

# Grave Happenings

## BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

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Check our web site for meeting dates

PO BOX 3707  
READING PA 19606

### Contributors/Staff

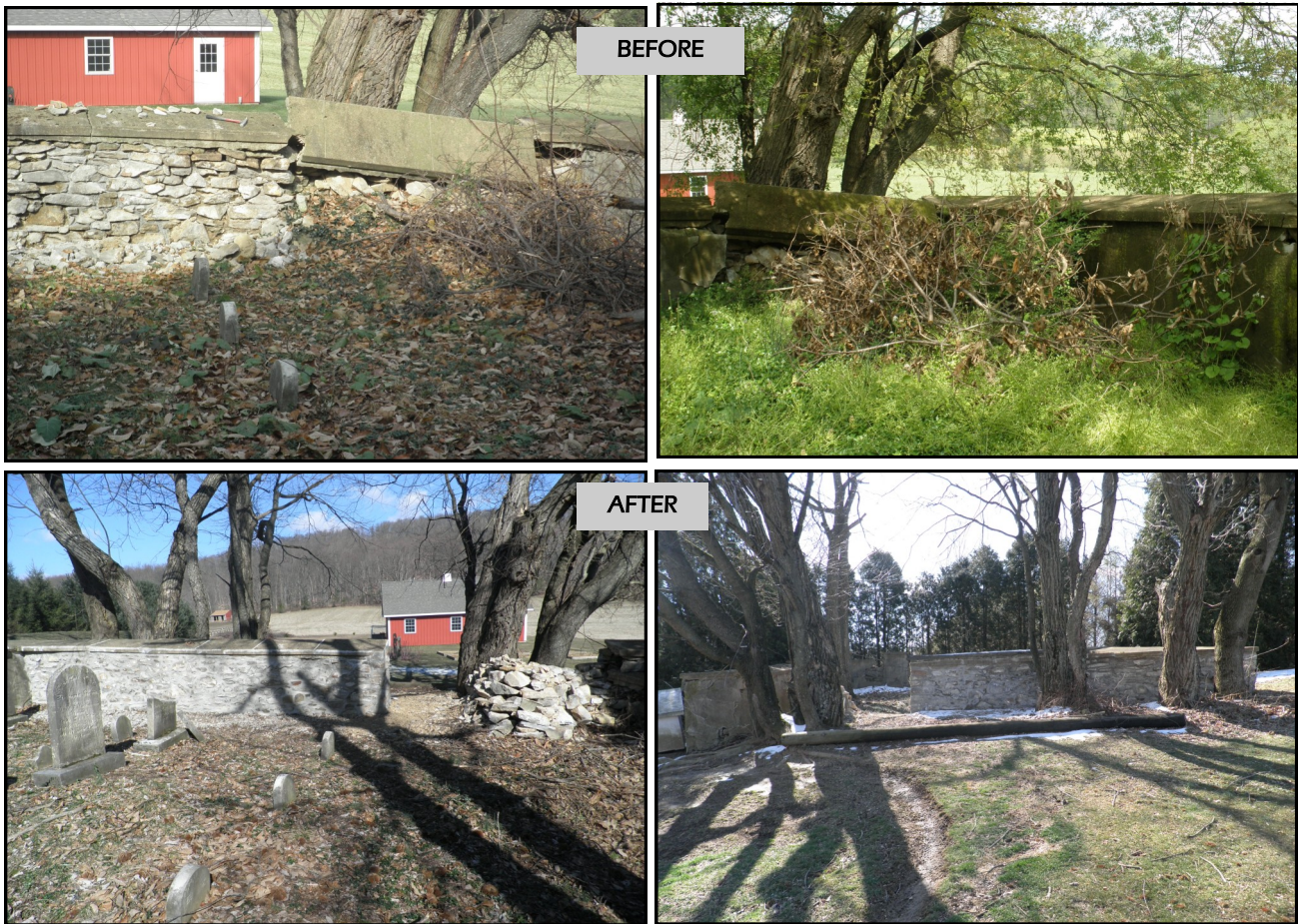
Betty Burdan  
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Anne Ketter

**BCAGP**  
Berks County Association  
for Graveyard Preservation



## Keim

Phase One at the Keim is complete. The collapsed section of the wall was removed and a new opening created so there can be easier access for maintenance. That entire section of wall was repaired, chipped out and repointed. The exterior was plastered with cement many years ago to try to keep the wall from crumbling, rather than correctly doing the stone masonry repairs. The plaster was removed and the stone wall is now restored in that section. The tree pushed the wall so it made no sense to simply rebuild that section without removing the tree. Since this burial ground had stiles and no opening, there was no way to get a mower in for maintenance unless someone wanted to lift it over the wall. So we created an access at this trouble spot. The rock is stacked and will be saved for filling in at a later date.



