several smaller sections need repair as well. Thanks to Florence Rothermel Heydt and other family members, the funding is in place. Their contribution combined, with ours, will stabilize this burial ground and this project has begun this month.



Work started



## LETTER FROM LES

During this year's graveyard cleanup conducted by Oley High School students a question was raised at the Schneider graveyard about why there were so few burials. The Schneider graveyard is large, 75' by 125', and surrounded by a stone wall about 4 feet high. Almost all of the tombstones are to the left of the entrance, though even to the left there are many plots without tombstones.

My response to this is pure speculation but I cannot believe such a sizable wall was built around land that did not contain burials. I believe that the graveyard is mostly full.

Those who are buried here and have readable tombstones include the immigrants, Hans Schneider and his wife Catharina. Also, four of the their five children are buried here and at least two of the spouses. There are numerous tombstones from the third and later generations, most from the two sons who inherited the property. The accumulating wealth of the family can possibly be inferred from the larger tombstones of the second and third generations as can the dispersal of wealth within large Schneider families through the smaller tombstones of later generations.

It is possible to infer that there was a plan to the layout, with the Schneiders being buried to the left and others to the right. Surely there were many non Schneiders living and working in the vicinity during the 1700s and early 1800s. Some were probably just buried out back wherever they lived and their gravesites lost relatively quickly. Others, with a connection to families like the Schneiders, were probably allowed to be buried in family graveyards with the expectation that these sites would be more permanent.

Most graves were probably marked in some way initially. The landowning families, being wealthier, were in better position to purchase tombstones of a more durable quality that could weather centuries. Many unmarked plots may denote people of lesser means, including later Schneiders.

Relatively early death may also be a factor in unmarked graves. I know of a granddaughter of Hans Schneider, who with her husband, owned considerable land not far from the Schneider holdings. Both she and her husband died in their forties, leaving 3 children in their early teens. While it is not known where this couple is buried, her father and grandparents, and their son and grandsons are buried in the Schneider graveyard and have tombstones. I suspect they too are buried here, but the choice of burial markers at the time of their death was handled more expediently than it would have had they lived longer.

Just to contradict my speculation, the Schneider graveyard does contain individual tombstones for a Dierolf, a Gerber, a Schaffer, a Nein, and 5 Hartman children on the left side and for whom my limited research has found no Schneider family connection. It is interesting to wonder what set of circumstances led to their burial here. Were they simply filling an occasional open space? More speculation.



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.



Keim



Hechler-Esterly

**Stiles** are steps that were put in the graveyard after it is full. It was not common but there are a few. They make it harder to maintain the burial ground because what they did was wall up the entrance, and put in the steps. At the time when it was done, people used hand tools to maintain them and didn't push a lawnmower up over the wall. When someone sees them for the first time they usually shake their head and ask "How did they expect anyone to get a lawn mower in?" The answer is they didn't. I even had someone ask me one time where the handicapped access is. There isn't much information on Stiles being used in cemeteries. Even Google yields no results. Why did they go through all that trouble to close up the wall and put in



Reiff



Hunter-Kemp

steps rather than just a gate is anyone's guess. Keith Schaffer insists that they believed it was a stairway to Heaven. The truth is we just don't know much about this practice, and if anyone has more information we would love to hear it!



Barnet-Peter

## Doing the Deed

Much can be learned by the family genealogist/historian, in reading the old family deeds. The deed recitation can tell if the property was inherited and what the relationship was between the now deceased grantor and the grantee. Multiple deeds may be written to multiple heirs. Many times the deed will recite where the deceased obtained the land and how much land there was to start with. These facts can often be verified in the estate file, which might include which heir is to receive which tract, how many acres or what portion of the whole.

The deeds can also tell you something about our ancestors. If they are deeding a mill or a blacksmith shop and tools to one or more heirs, it can be determined what their occupation was. Land ownership meant prosperity. If a large tract or tracts were being passed on or divided among the heirs it would be a sign that the ancestor was prosperous. Many deeds will quote parts of the will, to prove that the land was intended for the heir or grantee.

Deeds can speak of the affection a father may have for his children or for his spouse. It is not unusual to find the phrase "for the love and affection I feel" for my son, daughter, wife, or grandchild, giving the name of each. Very often the deed will be written with an exception, or subject to clause, so that a dower is provided for the surviving spouse, or for the care and welfare of the spouse. Finding these kind of statements in a deed, lets the reader know it was a warm and loving household.

When there is no will and the real estate passes, by law, to the descendents, the next deed written will include all of the heirs who share in ownership of the property inherited. In the case of female heirs it is the custom to include the names of their husbands in the grantors list. Their relationship will be defined as "the children and heirs" of the deceased. When a child precedes a parent in death, the names of the of the children of the deceased child may be given as heirs, in their stead.

