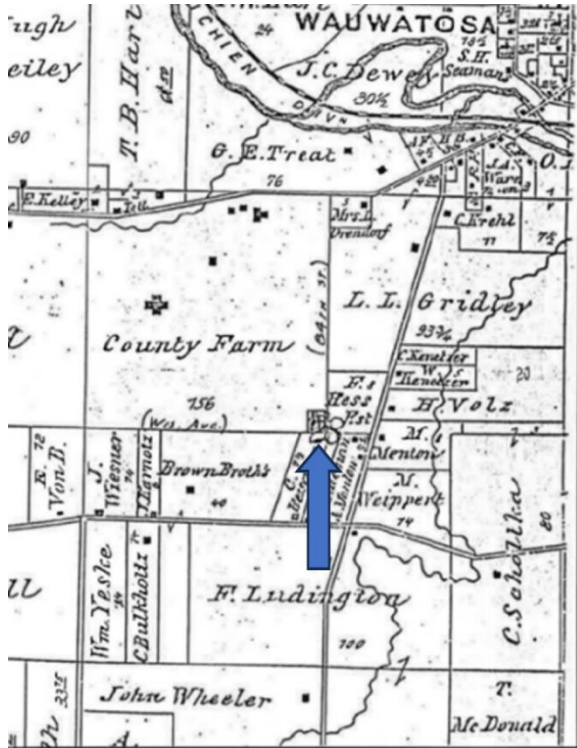


DESCENDANT COMMUNITY OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY GROUNDS CEMETERIES, INC.

by Judy Klimt Houston, President

<https://descendantcommunity.org>

PART 2: CEMETERY ONE



Did your ancestors reside in Milwaukee between 1852 and 1974? The County provided burials for residents due to poverty, health issues, or those who were unidentified at the time of death. Four cemeteries are found at the County Grounds, with interment dates often indicating the burial site – though the Asylum cemetery interred its own specific patients from 1880-1914.

This article is one of several to detail the history of the County Grounds cemeteries which held the burials of approximately 10,000 Milwaukee County residents.

First map on left which depicted Cemetery 1 in Section 28: H. Belden & Co. 1876 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Milwaukee County*.

Present location: Windsor Ct. and Wisconsin Ave.

Milwaukee County Genealogical Society's (MCGS) researcher, Robert Felber, viewed volumes of death certificates dating from 1872-1890, to locate undocumented burials in the poor farm cemetery. Milwaukee County death certificates were not a legal requirement until it became law in 1852; however, it was not strictly enforced until roughly 1880.¹

In addition, Find-A-Grave (FAG) memorials were created for this cemetery based on certificates found and the burial ledger² entries with special thanks to a group of researchers – many who are MCGS members. Our descendant community is in the process of transcribing death certificates to create new FAG memorials and support current FAG poor farm cemetery memorials to assist family historians. When complete, this action may help determine an approximate number of burials at Cemetery 1 from January 1872 to August 1882 beginning with Serow Martin's burial as noted on her death certificate which may be viewed through Ancestry or on microfilm at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Almshouse Burial Ledger found at Milwaukee County Historical Society (MCHS).³

In 1878, the County Board of Supervisors' Proceedings² raised concerns about the cemetery's limited suitability, with only one third of the 2.5-acre plot deemed suitable for graves. The rest was low with water rising to just six inches of the surface. Graves in suitable area are 2' 10" deep, leaving corpses resting 18 inches below the surface, considering the standard coffin height of 16 inches. This prompted the need for another cemetery, leading to establishment of Cemetery 2 – four years later.⁴

Disclaimer: Aerial images showing cemetery map placement(s) are from a 2022-2023 WHS slideshow presentation and are subject to minor changes when provided by the WHS.

