

Grave Happenings

BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

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READING PA 19606

BCAGP
Berks County Association
for Graveyard Preservation



Contributors/Staff

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Anne Wagner

Don't forget to check our facebook for updates and more photos!
Check the www.bcagp.org website for internet edition newsletter archives.



Current activities of our members & announcements

George M. Meiser, IX and Michelle N. Lynch, will launch their new television show "THE PASSING SCENE" on BCTV. It will be aired the 3rd Monday every month at 7PM.

Frederick C. Sheeler will be on the ballot for State House Representative, PA 5th District.

Keith Schaeffer will be at the 65th Kutztown Folk Festival this year teaching how to dowse for free. Festival runs June 28th to July 6th.

The next meeting of BCAGP board will be April 6 at 2PM at the Oley Legion Hall. All are invited to attend.

Winter of 2014, brought us almost to a standstill. All burial grounds have been under snow and the temperatures so low that we have little to report. As you can see here the easels at the Barnet Peter burial ground held up well through the snow! We were a little nervous about this, as it is a new concept for us. Happy to report the easels weathered the storms!



Rothermel



Walls need repairs



Descendants of Revolutionary war veteran Christian Barkert give his headstone the first biocide treatment with D-2 which removes biological growth.

The tombstone of Katie Bechtel ,daughter of Peter and Anna Rothermel, who died in 1855 is being reset.



Joachim Nagel, Patriot (b. 1706 d. 1795)

Memorial day will be here before we know it. The snow will be gone and the weeds will be up. We will again be heading out with the students from Oley High School in May. The goal is make as many as we can, accessible and safe for those that wish to place flags or visit. A huge **Thank you** to all those that help take care of the graveyards! **Thank you** also to the property owners who give us an easy way in through their land, and tolerate the sometimes inconvenient visit to their home so family and friends can check on the burial ground. **Thank you** to all (many are veterans themselves) who get out there and get a flag at every single grave, even if they have to walk through cow dung or corn stalks to reach their destination. **Thank you** to all the veterans who served!

See more on Joachim Nagle on page 10

LETTER FROM LES

A little over a year ago, two people separately reported to us that the cap on the Bertolet 1 graveyard in Oley township had been blown off. When we investigated, we found the cap from the left and rear walls in the farmer's field. The cap consisted of long sheets of bent tin nailed to slanted wooden supports which had been mortared into the top of the wall. Much of the wood was rotten. The cap may have been in place for more than a century. Incredibly, gusts of wind (probably from hurricane Sandy) were strong enough to lift the cap off the wall.

Initially the cap was dragged to the wall so that it would not be a problem for the farmer. During last spring's Oley High School Day of Caring, a group of students was able to lift the cap back onto the walls albeit with some tin noticeably twisted. It was no longer mortared in place but the weight itself gave some hope that it would remain in place.

In the meantime we had begun looking for the graveyard's owner. Betty Burdan did her normal impeccable job researching deeds. She found several deeds referencing '18 perches on which is maintained a burying ground.' A deed from 2007 contained text copied from prior deeds indicating that the graveyard itself had been transferred from Daniel A Bertolet to John Bertolet on Feb 7, 1824 in an unrecorded deed. Unfortunately, we found no subsequent deed transfers. Text replicated from deeds since 1927 indicates that the graveyard is maintained by the D Bertolet Family Association, Inc., but the only Bertolet Family Association that we have found has shown no interest.

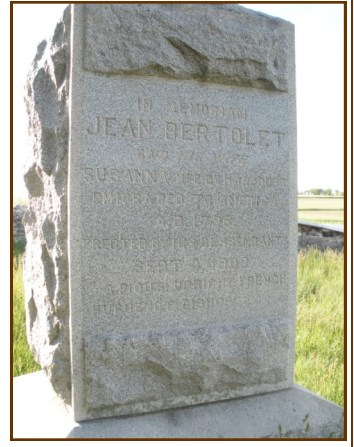


Through the course of 2013 our membership had discussions as to what to do about the cap as this repair was different from what the current members have dealt with. Various members contacted roofers and contractors whom they thought might be able to effect a fix or replacement of at least the damaged portion of the cap. Little interest was shown. To spur our decision making along, the wind blew a portion of the cap off the wall again last fall. Finally, we did receive a price for repair, but it was comparable to what slate caps have been costing us.