Some estates take years to settle and by the final distribution or partition of the real estate, even the widow may now be the wife of someone else and be so stated in the deed. This is more often the case when the widow is young, with young children to provide for. So, read the deeds carefully and never discount a deed as a source of family history.

Betty Burdan  
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### Glossary (Continued from issue 3)

Improvements - Any development of land or buildings through the expenditure of money or labor, generally thought of as permanent and fixed.

In fee of - Title in outright ownership of real property; including ability to transfer

Indenture - A deed between two parties conveying real estate by which both parties assume a responsibility...one to be the seller and one to be the buyer. Historically each transfer of real estate was documented twice on one sheet of paper. The copies were then cut apart in a random and irregular indented line so that the authenticity of the deed could be verified.

Inter alia - Among other things

Instrument - A written document that records an act or an agreement that is regarded as the formal expression in evidence of that act of agreement.

Intestate - To die without leaving a valid will

Intestate Property - Property which the deceased (testator) has failed to dispose of or devise in a will.

Intestate Estate - The result if the person to whom the decedent left a life estate, dies and the decedent did not provide for disposition of the life estate

Land Trust - Vests title to real property in the name of the trustee under a recorded deed of trust. A second agreement

may be written between the trustee and the beneficiaries.

Legal title - When a property is patented, a legal title to the property is transferred from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, also known as the Proprietors, to a private individual or corporation. All subsequent transactions between private individuals are done through deeds, not patents.

Letters of Administration - An instrument issued by the court, declaring a person legally appointed to administer the estate of someone who has died without a will, or intestate.

Life Estate - an estate whose duration is generally limited to or measured by the life of the person holding it.

Liens - A charge upon personal or real property to satisfy a debt.

Meanders - A winding path or course, often describes the lines in a tract of land

Meets & Bounds - Description written in a deed that names the names of adjacent property, or bounding, property owners and compass direction and length of the property line, from point to point of the compass.

Moiety - One of two equal parts of a tract. Often used when two or more heirs inherit one tract of land and divide it equally among themselves. The moiety is transferable by deed, indenture or binding agreement.

More or less - When referring to the size of a tract in a deed, meaning it is not an exact measure.

Neat measure - Indicating that the measurement given is accurate, precise as proven by a survey conducted, saying the tract in question does not include the traditional six percent over-plot allowance for roads or highways.

## Veterans Corner By : Karla Hummel

In 1973 the United States created something daring – the All Volunteer Military. After 40 successful years, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel said that “our all-volunteer force faces challenges. It will need to *rebalance, adapt, and evolve.*”

BCAGP is also an All Volunteer force! And we, too, are challenged to *rebalance, adapt, and evolve.*

I’m sure there are those of you who look at photos of our graveyard clean ups, when we are either sweaty or shivering, probably itchy, brandishing chain saws or lugging tree limbs, lifting stones and deafened by weed eaters & say, “I wish I could still do that!” (or, more likely “Thank goodness I can’t do things like that anymore!”). Well, what some of us are actually thinking as we work to preserve these historic treasures is “I’m getting too old for this. I wish we had more volunteers!”.

There are many ways to become more involved in our All Volunteer force. In addition to administration, research, the intricate study of deeds and genealogy, newsletters and Facebook updates, and the solicitation of funding, there are 3 things that BCAGP really needs to have to successfully *rebalance, adapt, and evolve*:

**Laborers.** Members who are willing and able to do pure manual labor. Whether they serve during cleanups or choose to adopt a graveyard (or several), they are people who are interested in physically caring for burial grounds. We can teach you how!

**Stewards.** Members who are willing to visit one or more sites every year to note the conditions (e.g. is there damage, have any tombstones toppled or broken, have tree roots pushed in a fence or wall, is anything missing) , possibly take a few photos, and report what you’ve found. If each burial ground were visited at least once each year, we would have up to date, accurate records, and be better able to set priorities. We’ll supply a checklist!

**Ideas.** To find laborers and stewards (and members and directors), we need ideas: suggestions on how to reach more students, Scouts, organizations, companies, municipalities or individual volunteers who can give some time and energy to supporting our goals. We’ll welcome newcomers!

Give it some thought.