In summary of the article titled “*The Potter’s Field Desecration*”, the Sheriff confirmed novice grave-robbers desecrated this site. (Fig. 1)

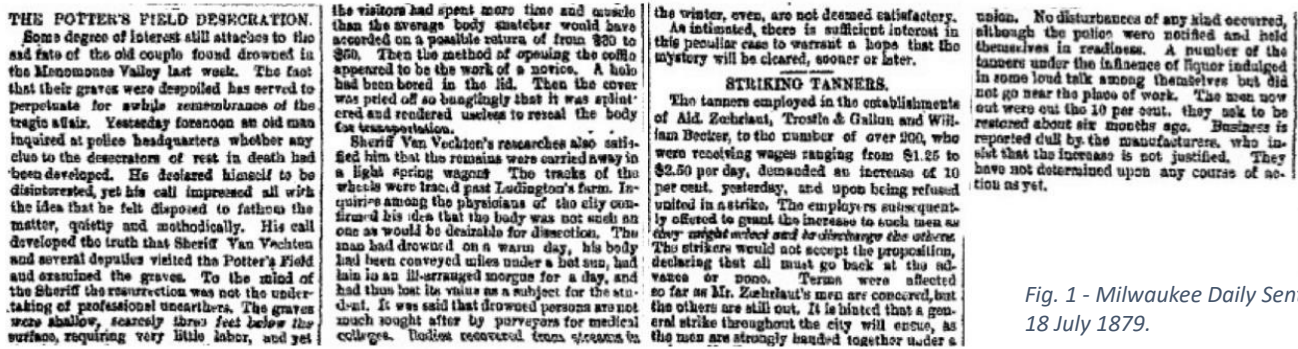


Fig. 1 - Milwaukee Daily Sentinel, 18 July 1879.

The 1937 aerial photo by the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) (Fig. 2), depicts headstones at Cemetery 1. Later, in 1951, the WHS aerial (Fig. 3) indicated headstones were removed, and per information provided to us by the WHS in March 2024 the interments are assumed under the sidewalk and roadway. (Fig. 4)



Fig. 2 - 1937 aerial.



Fig. 3 - 1951 aerial.

1971: Remains disturbed during pipeline excavation adjacent to north side of Wisconsin Ave at the west 8500 block.⁵

Milwaukee Journal, 19 May 1971: “*Excavators Find Bones of 4 People*”. Remains delivered to Museum.

1975: Remains disturbed at Cemetery 1 along Wisconsin Avenue due to a water main project.⁶

In September 2023, a witness reported to our descendant community that in 1971⁷, two dump trucks hauled excavated soil and remains westward and dumped by ponds north of Wisconsin Ave. and south of the ponds. Remains found at dump site.

Cemetery 1 held 500-700 adult burials and over 1,000 if the area also included infants.^{5 6}

2024: No signage exists at Cemetery 1 to honor these Milwaukee County residents.



Fig. 4 - 2022 aerial.

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WORKS CITED

- ¹ See information from WHS: <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS1586> (Retrieved 13 Aug 2024)
- ² Predates WI Burial Law, Wis. Stat. § 157.70.
- ³ <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2303724/milwaukee-county-almshouse-and-poor-farm-cemetery> (Retrieved 13 Aug 2024)
- ⁴ Richards, P.B. et al., *"Nine For Mortal Men Doomed to Die: The Archaeology and Osteology of the 2013. Milwaukee Country Poor Farm Cemetery Project."* (2016, p. 18)
- ⁵ Bruhy, Mark E. and David F. Overstreet, *"Phase I Investigation of Five Proposed Diversion Structures, April 1980 Addendum."* Report submitted to Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. (1980)
- ⁶ <https://sites.uwm.edu/milwaukee-county-poor-farm-cemetery/the-mcpfc/timeline/> (Retrieved 09 Aug 2024)
- ⁷ Overstreet, David F and Sverdrup, Keith A., *"Archaeology and Remote Sensing Investigations at Windsor Drive and Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee County Medical Complex, Milwaukee County, WI."* GLARC Reports of Investigations No. 312 Milwaukee, (1992, pp. 29-30)

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