

## COLUMBIA COUNTY POOR FARM INTERMENTS IDENTIFIED

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Who was buried in the Columbia County Poor Farm Cemetery located in Mt. Pleasant Township? This question has not had a satisfactory answer until now. Unlike most cemeteries that have tombstones and a record of burials, the Poor Farm Cemetery is just a flat piece of land with a memorial stone and one memorial marker. There is no convenient list of names that can be consulted or tombstones to read. How can one find who was buried in the cemetery?

To begin to answer this question we started with a little history. The Poor Farm was in operation from 1869 until 1977, but burials only occurred at the Poor Farm Cemetery from c. 1890 to c. 1952. Prior to 1890, people who died at the Poor Farm were buried in Old Rosemont Cemetery (Bloomsburg), in the Paupers section unless the body was claimed by the family and buried elsewhere. Without any cemetery record, no one could determine who was buried at the Poor Farm. The big break-through in solving this mystery was the acquisition of Mt. Pleasant Township death certificates, 1906 to 1954, given to the Historical Society on indefinite loan from the Columbia County Courthouse. This unique acquisition allowed the review of all the death certificates to determine which ones listed the Poor Farm as the place of Burial.

For years there were only six names of people buried in the Poor Farm Cemetery file (Cem. 209) at the Society. These were from old newspaper death notices found occasionally by volunteers. When the Mt. Pleasant Township death certificates became available, a concerted effort began in April 2007 to make a more complete list. Donna Laubach, a Society volunteer, combed the death certificate books and started identifying new names for the cemetery list. She copied certificates that identified the place of burial as *Poor Farm Cemetery*. Donna also noticed that starting in 1942, the burial place was sometimes listed as the *Columbia County Institutional District Cemetery*. As word of the project spread, other newspaper death notices surfaced. All the death notices indicated that the individuals were residents, sometimes referred to as inmates or guests, of the Poor Farm, but not all specifically stated that the burial was at the Poor Farm Cemetery. If the burial place was not specifically identified, it was assumed that the burial was at the Poor Farm. One burial notice was found in a newspaper clipping of the annual statement of the Bloom Poor District that had been pasted on the inside cover in George M. Hock's County Poor Farm record book. This was an unusual location since burials were not recorded in the minutes of his record book. George M. Hock was the manager of the Poor Farm from 1916 until approximately 1977 when the Columbia County Commissioners voted to close the Poor Farm. When the paper search was completed, a total of 42 burials were identified including 10 identified from newspaper clippings that did not specifically identify the Poor Farm Cemetery.

No one knew if the total number represented the actual number of burials. To address this question, an effort was made to try to establish the number of burial sites in the Poor Farm Cemetery by using ground-penetrating radar (GPR). GPR is an active method that transmits electromagnetic pulses from surface antennas into the ground, and then measures the time elapsed between when the pulses are sent and when they are received back at the surface. Luckily the cemetery was not overgrown with tall grass and weeds that would have prohibited the use of GPR. The good ground condition was due to its restoration by Ben James as an Eagle

Scout project in 2001. There was one problem though: the restored cemetery was in the shape of a triangle whereas the actual cemetery was rectangular. This was discovered by looking at a 1939 aerial photo that was part of a project to photograph the entire United States. This meant that a small part of the original cemetery could not be scanned.

In October 2007, four Bloomsburg University students performed the radar scans of the cemetery under the direction of Geography & Geosciences Professors Mike Shepard and Sandra Kehoe-Forutan. Although GPR is an indirect and ambiguous science, as pointed out by Professor Shepard, the students developed criteria to identify possible burial sites and then analyzed the printouts of the GPR scans. Their conclusion was that there were six sites that they were confident were burial sites and 31 that were possible burial sites, including some that appeared to contain multiple burials. The possibility of multiple burials at the same burial site was confirmed to have occurred by Ray Hock, Sr., son of George Hock. Ray grew up on the Poor Farm and knew that this practice occurred. The final conclusion of the GPR scans was that 37 graves had been identified. Taking into consideration that some of the graves had more than one burial and that a small portion of the original cemetery could not be scanned, this confirmed that the paper search number of 42 burials was probably close to the actual number.

Following is a list of the burials at the Poor Farm Cemetery and death dates.

Mrs. Catharine Brown, 16 Aug 1890  
Katie Heller, c. 25 Dec 1891  
Daniel Ingold, c. 1 Jan 1894  
Ephraim Ebner, c. 6 Jun 1894  
Charles Hock, c. 13 Oct 1898  
Jacob Dildine, 16 Jun 1899  
John Reeser, c. 27 Nov 1899  
Thomas Lyle, c. 31 Jan 1900  
Silas Dornel, 7 Feb 1900  
Louis Orio, c. Mar 1901  
August Freud, c. 1 Jan 1902  
Miss Kinney, 11 Oct 1902  
Jared Brown, c. 16 Dec 1902  
Mary A. Thomas, c. 23 Dec 1902  
Stillborn, c. 31 Jan 1907  
Daniel Gaumer, 9 Sep 1909  
Benjamin Bean, 27 Jan 1915  
James Harden, 25 Apr 1916  
Peter Remer, 1 Aug 1917  
Hendricks (Infant), 22 Oct 1918  
Sarah Evans, 5 Jan 1919  
Ruth Ann Parker, 1 Jun 1919  
Mamphis Tennessee, 8 Oct 1920  
Josusha [sic] Hess, 15 Dec 1922  
John Boneshefski, 27 Jul 1933  
Unknown (RR accident), 1 Dec 1938

Milton Houser, 22 Jun 1939  
Robert Evans, 18 Nov 1939  
Jess Rambo, 6 Jun 1941  
Charles Derr, 19 Jan 1942  
Unknown (Baby Boy) 25 Jan 1942  
Mike Patukis, 27 Feb 1942  
Peter Paul Keck, 13 Aug 1942  
Chauncy Ames, 17 Jan 1943  
Wilson Babb, 4 Jun 1943  
George Antayich, 8 Feb 1944  
George Adam Fisher, 22 Apr 1945  
Asa Miller, 9 Sep 1946  
Jacob Poorman, 12 May 1951  
Samuel Hillis, 28 Aug 1951  
William Goring, 17 Sep 1951  
Milton S. Stegner, 19 Dec 1952

If you have additional information about the burials at the Poor Farm Cemetery, the author would like to hear from you. You can reach the author at [andre@prolog.net](mailto:andre@prolog.net) or at the Society.