

Establishing Community Priorities for Descendants of Louisville's Intentionally Overburied Historic Eastern Cemetery

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Abstract

Although cemeteries in the U.S. are intended to serve as communal places of remembrance, they can also hold histories of trauma and violence that resonate across generations. Louisville's historic Eastern Cemetery suffered decades of grave reuse and overburial at the hands of its owners, denying descendants the peaceful resting place they envisioned for their loved ones. The University of Louisville's Center for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage curates surviving historic records that document these overburial practices. Each year, staff respond to hundreds of email requests from families and others seeking answers and information. Although the descendant community at Eastern is geographically dispersed and not self-organized, we hoped to learn more about their priorities to guide our community-engaged scholarship, and we turned to these inquiries for data. In this article, we analyze 272 email records search requests from December 2018 to December 2019 and share the results of a subsequent survey of 41 of these individuals. The results reveal several shared needs and have prompted subsequent research inquiries. One outcome discussed in this article is a shared desire among descendants to view and search digital copies of the historic records themselves. The data in this paper have also led to subsequent collaborative work to map surviving headstones, conduct a subsurface ground-penetrating radar survey, digitize and georeference surviving historic records, and conduct ethnographic research with descendants and voluntary caretakers of the cemetery today.

Introduction

As educators and scholars act as change agents (Fossland & Sandvoll, 2021; Janke, 2019), we should assess both our goals and our impacts as an essential component of community engagement (Cunningham, 2024). Community-engaged scholarship requires a reciprocal exchange of benefits for both the scholar and the community (Dostilio et al., 2012), so we must be able to measure outcomes for academic researchers, often in the form of research and creative activity products (Doberneck et al., 2010), and also for our community partners. Community groups may be interested in more concrete, direct project outcomes that can affect meaningful and visible change within communities, including outcomes defined by how scholars and community partners together conceptualize their reciprocal relationship (Dostilio et al., 2012).

Critically, community-engaged scholarship must be collaborative and must address a community-identified need (Strand et al., 2003). Yet, bringing community members to the table to play a participatory role in defining needs and priorities (Strand et al., 2003; Willatt et al., 2024) can be particularly challenging when the community is geographically dispersed, does not have an organized structure, or offers clear avenues for gathering community voices. Possible solutions to these challenges have included creating outlets, such as websites, for individuals to submit themed content or partnering with non-profit organizations to help organize community voices and facilitate knowledge exchange (Brydon-Miller, 2024). This article presents the challenges we have experienced as community-engaged anthropologists seeking to understand the needs and experiences of one such community - the descendants of individuals buried in Eastern Cemetery, an historic and massively overburied cemetery located in Louisville, KY (U.S.), with buried individuals representing many economic classes and racial identities – and outlines some of the initial approaches we have taken to gather this information.

Historic urban cemeteries across the U.S. offer powerful examples of the challenges of gathering dispersed community voices, identifying community needs and priorities, and advocating for change on behalf of communities. Many burial places remain sites of resonant historical trauma for groups of people living today (Blakey, 1998; Jackson, 2016; Rosenblatt, 2024). Cemeteries are intended as places of remembrance - peaceful settings where families and communities come together and honor the lives and memories of their loved ones. Anthropological scholarship in the U.S., especially work with historic Black cemeteries, reveals the profound ways in which such sites can hold complex histories of violence and also profound legacies of agency, meaning, and resilience (Jackson, 2025; Klugh, 2024).

Many historic cemeteries have also been negatively affected by growth, development, and neglect. Cemeteries serving early urban centers were often originally situated on the edge of or beyond city limits. However, as urban growth continued, city boundaries expanded, and the cemeteries themselves often became directly impacted, especially cemeteries that have reached capacity or are no longer in active use. Impacts can range from neglect to accidental or willful

destruction to active exploitation; cemeteries serving socially, economically, or structurally marginalized communities are most likely to have suffered these threats (Blakey, 1998; Davidson, 2007; Lemke, 2020; Seidemann & Halling, 2019). Yet, these cemeteries hold significant value as both enduring sources of community meaning and identity as well as archaeological research opportunities that help communities recapture glimpses of the lives of those buried within (Bell, 2022; Blakey, 1998; Klugh, 2024; Smallwood et al., 2018; Woodthorpe, 2011). Sites like Eastern Cemetery offer a way to see the power and possibility of place as a resonant form of social belonging and meaning-making across time, even as these sites can also hold historic trauma and violence or experience neglect and destruction (Jackson, 2016).

