

DESCENDANT COMMUNITY OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY GROUNDS CEMETERIES, INC.

by Judy Klimt Houston, President

<https://descendantcommunity.org>

PART 4: CEMETERY TWO: 1937-1992

How were the remaining 45% of the interred at Cemetery 2 cared for over the next 55 years?

In 1979, GLARC was hired and determined a minimum of 5,000 interments occurred from 1850-1974. GLARC March 1980 map identifying three cemeteries.^{1 2}

Just **seven** months post identification of existing cemeteries by archaeological survey, graves disturbed.



Fig. 1 - Nurses' Residence (Courtesy of the MCHS)

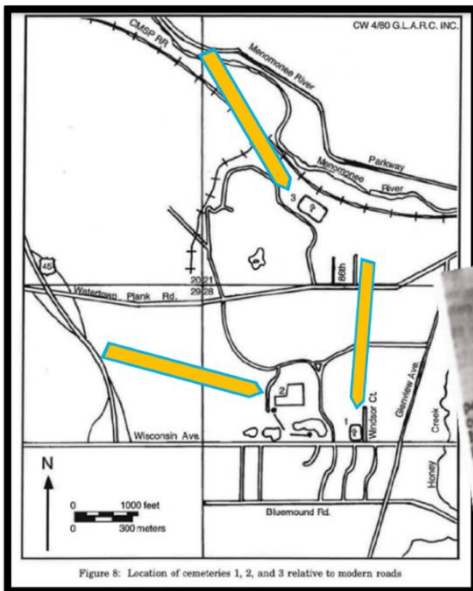


Figure 8: Location of cemeteries 1, 2, and 3 relative to modern roads

Paupers' graves dug up by workers

By MARILYN KUCER

The remains of four or five paupers were dug up accidentally by construction workers at the County Institutions grounds and unconceringly piled under a tree.

Their graves were in the original Milwaukee County Poor Farm Cemetery, where more than 5,000 people were buried from Feb. 14, 1852, until Jan. 5, 1928.

The remains were dug up Friday.

"That was unforgivable. ... That was an awful thing to do," said John Hein, information director for the County Medical Complex.

Symuel Smith, Institutions director, said, "They should have reported it."

Apparently, the workers did not report their findings because they were afraid their work would be stopped. They knew they would be working in what used to be a cemetery, county officials said.

"They told us, 'Don't tell anyone because we want to finish our work,'" said a student who saw the remains — a skull, teeth, numerous bones — shortly after workers dug up the graves.

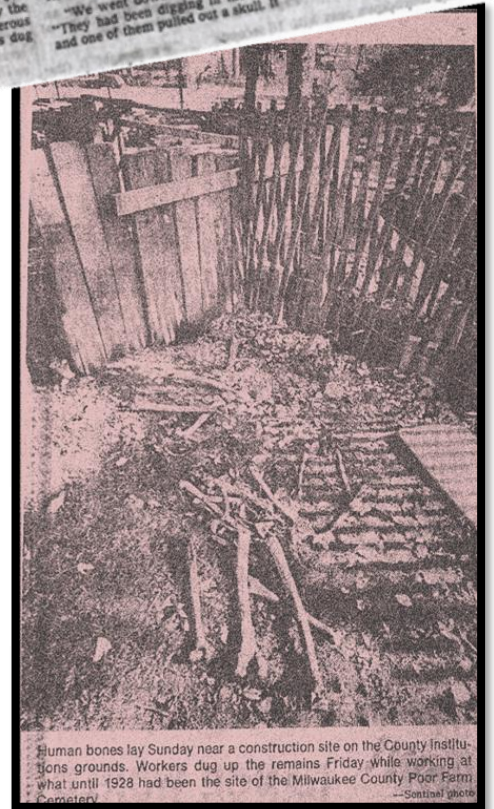
The student, an intern in a health field, said she and a friend were on their lunch break Friday when four construction workers from a private firm called to them.

"We went down there," she said. "They had been digging in the area and one of them pulled out a skull. It was in a box. I think those men took the skull."

She said the men also found several teeth and numerous leg bones. There also were disintegrating pieces of wood surrounding the remains, she said.

Bones
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Fig. 2 - Sentinel:
20 Oct 1980.



