

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

SG100010226
Listed 4/26/2024

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Potter's Field - West Price Hill

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 4700 Guerley Road

City or town: Cincinnati

State: OH

County: Hamilton

Not For Publication: ☐ NA

Vicinity: ☐ NA

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

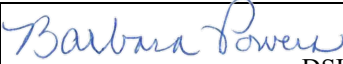
I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B C D

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-end;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  DSHPO/Dept. Head, Inventory and Registration </div> <div style="text-align: right;"> 3/11/2024 </div> </div>	
Signature of certifying official/Title: <u>Ohio State Historic Preservation Office, Ohio History Connection</u>	Date
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
<p>In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☐
Public – Local ☒
Public – State ☐
Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☐
District ☐
Site ☒
Structure ☐
Object ☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY/Cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY/Cemetery

LANDSCAPE/Park

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NA

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Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: NA

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

Established in 1852, the Potter's Field is a rectangular property comprising 26.38 acres in the West Price Hill neighborhood of Cincinnati. The site is divided into two distinct pieces by Guerley Road, which runs diagonally from southwest to northeast, and the terrain slopes up from the road on both sides (photos 1 and 2). The Potter's Field abuts residential uses on the west and north, and a cluster of five private Jewish cemeteries on the east and northeast. To the south is Rapid Run Park, which incorporated the southeast portion of the Potter's Field in 1934 and fronts on Rapid Run Pike. When it was active, the historic appearance of the Potter's Field was as an open field with mounds of burials and a caretaker's cottage near the north property line. The northwest part of the Potter's Field is now mostly overgrown with invasive plants such as honeysuckle. There are no existing structures; a caretaker's cottage was razed sometime after 1981 when the Potter's Field was closed, but a bronze sign (photo 3)¹ stands at its west edge on Guerley Road, and a driveway and walking path remain (photos 4, 5). The site contains an estimated 20,000 burials. Most are unmarked, but on the north side of Guerley Road, there are a few small nameplates set in concrete (photos 7 – 10). The southeast part of the Potter's Field is characterized by a wooded slope along Guerley Road, but its level high ground has been converted for park use with picnic tables and concrete walking paths (photos 11, 12), including one that connects with Guerley Road (photo 13). A power line running east-west through the park delineates the south border of the original Potter's Field (photos 14, 15). The site represents a single contributing resource, which retains integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association. The categories of design, materials, and workmanship are not applicable.

Narrative Description

As mentioned above, the Potter's Field is a 26.38-acre rectangular property established as a public burial ground in 1852. Located in the West Price Hill neighborhood of Cincinnati, the site is divided into two distinct pieces by Guerley Road, which runs diagonally from southwest to northeast. (See Figures 1, 2.) The terrain slopes up from the road on both sides, gradually on the northwest and steeply on the southeast. The Potter's Field contains approximately 20,000 burials. Most are unmarked, but on the north side of Guerley Road, there are a few small nameplates installed between 1960 and 1964. The southeast portion of the Potter's Field, incorporated into Rapid Run Park in 1934, has been adapted for park use with concrete walking paths and picnic

¹ The sign, donated by the Centaurs 4-H Saddle Club in 1969, mistakenly sets the founding of the Potter's Field in 1849. The land was not acquired until 1852.

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tables. One walking path leads north and down to Guerley Road. A power line runs through the park delineating the south border of the original Potter's Field.

Setting

The Potter's Field is adjoined by a single-family residential subdivision on the west and an apartment complex on the north. The rest of Rapid Run Park extends on the south, and five Jewish cemeteries lie on the east and northeast, with additional Jewish cemeteries on the east side of Sunset Avenue. Farther to the north is the Dunham Recreation Complex. The assemblage of the parks and cemeteries together represent a considerable amount of continuous green space and provide a rural character to the setting of the Potter's Field.

Integrity

When it was active, the historic appearance of the Potter's Field was as an open field with an undulating surface caused by constant burials. A caretaker's cottage, likely a farmhouse that already existed when the city bought the land, was visible at the top of the hill at the northwest corner. The northwest portion of the Potter's Field is now mostly overgrown with invasive plants such as honeysuckle. The caretaker's cottage was razed sometime after 1981, when the Potter's Field was closed, but a driveway, partly paved and partly grassy, still runs east through the northwest corner. There are no other existing structures. A 2022 archeological assessment of the southeast portion of the Potter's Field within Rapid Run Park by Archaeological Research Institute (ARI) confirmed the likelihood of burials in this area. The assessment, which used a non-systematic pedestrian, geophysical and Human Remains Detection dog survey, also helped define the boundaries of the cemetery in order to protect the remains.

The historic integrity of the Potter's Field is best assessed as it has been maintained in its period of significance. As a potter's field, the site has been neglected and sparsely maintained since its inception. In relation to the seven aspects of integrity, the site is assessed through its feeling, association, location, and setting – as the materials, design, and workmanship were never reflective of the property's significance. The site retains integrity of location and setting as it has not been moved and still maintains the wooded, rural setting. Additionally, the location is still located outside of downtown Cincinnati, away from this city center. Feeling and association of the site with its historic use are perceived in the sense of loneliness and isolation of the northwest portion reflected in the decision by the Cincinnati Park Board director in 1981, after burials ceased, that the Potter's Field was determined that it should return to its natural state to blend into the surrounding wooded area. This approach enabled remains below ground to remain undisturbed. This aligns with its history as a relatively unmaintained potter's field. The categories of design, materials, and workmanship are not applicable to this resource.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☒ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1852-1981

Significant Dates

1852

1934

1981

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Potter's Field-West Price Hill is significant under Criterion A at the local level in the area of Social History for representing the City of Cincinnati's approach to the burial of the dead who were without family and/or resources. The need was exceptionally great in response to outbreaks of cholera, influenza, and tuberculosis during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Period of Significance of the Potter's Field is from 1852, when the land was acquired, to 1981, when it was closed to further burials following citizen concern for the property due to its neglect, resulting in an investigation into the ownership and responsible party. The Potter's Field also meets Criteria Consideration D, which allows exceptions for "a cemetery which derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from distinctive design features or from association with historic events." The Potter's Field in West Price Hill, initiated in the wake of the cholera epidemic of 1849, is Cincinnati's only remaining public burial ground that still retains its essential integrity. While the northwest part of the site is neglected and overgrown, its appearance is endemic to the social history of the Potter's Field and reflects the low priority placed on the public necessity of burying the unknown, poor, and indigent. The nomination does not need to meet Criteria Consideration G: Properties that Have Achieved Significance Within the Last Fifty Years because while the cemetery's significance extends past fifty years, the majority of graves and the most important portion of the Period of Significance are greater than fifty years old.

Narrative Statement of Significance

The historic function of the Potter's Field was as an unconsecrated cemetery to bury the dead who were without sufficient funds, family, or friends to arrange a private burial. Established on land acquired in 1852, the Potter's Field in West Price Hill was preceded by two earlier public burial grounds, but both of those examples have been redeveloped. The existing Potter's Field reflects the need for public burial grounds that increased during outbreaks of disease, including the 1849 cholera epidemic, influenza epidemic of 1918-1919, and the tuberculosis scourge, which began around 1879, peaked in 1909, and continued until circa 1939.

According to a bronze sign on the property, the origin of the name is the original Potter's Field was bought with the thirty pieces of silver which Judas was paid to betray Jesus. "The priests and elders used it to purchase land from a potter. Exhausted of its clay and now useless for farming, they dedicated the land to bury strangers."² Another source suggests that the term originated in the early 1600s in London, where the Old Bailey Prison was abutted by a potter's field. When the city outgrew its original limits, this field was taken by the London authorities and turned into a graveyard for criminals who were executed on Tyburn Hill and for the city's poor who were unclaimed after death. Hence the name Potter's Field was associated with pauper burial grounds.³

² Eileen Muccino, "Potter's Field Records in PLCH Digital Library." *The Tracer*. Cincinnati: Hamilton County Genealogical Society, Vol 40, No. 3 (Sept. 2019).

³ "Potter's Field: How Pauper Grave-Yards Received That Title..." *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Sep 3, 1876, p 9.

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A Potter's Field was an essential need for any urban community. Cincinnati had two earlier Potter's Fields located within the downtown basin. The first known Potter's Field in Cincinnati was bounded by Plum, Elm, Twelfth, and Thirteenth streets, as marked on a Cincinnati map prepared by Oliver Farnsworth in 1819 (Figure 3) and another made by H. L. Barnum in 1831 (Figure 4). The first Potter's Field was across the street from present-day Washington Park, which was formerly occupied by two churches and their cemeteries. When first established, these locations were north of Cincinnati's urban core.

