

DESCENDANT COMMUNITY OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY GROUNDS CEMETERIES, INC.

by Judy Klimt Houston, President

<https://descendantcommunity.org>

PART 3: CEMETERY TWO: 1882-1937

From 1882 – 1925, the County provided burials in Cemetery 2 for its residents who suffered from poverty, health issues or those who were unidentified at the time of death. These were Milwaukee's laborers, bakers, teamsters and soldiers. Men, women, children and babies: all were buried here. This article is one of several to detail the history of care at County Grounds Cemetery 2 which held the **burials of 7,226 County residents, including 1,471 medical cadavers.**¹

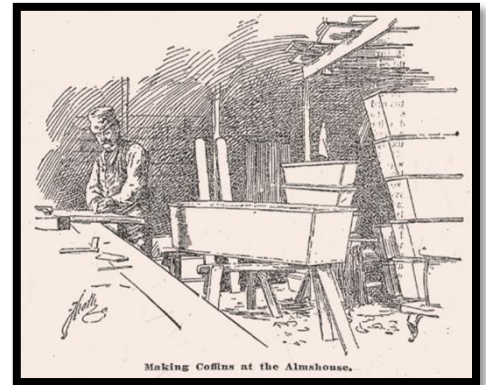
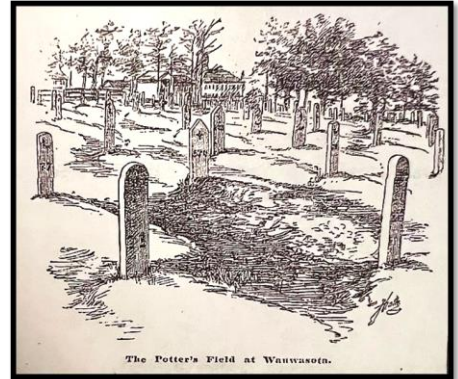
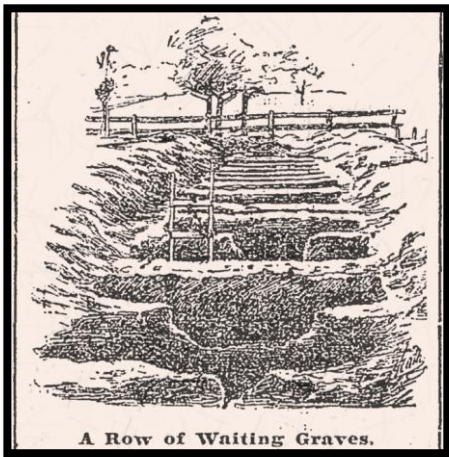


Fig. 1 - Milwaukee Sentinel, 6 Dec 1896.



BURYING THE PAUPERS

POTTER'S FIELD NOT AN UNATTRACTIVE PLACE.

EACH GRAVE IS MARKED BY A SINGLE WHITE PICKET.

Often the Friends of the Deceased Keep the Graves in Tidy Condition and Sometimes They Manage to Erect a Headstone—Interesting Characters Find Graves in the Potter's Field.

The general idea that the term "potter's field" came into use because some Mr. Potter may have at one time turned his fields or part of them into a burying ground for poor people, is erroneous. In the twenty-seventh chapter of St. Matthew in the Bible it is stated that the priests took the thirty pieces of silver that were claimed to have been the price of the betrayal of Jesus, and "bought with them

While the 1896 Sentinel article above appeared to praise the beauty at the Wauwatosa Potter's Field, other news questioned the care of those waiting for interment at County Grounds Cemetery 2.

CHANGED THE BODIES

Questionable Conduct of Undertaker Judson.

REMAINS OF A WOMAN SUBSTITUTED FOR THOSE OF A MAN.

Damaging Evidence Brought Out by the Investigating Committee of the County Board—What Became of the Remains of Albert Schmetzner?—His Friends Provided a Respectable Burial for the Body, but Judson Interred the Mangled Corpse of an Unknown Woman in Its Place.