## Hechler Esterly

**The Hechler Esterly is still being worked on. The last two walls are being repaired and chipped and repointed. Pictures of the finished product will be in the next newsletter.**

In our historical research, we sometimes seek evidence while fully realizing that we will never have proof.

Consider the “fieldstone”. Used as a grave marker when a stone carver was not available or not affordable, a fieldstone was routinely just a long, narrow rock embedded vertically as a tombstone would be – usually predating the cut, carved and engraved head and footstones in our historic burial grounds. On rare occasions we find a fieldstone with rough engravings of initials and/or dates (see our July, 2012 newsletter, vol 7.3, pg 5 for examples), but most have no inscription.

So, without physical evidence, i.e. a human body, how do we know if we have simply found a rock or if it's a fieldstone? Here's an example from the Hoch DeTurk Schenkel (HDS) with some basic criteria.

1. *Missing burials: are there documents or other evidence that there are more burials than there are tombstones at the site?* Yes. There are early family members for whom we have no recorded burial places.
2. *History: is there a record of fieldstones having been noted previously?* Yes. Chester Deturk's survey in 1931 notes that he believed there were at least 9 fieldstones at the HDS.
3. *Area: is there part of the graveyard that does not have carved grave markers?* Yes. At the HDS we have 4 trees, each marking a corner, with evidence of mortar forming a boundary around the site, and documents describing a fence. But the tombstones are only located in about 1/3 of the enclosed area.
4. *Location: are the supposed fieldstones aligned?* Yes. Looking down each of the 3 rows of tombstones, toward the “empty” section of the site, it is obvious that there are rocks in line with, and spaced similarly to the engraved stones.
5. *Implantation: is each rock placed in a manner which may indicate human involvement?* Yes. The rocks are vertical. Other random rocks lay at varying angles but are not upright.
6. *Size and shape: Do the rocks appear to be uniformly rectangular?* Yes. Most are not only long and narrow, but have the more pointed end protruding.

Let's view one example.



This rock was located in line with several tombstones. Once the vegetative growth was cleared, it was just over 3" tall and 7" across, with a pointed end, standing vertically.



After a few minutes careful digging, looking down into the hole, the flat rock was now 12" tall with uniform thickness.



Using my arm to demonstrate the depth of the hole, now at 16", the rock is still a uniform shape and vertical.



Completely removed and two feet long – only the portion between my fingers was above the current ground level! In a few more years it would have been completely submerged.

Once photographed, this stone was replaced in the exact location, but with 2/3 showing above ground level to approximate how it could have originally been placed.

Is this a fieldstone? We can't prove that it is, but the evidence clearly suggests that this rock was selected for its shape, buried vertically, and had newer tombstones placed in alignment with it. Comparing this rock and its conditions with hundreds of others that are randomly strewn around the site, I must choose to record it as a likely fieldstone (but whose??).

Karla Hummel

## LETTER FROM LES



One graveyard where BCAGP has spent a good bit of time is the Barnet/Peter graveyard in Maiden Creek Township. Apparently Stephen Barnet was the first person to settle here. From the earliest times into the 1800s any number of spellings is seen for this surname with Barnet, Bernet, Bernhard, and Berndt being the most common. Stephen Barnet married Maria Bertolet, eldest daughter of Jean Bertolet who settled in Oley in 1726. Their first known child was born in 1744. Presumably, they settled their Maiden Creek property somewhere around this time.

By the time Stephen died in September 1778, he had owned and sold land along the Schuylkill River in Maiden Creek township, and in Brunswick township in what is now Schuylkill County. His home was his property in Maiden Creek township. To locate it today,

Memorial Gardens Cemetery along Route 222 occupies roughly the eastern portion with the property extending south westward along what was then described as the public road to Easton, and is now Route 222.

