

# Rienzi Cemetery

A search for unmarked  
graves

Compiled by

Tracy Reinhardt

©2009

Rienzi Cemetery, A Search for Unmarked Graves, is a study undertaken in the summer of 2008 to determine the percentage of burials in the cemetery that are unmarked. A study was done of the original 3 sections known as the 'Old Grounds' of the cemetery. This area was the original 8 1/2 acres of land that comprised the original cemetery. The cemetery today covers over 50 acres of land.

## APPENDIX

Image A—full map of Rienzi Cemetery, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Image B—map of Rienzi Old Grounds with 1865 locations and names

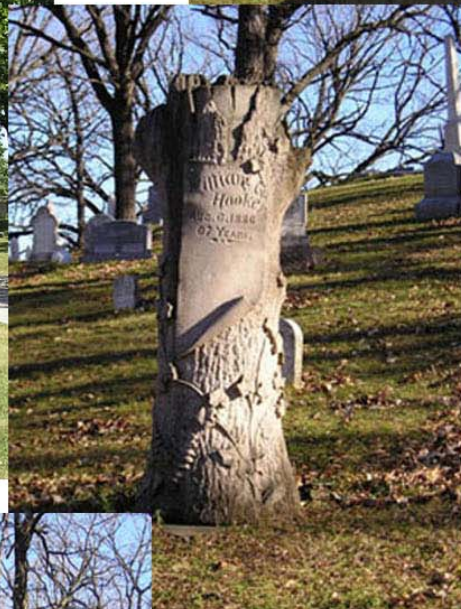
Image C—map of Rienzi Old Grounds, with current lot numbers

Image D—1923 surveyor's plat book of Rienzi Cemetery

Table 1—Number of burials per year in Rienzi Old Grounds, with average age of deceased

Table 2—Comparison of Death Dates from Rienzi Cemetery lot cards and tombstone inscriptions

# Rienzi Cemetery Old Grounds



The first monument that comes into view at the end of the entrance drive is a memorial to the veterans of the Civil War.

The Old Grounds are behind and to the right of the monument

All views show the hilly terrain prevalent throughout the cemetery

## Photos from top, clockwise:

- Tallmadge family monuments
- Sherwood monument in Old Grounds, with newer sections of cemetery in background—between the Old Grounds and newer section was once a man-made lake
- Hooker tree monument, at bottom of “Mountain Ave.” in Old Grounds
- Wilke tree monument, Old Grounds
- Civil War monument at grounds entrance



# Rienzi Cemetery

## A search for unmarked graves

by  
Tracy Reinhardt  
Copyright 2009



Flag-lined entrance to Rienzi Cemetery, shows pillars with common funerary symbols from the 1800's, including a draped urn, an inverted torch, and laural wreath

### The Cemetery

Rienzi Cemetery is one of the most beautiful cemeteries in Wisconsin. It currently covers 50 acres of land, and is the largest cemetery in Fond du Lac county. It is also one of the oldest cemeteries in the area, established three years before Wisconsin was granted statehood. The cemetery is situated just east of the city of Fond du Lac, and started out as a family burial ground for the Tallmadge family, when William Davies Tallmadge, 19 year old son of then territorial Governor Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, died in 1845. William had just completed his first year of college, and had come to Wisconsin to visit the land where his many relatives had recently settled. Only weeks before he died he had picked out his burial place, as well as the name for the family burial

Rienzi is named after Cola di Rienzi, the last Roman tribune, and a popular Italian leader who tried to restore the greatness of ancient Rome. He later became the subject of literature and song, including a novel by the English novelist E.G.E. Bulwer-Lytton (1835) and an opera by Richard Wagner (1842), both entitled *Rienzi*.

grounds.

The people of the city of Fond du Lac at that time, had one small area for burials that was swampy during normal times and flooded in the spring, and so the residents were clamoring for a new public cemetery. Gov. Tallmadge decided to donate 8.5 acres of his land for the purposes of a public cemetery, and in 1853 the Rienzi Cemetery Association was formed. This was one of the first businesses incorporated in the county. [see image A]

As a genealogist and local historian, I have had many occasions to collect tombstone inscriptions from all over the U.S., and it becomes a matter of routine to search for an ancestor's burial place. In every instance where a tombstone can't be located, the reasoning becomes one of "not yet finding the right cemetery". Nagging in the back of the mind, however, is the notion of an ancestor in an unmarked grave. What if they never put up a stone?

