



As a member of Grave Concern, Fred Buch promotes preservation, restoration, and maintenance of Lancaster County's historical graveyards, many which are in disrepair on family farms.

Buch Shares A Grave Concern

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff
EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — Although Fred Buch builds pipe organs, he shares a "grave concern" with farmers.

"Many farmers have old family burial plots on their farmland. They aren't aware of the laws that govern the care of these sites, nor of the funds to preserve and protect burial sites," Buch said.

Buch is part of the organization called Grave Concern, which was formed to promote the preservation of historic graveyards throughout Lancaster County.

Many farmers are unaware that state law protects historical burial grounds. Because farmers are not allowed to move tombstones, farming techniques are sometimes hampered. Plus the upkeep of the grounds is often more work for already busy farmers.

"We want farmers to know that our organization is available to consult with them, without charge, if they have questions about a cemetery on their property," Buch said.

Grave Concern has been able to link farmers with family members of a cemetery of the farmer's land. The family members often raise funds to restore the cemetery without cost to the farmers.

"These families often continue the maintenance, which is a real benefit to the farmer," Buch said.

"We are concerned that a good repore be maintained between those who want to restore family cemeteries and the owners of the properties so that it is a mutual beneficial situation," Buch said.

Grave Concern has established a format in dealing with owners and in laying out plans for restorations. To establish good relationships, the organization recommends that yearly rent be paid to use farm space access the cemetery.

"In some cases, people show no respect for a farmer's property when accessing a burial plot. We are here to help farmers mediate in situations where communication has broken down."

According to the law, family members must be given access to the burial site, but the type of access should be established in cooperation with the farmer.

In some cases land deeds include specific conditions in

maintaining farm cemeteries. On occasion, these conditions have been dropped or rewritten by new owners, but legally the original conditions still apply.

Grave Concern offers free consultation for those who want to preserve family burial plots. They help with mediation between family members and land owners of the plots.

"We are not attorneys, and we don't want to take the place of attorneys, but we can help interpret the law," Buch said.

The organization does have attorneys on the board.

Buch said that he has always been interested in cemeteries. In fact, when the Buch family farm was sold in 1917, the deed instructed that two acres of land surrounding the family cemetery be set aside for the annual Buch family reunion. However for many years, family members did not show any interest in the land. In 1960, during tax reassessment, an infirm family member was notified that taxes needed to be paid or the land would be sold. The land was sold to a farmer who retained and mowed the cemetery lot. Eventually Buch family members heard about the cemetery and offered to restore and care for the burial plot. One of the many nuisances in cemetery upkeep is the damage inflicted by ground hogs, which often dig holes in graveyards. Another is trees that grow wild. The Buch family raised \$10,000 to mark and reset stones, and to put a concrete curb and metal fence around the cemetery.

Like many other farm burial plots, the Buch family cemetery was difficult to access through the farmer's land.

A neighboring farmer reached an agreement with the Buchs to allow access to the cemetery.

Grave Concern was formed in 1990 to initiate restoration for the Shreiner Cemetery burial place of Thaddeus Stevens and to prevent the moving of James Buchanan's remains to Wheatland.

"We speak for those who cannot speak for themselves," Buch said of the organizations defense of burial plots. "Buchanan picked his own grave site. We feel strongly that it shouldn't be moved."

After the organization accomplished its initial goals, they dedi-

cated their efforts to historical cemetery preservation, restoration, and maintenance.

During the 1930s and 1940s, a man named Hunter Rineer had catalogued most of the county's cemeteries.

"These gravesites are part of our nation's history," Buch said. "Pioneers settled here and made this place what it is today. People who lived here and set aside the burial ground for their families, and it should be maintained as a memorial to these families."

Unfortunately, little by little some of these were disappearing and no one was sure of what was happening. In some cases, people were actually removing the stones and selling them in antique shops. In one case, a fellow used grave stones for paving stones in his backyard.

Aware of the endangered cemeteries, Grave Concern initiated the drafting of new laws that defines a historic burial ground as one that must be at least 100 years old and no burials within for the last 50 years nor any allowed for the future.

It is now illegal to remove tombstones for road construction or any reason other than for resetting the stones.

If a cemetery needs to be moved, it must be approved by court procedure. "It is possible but not easy to obtain permission," Buch said.

Buch said there is a renewed interest in restoring burial plots. "More family reunions are being revived and more families are starting the project of restoring family burial plots."

Grave Concern provides educational programs in grave yard restoration. In addition, they offer ground penetrating radar to help locate grave sites.

Tombstones offer a glimpse into history.

Buch said, "New Englanders put more epitaphs on their tombstones than the German who were more practical and generally didn't inscribe more than necessary. However, on a tombstone of one of Buch's ancestors, the name of the town where he was born in Germany was included.

"It was wonderful. We visited the community and were able to

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