Undertaker C. E. Judson's record is by no means improved by the evidence that is being adduced at the investigation which is being conducted by a special committee of the County board. The testimony introduced yesterday was as damaging as that presented on Friday, and was of an even more sensational character. By far the most important witness of the day was Joseph Roeder,

Fig. 2 - Sentinel: 4 Feb 1894.

A NEW SYSTEM URGED

REPORT OF COMMITTEE THAT INVESTIGATED THE BURIAL OF PAUPERS.

JUDSON SEVERELY SCORED

The Committee Recommends the County Board to Cancel His Contract and to Have the Bodies of Paupers Buried by the Superintendent of the County Farm.

At the meeting of the county board which opened at 2 o'clock this afternoon, the special committee which has been engaged in investigating the disposal of the pauper dead made its report. The committee reported on the proceedings already taken and asked that more time be allowed for further investigation of the matter.

Fig. 3 - Journal: 13 Feb 1894.

The Law Violated.

Under the statute the medical colleges are permitted to use for scientific purposes the bodies of all paupers who die at the county farm whose remains are not claimed by relatives or friends. But there is a clause which was not obeyed in this case. The law strictly provides that the subjects after being used shall be given "decent burial."

Last winter, on two occasions and at different places in the Sixteenth ward, portions of human remains were found, one in a garbage pile and the other in an open lot.

Not only in these cases has the law been violated, but the law providing for the "decent burial" of bodies dissected by medical students is almost invariably ignored. When the colleges are through with the subject, the remains in almost every instance are interred in potter's field. This, in the opinion of attorneys, is not complying with the law.

Furthermore, a Journal reporter has it upon excellent authority that in many instances the remains of two or three persons are dumped into one box and are buried on the county farm under a single permit.

The laws of Wisconsin governing the use of human bodies for scientific purposes are more liberal than in many other states of the union, and in view of this violation is pronounced all the more reprehensible.

Fig. 4 - Journal: 3 Feb 1896.

County Board of Supervisors investigated the questionable conduct of their contracted undertaker, Charles Judson, several times. **Result:** Judson's actions leading to desecration of the dead were dismissed and his employment with the County continued until his retirement.



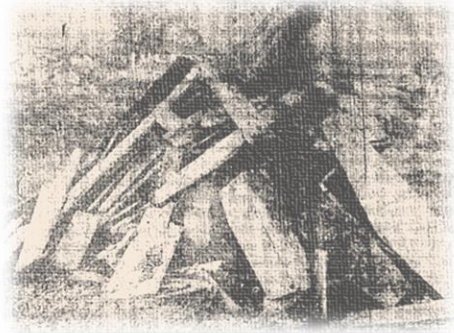
Fig. 5 - Wauwatosa News: 11 Dec 1908.

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Baby Coffins Fired Like Tinder:
BODIES OF GOD'S LITTLE ONES ARE DUG UP, STACKED, AND BURNED IN POTTER'S FIELD

Remains of Children and Adults, Whose Relatives Are Too Poor to Pay for Burial, Are Disinterred From Burying Ground in Wauwatosa, Piled in Their Coffins, in Huge Funeral Piles, and the Match Touched to Them; All to Make Room for More Bodies in Burying Ground, Which, in Turn Will Be Desecrated. Superintendent Bark Attempts to Evade Facts, But Admits Their Truth When Confronted With the Evidence.

Fig. 6 - Milwaukee Leader: 30 Oct 1912.



WHEN IS COUNTY BOARD GOING TO INVESTIGATE BURNING OF DEAD?

A second Board investigation reviewed Superintendent Ferdinand Bark's care of Almshouse inmates and the cemetery. Regardless of evidence proving elder abuse, feeding decayed food to the Almshouse residents, and desecration of the dead at the cemetery, Bark continued for 10 years as Superintendent until voted out of office late 1913 - at his retirement.



SKULLS OF MEN, WOMEN AND BABIES USED IN SPORT AT COUNTY ALMSHOUSE

Grave Diggers in Potter's Field on at Least One Occasion Took Human Skulls for Bowling Balls and Other Bones as Ten Pins, According to Inmate, Who Witnessed Desecration of Dead - To Conceal Evidence of Leader's Charges Piles of Ashes Are Covered With Earth.