As with all community-engaged scholarship (Strand et al., 2003), descendants themselves must play a central role in identifying cemetery needs and defining research and advocacy priorities (Klugh, 2024), even when they are not actively organized. In this paper, we present methods and results for identifying community needs among descendants of Louisville's historic Eastern Cemetery. Using a two-tiered analysis of one year of records requests and a survey of a subsample of these requestors, we argue here for the importance of identifying shared needs across a community that is geographically dispersed yet connected through time by a specific and powerful place. The results of this exploratory research are being used to support new collaborative and explanatory research to better understand Eastern Cemetery's history, its impacts on descendants, and to advocate for future public support.

History of Eastern Cemetery

Eastern Cemetery, located in Louisville, Kentucky, is one of the city's oldest cemeteries and has historically also been referred to as the Methodist Burying Ground, the Eastern Burying Ground, and White's Cemetery. The first recorded burial at the site took place in July 1843 under the name Eastern Burying Ground. The articles of incorporation were renamed Eastern Cemetery in 1848, and it was fully incorporated on March 4, 1854. Management of Eastern Cemetery was eventually consolidated under the company Louisville Crematory and Cemeteries Co., Inc. (LCCI).

From nearly its very inception, the reuse of graves seems to have been ingrained in management practices at the site. The oldest confirmed record of grave reuse dates to 1854, and by 1887, there was a reported concern that Eastern would soon be full (*Courier-Journal*, 1887, p. 9). As early as 1882, just two years after reaching its current size of 29.6 acres, it was publicly announced that "only four acres" of space remained (*Courier Journal* 1883:6). An 1885 concern about Eastern filed with Louisville newspaper the *Courier-Journal* by Dr. L.P. Blackburn reported that "[t]hey frequently pile them two and three in one shallow grave and cover the coffins with about six inches of dirt" (*Courier-Journal*, 1885, p. 8). Further complaints to the *Courier Journal* in the early 20th century re-exposed this practice and the company's attempts to hide it, including in a

1912 article that told of a man discovering someone else buried in his parents' grave (*Courier-Journal*, 1912, p. 5).

Without the knowledge or consent of families, LCCI continued the intentional practice of reselling and reusing graves across a century and a half. Grave reuse appears to have occurred consistently for many decades until a whistleblower at Eastern came forward in 1989. This resulted in legal action that ultimately dissolved LCCI's management and placed Eastern Cemetery under the jurisdiction of Jefferson County Circuit Court. University of Louisville archaeologists helped confirm that overburial did indeed occur at Eastern and at two other cemeteries managed by LCCI, Greenwood and Schardein. Though we may never know the full scale of overburial, Eastern Cemetery spans approximately 29 acres and should hold about 29,000 burials; however, it is estimated to hold well over 100,000 individuals.

As part of their continued strategy for reselling graves and confusing visiting families, LCCI adopted a practice of renaming and reorienting cemetery sections throughout time. Eastern is a multiethnic, multi-racial, and multi-class cemetery. Some section names are generic, such as Section A, Section B, Section 4, and Section 11. However, others highlight elements of social identity and of the impact of economic and racial divisions in Louisville through time, including sections named on Eastern's historic maps as: African Division, Cheap Willow Public, Old Slave Ground, and White Public.

The overburial at Eastern can be understood as an example of necroviolence, which De León defines as "violence performed and produced through the specific treatment of corpses that is perceived to be offensive, sacrilegious, or inhumane" (De León, 2015, p. 69). The names given to sections also powerfully demonstrate that many families who buried loved ones in Eastern were likely to be economically and/or socially marginalized, framing the necroviolence enacted on those buried in Eastern as an extension and compounding of broader structural inequities. Eastern demonstrates how necroviolence is generative, as it causes further emotional and social distress upon the living (De León, 2015; Reineke, 2019). Indeed, many descendants of those buried at Eastern are still enduring trauma from the violence done to their loved ones buried at the cemetery, and many are searching for ways to mitigate this damage as it continues to unfold.