These brief but frequent encounters with cemeteries has also made me wonder just how many unmarked graves those cemeteries contain. Does anyone have any idea what the percentage is? What would it take to find out? I couldn't find anything that addressed that question.

My first reaction was to make a list of the criteria needed for such a study. You need an older cemetery, and it should still have original records, so you can compare cemetery records to the number of tombstones. The end result will be the percentage of unmarked graves. Rienzi Cemetery, in Fond du Lac Wisconsin fit all the criteria for a study of this sort, so I went to work.

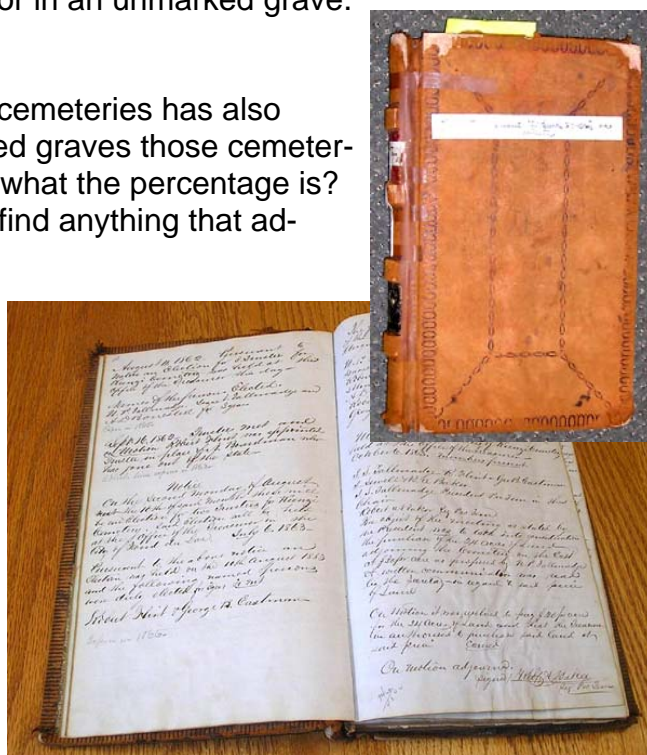
### The records

To assist me in this study, I had a lot of material. The cemetery still holds the original record books from the day the

cemetery was officially organized in 1853. [see Table 1] Adult graves sold for \$5 and children's graves (12 and under) for \$3. A pamphlet was printed in 1865 showing the by-laws of the cemetery association, as well as a list of all plot owners at that time. ([http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wifonddu/resources/cemeteries/rienzi/rienzi\\_oldgrounds.html](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wifonddu/resources/cemeteries/rienzi/rienzi_oldgrounds.html))

In 1874 a report was created to show all monetary sales of single graves, by year, from the time the association was incorporated. [see Table 2]

The cemetery has lot cards, burial cards, and lot sleeves. In 1923 the cemetery hired Jerry Donohue Engineering of Sheboygan to survey and map the entire cemetery, and



The original record book for the cemetery, with records and minutes starting in 1853 when the cemetery was incorporated.

the resulting book of maps also can be found in the office, tattered, but readable still.

The tombstone inscriptions were copied in the 1970's by the Fond du Lac County Genealogical Society. At the time the stones were copied, the society received permission from the cemetery to probe for buried tombstones, and approximately 100 fallen tombstones were unearthed on the grounds. I have counted 12,213 names in the tombstone inscriptions book published by the society in 1980. I was confident that the inscriptions data would be as complete as humanly possible.

Because Rienzi is now such a large cemetery, I decided to concentrate my study on the original 8.5 acres. These were the original plots sold from 1853, and would be a good representation of that era of records.

I started research by recording all of the lot cards in the cemetery office, for the Old Grounds section. This task was occasionally hampered because of one thing...the person hired to 'straighten out' the cemetery records at one time, had some pretty horrendous handwriting. This was made a bit more frustrating by the fact that he worked for the cemetery for years and years and years.

