



23 September 2026

On behalf of the Descendant Community of Milwaukee County Grounds Cemeteries, Inc., thank you for allowing us to stand with the Charleston community from Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

We are a fully volunteer, descendant-led nonprofit formed because generations of decisions were made about historic cemeteries without descendants having a meaningful place at the table.

More than 10,000 people were buried in four cemeteries on the Milwaukee County Grounds between 1852 and 1974. Over time, grave markers disappeared. Land was graded. Roads, buildings, and parking areas were constructed. Graves were disturbed, and thousands of people were eventually exhumed.

Today, 2,480 of our Ancestors who were removed from their graves remain unburied.

Our experience has taught us something we hope other communities never have to learn the hard way: meaningful community engagement must happen before decisions are made, not after plans have advanced and communities are asked to respond to them.

Engagement is more than holding a meeting. It means making participation accessible. It means sharing information openly. It means listening to descendants and community members early enough that what they say can actually affect the outcome.

Most importantly, burial grounds are not simply spaces on a development map. They hold people. They hold families. They hold histories that may have been forgotten by institutions but have not lost their value.

We cannot undo what happened to the cemeteries in Milwaukee. We can continue working to repair that harm, and we can use our experience to stand beside communities trying to prevent it from happening again.

To everyone gathering in Charleston: please continue asking questions, continue showing up, and continue speaking for those who can no longer speak for themselves.

The circumstances of a person's life should never determine the dignity afforded to them in death.

Judy Klimt Houston
Founding President
Descendant Community of Milwaukee County Grounds Cemeteries, Inc.