Weighing our alternatives, repairing the existing cap would have left some differences in appearance between the old and new, the degree of difference only apparent after the work had been completed. Half the cap would still be a century old and a probable future problem, and even without problems, maintenance would be required. In the end we chose to take a long term perspective and install a minimal maintenance slate cap on the entire wall and have a uniform look that will hopefully last many decades. We expect this to be completed in the first half of 2014.



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.



Note: We are still seeking the person who has been mowing and caring for this burial ground. Please contact any board member with information.



Groundhogs By: Keith J Schaffer

Groundhogs are seen often in cemeteries. They dig holes and undermine walls and make tombstones sink. They will also use the tombstones when they fall over, as part of their tunnel system. Groundhogs can have 80 foot tunnels. Groundhogs have been known to steal the veteran flags to take in their tunnel for bedding.

One time working at the Seyfert graveyard, a groundhog stole my mason line and took it in his hole. I tried pulling it out and he had 100 foot of line in the tunnel. We do not harm groundhogs, but do try to discourage them.

I believe that groundhogs like the graves because they like the calcium, and it's an easy hole to dig out. Most of the graves are lined with brick or stones, so it makes a good shelter for them. We found tombstones that were lost by looking down groundhog holes. We sometimes find bones that have been dug up by the groundhogs. The bones are put back and reburied in the hole they came from.

Many of our members have fallen into groundhog holes. They can be a hazard so be careful where you walk in a graveyard.

Groundhogs are great weather predictors!



Stones toppled from groundhog hole at Kauffman in Oley

Doing the Deed

Pennsylvania began as a land of farmers. When the first immigrants came to Pennsylvania they must have had a wish-list including, rich tillable soil, level land for easier cultivation, woodland from which to cut fuel and building timbers, and an adequate water supply for crops and livestock. Where there was no woodland on their primary tract of land, they would often purchase a secondary tract of woodland or sprout land to supply their needs. Where there was no creek or spring, they would obtain water rights from a neighboring tract.

Sometimes they purchased vacant land and started from scratch, sometimes they bought a tract that someone else had already made improvements on. Whatever the condition of the land, a description of that condition would be included in these early deeds, so the buyer knew exactly what they were getting and not getting. Much history can be learned from these descriptions.

Exceptions to the land were also noted, such as easements, right-of-ways, water rights both to and over the tract. It is often in these exceptions where we find the provisions for the family burial ground. In the 18th century there were no public burial grounds or cemeteries and church yard burial grounds were few and far between. It was imperative that the early settlers provide a place to respectfully bury their loved ones who passed. That place became the family burial ground.

On the practical side they would usually select a location, for the family burial ground, that would not interfere with their crop lands. This might be hillside, a gully, or a far corner of a working field, but always out of the way. When selecting the sight they would also consider access. Many of the deeds where a burial ground is excepted, will also contain an exception describing the route to be used to get to and from the burial ground. Finding these kinds of exceptions makes documenting the family burial grounds easier. We can learn who first set aside the land as a burial ground and which generation began using it. Also who the burial ground descended to.

Unfortunately, as years passed, a burial ground exception, written in an early deed, was sometimes forgotten or not mentioned in successive deeds. Technically the legal owner of a family burial ground would be the persons to whom the exception was written to in the last deed where it was mentioned. That last mention might be in the early to mid 1800s and that owner is long dead himself. In this case it would be the descendants of this person, who could lay claim to the burial ground, by the laws of descent. That is, if they knew their ancestor owned it and that they had the right to claim it, which is often not the case.

These become what I call orphan burial grounds, they do not belong to the land that surrounds them and no descendent has claimed them. They still belong to that last, long dead family member. The laws of Pennsylvania protect historical burial grounds, but it makes no provision for their care and preservation when the owners cannot be located. The care and keeping depends on organizations like BCAP, the few existing family organizations or generous neighboring property owners, who undertake the task without benefit of legal permission, but simply because the job needs to be done to pay respect to our ancestors.

Glossary of Terms (continued from volume 9 issue 1)

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 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.

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

Betty Burdan
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Veteran Highlight By :Karla Hummel



Wanting to learn more about a man buried in Berks County, I turned to California. Why? Recent developments in scanning and online publishing provide a wealth of information, previously available only in original documents and limited editions – now, immediately accessible and free! In 1907, Pennsylvania supplied The Leland Stanford Jr. University Library (now known to most of us simply as “Stanford”) in California, the **Pennsylvania Archives**, Sixth Edition. Stanford, in turn, now provides a scanned copy online. This book includes PA military abstracts from 1790-1817. There I found:

“Tuesday, Aug. 12, 1794

Return made according to law by the Brigade Inspector of the County of Berks of the election of officers of the Militia of that County, Commissions issued in due form to the following named gentlemen. Namely: ...