Human bones lay Sunday near a construction site on the County Institutions grounds. Workers dug up the remains Friday while working at what until 1928 had been the site of the Milwaukee County Poor Farm Cemetery. —Sentinel photo

From Old Jerusalem

There was in olden Jerusalem a guild of potters, and from their employment in a certain place the field became known as the potters' field. And when Judas repented of his betrayal of Christ and cast down the 30 pieces of silver at the feet of the chief priests, "the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, 'It is not lawful for us to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.' And they took counsel, and bought with them the potters' field, to bury strangers in." (Matt. xxvii, 6 and 7.) And from that, the name commonly has been given to a piece of ground reserved as a burying place for strangers, the friendless and poor.

19 Oct 1980 County memo (viewable at MCHS): plan to reinter remains at Cemetery 3.

Fig. 3 - Journal:
13 Mar 1944.

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.

Skeletons Reveal Old Churchyard

While engaged in excavating a cellar for a new house to be erected at 381 Thirteenth-st, Monday, the workmen unearthed five human skeletons. A Lutheran churchyard occupied that block at one time, and it is thought that the skeletons are the remains of persons buried there. The health department took charge of the skeletons and they will be sent to the county poor farm for burial.

Fig. 4 - Journal 3: 3 May 1904.

Wisconsin's Burial Site law, Wis. Stats. § 157.70, was enacted in 1985 to protect and preserve burial sites. Disturbances to graves prior to this date were not protected by the State – though, it was commonplace and a humanitarian practice to rebury remains if burials are disturbed.

WORKMEN EXCAVATING, DIG UP A SKELETON.

"Dead men tell no tales." And the longer they have been dead the less they tell. Only a story of dry, rattling human bones, which had long been dead was revealed yesterday when workmen excavating at 900 Aldrich-st, dislodged a human skeleton, which was fifteen feet under the ground. It was a ghastly discovery, which silenced a score of jesting workmen, and even struck some with fear. The coroner was notified, and the bones were removed to the morgue. It is believed that the skeleton is the remains of a man or woman buried in a cemetery thirty years ago on what is now Aldrich-st. It will be re-buried in potter's field.

Fig. 5 - Journal: 26 Nov 1907.

Their Final Reward Was Burial In Potter's Field

By Sharon Selz

Rest in Peace. After a lifetime of sorrows and joys, the thought of a reverent farewell to this earthly plane is important to many. But what of those who barely made enough money with which to afford the trappings of death. For many, their final resting place is a potter's field.

A burial ground for the poor and unknown, potter's field takes its name from a Biblical cemetery for strangers in Jerusalem. Milwaukee, too, has its potter's field. The original potter's field of Milwaukee County was located on the county grounds, approximately where the School of Nursing now stands (8700 W Wisconsin Ave.) The first burial there took place on

so did the needs of its people. The county grounds expanded to 1,200 acres, adding hospitals for the physically and mentally ill, and an orphanage. In peak years, 7,000 people were living in Milwaukee County institutions for short- or long-term care.

When deaths occurred in the institutions and families were unable to afford funeral expenses, Milwaukee County assumed the responsibility. Bodies were buried in pine coffins, directly into the earth. Since the potter's field, since the boxes were made of such flammable materials, they soon disintegrated, and bodies became scattered on the earth and clementines.

Construction plans in the area of Froedter Hospital required the moving of potter's field in 1925. By that year, 5,070 bodies had been buried in the original grave

This site was used by the county as a burial ground until the last interment on June 14, 1974. A total of 7,754 people are on record as being buried in the two potter's fields. This burial procedure was only used sporadically after World War II. In the 1950s, the county welfare system was shifting from provisions (food and goods in kind) to cash grants. The institution system was also modernizing, replacing orphanages with a foster care program, and lifelong mental homes with outpatient and drug treatment. Fewer people were living and dying on county grounds, and their needs were met in different ways.

Milwaukee County established agreements with funeral directors throughout the area in accordance with terms and conditions set by the Funeral Directors Association. Similar contracts were established with the Catholic Cemetery, and the South Wisconsin Cemetery

Funeral and cemetery expenses for individuals on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and General Assistance are normally covered by Milwaukee County. Seidman do families of welfare recipients have these costs to handle these costs. Covered are all funeral home and service expenses, as well as cemetery charges for the plot and opening and closing of the grave. Caskets and concrete vaults are provided, but no headstones are furnished.

Families are given opportunity to bury their loved ones in the cemetery. In the case of an indigent, an additional direct cost of \$300 is added to the cost of the funeral. The discovery could yield significant information about residents of Milwaukee at the end of the last century, a State Historical Society official said. The program coordinator for the society's burial site preservation program, said each grave would have to be excavated by hand and the remains analyzed by experts before it is determined what will be done with the remains. The road construction has been halted. The remains will be removed.



