



Globe-Times photo by Tim Gilman

Reclaiming Years of Neglect

Eric, 6, left, and **Jeff**, 5, help their father **John Kosalko, Jr.** with clean-up at St. Michael's Cemetery. As the caption under the photo in the Dec. 4, 1975 *Globe-Times* stated— "Lone man, 40, in a long battle to end years of cemetery neglect."

The article tells how the Hellertown, PA, resident cared for the cemetery most Sunday mornings and some of his days off from his mail carrier job.

His work followed earlier efforts to keep the cemetery from visible deterioration, but as he witnessed, the job was never quite done.

Today, the tradition lives on with Friends of St. Michael's, who invest their time on preservation and research with the support of South Bethlehem Historical Society.

SBHS Annual Meeting

Support Preservation of St. Michael's Cemetery

The South Bethlehem Historical Society's Thirty-third Annual Meeting featured a talk given by **Al "Corky" Barron** on the status of St. Michael's Cemetery—the burial site and historic legacy of immigrants who worked and died in South Bethlehem.

In his talk, Barron stressed the need for volunteers with the ongoing mission to keep the cemetery in repair, grass cutting during summer months and control of vegetation that continues to creep up the northern slope.

One particular volunteer Barron referenced was **John Kosalko**, who spent much of his free time maintaining the cemetery.

On Dec. 4, 1975, reporter **Len Barcosky** of *The Globe-Times* featured an article on Kosalko's progress at St. Michael's, "... clipping, cutting, raking and hauling."

That was 40 years ago. Since then, vandals had toppled headstones, many marred with graffiti.

In the 1980s SBHS founder, **Joan Campion** and Society board member, **Wilma Balzer** explored the condition of the cemetery and pushed for recognition of the historic site.

For the past twenty years, **Dan Gasda** headed a crew of like-minded volunteers, who manned lawn mowers and kept the grass cut.

Lehigh University founder, **Asa Packer**, donated the original 2.2-acre mountainside plot to Holy Infancy Roman Catholic Church for a cemetery. The first to be interred within its borders was **James Griffin** on Oct. 22, 1867.

Today, many parishes in the region, including Holy Infancy Church, struggle to maintain their properties, like St. Michael's.

A team of volunteers created the Facebook page, "Friends of St. Michael's Cemetery, Bethlehem, Pa.," to attract interest and help support others who expressed empathy for the cemetery, for example, **Ken Bratsch**, who searched for missing or lost headstones, discovered 400 headstones hidden under the sod; he also compiled a list of veterans from the Civil War to WWII and makes sure their graves are marked.

Rosemary Buffington researched death certificates of deceased who were interred at St. Michael's during the Spanish Influenza outbreak in 1918. Results from this and her other research can be

found on the free website, www.findagrave.com.

Barron concluded his talk with the need of \$250 to fuel lawn mowers annually—and \$2,500 to fund a new tractor. To date, \$2,000 has been raised for the equipment. The work of volunteers continues to preserve this historic site, a great value to the community.

Barron mentioned that monetary donations to help with ongoing efforts preserve to St. Michael's may be sent to Holy Infancy R.C. Church, 312 E. 4th St., Bethlehem, PA 18015 and specify "St. Michael's Cemetery."

Facebook page: Friends of St. Michael's Cemetery, Bethlehem, Pa.

Preservation and long-term stewardship of St. Michael's is a hallmark that helps to enhance the surrounding area's quality of life, while creating a more attractive neighborhood.

Join "Friends" to raise awareness of this important historical resource in the community. Your support is urgently needed for continued restoration and maintenance of this site.

For additional information, leave a message on the Facebook page.

Flu Deaths Had No Boundaries

BY ROSEMARY C. BUFFINGTON

Just over 100 years ago, all of South Bethlehem braced for a virulent strain of influenza that marched across the country during the final months of World War I. With daily war updates and Bethlehem Steel plant injuries, local newspapers were used to continuous horrors—but this was tough, as doctors struggled to keep up with new flu cases in St. Lukes and hastily built emergency hospitals.

Bethlehem was better prepared than most towns because of urgently needed war materiel produced by the Steel company and the newly unified City of Bethlehem, that lowered contagions by enforcing strict prohibitions on gatherings of all kinds. This included church services, athletic meets—and with great difficulty, bars and saloons. The townspeople went all in, buying war bonds with whatever extra money they could afford, shipping goods to the front where they could.

I wish my grandparents had told me about this historic time, but they remained their stoic selves till the end. So this past fall, I began researching the stories of 157 people interred in St. Michael's Cemetery—their demise attributed to 'The Spanish Flu' or 'Pneumonia following Influenza' on their death certificates.

The first illnesses were flagged in September 1918, with a horrifying acceleration that peaked in mid-October, then dropped in November, only to flare up again in December before tailing off into the winter. We now know this classic pattern of the infection, although at the time, daily newspapers zig-zagged between hope and despair, even as advertisements filled the pages touting treatments that ranged from Father John's Medicine to Vick's Vapo-Rub.

More men than women died—I suspect that more men than women probably lived in the area around St. Michael's Cemetery at that time. Many men who arrived alone from foreign lands and surrounding towns, lived in crowded boarding houses after they found work in South Bethlehem.

Similar to the national statistical data, the average Spanish flu burial in St. Michael's was a person in the prime of life. Today we

still debate why the epidemic cut down people who had the most to give in life that were suddenly stricken gasping for breath, turning blue and dying within hours. In addition to interments at St. Michael's, coffins were sent 'home' to nearby cities via train, while others were buried in Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Holy Ghost, and Fountain Hill cemeteries. Using St. Michael's current data as a snapshot, the total number of burials amounted to 311 in 1916; 316 in 1917; 485 in 1918; and 229 in 1919. The 'excess' deaths in 1918 were certainly visible.

Of the 157 death certificates I sampled in my research, 38 died in St. Luke's Hospital and 15 in the Northampton Heights Emergency Hospital. Thirty-seven different doctors signed the death certificates, by far the most signed by **Dr. Loyal Shoudy** of the Bethlehem Steel (18)—and **Dr. George Pehutias** of St. Lukes, who signed 24, an amazing amount of work.

Undertakers busily prepared the deceased for burials . . . **McGovern** had 45, **Bolich**, 31; **Madden**, 22; **Kinney**, 20; and **Conahan**, 17.

As the epidemic raged, deaths continued with the usual ever-present childhood diseases, deaths in childbirth, accidents, and suicides. The Oct. 7 issue of *The Morning Call* reported that **Joseph Csandli** fell 35 feet to his death, when he slipped while he jumped between two cranes at the Bethlehem Steel Company; **Joseph Marich**, 25, died of typhoid fever; **Lizzie Mamaro**, 2, died from burns received while playing with matches; and two people died when a trolley car flipped on a steep grade on Wyandotte St.—a mere sampling of deaths reported on Oct. 7.

On Nov. 11 at the end of WWI came Armistice Day . . . a day forever remembered with red poppies, when the town took a collective breath and newspapers shouted blessed peace, when army conscription was suspended and ads appeared touting gifts for the upcoming Christmas season—and life went on.

—Chart and map data researched from death certificates and interments at St. Michael's Cemetery by Rosemary Buffington. Map illustrated by Kenneth F. Raniere.