1st Regiment, 3^d Company, Lt. Daniel Dreibelbis”

This is just the first step in confirming the accuracy of our information regarding a burial in Richmond Township; that of Daniel Dreibelbis (Oct 17, 1768 – Oct. 7, 1843, aged 74 10 24, m April 24, 1798 Magdalena nee Kieffer), whose broken stone, engraved in German Schrift, no longer marks the exact location of his grave. We understand him to the father of 9, and a veteran of the War of 1812. This supporting data from California clearly indicates his military service!

Reading Eagle June 20, 1908

NINTH WELLER REUNION.

150 People Attend Gathering Near Hill Church.

The ninth reunion of the Weller family was held at the home of the oldest member of the family, Gideon Weller, aged 86 years, between Hill Church and Landis' Store. There were about 150 people in attendance and 25 teams brought the visitors to the place.

Gideon Weller is very feeble. His son, Louis, is his constant attendant. The old man greatly enjoys the reunions, though this year his condition does not permit him to become excited.

Dinner was served by the ladies present. After the meal the visitors gathered at the family cemetery, situated on the farm, where "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," and "Nearer, My God, to Thee" were sung, and the annual reading of the inscriptions took place. They were read by Joel Weller, of Boyertown.

Reading Eagle -April 27 1928

REMOVAL OF BODIES COMPLETED BY CITY

Removal of bodies from the old Friends' Meeting House Cemetery in the Maiden creek reservoir area to the new location in the same district has been completed, according to Councilman George W. Snyder. The removal included 680 bodies.

Work on rebuilding the meeting house in the new location will be started in the near future as soon as men now employed in placing the city's parks in shape have completed that job and can be sent to the Maiden creek district.

Some time ago Council passed legislation authorizing the Laureldale Cemetery Company to remove bodies from the Forney family burial plot in the Maiden creek area to the Laureldale Cemetery.

Reading Eagle September 16 1913

TO MARK GRAVE OF BERKS REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIER

Pottsville, Sept. 16.—Through the untiring efforts of Mrs. Ella Zerhey Elliott, the War Department has notified Mahantongo Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, that three headstones for graves of Revolutionary soldiers have been shipped here.

They will mark the graves of Capt. Conrad Minnich, at Cressona, Schuylkill County, Daniel Esterly, Exeter Township, Berks County, and John G. Zerhey, at Friedensburg, Schuylkill County.



The subject of ghosts or strange happenings often comes up when working on cemeteries. I can't count how many people have asked "do you ever see ghosts?" At the risk of sending many of you running the other direction ,I will continue on this subject. Most of our followers have heard the story about the voices at the Kirby, which is situated along 222 and was relocated back several feet for the roadway in the early 1900's. We are watching closely the current plans for widening the road again, as the sacred Kirby Burial ground is right in the path.

I was going through our record files for tidbits that might be interesting in the newsletter. A letter we received from a woman, whose family owned the Barto property at one time, caught my attention. I was reading this letter to Keith Schaffer which detailed the burial of her mother's still born infant, in a shoe box, in an unmarked grave in the Barto burial ground. Keith knew about the baby and told me about the work he had done there.

Many years ago Keith rebuilt the walls, carefully following the footers for size and dimension. The first day he worked there, a friend with equipment was on the site and every piece of equipment broke down, including a tractor and a backhoe. The friend went home while Keith went for parts. When Keith returned every nut and bolt on his chainsaw was loose.

A week later, Ralph Lorah, an officer of the group arrived to check on progress and it was a clear day with no wind. Keith was having a bad day and was complaining and venting about the job. A 50 foot piece of plastic, picked up off the ground and swirled around overhead, and landed on top of the first corner he had built. Keith exclaimed "the place is spooked" and Ralph left hastily.

The next day, Keith being concerned that he might be digging into graves, used his dowsing rods to determine if he was digging in a bad place. There have



been stories of Native American burials as well in the area. Satisfied he was not disturbing any graves, he sat down and said :“ I am not here to destroy your graveyard .I am here to rebuild it for you”. And after that there were no more problems and the job went smoothly. No one has reported anything unusual since the restoration .

The Barto burial ground is on land owned by the Reading Motorcycle Club, and their members devotedly take care of the grounds. There are few marked graves, however we believe there are more unmarked burials like the baby in the shoebox. We know Jacob and Veronica Berto/Barto are there.