As the city expanded northward around these cemeteries, they reached capacity and there was little space to expand. In addition to the city's physical encroachment, there was also growing concern about the sources of disease, including the idea that poisonous vapors, known as "miasmas," developed in cemeteries, particularly ones with vaults.

The solution was to establish cemeteries in Cincinnati's undeveloped environs. While some religious congregations procured more extensive grounds on the outskirts in the early 1840s, the perceived problem of crowded, possibly unhealthy cemeteries remained unsolved for the burgeoning city. Rapid urban growth and rising real estate values meant it was less expensive to find affordable land outside the city.⁴

The first rural cemetery established outside Cincinnati was Spring Grove Cemetery, located about four miles north of the city. After it opened in 1845, bodies were moved there from the churchyards, which were repurposed as Washington Park. (See Figure 5.) The Potter's Field site across Elm Street was over capacity from the 1849 cholera epidemic, which killed 4% of the city population. This ground has been occupied by Cincinnati Music Hall since 1878.

The second Potter's Field was established on Freeman Avenue between Kenner and Hopkins streets in the West End, then in Cincinnati Township, outside the city. The city acquired six acres in 1834 and four more acres in 1837. At its northwest corner, the site had an orphan asylum, which was moved farther out. The building became a pest house and the grounds served as a Potter's Field for about twenty years until neighbors' complaints caused the pest house and the Potter's Field to move outside the city limits. The land was redeveloped in 1858 as West End Park. Renamed Lincoln Park around 1865, it included a lake and a baseball field. (See Figure 5.) Later it was relandscaped when incorporated into the grounds of Union Terminal (now the Cincinnati Museum Center), when the latter was built in 1929-1933.⁵

The city sought a rural parcel of land for a new Potter's Field and settled on a 26.38-acre site in what was then Green Township. (See Figure 7.) The city purchased the land from Joseph P. Beggs, his wife Mary, and Harry R. Smith and his wife Anna M., for \$8,800, recorded on August 16, 1852.⁶ The land had a rough topography, making it difficult to farm, which was the predominant use of surrounding land at the time. The area, known as Price Hill, had begun to

⁴ Bruce Clouette, Spring Grove Cemetery NHL nomination, December 31, 2005, p 17.

⁵ Vanderbilt, Angela, "From Potter's Field to Union Terminal: The History of Lincoln Park = Adventures in the Subway and Street Improvements Digitization Project". University of Cincinnati Libraries. August 7, 2013, archived from the original on July 22, 2019. Retrieved July 22, 2019.

⁶ Hamilton County Recorder, Deed Book 179, Pages 326-327.

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develop in 1824 but its lack of easy access caused it to remain sparsely populated until an incline plane opened in 1874.

The establishment of the Potter's Field at West Price Hill coincided with a trend to establish rural cemeteries in the area. In 1842, Archbishop John B. Purcell had purchased 19 acres at what is now West Eighth Street and Enright Avenue to establish what is known as St. Joseph Old Cemetery, with half of its acreage allocated for German Catholic burials and half for Irish Catholic burials. In 1855, when City Council passed an ordinance prohibiting further burials within city limits, some German Jews organized the Judah Touro Verein, a burial and mutual aid society that opened a cemetery on Sunset Avenue in Price Hill very near the Potters Field. Prior to that, the Cincinnati Jewish community and synagogues were almost exclusively based in the West End, so they naturally looked west for burial grounds. In the years that followed, eight other Jewish cemeteries were located on adjacent properties along Sunset Avenue.⁷

In 1852, when the new Potter's Field opened, it included a residence and barn for the sexton, who used part of the acreage for farm crops and pasture for farm animals. These buildings probably already existed when the city bought the land. Between 1851 and 1895, there were six sextons—M. Schweine, Martin Kroulig, Henry Ridder, John Schaeffer, J. A. Schaeffer, and John Lowry. New interments began immediately, on the southeast portion of the property, starting with an estimated 4,000 relocated from the previous burial grounds in Over-the-Rhine and the West End, but no records are known to exist for them. Burials from the morgue were paid for by the county from the county fund, by city infirmaries from the city fund, and by the city hospital from the hospital fund. The sexton was paid \$1.25 per body for his burial service. 1866 was a peak year, with 679 burials because of the masses of Civil War soldiers returning north who were injured or who had contracted diseases, but names and causes of death were not listed. Cholera also spiked during the summer of that year.⁸

Lafcadio Hearn, who was notorious for his macabre stories, wrote an article in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* about visiting the Price Hill Potter's Field in 1874.⁹ Hearn persuaded the coroner to drive with him in a horse-drawn wagon to see the Potter's Field while posing as a medical student seeking bodies for medical study. Hearne described the field as "upheaved into a little sea of earth-waves by more than five thousand mortuary mounds, monumentless, nameless, barren." He noted that "the nameless graves are so closely packed together that they almost seem at a distance to have been piled one over the other." He described the "Sexton's home," at the cemetery as "a weird, low, long frame building."¹⁰

In conversation with Hearn and the coroner, the Sexton J. A. Schaeffer estimated there were five or six thousand people buried there, or at least there are that many graves, but admitted that some of them were empty because so many bodies were stolen by so-called "resurrectionists." "On the

⁷ Geoffrey J. Giglierano, and Deborah A. Overmyer. *The Bicentennial Guide to Greater Cincinnati: A Portrait of Two Hundred Years*. Cincinnati: The Cincinnati Historical Society, 1988, p 152.

⁸ "Burial of the City's Poor: A Visit to Cincinnati's Potter's Field," *Cincinnati Tribune*, January 13, 1895.

⁹ Lafcadio Hearn, "Golgotha, A Pilgrimage to Potter's Field," in *Period of the Gruesome: Selected Cincinnati Journalism of Lafcadio Hearn*, p 163-168, Nov. 29, 1874).

¹⁰ Ibid.

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whole, it seems to us that the management of Potter's Field is in the last degree unsatisfactory. There are no receipts given for bodies received; and no announcement of bodies having been stolen."¹¹ By the 1880s, Cincinnati had seven medical schools that required hundreds of dissection subjects each semester. Legal sources for acquiring so many bodies were insufficient, so there was reliance on corpses stolen from local cemeteries, and the Potter's Field was a popular source of supply. It is impossible to obtain an accurate body count for this reason, as well as all burial records prior to 1890 having been lost in a fire.¹² While during the nineteenth century grave-robbing was a concern for all cemeteries, it can be concluded that it was not uncommon for this to occur at the Potter's Field – which provided little backlash as many of those buried here were unknown and without family to be upset about the desecration of their loved ones graves.

In 1878, the City of Cincinnati purchased the 53-acre former Guerley farm, about 140 yards north of the Potter's Field in order for the City Hospital (now University Hospital) to establish a "Branch Hospital for Contagious Diseases." (See Figure 7.) Cincinnati experienced a series of smallpox epidemics between 1863 and 1878, and there was a need to isolate patients to protect the general population. By 1895, nearly 10,000 burials had been made at the Guerley Road cemetery, with an average of about 250 per year. In 1897, the hospital was remodeled to include a tuberculosis isolation ward, which began with just 15 cases, but by 1904 there were 425 cases.¹³ As the site expanded, treating tuberculosis was the primary focus, and in 1912 the hospital became a separate institution for that purpose, with 450 beds. (See Figures 8 and 9.)¹⁴

In 1927, Hamilton County took over operation of the hospital, which was renamed the Hamilton County Tuberculosis Sanatorium. With the discovery of a cure in the 1940s, tuberculosis declined and so did the hospital. The hospital was fully closed in 1971.¹⁵ A large number of the tuberculous patients treated at this hospital were buried at the West Price Hill Potter's Field, fitting the broader theme of the need for burial plots by institutions during widespread illnesses. For example, between the years of 1936 and 1939 the hospital buried 354 patients in a straight line within the cemetery, all of which are unmarked.

