

# Interpretive marker reveals many stories behind the stones at Meyers Burial Ground

**By Kyle Davis**

“The Meyersdale Area Historical Society agreed at its April meeting to look into the restoration of the cemetery located at the west end of the Salisbury Viaduct as a project ... Some of the eight workers who died during the construction of the viaduct are buried there, as well as members of the Meyers family who founded Meyersdale. The cemetery has slipped into a state of disrepair in recent years,” stated an article published in the Summer 1994 issue of *BackTracks*, the society’s quarterly newsletter. The cemetery being discussed was the Meyers Burial Ground, located northwest of the Salisbury Viaduct. The cemetery was a topic of discussion for a time in the society’s early years during a period when the graves were not regularly maintained.

In the nearly three decades since that discussion began, the Meyers Burial Ground has seen a complete makeover, nearly unrecognizable from its situation in 1994 and earlier. The cemetery has gone from an obscure landmark known by only the lore-heavy local historians to one of our area’s nicest spots along the Great Allegheny Passage.

The status of disrepair changed for the positive following community interest as the GAP trail was being instituted throughout the area, of which the burial ground is adjacent. The two most favorable improvements to the cemetery’s upkeep came when, first, Donald Meyers Watson Jr. took on the project as a labor of love about a dozen years ago, and secondly when an interpretive marker was installed earlier this year.

Watson maintains the property with help from William Kerrick, having permission from the current landowners, the Petenbrink family. Watson is a descendant of the Meyers family for whom the burial ground is named. Growing up on a farm southwest of the Salisbury Viaduct, he was aware of the cemetery since childhood and visited it with his family while the viaduct was still being used for trains, long before the GAP trail existed.

Explaining his enthusiasm for the maintenance of the cemetery, Watson recalled his personal interest and sense of community spirit, “It’s a deep family connection to the burial ground, but it’s also very important for this town. Before we began the restoration, not many people outside of the Meyers descendants even knew this was here. We talk to the bikers and tourists who come by, and they just love the area and the effort we put into this spot. I hope that this spot helps them to remember Meyersdale just a bit more.”

Watson and Kerrick have both previously served on the Meyersdale Area Historical Society’s board and have a deep appreciation for what the bike trail has done for our area. “Other than being a special place for our town, it makes for an interesting stop along the trail,” Watson continued to explain. “We do most of our work between April and October, and we have many travelers stopping to ask us questions. The sign is nice because it still gives an opportunity for the travelers to learn about the spot when we aren’t here.”

Kerrick also elaborated on his feelings towards the sign and the trail, “The people officially involved with the trail had the resources and the background to put up such a nice sign; we’re both really happy with it. The trail people and the Petenbrinks have been very good at

allowing us to use the necessary equipment to maintain the cemetery. Everyone has been very supportive with the work we've done. It's a great trail."

"The idea for the sign came from two different perspectives, the first being to preserve our local history and the second to enhance the Great Allegheny Passage," said Martin Hurl, a member of the Meyersdale Area Historical Society who first suggested to trail officials a sign should be installed. "For those visiting us from other areas, the trail is a vital part of our local economy."

Lindsay Baer, director of Somerset County's Parks and Trails, explained the marker at the Meyers Burial Ground came into existence after the Somerset County Recreation and Trails Association applied for a grant that would lead to new signage being placed across the Somerset County portion of the GAP, including the small family cemetery. "After the burial ground was included in the sign grant, SCRТА needed to work with the local groups who were knowledgeable enough to provide the information for the signs," Baer continued. "For the burial ground's information, we went to Meyersdale's Public Library, to Jen."

Since the sign was first installed earlier this year, it's received plenty of good comments from everyone who has been involved. "A ton of research went into what the sign says, and it's been a great way of summing up the history," said Baer. "We've had a lot of positive feedback. It's a great addition to Meyersdale's section of trail."

Jennifer Baer Hurl, archivist for the Meyersdale Public Library and Meyersdale Area Historical Society vice president, compiled the information that eventually ended up on the interpretive marker that stands at the burial ground today. "The sign that now marks this burial ground will help preserve the history of this area and its people while also broadening the experience and knowledge of those traveling the GAP," Hurl elaborated. "We thank SCRТА for funding the marker and our volunteers from the Meyersdale and Rockwood historical societies for assisting with the project. Library volunteer and Rockwood Historical Society member Linda Marker was especially helpful. Don Watson's family history book, *Our Ancestral Journey to Somerset County*, aided me in better connecting some of those laid to rest in this cemetery; he and William Kerrick deserve much credit for taking care of the burial ground year-round."

Interestingly, Jennifer discovered through her research the bodies of the workers who had lost their lives during the viaduct's construction in 1911 were not interred in the Meyers Burial Ground, as previously believed, but rather sent to their home communities for burial.

Hurl continued to explain the significance of the burial ground and preserving its history, "Each and every cemetery is full of stories written through the lives of those now laid to rest. "It's up to those of us among the living to ensure those stories are carried on and shared. That's why preservation is so very important, and nonprofits such as our Meyersdale Public Library and local historical societies are key to today's preservation efforts. I was able to obtain the vast majority of everything I needed to assemble the marker's text and art from resources available to me within our library's Pennsylvania Room collections, including old funeral home and cemetery records, obituary scrapbooks, newspapers, and family genealogies. Had these items not been shared with our library's archives and preserved there over time, my job would have proven impossible."

Among the resources on the Meyers Burial Ground that can be found in the Meyersdale Public Library is a specific booklet of information about the cemetery compiled by Watson in January 2022. The booklet goes into great detail on several related subjects, elaborating on his

own personal relationship to the cemetery, a general history of the land, and the work that has gone into preserving the historical site.

“My third great-grandfather, Christian R. Meyers, and his wife Mary Barned are buried in this cemetery, along with his sons and their offspring,” Watson’s booklet details. “Benjamin Chew originally got the land through a land patent from the British in 1776. John Trushall bought the land from Mr. Chew in 1798. Jacob Meyers bought the land from Trushall in 1816. Jacob was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania, but never set foot on the property. Christian Meyers inherited the land from his father Jacob. The property was then passed down from generation to generation until it was sold in 1947 to the Petenbrink family. Many tragedies occurred on the farm. Many of the Meyers’ died of diptheria/consumption and related diseases, many of them just days apart. The daughters of S.P. and Maggie Meyers were burned to death in 1891 when the house was consumed by fire.”

Aside from the recent installation of the new signage by SCRTA, Watson and Kerrick have also taken on a handful of impressive projects relating to the cemetery. After it became apparent some graves and stones were missing, the two found the missing tombstones were randomly buried in the ground or placed in a haphazard pile. The pair cleaned the stones up and properly reset them into the ground. Additionally, a new stone was purchased for Christian and Mary (Barned or Bond) Meyers since their old ones were fragmented. The earliest known burial was in 1823, with J. Meyers, and the latest known burial was in 1909 with Elizabeth Meyers.

The Meyers Burial Ground is nearly two centuries old, yet it has only found significance for most people outside of the Meyers lineage in recent years, despite bearing the same namesake as our community. This special spot remains as a sacred ground where the people of our past have laid to rest their kin, but now it also serves as an area of peace, a history lesson, or a beautiful view for travelers who have helped the Meyers name come to be widely renowned. “Hopefully someone will be able to keep this project going after we aren’t able to do it anymore, but until then we will be keeping at it,” concluded Watson.

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