Following the court case and resultant publicity, families were outraged and devastated to learn of LCCI's overburial practices, and they sought answers. As part of the resolution, the University of Louisville (UofL) agreed to curate all surviving burial records. Since that time, UofL faculty, staff, and students have responded to records research requests for families seeking more information about the location of their loved ones. The records continue to be curated at UofL's Center for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage (CACHe), and we receive hundreds of research requests each year.

Communities of Eastern Cemetery

Since agreeing to help document overburial and to curate surviving historic records of these practices, UofL has identified two primary communities with a vested interest in the future of Eastern Cemetery. However, their specific interests and level of organization are very different. Friends of Eastern Cemetery (FoEC) was formed in 2014 and is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and all-volunteer organization dedicated to restoring and maintaining the cemetery grounds (<https://friendsofeasterncemetery.com/>). For over 10 years, they have worked to mow the grass, remove weeds, clear downed trees, and raise and clean headstones. They also actively seek funding to improve architectural features like the entry gate, walls, and buildings, both through individual donations and through grants (e.g., Kentucky Colonels Good Works Program grants). FoEC is a vital community partner and strong advocate for Eastern, but many FoEC volunteers do not have family buried in Eastern.

The descendants of those buried at Eastern are the second core community. Unlike FoEC, they are not formally organized. Descendants are spread across the globe and have highly variable knowledge about both the practices that took place at Eastern in the past and about its physical and legal state today. This presents challenges in naming the descendants of individuals buried at Eastern Cemetery as a community or thinking of them as a collective. Nevertheless, they share the enduring trauma of the massive overburial that resulted in the desecration of graves across two centuries and the loss or destruction of significant grave location information. They also, as we see in hundreds of requests for information that CACHe receives each year, are very often seeking the same kinds of information about their family members buried at Eastern, which speaks to the similarity in needs and interests that we feel means they can be named for reasons of our work as members of a community.

Our academic research team, represented in the authors of this paper, began coming together in 2019, long after UofL first became involved in curating Eastern Cemetery historic records and supporting records research requests. None of us has family members buried in Eastern. As with all community-engaged scholarship, developing meaningful, reciprocal relationships with descendants of those buried within Eastern and with those who care for the cemetery today has required consistent, open, and honest communication about our desire to help, the skills we can offer, and our limitations as academics and researchers. Members of our team have built and are continuing to build trust and relationships with community members by giving our best effort to find the locations of those buried in Eastern, beginning to digitize and share digital copies of records, and participating as much as possible in FoEC's volunteer work days to mow grass, cut weeds, and remove fallen branches.

Methods: Understanding the Needs of a Dispersed Descendant Community

To better understand the needs of the descendants of those buried at Eastern Cemetery, we use two datasets: an analysis of one year of emailed research request records and a formal survey of a subsample of requestors. The formal survey received IRB approval from the University of Louisville Human Subjects Research and Institutional Review Board (IRB# 21.0306).

In 2018, CACHe created a dedicated email address, ceminfo@louisville.edu, for records research requests. This email allowed those seeking information on the presence/absence and burial locations of those interred at Eastern and two other local overburied cemeteries, Greenwood and Schardein, to contact CACHe in ways other than by phone or mail. Over the course of 2018, community partners, including FoEC, the Kentucky Attorney General's Office, and local history museums, helped promote awareness of this new research request pathway by updating websites with the new contact information and through word of mouth.

When each request comes in, we ask the requester to provide information about the deceased, including their full name, date of death, and other relevant information that might help us find their burial location, such as whether they were buried near other family members. This information is then cross-referenced against surviving historical burial records. The standardization and level of detail recorded by cemetery workers varied over time. However, most records at least include the full name of the interred individual, the date of birth, the date of death, and the burial location within the cemetery.

