

## DUST TO DUST ...TO DEVELOPMENT

By ELIZABETH CUMMINGS

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**LANCASTER COUNTY, PA** - It took two men to lift each gravestone onto the pickup truck that night about two years ago.

They carried the old stones down the narrow, steep stairs of the root cellar. That's where Jere and Steve Dickerman laid them, in Jere's root cellar, where they would be safe from the bulldozers tearing up the property outside. That's where they are today. The stones marked the 200-year-old resting places of 10 or so members of the Kauffman and Gamber families, some of the oldest settlers of Lancaster County. The bulldozer was hired by a descendent of those Gambers, who had plans to develop the family farm, next to Jere Dickerman's house in Manor Township.

It's an all-too-familiar story in Lancaster County, which is dotted with historic family graveyards. Dozens or maybe hundreds of them are already gone.

In some cases, the remains were moved and the gravestones preserved. In others, the graveyards were simply plowed or paved over, with the remains still in the ground. It's likely that some people are living in houses built on graveyards.

In a culture where respect for the dead runs deep, the idea of living over a forebear's bones is enough to give anyone pause. But aside from any spiritual - or spirit - concerns about living over a graveyard, there are other issues. Historians and genealogists see records destroyed. Land planners say old embalming fluids in the lost graveyards could contaminate water.

Jere Dickerman sees an issue of honor. As he watched the bulldozers flatten the land next to his house, he struggled with whether to take the already-neglected gravestones. But he lives in the farmhouse built by Kauffmans in 1767, and he has grown, over the years, to feel connected to those pioneers who carved a home from the wilderness.

"Somebody went to the trouble to honor them and have the stones carved and the stones put up," he said. "We have to try and save what we can."

This graveyard's story may have a happy ending, thanks to a group called Grave Concern, a cooperative developer and neighbors with long memories.

But two years ago Jere Dickerman expected to see townhouses built over the bones of the Gambers and Kauffmans. It seemed then that the little graveyard was gone forever.

Local historical societies record about 800 burial places in Lancaster County. Farm families used small graveyards before the advent of municipal cemeteries in the mid-1800s.

The state legislature passed a law in 1994 making it a misdemeanor to destroy a historic cemetery without a court order. Federal law already forbids destruction of Indian burial grounds.

The state law likely slowed the graveyard destruction, but historians and developers say there are still many times when a developer or farmer quietly plows or bulldozes the gravestones under.

Sometimes, when a graveyard has been lost for decades, new development uncovers the bones.

That happened in 1995, when contractors uncovered human bones at the Thaddeus Stevens State School of Technology. The Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission speculates the graves were part of the segregated poorhouse cemetery. The remains of five people were found; at least one was a black man. The commission asked African-American churches in the area if they would rebury the bones.

"We could not find an interested party," said Amy Riggelman, press secretary. Now, the bones lie in the commission's archaeology lab.

Most graveyards destroyed by development or farming quietly fade into the past. Lancaster Township is filled with family graveyards covered by residences. An 1864 map shows a Bausman family graveyard where the Villages of Lancaster Green is now. Another graveyard is shown where the apartments Lancaster Arms were built. And yet another is shown near the entrance of Gable Park Woods.

Local historian Jack W.W. Loose remembers receiving a phone call a few years ago, probably about the Gable Park Woods graveyard. The callers thought their house was haunted because it had been built over a graveyard.

Western culture has a changing, sometimes uneasy relationship with its dead. The popular movie "Poltergeist" centered on the consequences of developing over a cemetery without moving the bodies. But then again, cemetery vandalism is an increasing problem.

Religious attitudes change, too. Early Christians believed that bodies must be left undisturbed to rise on Judgment Day. But when Trinity Lutheran Church on South Duke Street needed parking, it used its graveyard. Around 1949, the church dug up the remains and reburied them, probably in the Woodward Hill Cemetery, according to Thomas R. Ryan, executive director of Lancaster County Historical Society.

Ryan mourns the destruction of cemeteries for aesthetic and historic reasons, because they are often records not only of family, but of culture. Different ethnic groups in the United States created different styles of markers. In time, the styles grew together into the artistry of the Victorian era.

"There's the issue of kind of the sanctity of death," said Ryan. "Who among us expects to be buried and disinterred? We call this our final resting place. The thought of paving it over, or just indiscriminately bulldozing it out ..."

There are more material concerns in the old graveyards.

The Lancaster County Planning Commission includes all the known graveyards in its database, partly because they are historic, said Kip Van Blarcom, a county planner.

But planners are also concerned about the possibility of groundwater contamination.

Bodies are now embalmed with organic compounds like formaldehyde. But when embalming first became popular, to transport bodies home from battles during the Civil War, embalmers used heavy metals, like arsenic, mercury and lead. They're all poisonous.

Embalming was expensive, so it was mainly used by the wealthy. But any fluids used then are likely still in the ground, although in trace amounts.

"What humans put into the ground could come back to haunt them," said David Kneib, online coordinator for the National Funeral Directors Association and a former mortuary science teacher.

Kneib noted old graveyards are far down the list of likely contaminants of groundwater. But both Kneib and Van Blarcom said that in case of contamination, it's important to identify each possibility.

But once a graveyard is gone, it's usually forgotten. Once the stones have been taken away, the remains are difficult to find.

H. Chester Haverstick, the Gamber descendant who inherited the farm next to Jere Dickerman's house, barely even remembered the old graveyard there, believing that the stones had long since been moved from their original location by farmers.

"If you dig around there you might find some bones," he said. "But the spirits of the people aren't there."

Haverstick cleared his land - and the graveyard - first for farming. Then last January, Haverstick sold to Crown Properties for \$342,218. He didn't tell the developer about the old graveyard. He didn't really think about it.

"People have peculiar oddities about graveyards," he said. "Not me."

But there were others who remembered. The Dickermans saved the gravestones. Another neighbor, reading about Crown Properties' plans to build 200 townhouses, called Grave Concern.

Grave Concern is a seven-year-old group dedicated to saving and maintaining old graveyards. It's working now to save a graveyard west of Donnerville Road in West Hemfield Township, where Cooper Booth Wholesale Co. wants to build a distribution center.

In December, Grave Concern member Clyde Groff spoke at a court hearing on that graveyard.

"We speak for those who can't speak for themselves," he said.

About a year ago, Grave Concern began to speak for the Gammers and Kauffmans. The group contacted Crown Properties with information that its planned townhouses might be built on top of human remains.

Crown Properties wanted Grave Concern to pinpoint the bones. That can be done, but it means spending money on a company to find them.

So Grave Concern president Jim McMullen phoned the neighbors. He found Don Western, who has lived on the corner of nearby Temple Avenue since 1949.

"Over that many years, almost 50 years now, we did a lot of walking on that farmland," said Western.

Western located the graveyard for McMullen. Two other neighbors confirmed his memory. Those involved, including Dickerman, believe at least some of the stones were still marking burial places.

So Grave Concern negotiated with Crown. And Crown wrote into its plan, scheduled for final approval in February, that the graveyard's land would be preserved.

Now, Grave Concern wants Jere Dickerman to replace the stones. Dickerman will be happy to see the resting places of the Gammers and Kauffmans left undeveloped. But he also wants to be sure someone, possibly from the homeowner's association in the new development, will care for the gravestones.

In his house built by settlers 200 years ago, Dickerman knelt to lift part of the floor, to show the wooden beams that underpin the house. They are oak, hard as stone, hand-hewn by the axe of some long-ago Kauffman.

"And I'm going to throw away the tombstone for a guy who did that?" he said, shaking his head. "No."

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