Burial records of the Potter's Field, which are housed in the Genealogy Department at the main branch of the Public Library of Cincinnati & Hamilton County, list burials at the Potter's Field beginning in 1901 and continuing through 1981. These records identify the ethnicity and treatment of the bodies, tracking whether they were African American or White. A good number of them were marked "A.S." indicating they were used for anatomical study by the medical college or embalming school. Some remains were identified as "S.B." for stillborn and "T.B. San" or "Tuber Sana" as sourced from the Tuberculosis Sanatorium, later known as Dunham

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Michael D. Morgan, Price Hill's Neglected 170-Year-Old Potters Field. . ." City Beat, 7/22/20, accessed online, 6/12/23.

¹³ Annual Report of City Departments 1905, pp 1271-1272 accessed online 5/25/23.

¹⁴ Nathan Hood, "The Intriguing History of Cincinnati's Dunham Hospital <https://libapps.libraries.uc.edu/liblog/2016/05/the-intriguing-history-of-cincinnati-dunham-hospital/>, accessed 5/23/23.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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Hospital. A number of veterans are known to be among the burials, including at least six veterans of the Civil War (1861-1865). There is one veteran of the Spanish War (1898) and several from World War One (1917-1918) as well, although the exact number is disputed.¹⁶

Those buried at this site included patients from the Infectious Disease Branch Hospital (now Dunham Recreation Complex), mentally ill patients at the local sanitariums, those without money for a private funeral, those who died of infectious diseases, drowning victims, heat wave victims, those who died without identification at times when the morgue was full, and persons of color who may have been segregated from some private cemeteries. As such, the cemetery itself was not upkept, with it being noted that those buried were done so in wooden caskets, at depths as little of two to three feet – often stacked on top of each other in one hole to save space. This would have been a stark contrast to the privately owned cemeteries in the city.

In the twentieth century, the Potter's Field at West Price Hill followed a pattern in Cincinnati of graveyards becoming city parks, as happened with Washington Park and Lincoln Park. Cincinnati's first city park was developed in 1817 but the design for today's parks system had its genesis in "A Park System for the City of Cincinnati" published in 1907. Through an aggressive land acquisition campaign, 70 parks were established by 1920. In 1934, the part of the Potter's Field southeast of Guerley Road, amounting to 6.826 acres, was transferred to the parks department. In anticipation of the new park, nine additional parcels of land totaling 46.030 acres had been acquired in the years 1928, 1929, and 1930. Development of a park, initially known as Lick Run Park, proceeded in 1938 and continued through spring of 1942. The work involved grading, landscaping, picnic areas, a shelter and comfort station, and a caretaker's residence. When formally dedicated on June 14, 1942, the park was renamed Rapid Run Park. A member of the WPA crew that built the park recounted that "they dug up bodies."¹⁷ Today, there are picnic tables and a walking path in the part of the park that was a cemetery.

While the southeast portion of the Potter's Field was incorporated into Rapid Run Park, the northwest portion, about 17.5 acres, not including the Guerley Road right-of-way, continued to be used by the County Hospital, which was renamed Dunham Hospital in 1964. When Dunham Hospital closed in 1971, the Hamilton County Welfare Department (now Human Services) took over operation of the Potter's Field.¹⁸

The Potter's Field was still in use as a cemetery through 1980, when Kathryn Owens discovered her father was mistakenly buried in the Potter's Field and had his body exhumed and reburied in a private plot. Owens was horrified by the neglect and overgrowth of the cemetery and sought criminal prosecution for the officials who allowed it to reach this state. It is estimated that over 20,000 people have been buried at this location, although it is unclear how many of these bodies remain interred.¹⁹ With Owens' drawing attention to the conditions of the Potter's Field, a legal discussion arose to who should be at fault for the neglect of those interred here.

¹⁶ Potter's Field Burial Records," Hamilton County Genealogical Society records, 2021, accessed online 5/14/23.

¹⁷ Report of the Secretary, Board of Park Commissioners, June 22, 1942, Park Board Archives.

¹⁸ "Potter's Field Burial Records," Hamilton County Genealogical Society records, 2021, accessed online 5/14/23.

¹⁹ Michael D. Morgan.

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In 1981, burials ceased, and the city and county wrestled over which entity should be responsible for the cemetery land. The county asserted that it had been deeded to the city, but the city said it was certain it was given back to the county, reflecting the lack of desire to address the social problem at hand. The city attempted to return it to the county, but Seth Staples, then County Welfare Director, responded in a letter dated April 17, 1981, that the county no longer needed the Potter's Field and would not accept responsibility as of May 8, 1981. Deeds confirmed that the land was in fact owned by the city, and thus the city was responsible for maintaining it. In June 1981, the City Manager's Office requested the Park Board and Recreation Commission, on a rotating basis, to accept responsibility of maintenance. "The Park Board and Recreation Commission did so reluctantly and indicated that maintenance would be performed as time and resources were available, not on a set schedule, and while personnel were in the area." Brent Owens of the Park Board included \$17,000 to \$20,000 per year for maintenance in his agency's operating budget, but also suggested that the Potter's Field "return to its natural state so as to blend into the surrounding wooded area", unfortunately following the off hands maintenance that was historically practiced here. With the Potter's Field out of operation, it was necessary for the city and county to contract with funeral directors for indigent burials in private cemeteries.²⁰

A 1981 article reported that Joe Scott, the gravedigger at the Potter's Field, was suddenly laid off by Hamilton County after serving in that job for 13 years, as a result of a budget cut by Welfare Director Seth P. Staples. (See Figure 10.) A photo in the article shows the small caretaker's house and shed near the top of the hill.²¹ These structures were removed sometime later. Scott recalled that "burials were in 'crudely constructed' wooden boxes, which rotted over time and broke open, causing resettling of the soil, so sunken graves often appeared. He filled them in when he was caretaker." Every grave was dug by hand with a pick and shovel. Wooden coffins were buried on top of each other, with later ones sometimes no more than two-feet-deep.²² Another testament to the lack of care for the burials of the individuals laid to rest here.

While there have been complaints of neglect since the cemetery opened, it continued even after operations ceased in 1981. Within seven months, the entire parcel was covered with weeds and garbage. In 1982 the property was mowed for the last time, as the city determined that the cemetery should return to a "natural state." With no plans to control this state, invasive species took over and the site quickly became overgrown and unpassable. Today, there are efforts to clean up the site, with the removal of these invasive species beginning along Guerley Road.

Periodically, family members and neighbors objected to the unkempt conditions. A letter to the editor of Press Community Newspapers—the Price Hill Press, Western Hills Press, and Delhi Press—in 1993, objected to possible disturbance of the burials in the Potter's Field in connection with a new housing project on its north boundary.²³ The letter refers to an environmental assessment describing rectangular depressions on the site, possible health hazards from

²⁰ "Potter's Field Burial Records," HCGS.

²¹ *Cincinnati Post*, April 1981, p. 1A.

²² "Report on Potter's Field," no date.

²³ The housing development triggered a lawsuit brought by attorney Timothy G. Mara in 1993.

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disturbing graves, the effects of erosion, and the potential destruction of an historic site that contained burials of Civil War veterans and victims of the influenza epidemic and even the Johnstown Flood of 1889.

Brent Owens, who was assistant director of the Park Board, attested there were numerous shallow rectangular depressions in the ground scattered about the slopes of the northwest part of the Potter's Field. He believed these depressions were caused by settlement of soil above graves and asserted that they were so numerous, they made it difficult to mow the grass, hence the decision to allow the Potter's Field property to revert back to a natural state.²⁴

In 1999, then acting director of the Park Board Steven Schuckman reported in a memo to City Council that natural growth had closed off access to the property, but a pathway had been cleared along a former roadway on the west side of the property that leads to the center of the site. He mentioned that Park Board staff were creating a walking trail through the site to make it accessible to visitors. But he added that out of respect for those buried at Potter's Field and as an appropriate land management practice, the character of the site should be left untouched. The same maintenance policy has continued to this day.²⁵

Summary

The Potter's Field-West Price Hill is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Social History for representing the City of Cincinnati's sparse accommodation for the burial of the poor and indigent. The Period of Significance is from 1852, when the land was acquired, to 1981, when the Potter's Field was closed. The Potter's Field also meets Criteria Consideration D, which allows exceptions for a cemetery which derives its primary significance from association with historic events, in this case, the epidemics of cholera in 1848, influenza in 1918, and tuberculosis beginning in the 1870s through 1939, and its association with a branch hospital. The Potter's Field is Cincinnati's third and only remaining public burial ground that still retains its essential integrity. The southeast part of the Potter's Field has been preserved as part of a park. While the northwest part of the site is neglected and overgrown, that neglect is endemic to the history of the Potter's Field and reflects the low priority placed on burying those who were without resources.