My next setback came from the accounting report of 1874, which summarized the number of single graves sold since the cemetery was organized. This accounting is a revelation for any genealogist, as it indicates that early records were concerned with monetary sales, and keeping a balanced budget for the organization. Period. Recording the 'Who' and 'where' of a burial didn't happen. The sales are recorded, but not the name of the deceased!

This was my first indicator that the actual cemetery records would have major gaps of information.

The early cemetery records also present another challenge for the researcher. Many small children's burials are simply recorded as 'infant child of (father's name), age 6 months'. So, these small children and infants are nameless and hard to match to any tombstone, if one exists.

It took all of one summer to copy the lot cards for the old grounds. Many interesting comments were found on the lot cards. One cause of death for a 92 year old man was listed as "age failure". The number of young children in the old grounds was the most difficult information to record, emotionally. Some are nameless. There are also three lot cards for the arms and legs of amputees, a thought which had never occurred to me before this research.

As the data came together from the cemetery office, I also began to enter the tombstone inscriptions for the same area.

### **The results**

Upon completion of my extraction, I counted a total of 2,128 names recorded as buried in the Old Grounds section of the cemetery. I counted 1886 names from the tombstone inscriptions for the same section. At first glance, this would indicate that the difference between the two lists, of 242, would be the number of unmarked graves. That would make it appear that 11.4% of the graves were unmarked.

## **The Analysis**

The next step was to verify and compare, lot by lot, the cemetery lot card records to the tombstone inscriptions. Name by name comparisons were made, with startling results. Of the 2,128 names logged from the cemetery records, only 1134 of the names had matching tombstone information. That leaves the remaining 994 names in unmarked graves, a whopping 46.7%.

The monkey wrench in the analysis comes when you consider the reverse - that 752 of the 1886 names on tombstones, have no record of a burial in the cemetery office. That's 39% of tombstone data as undocumented. This is a totally unforeseen complication, and indicates a major uncertainty with regards to the completeness of the cemetery records. I had already discovered that the early years only recorded sales, and not names of the deceased. So I knew there was a gap in the beginning. But to realize that over the years, burials were missed, not recorded or lost was disheartening.

But, lost records or not, this was not going to destroy the project. This is just a factor that needs to be taken into account. Perhaps other future cemetery studies will turn up similar results. I didn't give up.

I also decided to study in-depth the two specific large sections of the Old Grounds, that were set aside for single burials (see OG map, lots 229 & 230). There are a total of 154 burials listed for the two sections, and only 45 of those burials had tombstones. That's 71% unmarked burials. Another sad statistic for this singles area, is the fact that 50% of those graves were for children under the age of two.

In 1863 Rienzi cemetery purchased another 24 acres of land from the Tallmadge family, and some of the graves in the Old Grounds were reinterred in the newer section. The newer section also gave more choices for burial locations, and the statistics could shift because of this purchase.

A final analysis was done to try to determine an approximate number of burials in the Old Grounds, taking all factors into account.

If you add the 752 extra tombstone names that don't match any lot card records, to the number of actual lot card records, that would bring the number of burials to 2880.

That would indicate a 39% rate for unmarked graves. Taking this one step further, an allowance for missed unmarked graves has to be factored into the statistics also.

Using ratios to extrapolate an approximate number of burials for the Old Grounds would be as follows:

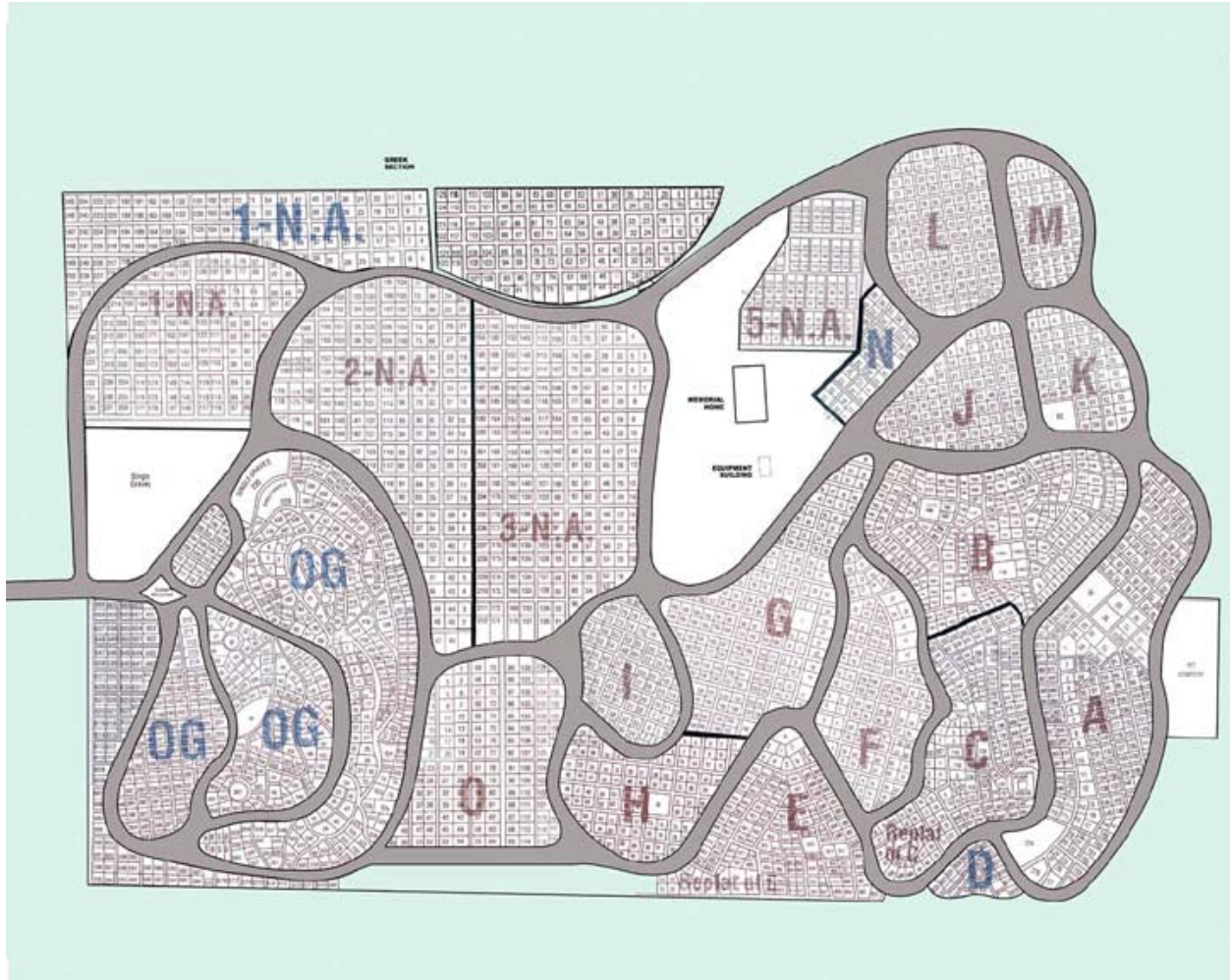
If 2128 lot records yields only 1134 with tombstones, then there should be **3539** burials to yield the 1886 tombstones that exist. The lot cards would appear to be missing 1411 burials, 752 of which are actually accounted for with tombstones. This would mean 47.2% unmarked graves.

## **Conclusion**

For every 100 names on tombstones, there are about 47 unmarked graves.



## Appendix



**[Image A]**

**Rienzi Cemetery Map:**

Sections marked "OG" are the "Old Grounds" (original 8.5 acres) incorporated in 1853

Sections A-I were part of 24 acres added in 1863.

