

Grave Happenings

BERKS COUNTY ASSOCIATION FOR GRAVEYARD PRESERVATION

OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(EMAIL ADDRESSES ON THE WEBSITE)

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Newsletter: contact Anne Wagner

WWW.BCAGP.ORG

Check our web site for meeting dates

PO BOX 3707
READING PA 19606

Special points of interest:

- Schneider
- Hechler Esterly
- Wartzluft
- LeVan
- Peters
- Knabb
- Day of Caring
- Koenig

BCAGP
Berks County Association
for Graveyard Preservation



Levan (Oley)

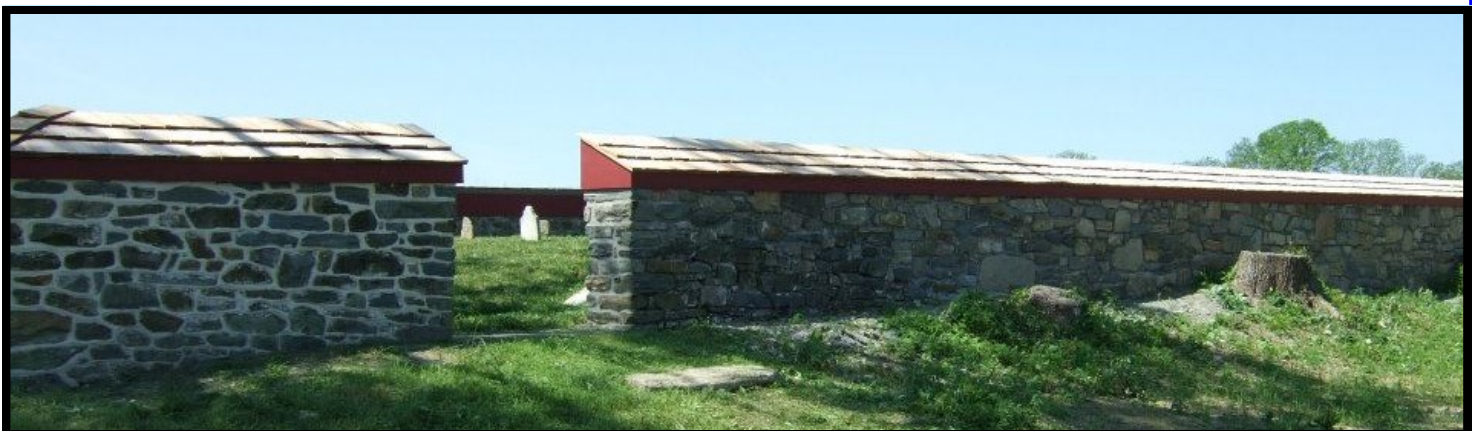
Walls were repaired and slate caps were put on to help preserve the walls longer.



As we reported to you last newsletter, the Pook family who bought the farm recently, finished the walls that we had started. It was finished with wood and shingle capping. These pictures were taken on Day Of Caring when the kids cleaned it up.



Peters (Oley)



Knabb



Repairs to what stones *can* be repaired will be an ongoing project, a few at a time. As years progress better materials are on the market for repairing marble stones. Traditionally a cement epoxy mix coupled with metal braces were the choice way to repair. We are working now with newer epoxies in the hopes of a cleaner and less noticeable repair job. These stones were also treated with D-2 biocide to remove growths and preserve the surface.

This first season the graveyard was cleaned out, the forest of trees removed and the front wall was repaired, chipped out and repointed. We have approved funding to do the same for the side wall on the Beecham Road side in fall. Contributions have not been coming in for this graveyard so if you wish to see this project



Hechler Esterly

completed, send your contribution marked "Hechler Esterly". We also are seeking someone to commit to maintenance. Years ago the Esterly Family Association maintained this graveyard but there doesn't seem to be a family Association anymore. Please contact us if you are willing to commit to maintaining this historic family burial ground.



