

GRAVE HAPPENINGS

Publication of the Berks County Association for Graveyard
Preservation-Vol. 1 June 2006

JACQUELINE NEIN AWARD

Was given to George Brown a senior
At Oley High School for past service
To the organization in addition to
Community service.



Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation Officers

Ralph P Lorah
President

James McClean
1st Vice President

Cynthia Jimenez
2nd Vice President

Hillary Murdock
Secretary

Angela Zern
Treasurer

ASSOCIATION HANDBOOK OF HISTORIC FAMILY GRAVEYARDS

Included are 310 sites. 125 without surface evidence.
Information includes over 200 site pictures.
Township maps with locations of all sites.
Cost of book. \$25.00 plus tax and \$3.50 P.& H.



The Hoch-High cemetery in Cumru Township is to be re-built in 2006.

UPDATE

THE HOCH-HIGH CEMETRY AT POPLAR NECK

At long last, the dilapidated Hoch-High cemetery at Poplar Neck will be restored to its former beauty and dignity by the Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation.

This venerable cemetery, dated from the 1700s, has been the scene of neglect and desolation for many years. It's location, once sitting serenely on a hill overlooking the distant city of Reading, has caused its downfall. It now sits on top of a capped landfill, Western Berks Refuse Authority. The surrounding grassy acres are now bare of trees and contain piping to let off methane from the landfill underneath.

The acreage it sits on was part of beautiful Poplar Neck Farm, founded in 1745 by Samuel Hoch-High, son of John, and grandson of settler Rudolph Hoch of Oley. Samuel's wife, Esther Herbein Hoch, in 1796, just prior to her death, stipulated in her will that the family cemetery be secured. Her husband Samuel had predeceased her by seven months, and her only living son, Isaac, had died the year before. Consequently, she was concerned that her husband and son have a decent and secure resting place, and directed that "out of her estate money shall be taken to build a stone wall around the burial place on the plantation of Samuel Hoch, deceased".

Now, the directive of our ancestress, Esther Hoch, echoes to us from across the years. The walls are falling, tombstones are overturned, a thicket grows up around the remaining walls. The cemetery must be restored!

The present structural appearance is that of the Victorian cemetery as it was redone in the 1880s by great grandson Ezra High, who erected walls of brick, topped with wooden coping, and beautiful wrought iron gates. The foundation of red sandstone is probably earlier, and most likely is the original 18th century foundation.

Plans are to demolish the crumbling brick walls and rebuild them. The red sandstone foundation appears to be stable, after all these many years, and will be retained if at all possible. The magnificent wrought iron gates, so similar to those that once graced the fence surrounding Ezra High's house, will be restored, and placed once again at the entrance to the cemetery. All the overgrowth surrounding the cemetery will be cleared, and a small parking lot will be built adjacent to it. The work will continue soon!

Members of BCAGP know that this particular cemetery restoration has been a long time coming. The funding has been a painful and nagging problem, with Grants secured and lost, and subsequent friction with the nearby municipality. Even before that, funds left by the "family" for the care of the cemetery ran out, with neglect and ruination being the inevitable result.

Now, Hoch-High family members can rejoice that this special legacy will be restored to them, and BCAGP will continue its mission of respect and care of the final resting places of those who have gone before us.

Respectfully Submitted by BCAGP member
Susan Miller-Speros

If not a current member, join us as we continue the work begun by so many before us.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Address: _____ **Phone:** _____

E-mail: _____

\$ _____ Annual Membership, \$15.00

\$ _____ Donation earmarked for the Association General Fund.

\$ _____ Donation to be used for the _____ gravesite.

\$ _____ Annual business or municipality membership, \$35.00

\$ _____ Donation to be used in _____ municipality.

Total amount enclosed: _____ **Mail Checks to: B.C.A.G.P., P.O. Box 3707, Reading, Pa., 19606**

CEMETERIES RESTORED BY BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION (BCAGP)



Ritter cemetery in Exeter Township



Hill cemetery in Earl Township



Hoch-Bertolet cemetery in Oley Township



Bertolet cemetery in Oley Township

POTTS CEMETERY
LOBACHSVILLE, BERKS COUNTY
Submitted by James A McClean, Jr.

When Nancy and I purchased the old Pott Mansion, Lobachsville in March 2000, we began a journey of restoration of the derelict house and property that continues to this day. We also began to research the Pott family and in the process, discovered the Pott family graveyard on our farm. The following is a brief overview of the Pott family with an emphasis on the graveyard. If anyone is interested in further reading, an excellent chapter of George Meiser IX in "The Passing Scene" Volume III and an article by Richard Orth in the Historical Review of Berks County, Volume 70, Number 1 (winter, 2004-2005) considers the Pott family and the development of Lobachsville.