²⁴ Brent Owens, Affidavit of Brent Owens, March 15, 1993, courtesy of T. Mara..

²⁵ Steven Schuckman, memo dated 1993, courtesy of T. Mara.

Potter's Field – West Price Hill
Name of Property

Hamilton County, Ohio
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Atlases and Maps

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Potter's Field – West Price Hill

Hamilton County, Ohio

Name of Property

County and State

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Sharkey, Rachel R. Archeological Research Institute, "Archeological Assessment of the Price Hill Potter's Field Cemetery, Rapid Run Park, Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio," 12/20/22.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government

Potter's Field – West Price Hill
Name of Property

Hamilton County, Ohio
County and State

____ University

____ Other

____ Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): HAM0738521

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 24.65

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 39.120498 | Longitude: -84.592037 |
| 2. Latitude: 39.120175 | Longitude: -84.587636 |
| 3. Latitude: 39.117759 | Longitude: -84.587736 |
| 4. Latitude: 39.118049 | Longitude: -84.592292 |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries of the Potter's Field enclose a rectangular lot measuring 1273.14 feet on its north line, 820 feet on the east, 1273.14 feet on its south line, and 824 feet on the west. The right-of-way of Guerley Road, which runs diagonally through the site, is excluded from the 26.38 acres shown on historic atlases, yielding an area of 24.65 acres.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries are the same as those in the deed of purchase, recorded on August 16, 1852, in Hamilton County Deed Book 179, page 328, and reflect the historic boundaries of the Potter's Field shown in 1869, 1884 and 1922 maps. As previously mentioned, an archeological assessment revealed burials on the southeast portion of the site and helped confirm the boundaries in that location.

Potter's Field – West Price Hill
Name of Property

Hamilton County, Ohio
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Beth Sullebarger, Principal
organization: Sullebarger Associates
street & number: 1080 Morse Avenue
city or town: Glendale state: OH zip code: 45246-3830
e-mail: sullebarger@fuse.net
telephone: (513) 703-0877
date: December 11, 2023

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:**

Figure 1. Location map showing adjoining Rapid Run Park and nearby Dunham Regional Recplex (former site of Cincinnati Branch Hospital)

Figure 2. Sketch map and photo key plan

Figure 3. 1819 Plan of Cincinnati showing the “Public Burying Ground” at the corner of Elm and West Fourteenth streets, the location of Cincinnati Music Hall since 1878

Figure 4. H. L. Barnum, Map of Cincinnati, 1831, showing location of the first Potter's Field

Figure 5. C. O. Titus, *Atlas of Hamilton Co. Ohio*, 1869, pl. 76, showing Washington Square in place of the Episcopal and Presbyterian Burying Ground and Lincoln Park in place of the second Potter's Field

Figure 6. Titus, *Atlas of Hamilton Co. Ohio*, 1869, Pl 11

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Figure 7. *Atlas of the City of Cincinnati, Ohio*, Robinson, Elisha & Pidgeon, Roger H., 1884, showing Potter's Field and 1878 purchase of land by the City of Cincinnati for the Branch Hospital

Figure 8. City of Cincinnati Topographic Survey of 1912, Sheet 40, showing Potter's Field and expansion of the Cincinnati Branch Hospital grounds in 1911

Figure 9. Insurance Maps of Cincinnati Ohio, Sanborn Map Company, New York, 1922, V5, P 46

Figure 10. *Cincinnati Post*, April 1981, page 1A

Photographs

Photo Log

Name of Property: Potter's Field

City or Vicinity: Cincinnati

County: Hamilton State: OH

Photographer: Beth Sullebarger

Date Photographed: April 12 and May 31, 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 15. View looking northeast along Guerley Road

2 of 15. View looking southwest along Guerley Road

3 of 15. View of bronze sign commemorating the Potters Field, looking northeast

4 of 15. View of driveway, looking northeast

5 of 15. View of clearing at the end of driveway, looking east

6 of 15. View of footpath, looking southeast

7 of 15. View of footpath, looking north

Potter's Field – West Price Hill

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8 of 15. View of Potter's Field, looking north

9 of 15. Row of grave markers, looking west

10 of 15. View of grave marker, looking north

11 of 15. View of former Potter's Field within Rapid Run Park looking north

12 of 15. View of former Potter's Field within Rapid Run Park looking southwest

13 of 15. View of walking path into Rapid Run Park, looking south from Guerley Road

14 of 15. View of power lines within Rapid Run Park, looking northeast

15 of 15. View of power lines within Rapid Run Park, looking east

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Potter's Field – West Price Hill

Name of Property

Hamilton County, OH

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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 1

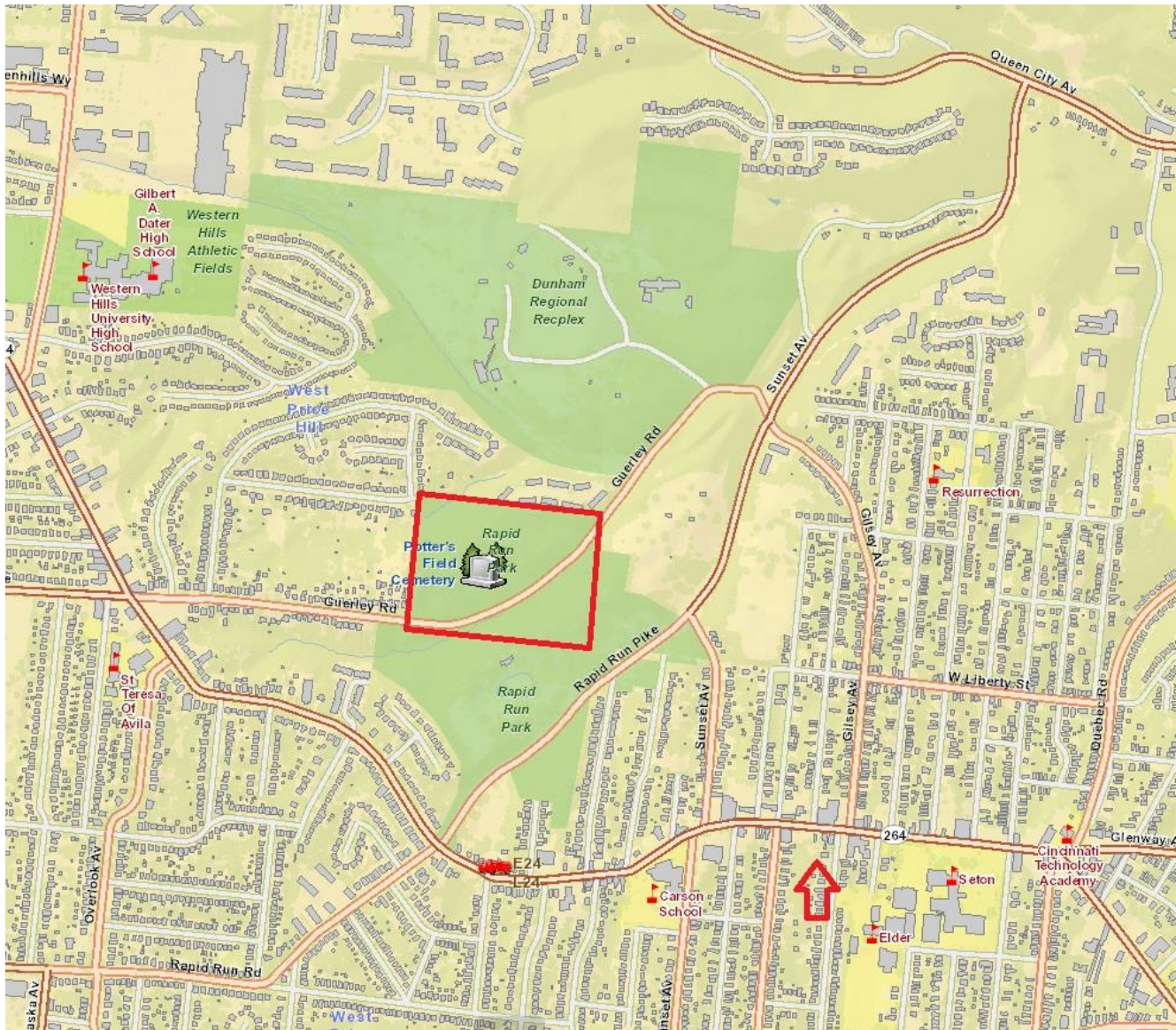


Figure 1. Location map showing adjoining Rapid Run Park and nearby Dunham Regional Recplex (former site of Cincinnati Branch Hospital)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Potter's Field – West Price Hill