In this paper, we analyze email requests from December 2018 through December 2019. A total of 272 inquiries were submitted to the [ceminfo](mailto:ceminfo@louisville.edu) email account in that time period, which included many inquiries from those identifying themselves as the family member of someone interred at Eastern, as well as inquiries from individuals conducting historical research, from organizations, and others from individuals who do not clearly identify their connection to Eastern. We categorized email requests into comparative variables: "Burial Date", "Research Success", and "Purpose of Request." For a request, the Burial Date is the date of burial recorded for the individual under inquiry. We grouped Burial Date into five categories: 1800-1899, 1900-1920, 1921-1940, 1941-1960, and 1961-1999. The youngest and oldest categories have larger date ranges to achieve statistically robust sample sizes. Research Success is a categorical measure of whether an individual records search was successful; a successful request resulted in the individual confirmed to be interred at Eastern, and the physical location of their grave could be relocated. A partial success is considered when an individual was confirmed to be interred at Eastern, but their grave could not be relocated due to incomplete historic mapping. An unsuccessful request could not confirm whether an individual was interred at Eastern, possibly because they were never buried at Eastern, or they were interred at Eastern, and the historic records were not preserved. We note that, upon receiving a research request, we do not request the submission of any personal information, including demographics such as race or ethnicity. The request data analyzed relates specifically to the individuals buried within Eastern.

Invitations to participate in a formal survey were sent to all 272 individuals who had contacted CACHe via the dedicated email line during the study period, and the survey was open for 3 months in the summer of 2021. The emailed invitation included an initial statement that submission of the survey form constituted consent to participate in this research. A core purpose of this survey was to gain insights into community demographics and offer an initial opportunity for descendants to more directly voice their needs beyond individual grave research requests.

To gain a sense of potential generational differences in community needs, we asked respondents for their age and grouped Requestor Age into five categories: 20-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, and 70+. We used the same Research Success and Burial Date variables as were applied to the email analysis. We grouped the Purpose of Request into two broad categories: Historical Requests, including family tree and genealogical searches, and Active Requests. Generally, for the former, these requestors are seeking historical confirmation that an individual is indeed buried at Eastern, birth and death data, and any associated family members; but the requestor is often not seeking any direct action beyond the research. Active Requests include requestors who tied their research request to a more direct action, including requests that mentioned wanting to visit a grave in person, place, or replace a headstone, or disinter a loved one. Finally, we asked respondents whether they would like us to initiate efforts to digitize the records that CACHe holds about Eastern. We offered three possible responses to this question:

Yes - I prefer to see the digital records and perform my own search.

Maybe – I want to search the digital records, but would like to confirm results with UofL CACHe staff.

No – I prefer to have UofL CACHe staff conduct records searches and am not interested in the digital records.

Analyses of email and survey variables were performed in SPSS Statistics. We use chi-squared tests to assess significance, and Adjusted Residual (AdjR) values greater than 2 and less than -2 are used to identify which specific observed responses differ from expected values (Van Poole & Leonard, 2011). For tests with smaller sample sizes (multiple expected values less than 5) resulting in insufficient statistical power, the Monte Carlo random sampling method is used to calculate significance (Mehta & Patel, 2013).

Results

From December 2018 to December 2019, CACHe received 272 email records research requests from people seeking information about an individual potentially buried in Eastern Cemetery. We interpret the sheer number of requests within a single year as clear evidence of the continued importance of Eastern Cemetery to the descendant community and to many others who remain

connected to this place. Even today, several decades after the whistleblower came forward, families and members of the wider community are still searching for answers.

Burial Dates from email requests span the entire chronological history of Eastern's active use. The Research Success rates significantly differed (Pearson chi-square = 79.618; $P < 0.001$) between Burial Date groups (Table 1). Perhaps not surprisingly, searches were the least successful for the earliest burials, with 77% of 1800-1899 requests resulting in only partial success (AdjR = 7.5). Burials dated to 1921-1940 (AdjR = 3.4), 1941-1960 (AdjR = 2.8), and 1961-1999 (AdjR = 5.8) each had significantly higher search success rates, and the rate of success increased as burial age became more recent.

TABLE 1. Research success rate vs. burial date. Significant adjusted residuals are bolded.