Researchers for Great Lakes Archaeological Research Center in Milwaukee continue to unearth rough-hewn coffins at a site on the County Grounds. A pauper's grave site was found during road construction for an addition at Froedter Memorial Lutheran Hospital in Wauwatosa.

In August 1991, the Doyne Ave. project began and remains were "accidentally" disturbed.

Despite the March 1980 survey and map detailing this site, and having disturbed remains in 1980, the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center (MRMC) once again claimed no awareness of the burial site. With the new burial law in place, an application was required and submitted to disturb the graves.

On 30 Aug 1991, the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) approved the disturbance with its director stating, "...I cannot understand how this project progressed to this point without anticipation of the present problem. Several previous construction projects in this area have disturbed human graves and, it is apparently common knowledge among some county staff that this area had been used as a pauper's cemetery... The fact that these burials represent Milwaukee's indigents does not mean that they deserve any less of our respect..."

1,649 individuals were exhumed in 1991/92 with the State's approval.²

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Cryptic find: Work reveals burial site

By TYLER L. CHIN
of The Journal staff

Wauwatosa — A large burial site has been discovered on the campus of the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center.

County workers found human bones last week while excavating for a new service road east of Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospital, according to Sig Tomkalski, associate director of hospital services for the Milwaukee County Medical Complex.

"We believe there's at least 150 burials," said Richard Dexter, compliance chief for the State Historical Society, which performed additional work after the initial find "to discover whether there were four or five graves, or a lot. There was a lot."

Dexter said the graves were laid out in rows with wooden coffins that had "hinges and nails and other evidence of what we call coffin furniture."

Based on the coffins, Dexter speculated that the site was a pauper cemetery and that bodies were buried there between 1860 and 1880, although the county apparently doesn't have records on the site.

He and Tomkalski believe the remains were those of people who died at medical facilities that were forerunners to the existing Milwaukee Regional Medical Center.

FARM BOUGHT IN 1852

The center had its roots as a home for Milwaukee County's destitute. In 1852, Milwaukee County bought a 160-acre farm in what was later to become Wauwatosa and began using it as housing and an infirmary for the poor.

The poor farm, or almshouse as it was sometimes called, was like something out of a novel by Charles Dickens, Father Steven Avella, a local historian, told The Journal in a 1987 article.

Among the residents in the communal dormitories were alcoholics, thieves, sick people, the elderly, newly arrived immigrants, widows, orphans and the insane, Avella said.

In 1961, Milwaukee County Hospital was established as a response to problems at the poor house, he said. In later years, the other county institutions were developed to provide separate care and treatment for groups of people who had been thrown together in the original poor house, he said.

"We probably won't know who these people were unless the county could locate records," Dexter said of the recently discovered remains.

GRAVES TO BE EXHUMED

The graves — buried in clay soil 4 to 5 feet below the surface — will be exhumed by hand, he said, adding that experts will be able to determine the age and sex of the dead as well as the general health of the population for the period in question.

The county has hired a Milwaukee firm, Great Lakes Archeological Research Center, to excavate the burial site. At this point, it is unknown how long this will take or where the remains will be relocated. Work began Thursday.

Tomkalski said work on the road had been halted. Before the excavation, completing the road, which will be less than a half-mile long, had been expected to take a month and a half.



JEFF LOSSDIN, an employe with Great Lakes Archeological Research Center, examines an unearthed tibia or shinbone, during excavation Thursday at a burial site on the campus of the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center in Wauwatosa. The site may have been a pauper's cemetery between 1860 and 1880. Journal photo by Richard Wood



17 Oct 1991: WHS's director requested MRMC to provide the State with "...the burial ledger with names of persons interred in this cemetery, as we must attempt to locate people with an interest in these burials as soon as possible."

29 Jun 1992: A second request from WHS to MRMC for the burial ledger to inform interested persons.

19 Nov 1992: Last exhumation occurred totaling = 1,649. Transferred to Marquette University by Dec 1992 for analyses per WI Burial Law with completion no more than 15 years.

MILWAUKEE SENTINEL Friday, October 25, 1991 4A

Pauper cemetery in Tosa could hold 4,700 graves

By JOE MANNING
Sentinel staff writer

A lost pauper cemetery discovered during construction at the Milwaukee County Medical Complex in Wauwatosa this summer could contain the remains of 4,700 early county residents, an archeologist and a state historical expert said Thursday.

A 1930s map of the County Grounds shows that the cemetery, which was not used after 1929, encompasses about 5 1/2 acres, said David Overstreet of the Great Lakes Archeological Research Center, the firm hired to remove old graves where the hospital's ambulatory care facility is being built.