Fig. 7 - Milwaukee Leader: 22 Nov 1912.

Fig. 8 - Milwaukee Leader: 15 Nov 1912.

RELATE CONDITIONS AT POTTERS' FIELD

Newspaper Reporter Gives Gruesome Testimony as to Method of Disposing of Bodies.

BARK MAKES DENIAL

Tells County Board Committee That No Conditions Existed Such as Photograph Showed.

COUNTY BOARD DAUBS WHITEWASH ON BARK AND ALMSHOUSE TRUSTEES

The "non-partisan" county board has done exactly what was expected of it in its findings on the charges of desecrating the dead at the county almshouse.

them. Inasmuch as he was blameless in the first instance, how could he?

DISREGARD ALL TESTIMONY.

the desecration of the dead as described by The Leader.

Martin Snelmeister, who has a little one buried in the potter's field, saw the coffins and bones, burned, and a test-

Fig. 9 Milwaukee Leader: 18 Dec 1912.

COUNTY POOR 'FEAST' ON SALT PORK AND POTATOES

Continued.

were served poorly cooked meat which had begun to decay and often times smelled so badly they were unable to sit at the tables which this offering was piled before them. The vegetables were also bad, the inmates testified, and they begged the trustees to give them decent food.

Immediately after the investigation, it is said, the food became better and the treatment of the aged inmates more humane. Recently, however, the superintendent has again allowed rotten meat to appear on the tables in the almshouse dining room, according to several inmates, and a number have been made ill as a result. Testimony that the food was bad was given the trustees present at the almshouse when the desecration of graves was being investigated. They were loth to believe the charges and denounced one of the inmates as an "agitator" because he complained about the food.

Inmates Flogged.

Charges have also been made that aged inmates are treated cruelly by rough employees. Because some of the aged men and women have not been flogged by attendants, according to other inmates who have witnessed such treatment.

Recently one of the inmates who helps to take care of the aged and feeble in the hospital ward attacked an old man who was barely able to walk. He threw the old man to the floor and kicked him several times. Unable to rise the old man sought to protect himself by crawling along the floor but was pursued by the attendant. The old man became exhausted in his flight from torture and lay huddled on the floor, sobbing like a child.

If the trustees hold an investigation at the almshouse this old man and several others will testify to their treatment.

"...evidence gathered from these historic documents, the increasing pressures on Superintendent Bark and the way in which this interaction with his environment may have caused him to act outside of social and legal norms."²

Fig. 10 - Milwaukee Leader: 30 Nov 1912.



MILWAUKEE COUNTY ALMS HOUSE.

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Milwaukee County Home for Dependent Children (MCHDC) photos (Courtesy of Milwaukee County Historical Society).

An investigation in 1915 reviewed why 50% of the babies died between 1911-1914 while living at MCHDC.³

309 children who died at the Home from 1898-1925 were identified as buried at Cemetery 2.¹

Primary causes of death were due to diseases arising from starvation and lack of sanitation = 195.

Deaths due to other diseases = 111.

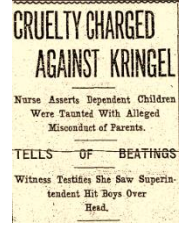


Fig. 11 - Sentinel: 24 Feb 1915.

Supervisor Frederic Heath's investigation of Superintendent August F.W. Kringel's actions relied on 75 witnesses indicating: starvation, abuse, malnutrition and a lack of proper sanitation at the Children's Home. Doctor Jurss and Coroner Nahin reported 50% of babies at the Home died due to neglect. Six nurses left with Dr. Jurss and one nurse committed suicide apparently due to the investigation.³

Kringel retired as the Superintendent after 38 years at the MCHDC. [1915 News articles from Sentinel/Journal]

ABUSE OF CHILDREN CHARGED BY NURSE AT KRINGEL PROBE

Miss Ellen Kisbert Corroborates Testimony Concerning Mice and Severe Whippings.