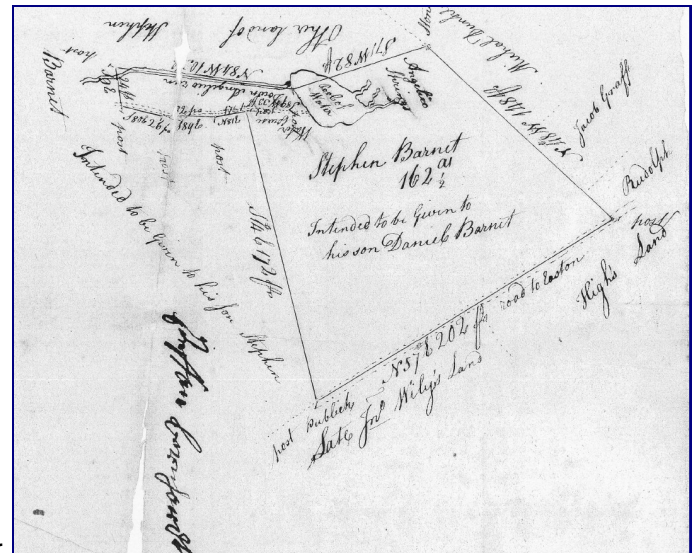
Among Stephen's estate papers in the Register of Wills office in Reading is a map depicting how he wanted his property divided between his 2 sons, Stephen and Daniel. The property was roughly split in half with Daniel receiving the eastern portion of 162.5 acres and Stephen the western section. Names of adjacent landowners included Joseph Wily, Rudolph Hoch, Jacob Graff, and Michal Dunkle. What is interesting about this map is the depiction of what it calls Angelica Springs, a pool of water, and Angelica Run. Today, more than 230 years later, a short walk from the graveyard reveals that little has changed. Angelica Run is now known as Peter's Creek and flows into Ontelaunee Lake.

From the father's will, Daniel inherited the dwelling place where Stephen Sr. lived. The small historic graveyard only contains marked graves for Daniel and some of his descendants. It is unknown where Stephen Sr. is buried, but it is likely that Daniel was buried near his parents. No burial ground is known for the family of his brother Stephen. Stephen's line of descendants is much more fruitful than that of Daniel's and some of Stephen Jr's children are buried at St Peter's Church in Molltown.

Daniel Barnet married Maria Elizabeth Lies, daughter of Heinrich. She and Daniel died 3 days apart in Oct 1839, and their deaths were reported in the same edition of the *Reading Adler*. They had one known child, Susanna, who lived to adulthood. Susanna married Abraham Peter, great grandson of Engel Peter who settled in Oley around 1719. Abraham died in 1824 and Daniel Barnet became guardian for some of his grandchildren. Daniel's will bequeathed the 164 acres on the north side of Easton Rd to his two living grandsons, Joseph Peter and Benjamin Peter. His will specified that this land was not to be divided or sold by his grandsons as long as both lived.

After Joseph Peter died in 1866, his eldest son, Ephraim sold his father's interest in the land to his uncle Benjamin on April 1, 1868. Benjamin died January 9, 1897, and left the property to his son David Peter. At this time, 119 years after Stephen Barnet Sr's will, adjacent property owners included Herman Berndt and Peter Dunkle, descendants of the owners of 1778. David Peters (now Peters, not Peter) died December 17, 1921 and bequeathed his farm in Maiden Creek township known as Angelica Farm, again a name from 1778, to his son Thomas Peters. However, David stipulated that if his son Thomas did not sell the farm, it was to be sold after Thomas' death and the proceeds distributed to the heirs of Thomas and David's 3 daughters. Thomas died December 17, 1962. Sale outside the founding family to Anthony Maggiaro was made on November 24, 1971 for

\$140,000.



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.

*Recently, Helen Smith called me, as a member of the Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation for help. Helen and her husband Dennis purchased four small tombstones at an auction about 20 years ago.*



*The dealer told her the family didn't have the money for the finished stones so they ended up being sold eventually in his store in Lebanon. Helen purchased the stones in the hope of eventually learning where the graves were and placing the stone where they were intended to be. Having no idea what area the stones originally came from, this might have seemed like a search for a needle in a haystack. So in the meantime, the stones sat in Helen's pretty garden in Sinking Spring awaiting their fate.*

*I sent out the information to several members of our organization to see who wanted to work on this puzzle and was pleasantly surprised at how quickly we assembled the pieces of information needed to put these stones to rest.*

*With Betty Burdan, Robin Smullen, Karla Hummel, and especially Bruce Speck, who volunteered for Find-A-Grave helping me, we solved this in less than 24 hours! With several of us working as a team, we each found different pieces of information and made different phone inquiries. We discovered the funeral home was Hetrick-Mull. Fortunately, they are members of our organization and were excited to help, although the records from that long ago were removed to another location. We hit the jackpot when Robin found a Find-A-Grave entry for Amy Meshok and I contacted Bruce who posted that memorial. Bruce is active in the Lebanon area; entering tombstones and data on a website that is key to genealogist research in the era of computer research. Bruce also has access to obituaries in the Lebanon newspaper, which was the key to the final outcome.*