Burial Date		Research Success?		Total
		Partial	Yes	
1800s	Count	87	26	113
	Expected	56.5	56.5	
	Count			
	Percent	77.0%	23.0%	
	Adjusted Residual	7.5	-7.5	
1900-1920	Count	37	36	73
	Expected	36.5	36.5	
	Count			
	%	50.7%	49.3%	
	Adjusted Residual	.1	-.1	
1921-1940	Count	7	25	32
	Expected	16.0	16.0	
	Count			
	%	21.9%	78.1%	
	Adjusted Residual	-3.4	3.4	
1941-1960	Count	3	14	17
	Expected	8.5	8.5	
	Count			
	%	17.6%	82.4%	
	Adjusted Residual	-2.8	2.8	
1961-1999	Count	2	35	37

Expected	18.5	18.5	
Count			
%	5.4%	94.6%	
Adjusted	-5.8	5.8	
Residual			
Total	136	136	272

For the formal survey, we received responses from 41 people who were seeking information about someone potentially buried in Eastern. Of these, 32 indicated being related to someone interred at Eastern and 9 either did not provide enough information to determine whether they were related or indicated that they were not relations. 35 people were seeking general historical, genealogical, or family tree information. Five sought information for a more specific purpose, including physically visiting a grave, placing a headstone, or potentially disinterring a loved one. One response does not fall into either category. There was no significant difference (Pearson chi-square = 1.477; Monte Carlo $p = 0.552$) in the Research Success rate between those seeking information for historical or specific purposes (Table 2). Similarly, there was no significant difference in the preference for historic records digitization (Pearson chi-square = 0.838; Monte Carlo $p = 0.846$) between those seeking information for historical or specific purposes (Table 3).

TABLE 2. Research success rate vs. request purpose.

Request Purpose		Research Success?			Total
		No	Partial	Yes	
Historical/Genealogy	Count	6	10	19	35
	Expected	5.3	9.6	20.1	
	Count				
	Percent	17.1%	28.6%	54.3%	
	Adjusted	1.0	.4	-1.1	
Specific Action	Residual				
	Count	0	1	4	5
	Expected	.8	1.4	2.9	
	Count				
	%	0.0%	20.0%	80.0%	
	Adjusted	-1.0	-.4	1.1	
	Residual				
Total		6	11	23	40

TABLE 3. Digitization preference vs request purpose.

Request Purpose		Digitize Records?			Total
		No	Maybe	Yes	
Historical/Genealogy	Count	4	14	17	35
	Expected	4.4	13.1	17.5	
	Count				
	Percent	11.4%	40.0%	48.6%	
	Adjusted	-.5	.9	-.5	
Specific Action	Residual				5
	Count	1	1	3	
	Expected	.6	1.9	2.5	
	Count				
	%	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	
	Adjusted	.5	-.9	.5	
	Residual				
Total		5	15	20	40

Comparisons of Requestor Age reveal no significant differences (Pearson chi-square = 8.223; Monte Carlo $p = 0.448$) in research success rates (Table 4). However, there are significant differences (Pearson chi-square = 15.734; Monte Carlo $p = 0.043$) in the preference for historic records digitization (Table 5, Figure 1). The differences occur between the very oldest and very youngest requestors. Requestors aged between 20 and 40 overwhelmingly prefer to have the records fully digitized to allow them to conduct their own searches for the names and grave locations of loved ones (AdjR = 2.4). Conversely, while some requestors aged over 70 preferred or were open to records digitization, a significant proportion were not interested in digitization and preferred to rely on CACHe staff to complete records searches (AdjR = 3.1).