SOCIAL WORKERS ATTEND

Many Women Listen to Witnesses Tell of Alleged Conditions of Children's Home.

NURSES ARE OVERWORKED

Says Two Took Care of From Fifty to Sixty Children Who Were From 3 to 6 Years Old.

KRINGEL HEARING ALMOST DEVELOPS INTO A FIST FIGHT

Lie Is Hurlled and Dr. Jurss and Paul Wise Run at Each Other.

DEPUTY STEPS BETWEEN

Physician Continues on Stand and Gives Testimony Concerning Trustees.

BLEW SMOKE AT BABIES

Alleges Men Came Into Room Where Babies Were and Puffed Clouds Into Their Faces.

NURSE TAKES LIFE BECAUSE OF FEAR OF GOING INSANE

Anna Kramer Leaves Note Saying She Did Not Want to Go to Asylum.

CRITICISM IS UNBEARABLE

"It's Too Terrible to Hear People Say I Mistreated Children," Reads Message.

FUNERAL ON THURSDAY

Kills Self on Eve of Testifying at Investigation of Cruelty.

CHILDREN DIED OF NEGLECT, NAHIN SAYS

Former Coroner Charges Lack of Care at County Home.

CITES DEATH RATE

14 Out of 30 Succumbed to Measles, Witness Asserts.

BOY TAKES STAND

LACK OF ATTENTION KILLED CHILDREN, DOCTOR TESTIFIES

Shocking Conditions at Home for Dependent Children Alleged by Dr. George J. Jurss.

CITES A PITIFUL CASE

Tells How Little Girl Died of Tubercular Spine Through Gross Negligence.

BABIES FED POTATOES

Physician Asserts Little Ones Were Improperly Clothed and Slept Three in One Bed.

PARTIES AND WINE FIGURE IN HEARING ON HEATH CHARGES

Says: Kringel of Home for Dependent Children Entertained His Friends, Nurse Asserts.

SAYS FOOD WAS SCARCE

Employees Were Neglected, Gertrude James Tells County Board Committee at Tuesday Session.

CLAIMS CHILDREN BEATEN

Faces Were Bruised and Inmates Cried, Mrs. Mary Buntowski Testifies Before Probers.

ASSERTS TRUSTEES COULD NOT BELIEVE INSTITUTION HEAD

Henry Harman Tells Why He Severed Connections With Home for Dependent Children.

FOUGHT WHISKY BILLS

Declares He Found Strong Drink Was Purchased to Treat Visitors With.

CLAIMS CHILDREN DIED

Dr. Nahin Testifies That Neglected 'Cursed' Many Little Ones to Succumb to Measles.

SICK BOY BEATEN, SAYS GIRL AT QUIZ

Sister in Years Tells of Alleged Whippings at Home for Dependent Children.

ASSERTS FOOD WAS BAD

CLAIMS CHILDREN HIDDEN FROM KIN

Mrs. Mary Ciolek Tells Probers of Dependent Home Brother Was Spirited Away.

RUDE TREATMENT CHARGED

Woman Says Attendants at Institution Were Unkind and Door Was Slammed in Her Face.

LUTIE E. STEARNS CRITICISES KRINGEL

Asserts Conditions at Home for Dependent Children Are Badly in Need of Attention.

RAPS SCHOOLING SYSTEM

Witness Says No Attention Is Given Important Subjects—Food Called "Horrid Lesson."

BOY SHOWS BRUISE AT KRINGEL PROBE

Tells Up Sleeve, Bares Mark, Hears His Head and Is Silent.

MRS. KANDER TESTIFIES

Declares Nursery Is Better Than It Was Eight Years Ago When She Inspected It.

Excerpt from the investigation [Vol. 1]:
 Supervisor Heath to the Home's inspector:
 "If you brought your child here, what chance would it have to return to you?"
 Inspector's answer: "No chance at all."