LETTER FROM LES

It is not uncommon for BCAGP to receive an inquiry from someone searching for an ancestor's burial place. We do the best we can to respond to requests. Our information consists primarily of research done in the 1990s by founding members of BCAGP. Graveyard reconnaissance, deed research, and tombstone readings among other activities were performed then to build a repository of information about Berks gravesites. By 1999, this information had been consolidated and used to publish *Epitaphs*, our volume documenting known Berks County graveyards. Unfortunately, we have been unable to find source material used for *Epitaphs*, so we are generally limited to the content of *Epitaphs* itself to respond to inquiries.



Epitaphs identifies 304 private graveyards in Berks County and says 185 have surface evidence however surface evidence was defined. To me surface evidence requires a wall and/or a pattern of tombstones (or ground depressions) that gives some appearance of a burial site. Quite a few sites in *Epitaphs* lack this. We can only speculate on what surface evidence was found earlier.

Of course, this in no way precludes the existence of a burial site, only that its exact location is unclear. In addition to sites in *Epitaphs*, our researchers occasionally find references in old newspaper clippings or old deeds identifying burial locations. Exact references to trees, stones, streets that may have once located a gravesite prove of limited value after decades when the surroundings may have changed dramatically.

The result is that our ability to pinpoint to descendants exact locations of burial sites is often inexact. We might get them to a neighborhood, a field, or a specific street and be able to say your ancestors are probably here. But for those looking for certainty, we often cannot provide that.

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.

"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.

The Koenig family graveyard in Bern Township is a rare sight in Berks County. This graveyard is adorned by the most simplistic grave markers, yet the preservation has been amazing!

The majority of the markers for these Amish burials are hand carved field-stones with nothing but initials and the year.



When I first tracked down this burial ground very close to my own home, I noted how well maintained it was compared to many I had been finding. Other than a badly damaged old gate it was really rather perfect. The property owners, who also own Peacock Bridge Kennels, are historic minded and protective of the graveyard. Their office is directly across from the graveyard in a remote area in quiet peaceful surroundings, complete with peacocks- all within a short span of the historic Peacock Lock.

It didn't take long to discover Bill Koenig and his wife who have been lovingly caring for this family plot themselves for many years. We purchased a new iron gate to help him in his mission to respect the memory of his ancestors. It was a small thing we could do to support this family member to preserve this part of his heritage.

And so it appears that my initial impression of perfect applies not just to the graveyard but the working arrangement between family and property owners as well. This quaint burial ground is a wonderful example of how it should be.



I am not sure if anyone knows who "W.D. 1761" or "E.R. 1804" is, but I am sure they and their family would be very pleased. Thank you to the Bensing's and the Koenig's for allowing us this glimpse into the past and preserving it for the future.

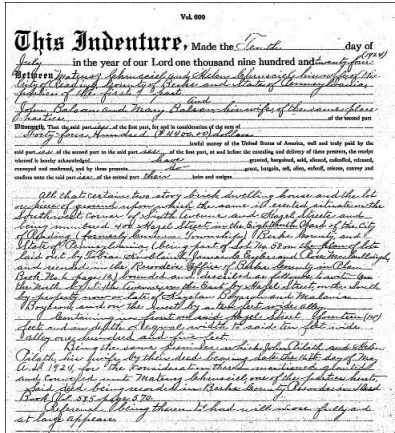


Anne Wagner is 2nd Vice President of BCAGP.

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

Doing the Deed

In order to fully understand a deed or indenture, you need to know the parts of a deed or its anatomy.



First on most deeds is the date the deed was written. A deed usually begins with "This indenture written on " This date can fall years or decades prior to when it is recorded. The present date of recording will appear at the end of the deed.

Next the deed or indenture will identify the Grantor, or person selling or transferring the land. The grantor is often described by his location of residence, his occupation and his marital status. Many deeds include the name of the spouse, saying she is the wife of the grantor. In some cases the Grantor is a group of people, who might be the heirs of a person, who are selling the land as a result of the death of their relative.

The name of the Grantee, or person buying or receiving the land, is next. The Grantees residence and his occupation are very often included, just like the Grantor. Many of the early deeds were written only to males whether they were married or single. The wife's name was not included until the land was sold, as she had to agree to the sale of her own free will.

Once we know who is selling the land, to whom they are selling it, the next items of interest include, where the land is situated, how much is being paid for the land, or the "consideration," followed by a complete physical description and size of the land being sold. The description is often referred to as the "meets and bounds," meaning what other tracts does this tract meet up with or other land owners it is bounded by.