*We thank the **Reading Motorcycle Club** for protecting this historic place, and for the work they have done on the nearby Weiser-DeTurk burial ground as well. And may all those buried within those walls, and those outside as well ,rest in peace.*



Anne Wagnet

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Revolutionary War Veterans in the Fritz Burial Ground

by Betty J. Burdan

Nine years prior to the Revolutionary War, the 1767 tax list for Douglass Township, Berks County counted 46 heads of households and 4 single men. While this list provides the numbers of livestock, it does not count the number of household members, leaving us with no population total. By 1790 the number of households had increased to 79, with a total population of 441. On average this would be a gain of 1 and 1/2 households per year, so that by 1776 there may have been approximately 59 heads of households at the start of the Revolutionary War.

Ten of these Revolutionary War Soldiers and 1 Revolutionary Patriot are buried at the Fritz Burial Ground in Douglass Township, or about 1 out of every 6 households. To date an additional 31 men from Douglass were found to also have served in the Revolutionary War. Given the length of the war and the total number served, may translate into nearly 1 member of each household going off to fight for our independence.

Eight of those buried at the Fritz are recognized by bronze plaques placed by the Berks County Chapter of the DAR in 1972, through the efforts of Marion (Nagel) Rhoads. Two more, George Brunner and Johannes Reifschneider were recognized and documented after 1972. The latter on September 2, 2010, when Dale Derr, director of the Berks County Department of Veteran Affairs, personally placed a flag by his tombstone.



Joachim Nagle, the Patriot, born in 1706, was well into his 70s during the war, yet he took it upon himself to supply grain and food to the troops at Valley Forge. There is evidence Joachim had some sort of memorial placed in front of his tombstone, but it is long worn away. We can only guess it may have recognized his service to his country.

These Douglass Township soldiers, for the most part, served in the 5th Battalion, 6th Company from 1777 to 1779 and from 1781 to 1782 they served in the 3rd Battalion, 6th Company. Samuel Sands was Captain to both units.

Those buried at the Fritz are:

- (1) Bernhart Honeller/Hornerter (b. Oct 17, 1755 d. Oct 12, 1823) Pvt 4th Btn. Philadelphia County
- (2) Johann Georg Gresch (b. Jan 10, 1798 d. Feb 12, 1806) Pvt 5th Btn, Berks County
- (3) Johann Christian Jorge/Yorgey (b. 1764 d Nov. 17, 1834) Pvt 5th Btn, Berks County (4) Bernard Fegley (b. March 26, 1757 d. March 7, 1844) Pvt 5th Btn, Berks County
- (5) Jacob Heppenhaemer (b. Dec 17, 1762 d. March 9, 1832). Pvt 5th Btn, Berks County
- (6) John M. Na-gel (b. 1756 d. 1834) Pvt 5th Btn, Berks County
- (7) Johannes Keihly (b. Dec 5, 1742 d. Jan 22, 1822) Pvt 5th Btn, Berks County
- (8) Johannes Al-bright (b. Nov 7, 1756 d. July 19, 1823) 1st CL Pvt Lancaster County
- (9) Joachim Na-gel (b. Feb 21, 1706 d. July 26, 1795) Patriot*
- (10) George Brunner, Berks Co. (b. Apr 23, 1755 d. Dec 6, 1845) Militia, 6th Co., 5th Btn, Berks County
- (11) Johannes Reifschneider (b. 10 May 1749 d. 11 Apr 1836 age 86-11-1) 3rd Class, 7th Company, 4th Battalion, Phila County Militia Douglass Twp: Page 796 Vol. 1 6 Series PA Archives.

Besides those buried at the Fritz other Douglass members of these two companies have been identified as: Samuel Avenshein, Henry Buck, William Brunner, Henry Bunn, Herman Bunn, Jacob Bunn, George Eagle, Henry Eagle, John H. Eagle, David Heppenhimer, Valentine Fisher, John Fritz, Martin Fritz , John Hatfield, Henry Houck, Henry Keely, Jacob Keely, John Keely, Daniel Leven-good, Philip Leven-good, Peter Meffert, Peter Moser, Peter Nagel, David Potts, William Potts, John Romich, John Sands, Joseph Sands, Samuel Sands, Henry Yorge and Henry Yorge Sr.

Douglass Township, was not so different from every other town-ship, village or neighborhood in Berks. These brave men stepped up to the plate to serve their country, just as men and women have continued to do to the present. As Memorial Day approaches we would do well, to pause and thank them all for the freedoms we enjoy.

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 descendant **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 ongoing 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
for meetings times*