*Michael F and Amy F (Williams) Meshok lived in the Lebanon Pennsylvania area and had five children between 1925 and 1938. Sadly, only Mary survived leaving a sad beginning to their long marriage until Amy died in 1962. Tombstones were ordered for the four babies.*

*Amy F Meshok 1926-1926*

*Dorothy M Meshok 1928-1928*

*Pearl F Meshok 1931-1938*

*Michael F Meshok 1938-1938*

*For some reason, the tombstones were never paid for and were not picked up so the graves remained unmarked.*

*We found the census data for an Amy F and Michael F Meshok in Lebanon and instantly knew they had to be the parents of these babies, since two of the children have their name and same middle initial. We followed their life online through government and church records leading to their first born child, Mary, who lived a good life with her husband, Lester Weaver in the Lebanon area. When Bruce found Lester's obituary we knew Mary had a son, Albert.*

*Locating Albert was no harder than looking him up in the directory. It was a sweet ending because Albert had heard family stories about the stones having been auctioned off and people telling them they saw them but by that time no one knew who bought them. Albert's mother Mary wanted to find those stones but was never successful.*

*From there, we concluded this mission knowing Albert will make sure the stones are in their proper place, marking the graves of his infant aunts and uncles in the Cornwall Cemetery in Lebanon County. Thanks to the Smiths for their act of kindness many years ago.*

*Anne Wagner is 2nd  
Vice President of  
BCAGP.  
(awagner615@aol.com)*

## Doing the Deed

"An Exception" or "Subject to" are phrases that are frequently found in old deeds. They can have similar meanings, expressed in different ways for different purposes. Both describe restrictions or obligations placed on the property being sold or transferred. Sometimes they are spelled out in great detail and sometimes not.

An "Exception to" a deed is the seller's means of telling the buyer that he is purchasing the land as described in an earlier deed written to the seller, except for certain changes or restrictions that now exist. For example, a grantor owns a 150 acre plantation in Berks County. He's owned it for the last 50 years and now it is time to sell. He remembers that some years before he sold a small portion, maybe an acre or two, to a neighbor. When he sells the remainder of the land, the new deed must disclose the fact that it is no longer 150 acres, but is now 148 or 149 acres. The descriptions of meets and bounds may be written the same as on the seller's original deed, but "An Exception" is added stating that on a certain date, recorded or not recorded, 1 or 2 acres was sold to another party. Therefore, the tract is not the same as the original deed. The new deed must reflect any changes made in the size of the tract.

"Subject to" is used to describe rights, privileges or obligations that purchase of the land carries with it. Sometimes the sale of the tract may be subject to a dower owed to the wife upon the death of the seller. Or it may be subject to a life-interest in the homestead by a widow, meaning she would have the right to remain in the house until she dies. It may be subject to a mortgage debt, or water rights given to a neighbor, or an easement or right-of-way written to other parties for certain purposes.

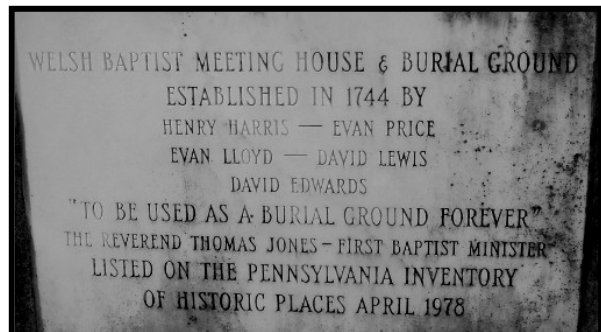
Another exception, the one BCAGP looks for, is the exception defining the location and size of a family burial ground and access to it. Access can be a clearly stated as a right-of-way or easement for an access route leading from a public road or cart way to the burial ground. Some deeds are re-surveyed and the meets and bounds written precisely to skirt the burial ground, giving the buyer only the land around it, but not the burial ground itself nor the access route. Sometimes only the burial ground is excepted and the privilege of access is written as an exception or subject to, in language that allows the descendants of those buried there, or others, to access to the burial ground at the discretion of the new owner.

Sometimes a separate deed or deeds to the burial ground and access route are written to the next generation in

the family and a chain of ownership is established that may continue generation after generation to the present day. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Many of these exceptions for burial grounds and access never have a separate deed written for them to anyone. They remain only exceptions in an old deed showing that the current owner only owns the land around them.