A final piece of information would be the recitation, sometimes called the citation. This often begins with the phrase, "It being the same as" or "it being a part of," going on to describe how the current grantor came into possession of the land in order that he may legally sell it. Ideally it will name the previous owner, the date it was sold to the current owner and the county, date, deed book and page number where it was recorded, if it was recorded.

Sometimes the recitation comes in the beginning of the deed or indenture and is prefaced by "Whereas" The whereas statements often recite a chain of title in themselves, beginning with the first patent from the Penns up to the present owner. Even if you find whereas statements going back to the Penns, it is still wise to verify all information presented. There were no photo copiers in the early days, all deeds were copied by hand and mistakes were made.

The recitation may also include exceptions, such as rents due, portions that may have been sold, mortgages, dowers owed to widows of previous owners, or portions that may be reserved for a specific purpose. An exception may be the family burial ground or access to it. Some may even describe who was buried there and who may have access to be the caretakers. This is how many of the family burial grounds with no surface evidence are found and documented. Without this information some family burial grounds would be lost forever, never to be found.

Betty Burdan
 bjburdan@dejazzd.com

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

ELECTION OF OFFICERS 2012

In accordance with BCAGP's bylaws, we announce the upcoming election of Officers of the Board. Interested parties should appear at the July meeting or express your interest in a position in writing prior that meeting. Nominations for all positions will be accepted at our meeting on July 29th, 2pm, at the American Legion Hall in Oley. Nominees will be introduced at our Sept/Oct meeting (date TBA). Voting and counting of ballots will take place at the general membership meeting on November 11th 2012.

RED DAY AT THE SCHNEIDER

Each year the Realtors at Keller Williams participate in what they call their "Red Day". Each office chooses a non profit group to volunteer a day of their service. The Exeter office chose us this year and we found the perfect graveyard for this group of adults to fine tune. The Schneider burial ground in Oley is one of the largest private burial grounds in Berks County . Many of the tombstones sunk enough to make reading the stone difficult. May 10th the mission was to cut down the weeds and reset the sinking stones. A lot was accomplished! Chick-Fil-A provided lunch for the event and there was a good turn out. THANK YOU KELLER- WILIAMS and thank you Chick-Fil-A!



Left: sandstone being reset. Note the marks showing where the stone was buried with only the top showing.



Above right: volunteer raising and resetting Tombstone of Heinrich Schneider (right)

Heinrich Schneider (1721-1764) lived in Alsace but his family lived in Oley. After this stone was raised on "Red Day", member Neil Scheidt, an avid and astute researcher (who has recorded more than 13,000 local burials on Find A Grave), realized that this man's stone was not recorded. You can see from the **dirt line**, his name was ground level and covered with grass. Heinrich (Henry) had many children and certainly some descendant will be thrilled to find his grave. We will now add his name to our Schneider Burial ground records. It is discoveries such as this that makes volunteering with BCAGP so rewarding.



Wartzluft

Reconstruction of the stone wall is almost finished!
The stone that was used was very small which makes
the rebuilding more tedious.



On The Mason List

Walls

- ✓ The Wartzluft (rebuild)
- ✓ The Deturk 2 (rebuild)
- ✓ The Hechler Esterly (chip out and point)
- ✓ The Bieber Leshner (repair sections)

Tombstone repair

- ✓ The Sously
- ✓ The Knabb
- ✓ The Barnet Peter
 - ✓ Hill
 - ✓ Spohn

Volunteers needed for Weed whacking :

Hechler Esterly (Exeter)
Schneider (Oley)
St Henrys Reichert Dumm (Richmond)
Kauffman (Oley)
Kauffman (Maidencreek)
Rickenbach (Bern)

[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."