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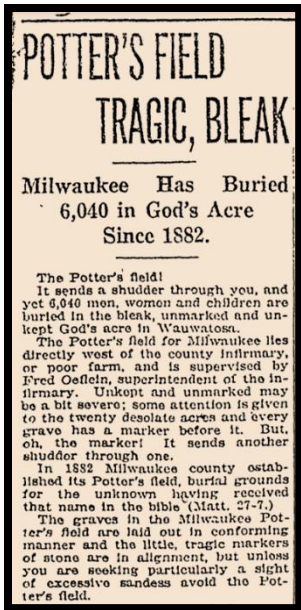


Fig. 12 - Milwaukee Sentinel: 10 Feb 1924 (cont'd. bottom right)

Early 1930's: Works Progress and Administration (WPA) produced the first known map of Cemetery 2 before deconstruction. Found at Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) by Great Lakes Archaeological Research Center (GLARC) in 1991.⁵

This map depicted the fenced cemetery, its fenced access road, and nearby county buildings – validates cemetery drawing and news article of 6 Dec 1896 Milwaukee Sentinel found on page 1 of this article.

A haunting of the 1912 desecration at the cemetery reveals itself 18 years later. (Fig. 14)

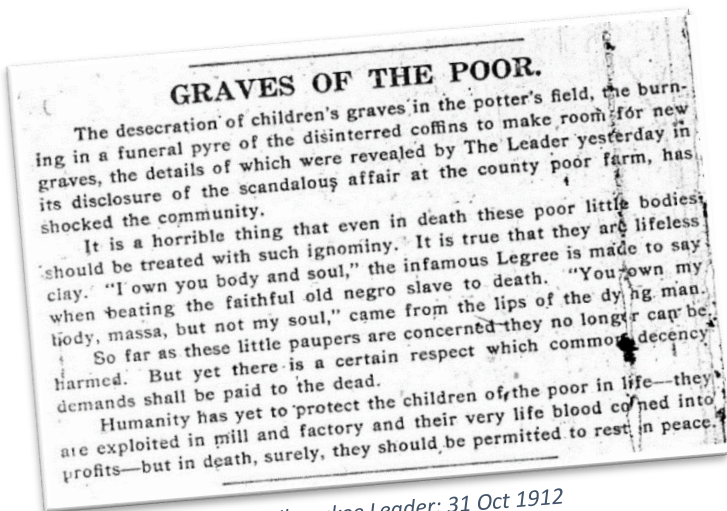


Fig. 15 - Milwaukee Leader: 31 Oct 1912

Scholarly research reveals **graves totaled 7,226 when abandoned in June 1925** recognizing need and beginning a third burial site.¹

1928: Milwaukee County began construction of the Hospital [right photo], followed by Nurses' Residence placed inside Cemetery 2.⁴

Burials in Cemetery 2 were to be exhumed and reburied in Cemetery 3.

"Contemporary accounts suggest the burials that were moved were those very few whose relatives visited regularly...the bulk of the burials were left in place."⁴

Cemetery 2 grave markers removed, fill placed over the cemetery area, fence delimiting cemetery area dismantled, cemetery no longer marked as a burial site.⁴



Fig. 13 - 4-77; Courtesy of Milwaukee Co. Historical Society

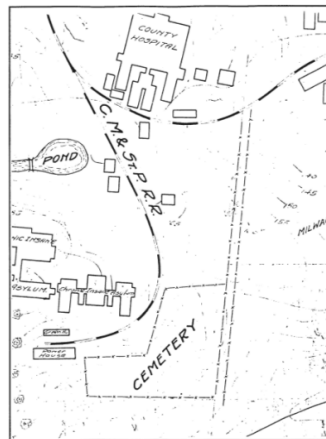


Figure 1: W.P.A. Era plat from MMSD Archives

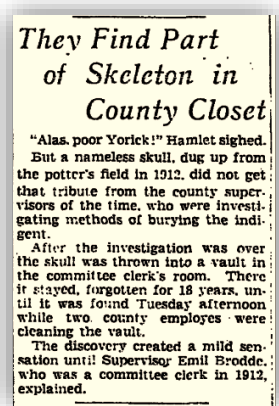
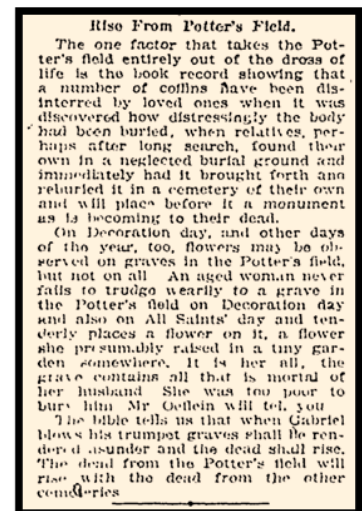