TABLE 4. Research success rate vs. requestor age

Requestor Age		Research Success?			Total
		No	Partial	Yes	
20-40	Count	0	2	3	5
	Expected	.7	1.3	2.9	
	Count				
	Percent	0.0%	40.0%	60.0%	
	Adjusted	-1.0	.7	.1	
41-50	Residual				6
	Count	2	0	4	
	Expected	.9	1.6	3.5	
		Count			

	%	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	
	Adjusted Residual	1.4	-1.6	.4	
51-60	Count	2	5	5	12
	Expected Count	1.8	3.2	7.0	
	%	16.7%	41.7%	41.7%	
	Adjusted Residual	.2	1.4	-1.4	
61-70	Count	1	3	4	8
	Expected Count	1.2	2.1	4.7	
	%	12.5%	37.5%	50.0%	
	Adjusted Residual	-.2	.8	-.5	
71+	Count	1	1	8	10
	Expected Count	1.5	2.7	5.9	
	%	10.0%	10.0%	80.0%	
	Adjusted Residual	-.5	-1.4	1.6	
Total		6	11	24	41

TABLE 5. Requestor age vs. digitization preference. Significant adjusted residuals are bolded.

Requestor Age		Prefer to Digitize?			Total
		No	Maybe	Yes	
20-40	Count	0	0	5	5
	Expected Count	.6	2.0	2.4	
	Percent	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
	Adjusted Residual	-.9	-1.9	2.4	
41-50	Count	0	3	3	6
	Expected Count	.7	2.3	2.9	
	%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	
	Adjusted Residual	-.9	-1.9	2.4	
51-60	Count	0	3	3	12

61-70	Expected	.7	2.3	2.9	
	Count				
	%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	
	Adjusted	-1.5	.9	.1	
	Residual				
71+	Count	1	4	3	8
	Expected	1.0	3.1	3.9	
	Count				
	%	12.5%	50.0%	37.5%	
	Adjusted	.0	.7	-.7	
Total	Residual				
	Count	4	3	3	10
	Expected	1.2	3.9	4.9	
	Count				
	%	40.0%	30.0%	30.0%	
Total	Adjusted	3.1	-.7	-1.4	
	Residual				
Total		5	16	20	41

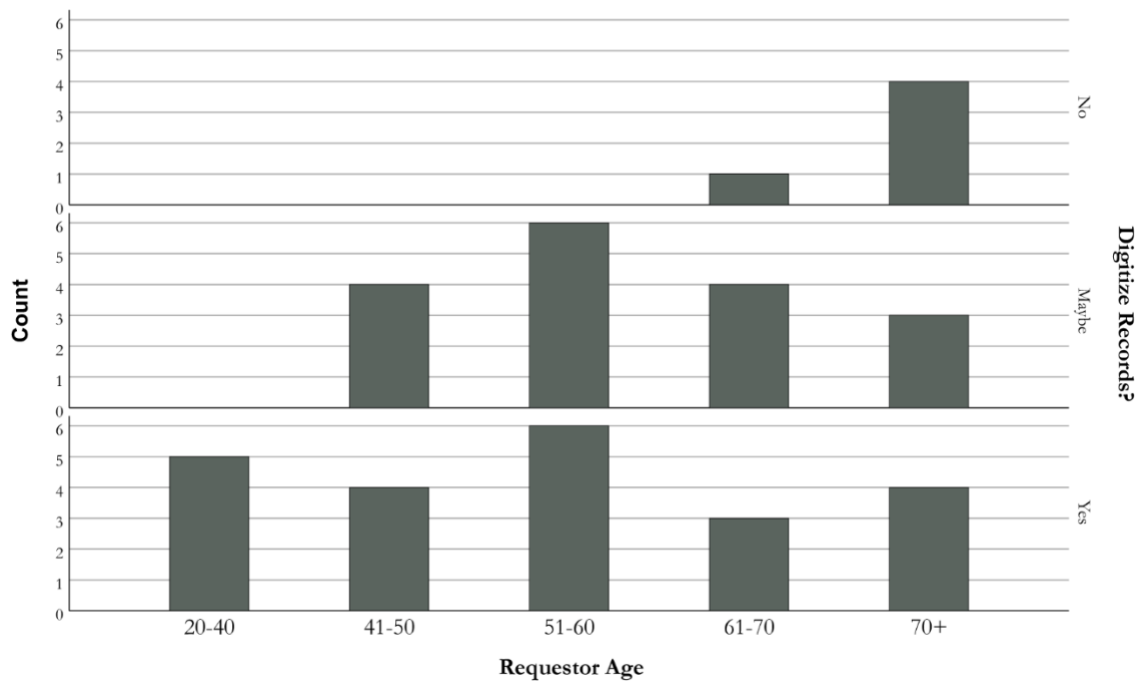


FIGURE 1. Stacked bar graphs comparing digitization preferences for requestor age groups.