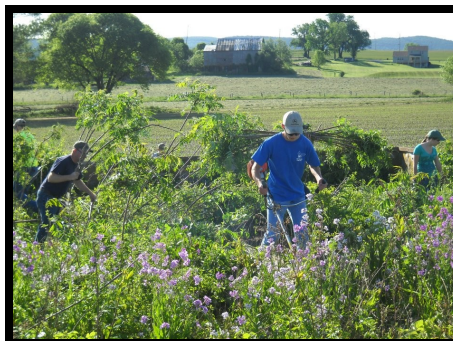
Day of Caring

The annual Day of Caring is basic graveyard maintenance...on fast forward. BCAGP volunteers alone could not possibly clean up all the sites in Oley every year - but, take 17 capable teens & 2 enthusiastic teachers, load plenty of landscaping equipment with safety gear & lots of bottled water, add the magic ingredient (pizza) and *voilà*, all done!

Our job as BCAGP members was to arrange access to the graveyards, lead everyone to the sites, provide important information (such as which graveyards had significant poison ivy), and wherever possible, to offer the history of the sites and those interred therein – and to order the pizza.

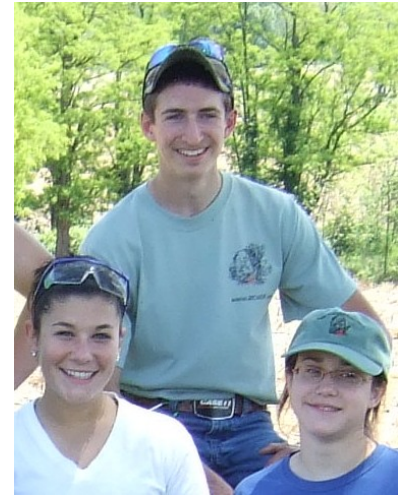
Our special thanks go to Jeremy Deisher, Oley Valley High agricultural educator, who once again coordinated student involvement, and to the Oley Valley School District, which provided transportation for the day. These energetic students cleared brush, shrubbery, weeds and more, turning chaotic jungles into orderly burial grounds. After pizza for lunch at Belle Italia (some of us prefer having restrooms so we didn't eat at a farmyard site this year), we had to find *additional* graveyards because all those we'd planned were completed with time to spare! There was time for hands-on instruction about resetting tombstones and how to effectively use biocide, as well as discussion about research and preservation methods.

This year's Day of Caring students completed: Bertolet 1, Bieber/Lesher, DeTurk 1 & 2, Guilden 2, Hoch, Hoch/Bertolet, Hoch/DeTurk/Schenkel, Hunter/Kemp, Kauffman, Keim (Pike and Rockland), Lesher, Levan, Peter, Weidner and Weiser/DeTurk. The students gave 100% all day – and *they* didn't even need ibuprophen afterward!



Photos and story by :
Karla Hummel

Congratulations to Damian Oswald who is our 2012 Senior award recipient of the Jacqueline B Nein award. Damian has been a repeat Day of Caring volunteer and was chosen by his teachers as the most deserving student for this award we present. We thank Damien for all his community service and wish him well on his post high school journey.



Our Mission

To preserve and maintain the historic Berks County graveyards in Eastern Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Historic Burial Places Preservation Act (1994) provides for the preservation of historic burial places, tombs, monuments and gravestones and imposes penalties for violations. Research supports the existence of over 300 historic graveyards in Berks County of which approximately 120 remain with some sort of visible surface evidence. The BCAGP is working aggressively to preserve these historic grave sites for future generations.

JOIN OR DONATE TODAY!

If not a current member, please join us in preserving and maintaining our historic graveyards. Or if you do not wish to be a member at this time, but are interested in contributing support for a specific graveyard, please indicate that graveyard on the form below. We also appreciate contributions to the general fund.

MEMBERSHIP FORM - 2012

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

\$ _____ Annual Membership, Individual \$15 Family (residing in the same household) \$25

\$ _____ Annual business or municipality membership, \$35

\$ _____ Donation earmarked for the *Association General Fund*

\$ _____ Donation to be used for the _____ gravesite

\$ _____ Donation to be used in _____ municipality

Total Amount enclosed _____ Date _____

Mail Checks to: B.C.A.G.P., PO Box 3707, Reading, PA 19606

Membership runs a calendar year January to December. Membership dues paid after October will be applied to the next membership year

The official registration and financial information of Berks County Association of Graveyard Preservation may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Berks County Association for Graveyard Preservation is a registered 501 (c) (3). Please check with your tax advisor as to the deductibility of your contribution.

Please check our website www.bcagp.org
for meetings times