

## Columbia County Poor Farm Interments Identified

By André Dominguez

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 1906 to 1954 Mt. Pleasant Township death certificates 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, probably referred to as the steward, of the Poor Farm from 1916 until approximately 1947 when Ray T. Hock, Sr. became the manager. Ray was the manager from 1947 until 1953. In 1953 Bill Troutman took over the position until 1977 when the Columbia County Commissioners voted to close the Poor Farm. Prior to George M. Hock, his father, Michael B. Hock was the steward at the Poor Farm. When the paper search was completed, a total of 44 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 where as 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 44 burials was probably close to the actual number.

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

1. Mrs. Catharine Brown, 16 Aug 1890
2. Katie Heller, c. 25 Dec 1891
3. Daniel Ingold, c. 1 Jan 1894
4. Ephraim Ebner, c. 6 Jun 1894
5. Charles Hock, c. 13 Oct 1898
6. Jacob Dildine, 16 Jun 1899
7. John Reeser, c. 27 Nov 1899
8. Thomas Lyle, c. 31 Jan 1900
9. Silas Dornel, 7 Feb 1900
10. Louis Orio, c. Mar 1901
11. August Freud, c. 1 Jan 1902
12. Miss Kinney, 11 Oct 1902
13. Jared Brown, c. 16 Dec 1902
14. Mary A. Thomas, c. 23 Dec 1902
15. Stillborn, c. 31 Jan 1907
16. Daniel Gaumer, 9 Sep 1909
17. Benjamin Bean, 27 Jan 1915
18. James Harden, 25 Apr 1916
19. Peter Remer, 1 Aug 1917
20. Hendricks (Infant), 22 Oct 1918
21. Sarah Evans, 5 Jan 1919
22. Ruth Ann Parker, 1 Jun 1919
23. Memphis Tennessee, 8 Oct 1920
24. Josusha [sic] Hess, 15 Dec 1922
25. John Boneshefski, 27 Jul 1933
26. Unknown (RR accident), 1 Dec 1938
27. Lydia Baker, 5 Mar 1935
28. Milton Houser, 22 Jun 1939
29. Robert Evans, 18 Nov 1939
30. Jess Rambo, 6 Jun 1941
31. Charles Derr, 19 Jan 1942
32. Unknown (Baby Boy) 25 Jan 1942
33. Mike Patukis, 27 Feb 1942
34. Peter Paul Keck, 13 Aug 1942
35. Chauncy Ames, 17 Jan 1943
36. Wilson Babb, 4 Jun 1943
37. George Antayich, 8 Feb 1944
38. George Adam Fisher, 22 Apr 1945
39. Asa Miller, 9 Sep 1946
40. Jacob Poorman, 12 May 1951
41. Samuel Hillis, 28 Aug 1951
42. Charles E. Aumiller, 21 Aug 1951
43. William Goring, 17 Sep 1951
44. 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.