Fig. 14 - Journal: 28 Jan 1930.

Desecration of the dead is now, as was then, outside societal norms.

At this Potter's Field, defilement of graves belonging to these 7,226 County residents occurred often.



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Reveal Graves in Digging Job

Workers on Nurse Home for County Find Six Coffins in Field

[Picture on Picture Page]

Amid some 8,500 decayed graves of an abandoned potter's field the county is building its new \$500,000 nurses' home at the new county hospital, Wauwatosa. Excavators at work Tuesday on the foundation dug up six partly decomposed, must covered coffins from a small section of the site.

Discolored water poured from the black wood coffins as they were lifted from the ground. The rotted pine of the boxes collapsed in the bucket of the power shovel. Splintered wood and decayed bones were strewn alike as the boom swung to empty the bucket into trucks.

The debris was hauled a few hundred feet west of the nurses' home site, spread near the hospital for the chronic insane and crushed into the ground as the basis for a proposed landscape project.

In Middle of Field

Workmen were unable to estimate how many more coffins would be dug from the site before the foundation of the H-shaped building is completed. The building is to be 183 by 160 feet. Its location is almost the middle of the county's original 15-acre potter's field, set aside 70 years ago.

The old potter's field was abandoned in the winter of 1929, when it was decided to construct the new nurses' home just west of the new county hospital, facing Wisconsin at. The proposed site was leveled and the whole potter's field graded and leveled.

About 200 graves were transferred at that time to a new potter's field - now called the County cemetery - covering 10 acres, north of the county institutions' fire station, off the Watertown road. Most of the graves removed to the new cemetery were those which had been given some attention by relatives of the deceased. Many of them had markers or small monuments.

Burials Before 1882

Part of the old potter's field was dug through in 1929 to make way for the new county hospital and for steam tunnels connecting the central heating plant with the new hospital, hospital for the chronic insane and the hospital for mental diseases.

Fred J. Oeffeln, superintendent of the infirmary and in charge of potter's field, said the first record of burials in the old abandoned field was Feb. 14, 1882. Some uncatalogued documents, however, indicate burials there 12 to 15 years before. No accurate record of the burials or care of grave markers was kept until 1914, when Mr. Oeffeln became superintendent of the infirmary.

Mr. Oeffeln said between 200 and 400 burials take place yearly in potter's field. The county now furnishes redwood coffins. It costs \$50 for each burial.



EXCAVATIONS for the new nurses' home at the county hospital have revealed that it is being built on an abandoned potter's field. Vincent Pacholski, one of the contractors, is shown beside a hole which formerly held a small baby's coffin.—Journal Photo

Fig. 16 - Journal: 6 Apr 1932.

Excavate for New Building, Dig Into Paupers' Graves

EIGHTEEN unidentified graves have been dug up so far on an abandoned potter's field in excavating for the site of the new \$500,000 nurses' home at the county hospital, Wauwatosa. About one-third of the excavation is completed. Vincent A. Pacholski, 5515 N. Danbury road, Whitefish Bay, contractor, reported Tuesday.

The excavating machine was moved Tuesday to the east section of the site and it is expected that a score or more graves will be found.

The decomposed black coffins collapse almost as soon as they are lifted by the bucket of the power shovel and the splintered wood and decayed bones are hauled near the hospital for the chronic insane, where a filling-in and landscaping project has been started.

Mr. Pacholski said workmen would begin Wednesday to pour concrete for the footing of the west wing of the home. The building will cover 180 feet by 160 feet. The excavation will be finished this week.

