DESCENDANT COMMUNITY OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY GROUNDS CEMETERIES, INC.

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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

<u>Disclaimer</u>: 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)

THE POTTER'S PIELD DESECRATION. Soms degree of interest still attackes to flor and fate of the old couple found drowned in the Menomones Valley last week. The fact that their graves were despoiled has served to perpetuate for swhile remembrance of the tragic affair. Yestesday forenoon at old man inquired at police beadquarters whether any clus to the desecrators of rest in death had been developed. He declared hiencel to be disinterested, yet his call impressed all with the idea that he felt disposed to fathous the matter, quistiy and mothodically. His call developed the truth that Sheriff Van Venheun and several deputies visited the Potter's Field and crasuined the graves. To the mind of the Sheriff the resurrection was not the undertaking of professional uncarthers. The graves were shallow, scarcely three feet below the surface, requiring very little labor, and yet

the visitors had spent more time and causele than the average body anatcher would have accorded on a possible return of from \$30 to \$300. Then the method of opening the cells appeared to be the work of a novice. A hole had been bored in the lift. Then the cover was pried of so banglingly that it was splintered and readered uscless to rescal the body for texasportation.

Sheriff Ven Vechten's researches also satisfied into that the remains were carried away in a light spring wagon? The tracks of the wheels were traced pass Ludington's farm. Inquiries among the physicians of the eily constraint his des that the body was not such an one as would be desirable for dissection. The man had drowned on a warm day, his body had been conveyed utiles under a hot sue, had had thus host its value as a subject for the student. It was said that drowned persons are not much lought after by purveyers for medical colleges. Budges econvered from spreams in

the winter, even, are not deemed satisfactory. As intimated, there is sufficient interest in this peculiar case to warrant a lope that the mystery will be cleared, somer or later.

STRIKING TANNERS.

The tanners employed in the cotabilishments of Aid. Zechriaut, Trestle & Gallon and William Becker, to the number of over 200, who were recolving wages ranging from \$1.25 to \$2.50 per day, demanded an increase of 10 per cent, pesterday, not upon being refused united in astrike. The employers subsequently offered to great the increase to such men as they might scheet and be discretained the other actions and the contract of the other actions. The strikers would not scoops the proposition, declaring that all must go back at the advance or none. Terms were affected to far as II. Zehrhautti men are confected to far as the Zehrhautt hen are concered, but the others are still out, II is histed that a general strike throughout the city will ensue, as the men are strongly handed together under a

union. No disturbances of any hind occurred, although the police were notified and held themselves in readiness. A number of the tamers under the influence of fliquer indulged in some load talk among themselves but did not go near the place of work. The men now out were out the 10 per cent. they nak to be restored about six months ago. Business is reported dull by the numeraturers, who insist that the increase is not justified. They have not determined upon any course of action as yet.

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. 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}



Fig. 4 - 2022 aerial.

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

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WORKS CITED

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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)