Wilhelm Pott, his wife Gertrude (the widow Lobach), his brother Deganhart, his children, and Peter Lobach arrived in Philadelphia on the Schwenkfelder ship "St. Andrew" in September 1734. Mr. Pott was a successful businessman who had heard about the iron making opportunities in Oley and he moved here in 1736. The Pott family formed marriage alliances with other prominent local farmers of the day, including the Hochs, Keims, and Leshers.

Wilhelm was a very religious man and active in the Oley Moravian movement and the Brethren of Falkner's Swamp. Wilhelm Pott was an iron master with several forges. He also owned a large plantation (our present farm), grist mills, saw mills and fulling mills. Upon Wilhelm's death in 1781, his son John Pott, Sr. took over the family business and continued, until his death in 1805 as a prosperous "man of affairs" in Oley. He sent his son, John Pott Jr., to run a forge in Schuylkill County circa 1795. John Pott, Jr. is credited with founding Pottsville and Centerport.

Upon John Pott's death in 1805, the family scattered throughout Pennsylvania, and the Pott name disappears from the Oley Valley shortly thereafter.

When the Pott family arrived here, circa 1736, there was already a settler's log cabin, built by an unknown hand on the farm. Its stone remains may be seen to this day. Sometime later they built a large (for the time) mansion. It has a date stone placed to the right of the front door that is marked "Wilhelm Pott, 1755, John Pott".

1755 is the year John Pott, Sr. married Magdalena Hoch, who's twin sister married Jacob Keim of the neighboring Keim farmstead a year or two earlier. Based on architectural evidence, it is believed that the Pott mansion was built earlier, circa 1740 and raised a full story in 1755 to accommodate the newly weds.

As mentioned, when we moved onto the farm in March, 2000, it was largely derelict and overgrown with no ornamental plants, etc. However, approximately 50 feet west of the house was an area containing the largest tree on the farm, a great ash tree and ancient lilac bushes. As spring came, old style flowers came up including lily of the valley and an heirloom tulip often found around old Pennsylvania German farms.

We were aware of the Berks County tradition of early family graveyards and, when some landscaping was done, we ordered the workmen to report unusual things they might find.

One morning, a man digging with a backhoe approached and said he had uncovered what appeared to be a remnant of a stone wall around the ash tree. A gentleman working on the inside of the house that day was a dowser and familiar with old graveyards. He borrowed some wire hangers and proceeded to "dowse" the graveyard, identifying a small plot surrounded by a wall and a "graveyard" pattern, indicating the gravesites.

At that point, we called in the BCAGP and Keith Schaeffer came to the farm to re-dowse the graveyard (we had not marked it after the initial dowsing). He identified the same walls and gravesites, including a child's grave. (We later learned that John Potts Sr.'s first-born daughter, Esther, died in infancy). He also marked the perimeters of the graveyard with flags.

Several weeks later, we had the pleasure of a visit from Arthur Conrad, now deceased, who had grown up on our farm in the 1930's. He was able to identify many artifacts on the farm, the various outbuildings, etc. Upon observation of the flagged graveyard, Arthur noted that, as a boy, it had been surrounded by a picket fence and he was forbidden to go in, but his parents would never tell him what it was!

One day on business in Pottsville, PA, I visited the Schuylkill County Historical Society and was given a manuscript to review. It was the original of the inaugural address delivered to the Historical Society in 1900, entitled "History of the Pott Family" (it's interesting to note, the document was folded to fit in a vest pocket!) It was noted that living members of the Pott family were interviewed during his research and they spoke of the family's roots in Oley. It also was related that the original settlers, Wilhelm and Gertrude Pott were "buried on the homestead" – our farm! This is the only written reference to the graveyard known to me, thus far.

There is no surface evidence but probing indicates bricks laid several inches under the ground. Finally, the ancient barn on the farm has a sandstone marker carefully laid in a prominent place by the door. It is engraved "John Pott" but was reduced to fit the wall, cutting off approximately one third of the name. In all probability, a gravestone.

VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT:

WWW.BERKSCAGP.ORG

BCAGP

Restoration and preservation of family graveyards through initial clean up, tombstone repairs and resetting wall repairs, regular inspection and maintenance

The mission statement of the BCAGP is to preserve and maintain historic Berks County graveyards. A historic graveyard, as defined by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, is one that has a burial at least one hundred years old and has not had a burial in the past fifty years, nor is more intended. Many Berks County historic graveyards date back to colonial times. State laws protect these sites, and the distribution of Grave Happenings, our publication listing almost 300 graveyards make it public record. These graveyards are a unique historic resource that is part of our early heritage and culture. Please join with us and share in the pride of preservation.

The BCAGP is recognized as a nonprofit organization under section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

GRAVE HAPPENINGS



BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

P.O. BOX 3707, READING, PA. 19608