Name of Property

Hamilton County, OH

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 2

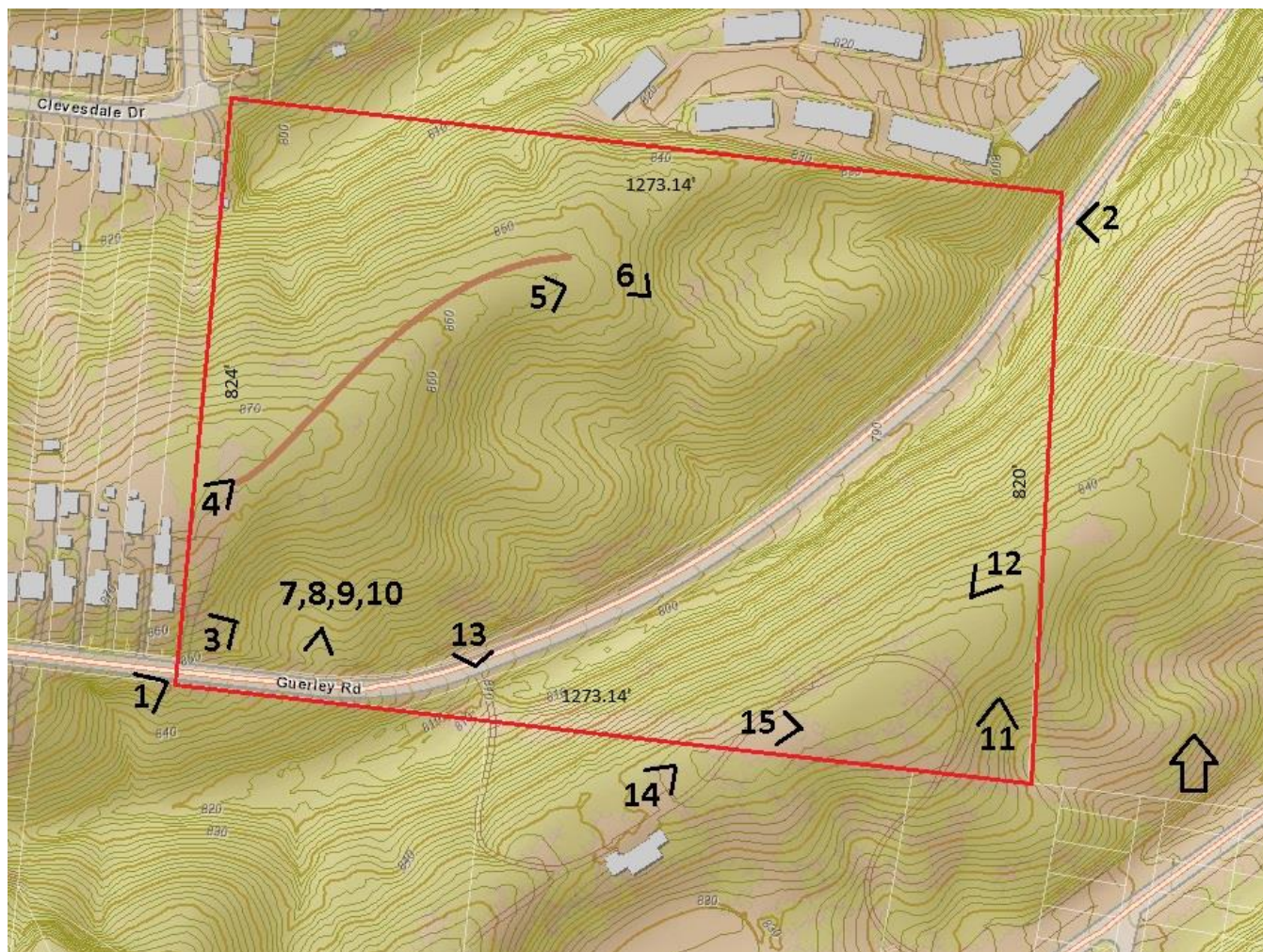


Figure 2. Sketch map and photo key plan

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Potter's Field – West Price Hill

Name of Property

Hamilton County, OH

County and State

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Section number 8 Page 3

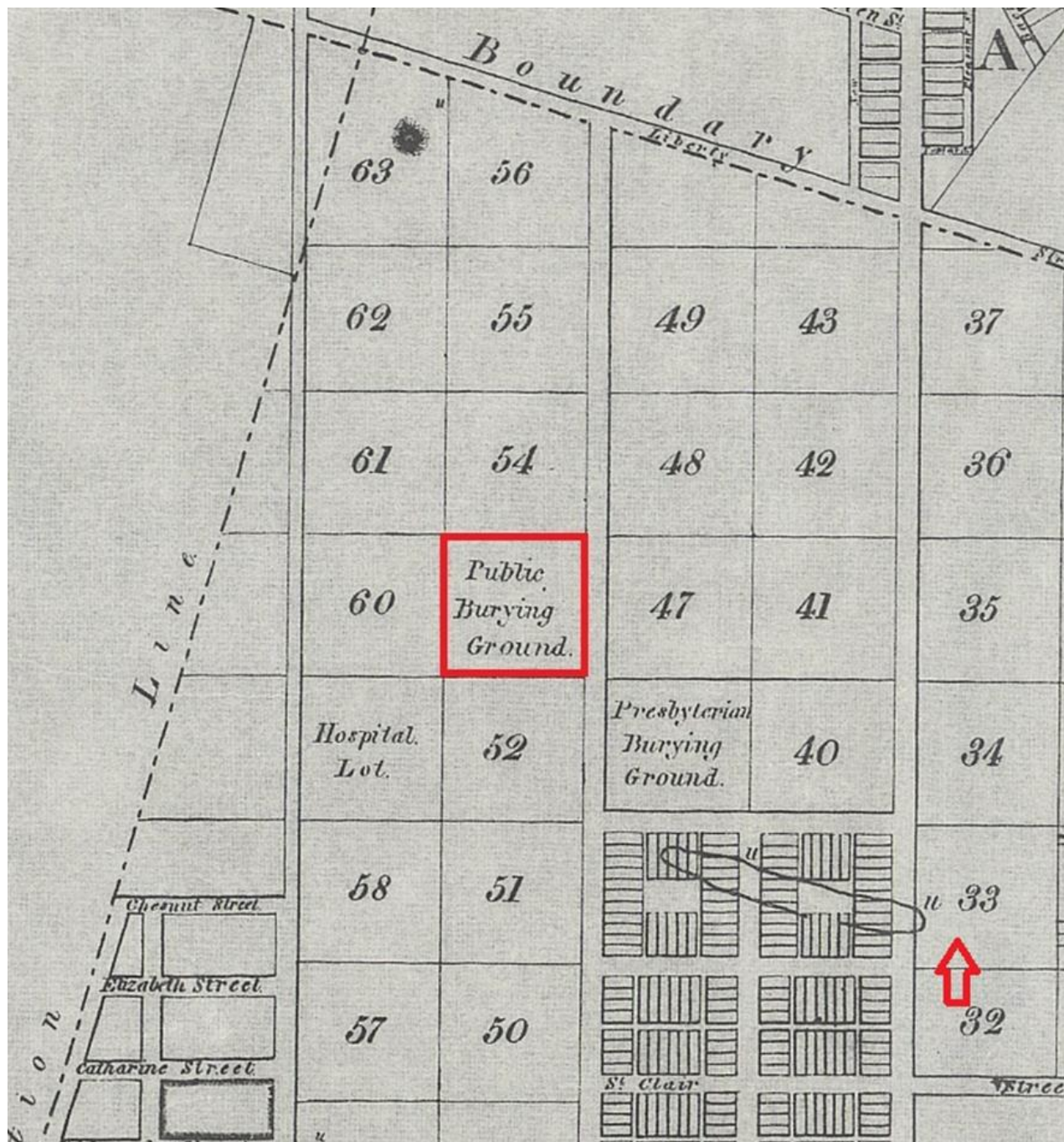


Figure 3. 1819 Plan of Cincinnati showing the "Public Burying Ground" at the corner of Elm and West Fourteenth streets, the location of Cincinnati Music Hall since 1878

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Potter's Field – West Price Hill