News revealed desecrations of the dead when a Nurses' Residence is placed in the center of Cemetery 2 - just seven years after the last burial in Potter's Field.

Fig. 17 - Journal: 12 Apr 1932.

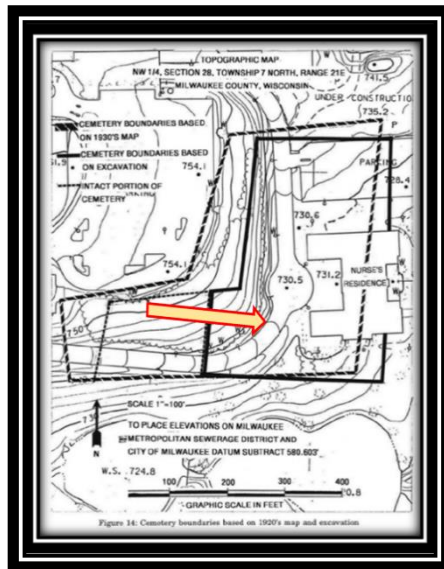
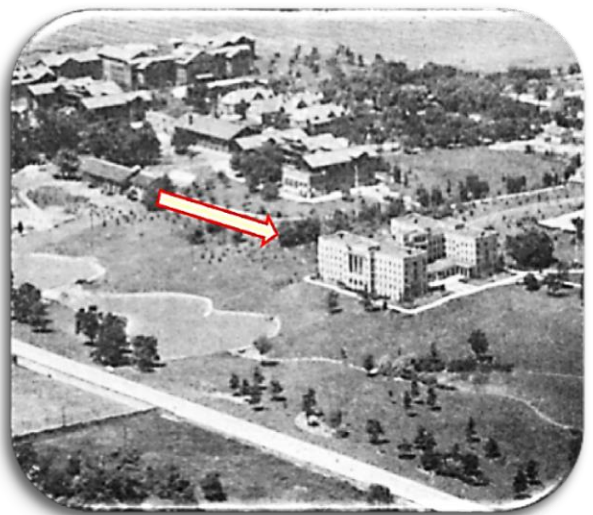


Fig. 18 - Nurses' Residence. 1937 aerial photo. Journal: 28 Jun 1987.

Placement of Nurses' Residence within Cemetery 2 depicted on 1993 map.⁶ (See left and Fig. 18.)

Scholarly evidence estimates 55% of burials destroyed by construction.⁷



Thus, this page ends the County's first 55 years of care for 7,226 graves filled with its most vulnerable residents once buried at Cemetery 2.

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WORKS CITED

- ¹ Drew, Brooke L., "Death in Anonymity: Population Dynamics and the Individual Within the Milwaukee County Poor Farm Cemetery, 1882–1925." (2018) *Theses and Dissertations*. 1787. <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/1787> (Retrieved 13 Aug 2024)
- ² Anthony, Alexander, "Crime, like Death, is Not Confined to the Old and Withered Alone: Dickensian Conditions, Grave Desecrations, and Archaeological Correlates at the Milwaukee County Institution Grounds." (2016) [cited by permission]
- ³ Milwaukee County Historical Society Archives, MSS-3284 Box 1: Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors Joint Commission
- ⁴ <https://sites.uwm.edu/milwaukee-county-poor-farm-cemetery/the-mcpfc/timeline/> (Retrieved 13 Aug 2024)
- ⁵ Overstreet David F. and Keith Sverdrup, "Archaeological and Remote Sensing Investigations at the Froedtert Hospital Tract, Milwaukee County Medical Complex." GLARC Report of Investigations No. 310 (1992, p. 4)
- ⁶ Richards, Patricia B. and M. Kastell, "Archaeological Excavations Almshouse Burial Ground Milwaukee County Poorhouse, Wauwatosa, WI." GLARC Report of Investigations No. 333 (1993, Map p. 62)
- ⁷ <https://sites.uwm.edu/milwaukee-county-poor-farm-cemetery/history/> (Retrieved 13 Aug 2024)

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