Overstreet said he discovered the old Works Progress Administration map in the bowels of Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District offices.

Sigmund Tomkalski, associate administrator of the hospital, said removal of the grave sites was not slowing construction of the outpatient facility, which is being built next to the new outpatient clinic at Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospital.

The map defines the general boundaries of the pauper cemetery, he said. More detailed surveys will have to be conducted to determine the exact boundaries.

Pauper cemetery



The number of pauper graves at the site is estimated from the size of the cemetery.

Overstreet said his firm will remove about 300 graves from the area under construction.

The grave removal is on the northern end of the cemetery.

Graves not affected by the construction will not be touched.

About 150 graves have been removed so far by teams from his firm, and the work is expected to continue into the winter.

Overstreet said an initial review of the human remains shows that many of the paupers died of trauma, sometimes caused by trains. He said skeletons have been found in coffins with severed legs or missing limbs.

Some of those buried were murder victims, he said.

Nutrition was poor for the paupers, who showed early tooth loss, bone lesions and other diseases, he said.

Additional grave excavation may be necessary next year, when the county hospital tears down the former nursing school and begins building a new parking structure.

Tomkalski said grave removal is unlikely to delay construction of the parking structure because any graves on the site would have been dealt with in 1932, when the school was built.

In addition to grave sites, Tomkalski said, construction crews were running into unknown and abandoned steam tunnels containing asbestos, water lines, and other old building remains.

Law unclear on what to do with remains of paupers

By JOE MANNING
Sentinel staff writer

It may take years to determine what to do with the remains of hundreds of paupers whose graves were discovered during hospital construction last year on the Milwaukee County Medical Complex grounds in Wauwatosa.

The reason, according to an assistant professor who is studying the bones, is that state law is unclear on what to do with such a large cache of remains.

Norman Sullivan, a physical anthropologist at Marquette University, estimated the remains of 1,500 paupers will be removed from the construction site next to Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospital.

It is the largest group of remains ever recovered in the state, Sullivan said.

The remains eventually may have to be reburied in individual coffins at county expense.

Sullivan said he is working with state officials to determine what will happen.

He would like to keep the remains at Marquette as a science collection and for insight into the lives of Milwaukee's poor 100 or more years ago, if relatives cannot be found who would ask for reburial.

There is a registry of names of people buried on the county

grounds, but the identities of individual remains of the paupers are unknown.

Sullivan said state law requires that each set of remains be analyzed by experts before determining what to do with the remains.

If he were to examine the estimated 1,500 remains, it would take at least 10 years, he said.

Sullivan said he is the only person in Wisconsin qualified to do the work. He has remains from 500 burials now at Marquette.

David Overstreet, of the Great Lakes Archeological Research Center, the firm removing the bones under a contract with Milwaukee County, said the excavation may be complete by the end of the month. About 150 graves still must be removed, he said.

Overstreet said the State Historical Society is working with Sullivan to determine what should be done with the remains.

Broken bones found in a few coffins show that the people had died of severe trauma and some may have been struck by trains, he said.

Sullivan said his examination of the bones will involve chemical and anatomical analysis and X-rays.

He said the bones are serving to help develop new techniques for analyzing remains. Mathematical projections can be made

based on the state of preservation of the bones, contributing to the science of forensics in determining how long a body has been buried.

Sullivan said he wants to learn how people lived in Milwaukee years ago. How the wealthier classes lived is well known, he said, but the lives of paupers have not been documented.

His studies of bones and teeth can show the diet, diseases and quality of life of the poorer classes, he said.

His initial view tells him "these people weren't treated very well in life. There is a lot of pathology in the bones — infectious diseases and surgical evidences. This was an impoverished population with a lot of trauma and dietary inadequacy."

The remains are primarily of adults, although there are some remains of infants, Sullivan said.

The burials are from the late 1880s to the early 1900s.

RAF jet drops bomb; no one seriously hurt

Nordhorn, Germany — AP — A Royal Air Force Tornado jet on a practice bombing run dropped a bomb near a group of protesters Tuesday, slightly injuring some people, German television reported.

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WORKS CITED

- ¹ Bruhy, Mark E. and David F. Overstreet 1980a/b, *“Phase I Investigation of Five Proposed Diversion Structures.”* (April 1980, Addendum, p. 4)
- ² Adapted by: Richards, Patricia B. and M. Kastell, *“Archaeological Excavations Almshouse Burial Ground Milwaukee County Poorhouse, Wauwatosa, WI.”* GLARC Report of Investigations No. 333 (1993, pp. xv, 37)

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