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Section number 8 Page 4

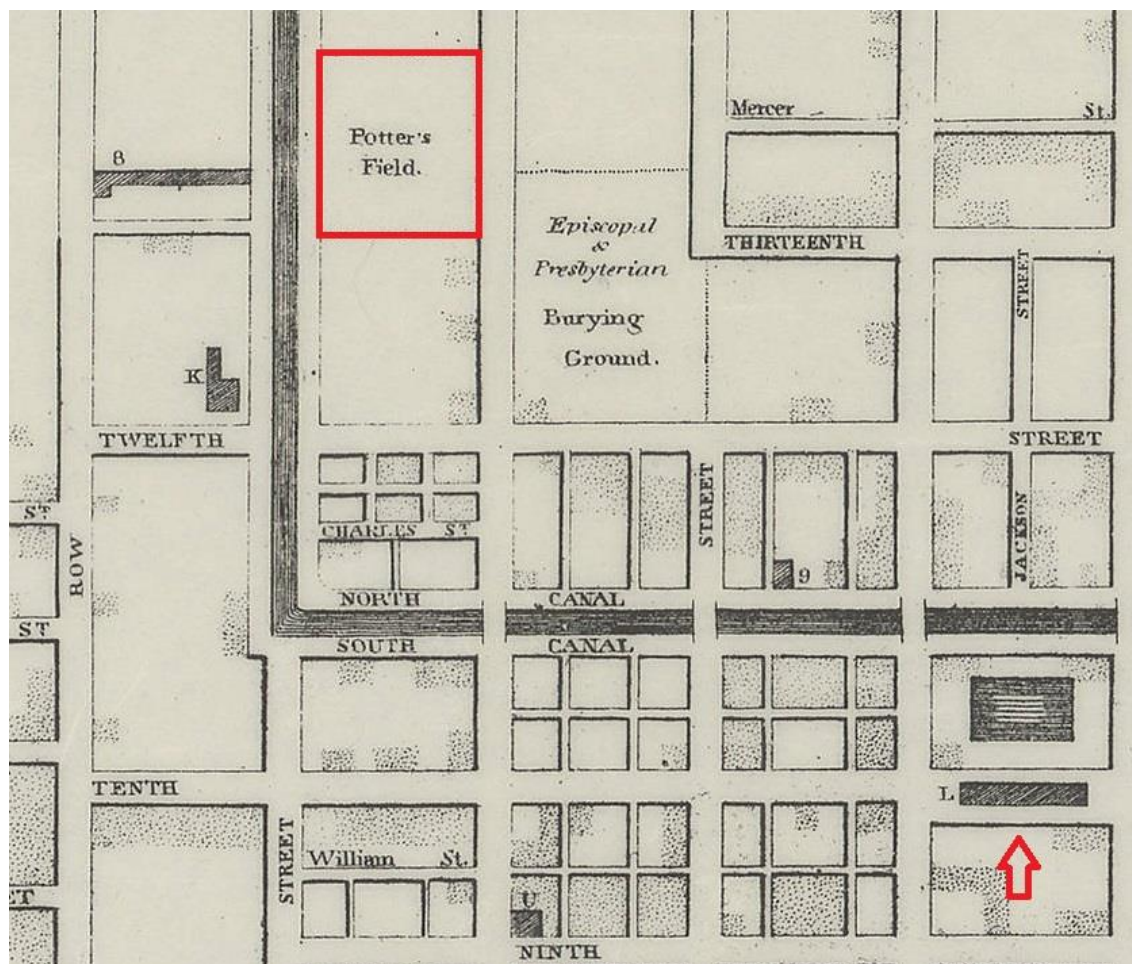


Figure 4. H. L. Barnum, map of Cincinnati, 1831, showing location of the first Potter's Field

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Potter's Field – West Price Hill

Name of Property

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Section number 8 Page 5

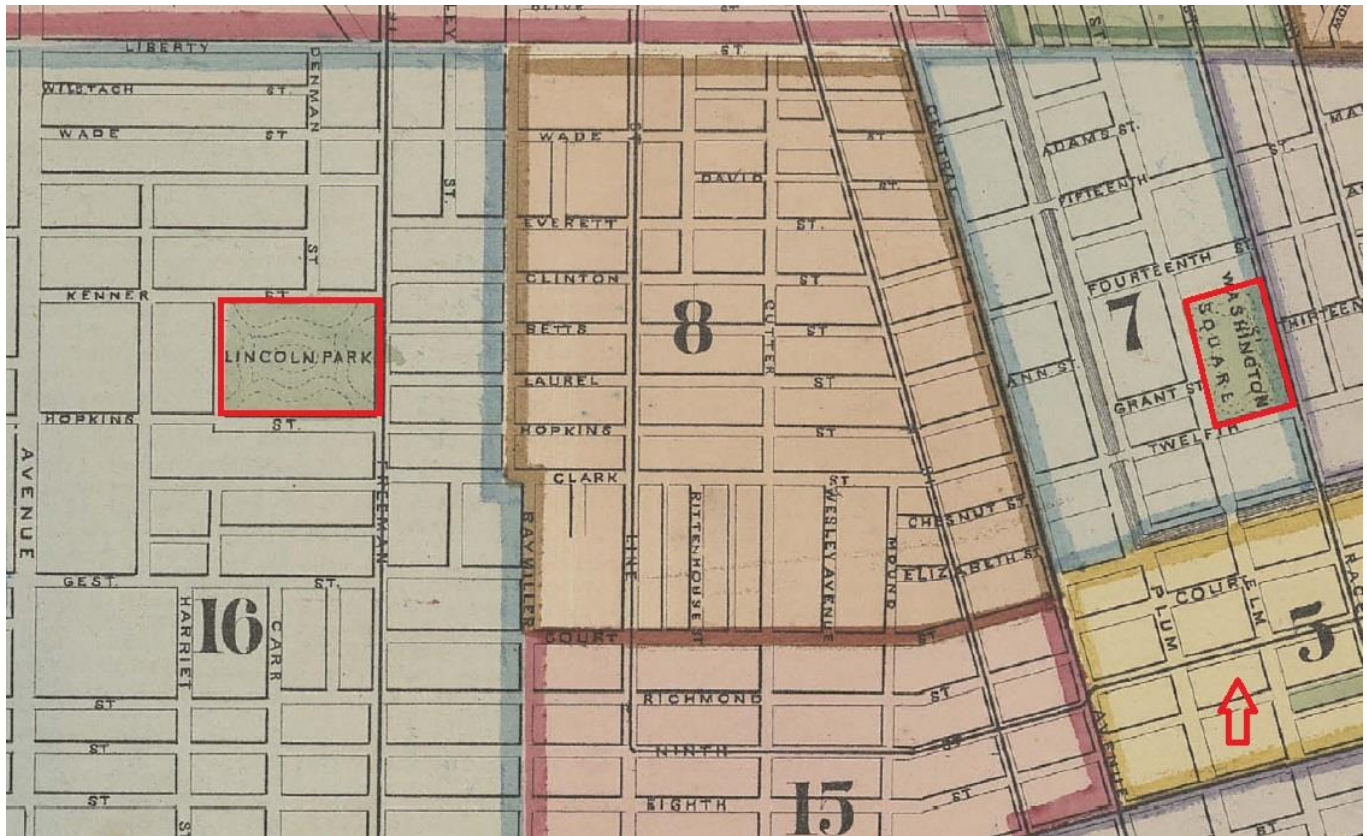


Figure 5. C. O. Titus, *Atlas of Hamilton Co. Ohio*, 1869, Pl. 76, showing Washington Square in place of the Episcopal and Presbyterian Burying Ground and Lincoln Park in place of the second Potter's Field