If the owner of the burial ground and access route dies and no other deed was ever written to anyone else, they become what might be called an "orphan" burial ground. They had an owner, but the owner is now deceased. No clear deed chain is established beyond the original exception and exceptions carried in successive deeds.

This is the case with the Bernhard Adam burial ground on Old Wyomissing Road, Reading. Much has been written about this burial ground. A plaque on its wall, placed in 1978, states that it began life as a Welsh Baptist Meeting House and Burial Ground in 1744, "to be used as a burial ground forever."



A search of the chain of deeds revealed that on May 26, 1798, Bernhard Adam pur-

chased a tract of land from Caleb Jones which included this burial ground, the tract being called the "Church Land." Caleb Jones had purchased sundry tracts at a Sheriff sale prior to selling this tract to Bernhard Adam. No exception for a burial ground was found in this 1798 deed, but later deeds did except the burial ground and access route to it, both situated within this tract. So it is assumed that Bernhard Adam as of May 26, 1798, was the last owner of record to the burial ground. As the rest of the deeds were reviewed from that time forward there was always an exception to the burial ground and access route clearly spelled out. Meaning that the owner remains as Bernhard Adam, who died in 1810, and not any of the persons who purchased the tract thereafter.

Burial grounds and cemeteries are non-taxable lands, therefore the tax assessment office has no reason nor real obligation to identify owners of burial grounds or ceme-

*(Continued on page 7)*

*(Continued from page 6)*

teries. The only folks who need to identify the owner of any burial ground would be those who wish to take on the task of caretaking or preserving the site. BCAGP must obtain permission from the current owner of any burial ground in order to proceed to do any maintenance, repairs, conservation or preservation. In the case of these orphaned burial grounds, such as the Bernhard Adam, this becomes impossible. The owner of record to the Bernhard Adam has been dead for more than 200 years. The end result is there is no living owner nor authority to grant permission to do any work on the Bernhard Adam.

As BCAGP research continues other orphan burial grounds have been identified. Much as BCAGP would like to lend a hand in taking care of every private, historical burial ground in Berks County, it is impossible in these cases. So, if you know of a burial ground that needs care, also know that BCAGP is not neglecting it. It simply may not be possible to identify an owner and receive the necessary permission needed to proceed.

[Betty Burdan](#)

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



## Veteran Highlight By Karla Hummel



Researching the men and women buried in Berks County historic graveyards is, at least for me, unfailingly confusing. Finding information that is consistent and verifiable is always challenging.

Consider the story of Adam Ruppert. You'll find him resting in Rockland Township, about 20 yards from Schweitz Rd. His stone is simple, just his name, dates of birth & death, and his age.

Born in 1755 in the county he would take up arms to create, Adam was the son of Caspar Ruppert who had arrived on the ship Europa in 1741. We know that Adam served in the 10<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Regiment, with family documents showing him at age 22 as one of the "naked and starving men" in General Washington's command in the Valley Forge winter of 1777, but a muster roll lists him in 1780 as one of three Corporals in the Company of "Captain Lieutenant" Jacob Giles Hicks. Did Adam serve a

lengthy 3 year enlistment at a time when turnover of personnel brought a crisis to the new army? Or is there fault with the data? Was Jacob Hicks really a Captain Lieutenant – a rarely used rank wherein an officer holds the duties and responsibilities of a Cpt. but receives the pay and privileges of a Lt.? Other companies on the muster roll had 1 Captain and 3 Lieutenants. Also, Jacob Hicks is listed as a Prisoner of War at the same time as he is listed as commanding the Company! As always, there is more research needed....

Adam Ruppert married Barbara Zimmerman. He passed away at the age of 74, and she at 84. While his grave bears deserved military honors, I think Barbara's should carry a special tribute – she bore her soldier husband 11 children and still lived a full decade longer than he did! Perhaps Adam and Barbara would be proud that generations of their progeny moved west as the county expanded. The town of Rupert, Idaho (the 2<sup>nd</sup> "p" in the spelling disappeared in ~ 1840) bears their name.

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

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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.



May 24th will be this year's Oley Day Of Caring where Oley students and advisors go out with us and clean up Oley area graveyards.

Board Meeting will be April 7th at the Oley Legion Hall at 2pm. All invited to attend as always.