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

*The Fix-Gerber burial ground is sandwiched between route 422 and route 10 at the edge of Reading. People frequently visit while walking the Schuylkill River Trail. Over the years land had been shaved off the burial ground under various circumstances and records are sketchy. Land was taken for the canal and then the railroad and then taken for the highway.*

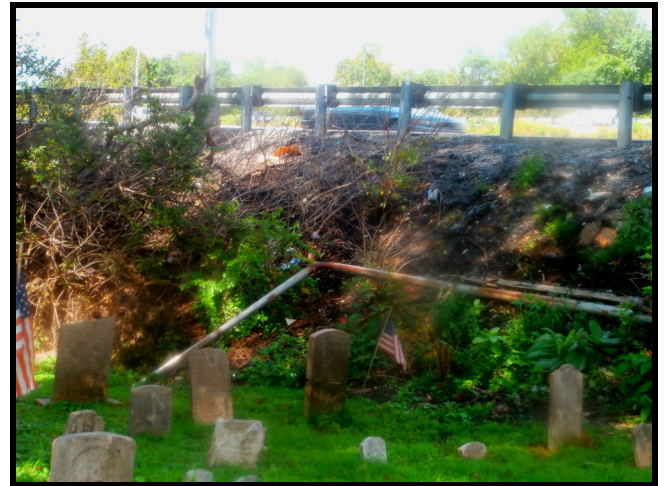
*The burial ground was started in about 1816 and is likely the oldest private burial ground in the City of Reading. At one time the land was in Cumru township. Three families had separate sections but all blend into one. There is an odd looking building at the end that was an ammunitions storage house that belonged to Stichter hardware.*

*When the railroad vacated, Samuel Fix successfully won a court action to get the land back, so the railroad no longer owned that right of way that the Schuylkill River Trail is now on along that section. It is unknown how the River Trail obtained an easement to that section, when it really belonged to the graveyard, but it does provide a way that people that normally would not see the graveyard get to learn about its history.*

*In 1963 the state went to court to ask permission to move two graves to another location for the highway to go through. Prior to that time, the only other access was over the railroad tracks (now the river trail). When Judge Hess granted the petition to move two graves, the question of access was addressed. According to the Reading Eagle, the caretaker of the plot was assured by the state it would be possible to park on the shoulder of the road, and walk into the cemetery. Judge Hess however said that "it would be good if some arrangements could be made so that vehicles and equipment could be driven into the cemetery if other reinterments or removals might prove necessary in the future.." As you can see from the photos there is a*

*steep bank from the roadway to the cemetery and no other access was provided on that side. On the other side there is no parking on the side of the cemetery and to park on the other side and cross that highway is not very safe. Where the state expected access is a mystery to me.*

*The Shillington Odd fellows, and particularly Neil Thomas, have been the latest of a long line of caretakers of the plots. They have done a fabulous job! Now that the state is planning yet another infringement on the burial ground to add another lane to the highway, we are concerned about the safety of the burial ground and those visiting and tending with the highway getting even closer. It is still in the*



*planning stages. We will be watching this situation carefully and you will be hearing more. This brings a lot of questions, and illustrates a lot of problems we have with the PA Historic Burial Grounds Act which we will be talking about in more detail later.*



*Anne Wagner*



## St Henry By: Karla Hummel



The Reichert Dum / St Henry graveyard in Richmond Township is - quite simply - big. Too big. Unlike most of the family burial grounds that BCAGP members physically maintain, this is a real cemetery, measuring a full 100' x 100'. It requires a team effort and is accessed through a gracious neighbor's property, up the unpaved drive to a small parking area from

which we then walk (carrying loppers, weed whackers, chainsaws, gas cans, water) past the green houses and the first field, by more green houses (don't forget to greet the goats), to the even longer hike along the edge of the next field (preferably wearing bright orange as we see the hunters nearby) to the partially toppled stone wall. Then we can get to work in the big, too big, graveyard.

The land has seen several eras: it has been farmland, a private graveyard (of the Reichert & Dum families), and the consecrated cemetery of the Catholic Church (St. Henry, a long ago razed mission built to serve the needs of local lead miners).

Consecration is the act of setting aside land for sacred use in perpetuity, and when St Henry closed its doors, the land became the property of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (the Allentown Diocese had yet to be created) -- so how did BCAGP come to care for it? We'd heard that over the decades, various groups (at least 1 parish and Boy Scouts) were involved in caring for the land. But somehow it was abandoned and forgotten. So in 2010, with the assistance of local college students, BCAGP trekked through the fields and began work on

a scale larger than what we usually face, and heavily overgrown.

After several years of daunting cleanups, it became obvious that this one cemetery was usurping time that could be used to use to maintain several other sites. It was time to request, cajole, or demand help from somewhere, and as the most vocal grumbler about the problem, I was selected to go find it.