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Section number 8 Page 7

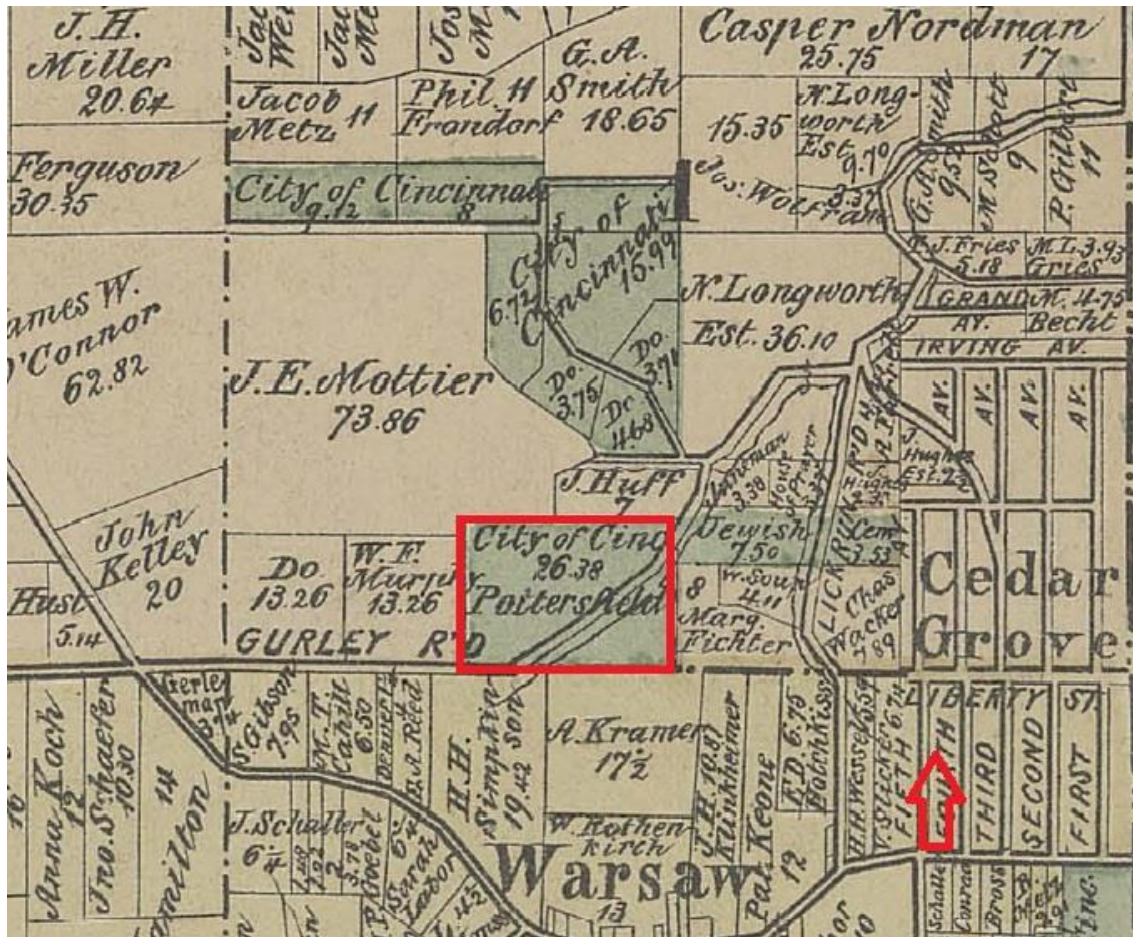


Figure 7. 1884 *Atlas of the City of Cincinnati, Ohio*, Robinson, Elisha & Pidgeon, Roger H., showing Potter's Field and 1878 purchase of land by the City of Cincinnati for the Branch Hospital

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 8

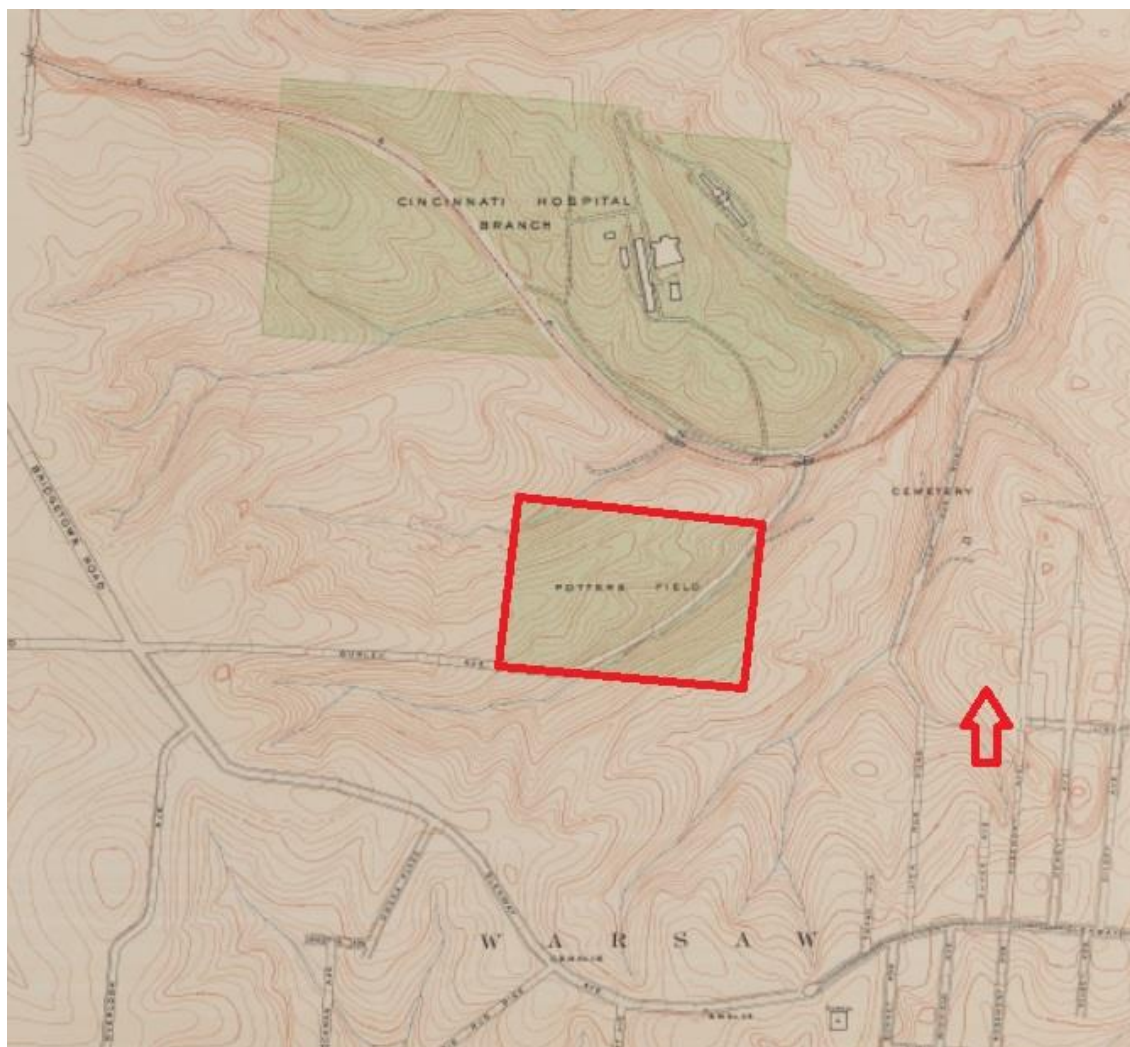


Figure 8. City of Cincinnati Topographic Survey of 1912, Sheet 40, showing Potter's Field and expansion of the Cincinnati Branch Hospital grounds in 1911

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Potter's Field – West Price Hill