Burial Receiving Vault was built in Section C in 1865

Section O was originally a man-made lake

Sections J-N were added in 1923

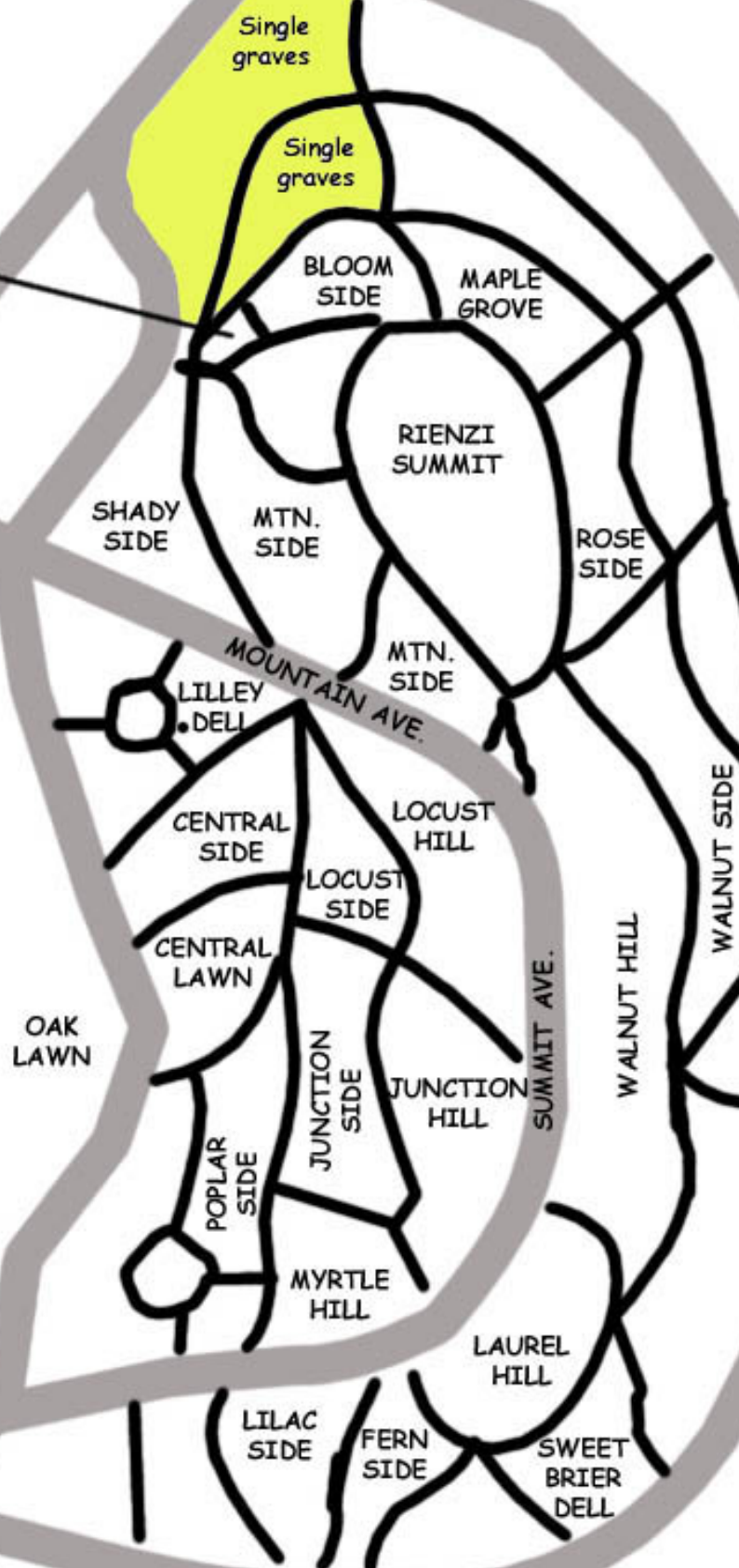


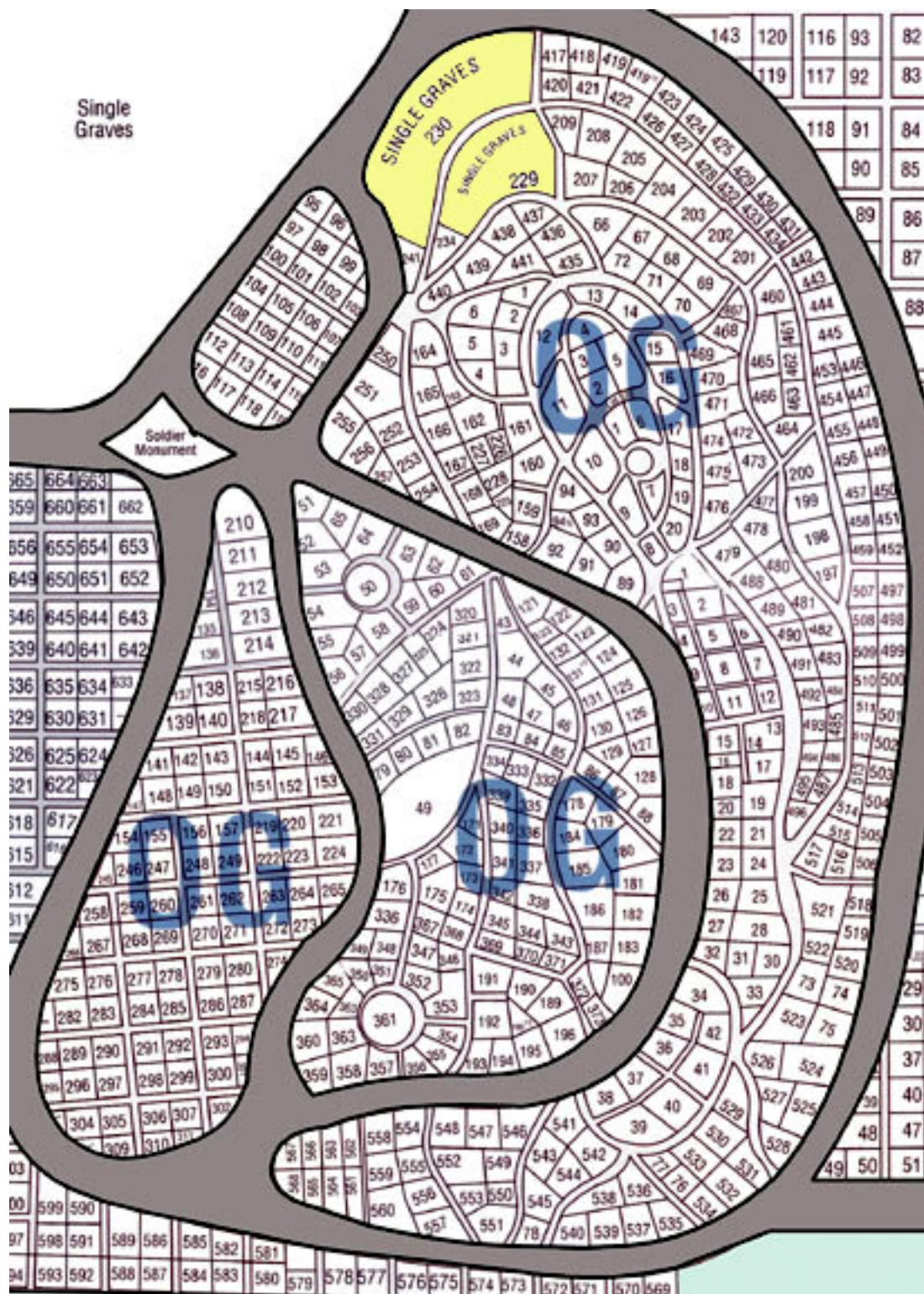
[Image B]

Old Grounds  
Rienzi Cemetery  
Fond du Lac, WI

Drawn from the 1865 list of lot owners published by the Rienzi Cemetery Association

VIOLET  
SIDE





[Image C]

Rienzi Cemetery, Old Grounds Sections  
Current Lots

**Table 1**  
Number of burials per year  
Old Grounds

|               | Number of burials | Average age | Number of burials age 12 and under | Adults      | Unknown age |
|---------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1840-1849     | 8                 | 9.5         | 6                                  | 2           | 0           |
| 1850-1859     | 115               | 26.1        | 29                                 | 58          | 28          |
| 1860-1869     | 463               | 27.6        | 162                                | 206         | 95          |
| 1870-1879     | 288               | 35.3        | 82                                 | 165         | 41          |
| 1880-1889     | 160               | 47          | 16                                 | 134         | 10          |
| 1890-1899     | 269               | 54.7        | 21                                 | 213         | 35          |
| 1900-1909     | 292               | 60.1        | 22                                 | 244         | 26          |
| 1910-1919     | 293               | 66.6        | 18                                 | 210         | 65          |
| 1920-1929     | 225               | 75.4        | 9                                  | 171         | 45          |
| 1930-1939     | 159               | 67.8        | 2                                  | 142         | 15          |
| 1940-1949     | 142               | 70          | 4                                  | 134         | 4           |
| 1950-1959     | 108               | 75.7        | 0                                  | 101         | 7           |
| 1960-1969     | 92                | 72.8        | 1                                  | 89          | 2           |
| 1970-1979     | 43                | 81.4        | 0                                  | 37          | 6           |
| 1980-1989     | 16                | 82.9        | 0                                  | 16          | 0           |
| 1990-1999     | 11                | 84.1        | 0                                  | 11          | 0           |
| 2000-         | 10                | 79.5        | 0                                  | 10          | 2           |
| Unknown date  | 190               |             |                                    |             |             |
| <b>TOTALS</b> | <b>2884</b>       |             | <b>372</b>                         | <b>1943</b> | <b>381</b>  |

This table represents the total burials by year from all data combined.