And so, I came to be sitting 40 miles from St Henry / Reichert Dum (in a dress and heels rather than my usual BCAGP attire of dirt covered jeans and steel-toed boots) in a conference room in Bethlehem, for a meeting with the Reverend Monsignor William Baver and Mr. Larry Hillanbrand, respectively the Director and Superintendent of Diocesan Cemeteries for Allentown. Fully prepared with the history of St Henry, deed research, ground and aerial maps, before and after photographs of the site, and surrounding property owner contact information, I was ready to present our cause. But it turned out that St Henry was never really abandoned --- just administratively lost! Msgr. Baver was not only quite familiar with the background of the site, he'd already (based on my initial contact email) had Mr. Hillanbrand take a work crew to the cemetery to complete an initial landscaping! The Diocese had cared for the cemetery for decades, but during a personnel change in 1997, the outlying -- and to their staff rather small -- site, which had not been documented by previous staff, simply disappeared. It was all a paperwork error!

The results couldn't be better! The Allentown Diocese is delighted to have St Henry back in their care, and will provide more frequent and comprehensive landscaping than we ever could. BCAGP is equally delighted to be relieved of the burden so that our efforts can be utilized in other graveyards. And I fully believe that the Reicherts, Dumms, Bartletts, Seyferts and all the other inhabitants of this burial ground are quite satisfied as well.



## Updating the By-Laws

The Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation (BCAGP) was founded in 1995. In a short while it will celebrate its 20th year in operation. Over these 19 plus years, we've learned a great deal about what works for us, and how methods and means of operation have evolved.

Every organization, public or private should review and update their By-Laws from time to time, as they grow and change. The Board of Directors has taken on that task and has crafted modified By-Laws to be proposed to the membership for a vote at their next Annual Meeting.

The mission and goals of BCAP have not changed. They are still to promote respect for all graveyards, facilitate the restoration, maintenance and preservation of neglected or abandoned historic graveyards within the bounds of Berks county.

The proposed By-Laws follow the current By-Laws closely, but state more clearly and in more detail how the business of the Association is conducted. Simple changes like allowing us to make notifications via e-mail in this electronic age. Sections have been added to expand on the qualifications of members who serve on the Board of Directors and how to handle vacancies.

A copy of the current By-Laws and a copy of the proposed By-Laws is available by contacting Betty Burdan

## Notices

The 2014 Annual Meeting will be exceptionally important! Mark your calendar for November 16th @ 2PM, Legion Hall in Oley. We will be voting on the updated By-Laws. If approved, we will also then vote to elect Officers and Directors as the By-Laws call for term limits, and require Officers and Directors to have synchronous terms. Please submit nominations either in person at the Meeting, or in writing to the address on the front of this publication. There will be a second Meeting early in 2015, as the revised By-Laws call for an annual financial review as soon as practical in the calendar year.

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Once again we are taking inventory on our equipment. If you have BCAGP equipment, please notify Les Rohrbach. If you are no longer using it please return it so it can be used by someone else. Thank You.

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October has two clean up days scheduled. Volunteers needed and welcomed. Contact Les Rohrbach for directions if needed, and check face book for updated information (cancellations etc). October 11th we will be working on the Kauffman in Maiden creek and the Rothermel #1 in Maiden creek. October 25th we will be working on the Sassaman and the Kutz in Maxatawny township. In the unlikely event we get to one, and it has been done by someone else, we may have to select a last minute alternative. If you are planning to come out it would be a good idea to contact Les for a cell number in case we end up moving to another location before you get there.

### [Historic Burial Places Preservation Act \(PDF\)](#) of April 29, 1994 (P.L. 141, No. 22)

This Act defines "Historic burial place" as "A tract of land that has been in existence as a burial ground for more than 100 years wherein there have been not burials for at least 50 years and wherein there will be no future burials or listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission."

It further states that municipalities may not use eminent domain to take a historic burial ground for an alternate use. PHMC approval must be given before a burial ground is taken for "public use." If the burial ground is taken for public use, then the burial ground authority must preserve a record of what was removed. This record must be sent to the county and PHMC.

Furthermore, this Act also stipulates that the following actions are illegal: the removals of a fence, tomb, monument, gravestone, or fragment. These actions are legal only if the object(s) is being removed with consent of the owner or descendent **and** a court order for the purpose of "repair or replacement, reproduction or preservation and display in an accredited museum."

*"Grave Happenings" is a collection of articles provided by members of our Board about recent and on-going activities. We are always open to your suggestions for future content.*

*Permission to reprint any materials herein is granted provided they are printed in their entirety and that BCAGP's author is cited.*



## 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.

# 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 - 2014

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. 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*