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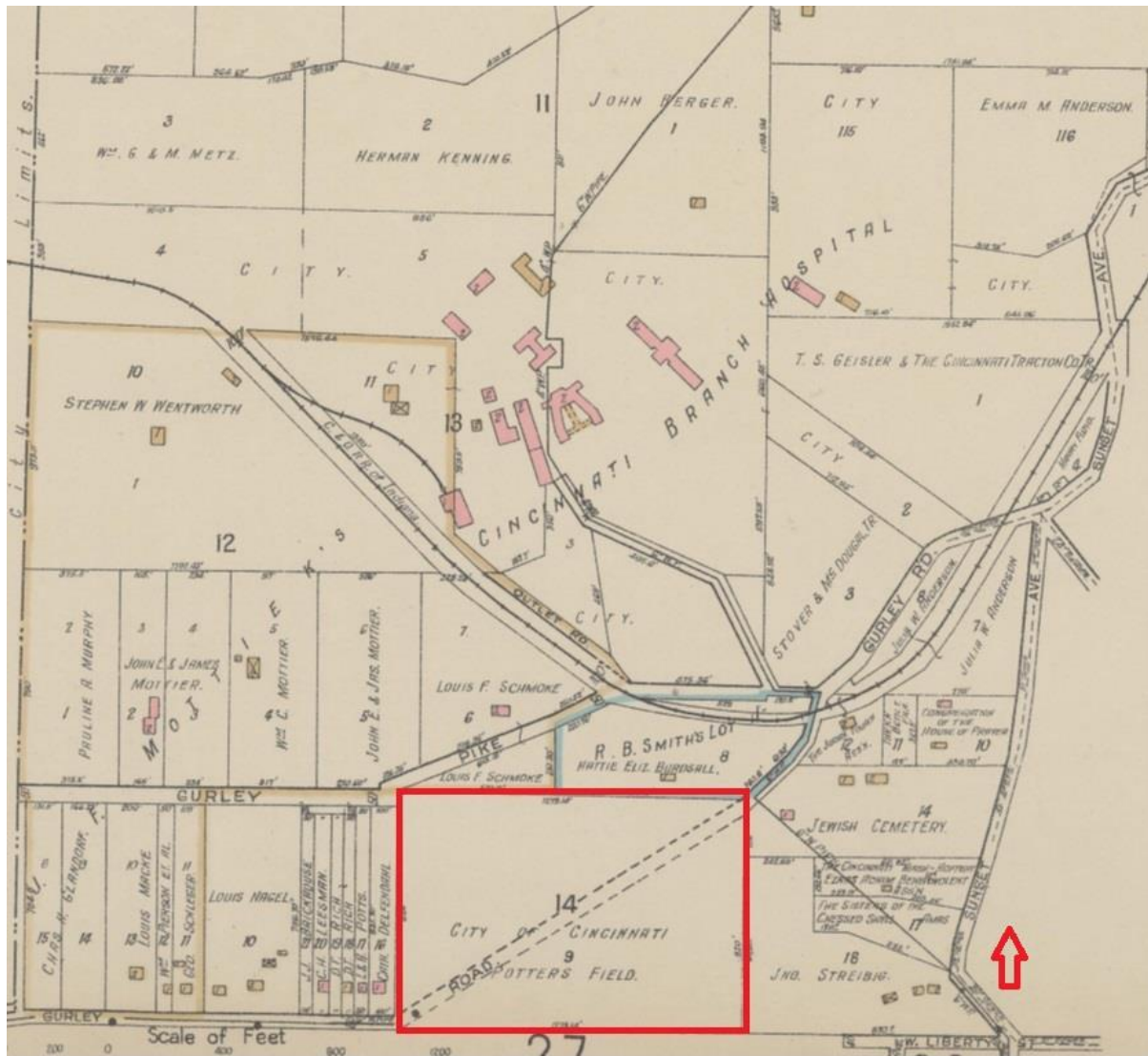


Figure 9. Insurance Maps of Cincinnati Ohio, Sanborn Map Company, New York, 1922, V5, P 46

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Potter's Field – West Price Hill

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Section number 8 Page 10

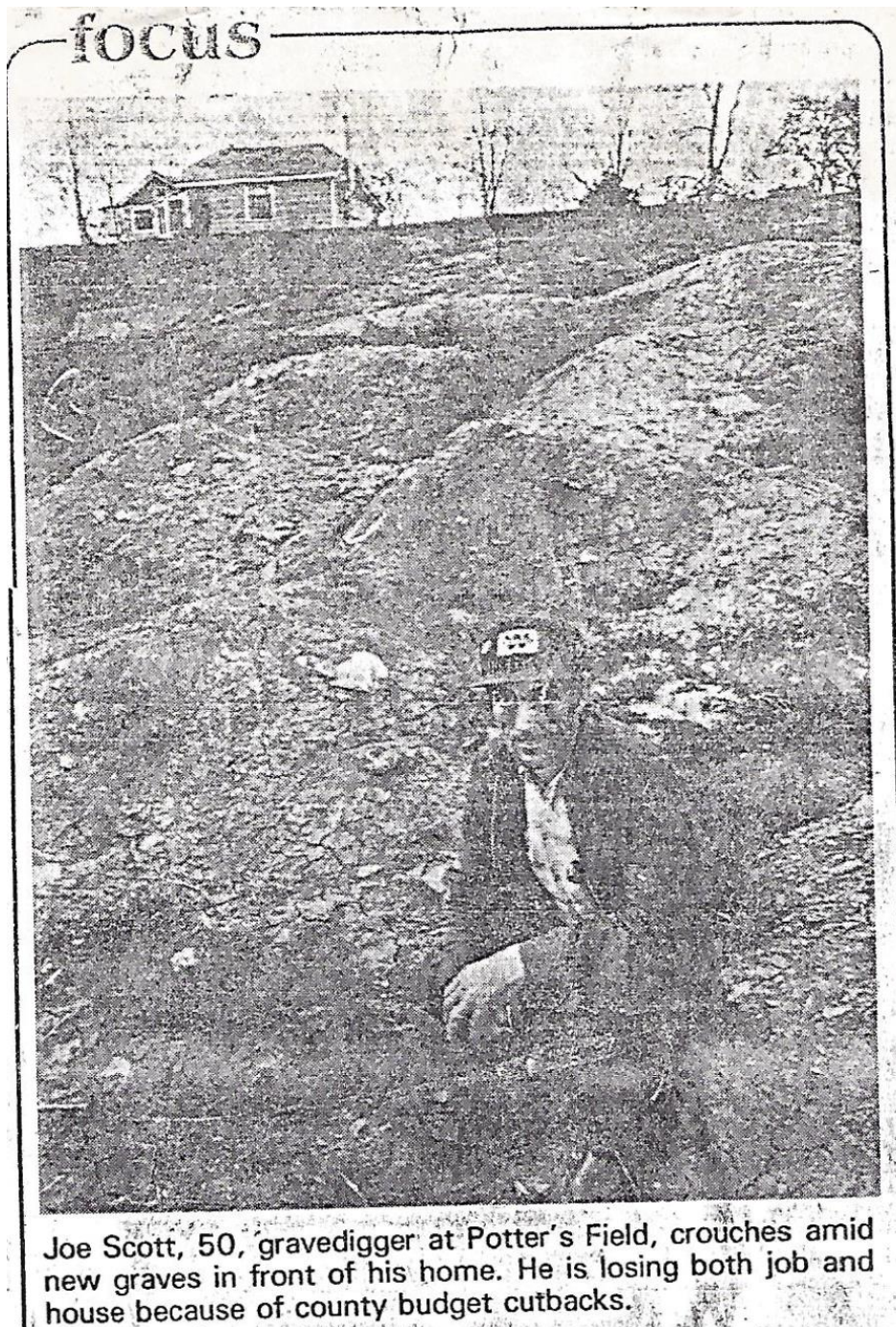


Figure 10. *Cincinnati Post*, April 1981, page 1A

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Potter's Field, Cincinnati,
Hamilton County, Ohio

1. Lat 39.120498
Long -84.592037
2. Lat 39.120175
Long -84.587636
3. Lat 39.117759
Long -84.587736
4. Lat 39.118049
Long -84.592292

STATE OF KENTUCKY
KENTUCKY GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

COVINGTON QUADRANGLE
KENTUCKY-OHIO
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)
SE/4 WEST CINCINNATI 15' QUADRANGLE



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, USCE, and the city of Cincinnati
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1949 and
in part by the city of Cincinnati. Field checked 1950 and 1953. Revised from
aerial photographs taken 1977. Field checked 1978. Map edited 1981
Polyconic projection, 10,000-foot grid ticks based on Kentucky coordinate system,
north zone, and Ohio coordinate system, south zone
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 16
1927 North American Datum
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983
move the projection lines 3 meters south and
5 meters west as shown by dashed corner ticks
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked
Red line indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
Ohio area lies within the Between the Miamis Land lines based on the
Great Miami River Base. Dotted land lines established by private
subdivision of the Symmes Purchase

UTM GRID AND 1987 MAGNETIC NORTH
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

SCALE 1:24 000
1 000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET
1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 KILOMETER
CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
DENVER, COLORADO 80225 OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
KENTUCKY GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY 40506,
AND KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, FRANKFORT, KENTUCKY 40601
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Revisions shown in purple and woodland compiled in cooperation
with State of Kentucky agencies from aerial photographs taken 1984
and other sources. Contours not revised. This information not field checked
Map edited 1987
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, hard surface ——— Light-duty road, hard or improved surface ———
Secondary highway, hard surface ——— Unimproved road ———
Interstate Route ——— U. S. Route ——— State Route ———

COVINGTON, KY.-OHIO
SE/4 WEST CINCINNATI 15' QUADRANGLE
39084-A5-TF-024

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