**[Table 2]**  
Comparison of Death Dates from Sources

| YEAR OF DEATH | From Lot cards | From TOMB-STONES | From ACCT REPORT | YEAR OF DEATH | From Lot cards | From TOMB-STONES | From ACCT REPORT |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1841          |                | 1 <sup>1</sup>   |                  | 1875          | 6              | 12               |                  |
| 1845          |                | 3                |                  | 1876          | 6              | 16               |                  |
| 1846          |                | 1                |                  | 1877          | 3              | 12               |                  |
| 1847          |                | 1                |                  | 1878          | 10             | 16               |                  |
| 1848          |                | 1                |                  | 1879          | 17             | 20               |                  |
| 1849          |                | 2                |                  | 1880          | 7              | 14               |                  |
| 1850          | 1              | 8                |                  | 1881          | 4              | 19               |                  |
| 1851          |                | 4                |                  | 1882          | 4              | 15               |                  |
| 1852          | 1              | 5                |                  | 1883          | 10             | 18               |                  |
| 1853          | 2              | 6                |                  | 1884          | 5              | 12               |                  |
| 1854          | 4              | 15               | 3                | 1885          | 2              | 15               |                  |
| 1855          | 4              | 9                | 4                | 1886          | 4              | 16               |                  |
| 1856          | 3              | 8                | 3                | 1887          | 4              | 23               |                  |
| 1857          | 6              | 15               | 6                | 1888          | 3              | 20               |                  |
| 1858          | 13             | 11               | 3                | 1889          | 0              | 14               |                  |
| 1859          | 8              | 9                | 2                | 1890          | 6              | 15               |                  |
| 1860          | 14             | 26               | 4                | 1891          | 7              | 17               |                  |
| 1861          | 2              | 17               | 1                | 1892          | 5              | 20               |                  |
| 1862          | 13             | 28               | 3                | 1893          | 6              | 22               |                  |
| 1863          | 10             | 26               | 5                | 1894          | 20             | 21               |                  |
| 1864          | 11             | 25               | 5                | 1895          | 25             | 10               |                  |
| 1865          | 39             | 20               | 15               | 1896          | 26             | 19               |                  |
| 1866          | 90             | 19               | 8                | 1897          | 26             | 19               |                  |
| 1867          | 78             | 26               | 16               | 1898          | 36             | 19               |                  |
| 1868          | 66             | 13               | 21               |               |                |                  |                  |
| 1869          | 40             | 10               | 17               |               |                |                  |                  |
| 1870          | 54             | 20               | 27               |               |                |                  |                  |
| 1871          | 40             | 14               | 7                |               |                |                  |                  |
| 1872          | 49             | 15               | 12               |               |                |                  |                  |
| 1873          | 7              | 13               | 17               |               |                |                  |                  |
| 1874          | 4              | 15               | 8                |               |                |                  |                  |

<sup>1</sup>This death date appears to preceed the death of William Davies Tallmadge, the first burial; further investigation indicates it comes from the tombstone of a woman who died in 1869, and the names and dates of her five children are listed on her tombstone, including two sons who died at Gettysburg and Shiloh, as well as this child who died in 1841. It is likely that this child as well as the soldiers are buried elsewhere, since the cemetery did not yet exist in 1841.





Image D

The original book of section maps for Rienzi Cemetery  
 Surveyed by Jerry Donohue & Associates of Sheboygan, WI in 1923

[Note—most notations on map are after the fact. The year of purchase is usually indicated on the lot. Numbers on lot lines are measurements in feet. RP means re-purchased. A lot outlined in blue or green pencil appears to indicate that the lot is full. 2-B or 3-B possibly indicates an inventory of how many burials, but there is no year to indicate when the inventory took place. Other symbols have yet to be deciphered.]