**Is anyone interested in purchasing a used Billy Goat Outback Brush Hog mower from us? We purchased it several years ago and decided it was too bulky for our use. Serviced at Ed's Small Engine Repair and currently in storage. \$500 or best offer, you pick up. As is.**

**Contact any member of the board for more information or to arrange to see it.**

- ✓ Model #82DB BC002401HE
- ✓ 11.0 Honda 8.20 hp engine
- ✓ Electric starter and pull starter
  - ✓ 24 inch blade width
  - ✓ Weighs 300 pounds

*"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.*



# Gone But Not Forgotten



Area of the Deisher Burial ground in Maxatawny township



Although a variety of PA burial ground laws were around since the early 1900's, many burial grounds have been destroyed or covered over. Burial ground laws have evolved and changed over the years, but it wasn't until 1994 that the Historic Burial Grounds act was better defined and clearly specified that it is illegal to remove tombstones. The Yoder burial ground in Pike township is actually in the front yard of the home you see in the picture. The orange flags mark the approximate place. The house was built and the stones were removed and/or covered over. The current property owners would like to restore or at least memorialize the family burial spot. There have been rumors that stones still exist but their location is unknown. We are seeking information on what happened to the tombstones.



The Johan Peter Deisher family burial ground is far in the background of this memorial stone placed along the road in Maxatawny township. The burial ground has long been plowed over and there is little information in regard to who or how many are buried there. There are remains of buildings from the original Deisher farm yet nothing is visible of the burial ground. Although PA law would prohibit this now, and probably did then, most farmers were not aware and enforcement was not readily available. It is important for property owners to be aware of potential burial grounds on their land even if there are no visible remains.



## George Y Hess

Son of George Hess Sr.

Born August 18, 1851 - died Sept 8, 1874

According to a notice in the Reading Eagle Sept 18, 1874, George died of

*Typhoid fever days after another close relative died of the same disease. At the farm the fever had raged since hay making and four and more at a time were ill. No one would go there to wash or bake and Mr. Hess Sr. had to do most of the work himself.*

*Buried in the Kirby Burial Ground in Kirbyville, he was 23 years and 21 days old when he died. Rev. Koenig a dunker preacher officiated. He also lived in Lebanon county.*



## Where was "Hettie" Nein buried?



A burial notice for Hettie Nein, which appeared in the Reading Eagle on December 20, 1900 offers little to go on for Hettie's place of burial. It said simply that the remains of Hettie Nein who died at the Almshouse, were interred in Snyder's Burial Ground near the Oley Line.

Knowing that Hettie was a nickname for Esther, a search was made for both Hettie and Esther Nein in the known burials in Berks County private burial grounds. Two were found but neither death date matched Hettie's, which was likely 4-5 days before the notice appeared. Neither were buried in a Snyder Burial Ground.

Esther Nein b. May 31, 1796 d. April 7 1877 is buried in the Nein Burial Ground east of Limekiln and Quarry Road. Esther (nee Bertolet) Nein wife of Daniel b. Nov. 19, 1749 d. Sept 5, 1792 was buried in the Bertolet Burial Ground off Bertolet Mill Road in Oley.

The Oley Line, a trolley line passed by many private burial grounds on its way from Mt. Penn to Oley and beyond. One of them is a Schneider/Snyder Burial

Ground where the oldest burial is that of Johannes Schneider, who died in 1743. Other burials include Geehr, Messersmith, Hoch, Bertolet, Miller, Dierolf, Levan, Gerber and Schaeffer, but not Hettie Nein. A second Snyder Burial Ground in Oley, whose burials were removed to the Spies Cemetery in 1991, did not include a Hettie Nein.

Who was Hettie? According to the 1900 census, she was indeed a resident at the Almshouse at the age of 89, born April of 1811. She was single (not widowed) and she could read but not write and she spoke English. Twenty years earlier, she resided on Church Street in Reading, keeping house for herself. In 1870 she was 59, living in Reading with a 19 year old border, Daniel Potter. This is where the trail goes cold on Hettie. She could not be found in the census prior to that. Some family researchers have linked her as a daughter of Daniel Nein, who is buried at the Snyder where the burials were removed but no substantial proof was provided.

Where was Hettie buried? Did she have a tombstone to mark her final resting place or was she interred without anything to mark her burial? Is it possible to

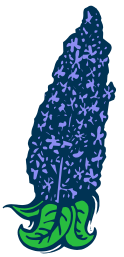
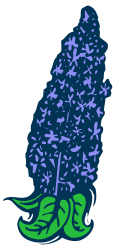
If you have information on Hettie Nein please contact Betty Burdan

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."



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 - 2013

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*