

Exploring the Cemetery: Pipgress

One of the more unusual names in the cemetery is “Pipgres.” George Pipgres was born July 24, 1844 in Schleswig, Germany, and died August 2, 1882, in Rothsville. In all of Findagrave’s records for the whole world, there are just 25 Pipgres or Pipgress entries. However, there are 107 Pipgras or Pipgras entries. My grandmother always pronounced it “Pip-grus.”

In Europe the name was Piepgras (210 in Findagrave). As to the meaning of the name—I have no idea. I suspect it is some sort of composite between Danish and German. It is certainly rare.

In the 1880 census, George Pipgres stated that he was born in Schleswig, which is in the northernmost region of Germany on the peninsula that extends into Denmark. This area was fought over by Denmark and Germany throughout the 1800s and early 1900s.

George probably immigrated in 1855. He married Margaret Seltzer, daughter of Rothsville residents George and Annie Seltzer. Margaret was also born in Germany in 1843,

They probably lived first in western Pennsylvania because a son, George S. Pipgress, was born in Pittsburgh in 1867. Also, George recorded his “Intention to file for Citizenship” there in 1868. He was still in Pittsburgh in 1875.

Additional children were born in Warwick Township in 1877 (Mary), 1880 (Susan), and Harry (1882). In 1880 George gave his occupation as a cigarmaker, like many others in Rothsville. He died suddenly at age 38 years and 6 days, as recorded in the church records. In the Lititz Record, the name was spelled “Pipegrass.”

Margaret died in 1897 in Lancaster where she was living with her youngest son, Harry. Son George stayed in Rothsville and married Ella Ressler, daughter of Frank and Lizzie (Eckert) Ressler and had 8 children: Elmer, Franklin, Harry, Elva, William, Margery, Maud and Luella, thereby contributing greatly to the number of Pipgreses.

So you can add Pipgress to the list of unusual names found in the Rothsville Lutheran Cemetery (and scarcely anywhere else), along with Ravegum and Leeking.

The most famous Pipgras is George William Pipgras (1899-1986), American baseball pitcher and umpire, known as the “Danish Viking.” He spent his playing career with the Yankees and was a member of the Famous “Murderers Row” 1927 Yankees team.