Discussion: Community Needs and Charting a Path Forward for Eastern Cemetery Descendants

Families of those interred at Louisville’s Eastern Cemetery continue to suffer from the consequences of decades of overburial and grave reuse, while also remaining linked to Eastern as a resonant and complicated place within their own family’s history and the history of Louisville. In the absence of an organized community or an active, decision-making body of descendants, we analyzed two datasets to help gain a clearer understanding of some shared needs and priorities that could inform our future research directions, practices in managing records, and approaches to community engagement.

The sheer volume of email records research requests, 272 within a single year, provides clear evidence that descendants and wider community members are still seeking answers and information. This is not an outlier; CACHe routinely receives hundreds of records search requests each year, primarily from families looking for information on whether their loved one is buried in Eastern and where the grave is located. Unfortunately, our analysis shows that 50% of these requests are not fully successful. Reasons a request is not successful vary. In some cases, the individual’s name may not appear in our records because they were never buried at Eastern. In others, our inability to find an individual could be because the historic record of that burial has not preserved. In both cases, there is little we can do within our own records, now or in the

future, to change these results or provide confirmation one way or another. Partially successful requests are, in many ways, more frustrating. In the majority of these cases, we can confirm the individual is indeed buried in Eastern, but cannot pinpoint the specific location of their grave. Reasons we cannot locate a known burial include an absence of historic maps documenting the location or a lack of sufficiently reconstructed locations of neighboring, knowable grave locations. LCCI's intentional shifting of section names and boundaries through time, along with their other interventions at the site meant to confuse family members and obfuscate their actions, have also resulted in significant challenges to connecting historic maps and records to the landscape of Eastern today. While there is little we can do when the barrier is a lack of preserved records, we can work to improve our internal reconstructions of historic burial practices throughout time. We discuss this research path further below.

We have identified several important takeaways from the directed survey of a subsample of record research requestors. First, the majority of respondents either definitively want the records digitized in order to be able to conduct their own searches (50%) or want the records digitized but also want to retain help from CACHE staff for their searches (37.5%). This strong preference for digitization was not driven by whether or not the individual respondent's initial request sent to CemInfo was ultimately successful, suggesting that preference for digitization is not only driven by the ability of CACHE staff to fulfill inquiries. The digitization of records is clearly a priority. However, we must be mindful of the nuances that we see within the responses as well. While younger people unquestionably prefer digitization, respondents over age 70 still prefer that CACHE staff either fully conduct or assist with records searches. In considering these responses, we are also mindful of two points. First, younger individuals today, who prefer digitization, may shift their preference if we ask the same question 10 or 20 years from now. Second, if one day we can fully digitize and publicly post all Eastern records, we must still be willing to help conduct records search requests for descendants who are unsure of their ability or unable to perform searches themselves. These results also suggest that the community appreciates and trusts the work CACHE researchers do. We also see the impact and import of these forms of communication with staff in the connections created between CACHE staff and descendants during search processes, as many inquiries require multiple back and forth emails.

These results are guiding our research path as we seek to help the community understand and address the century and a half of violence enacted at Eastern Cemetery and its many repercussions into the present. We must strive to continue improving our ability to successfully identify in our records the grave locations of individuals known to have been buried in Eastern. We also have a clear mandate, as seen in this survey, to digitize the records and make them available, while also retaining the connections and assistance that CACHE staff provide to descendants and to the wider community searching for information about Eastern. As discussions with our organizational community partner, Friends of Eastern Cemetery, have also made clear, we must all continue working together to advocate for Eastern. To help meet these goals, our

research team, with the support of FoEC, secured a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to conduct archaeological mapping of surviving headstones, georeference headstone locations with historic maps, conduct a ground-penetrating radar survey to further document the subsurface impacts of overburial, and conduct detailed ethnographic research with FoEC volunteers, descendant family members, and at the site. This work has since expanded further to include a historian and an archivist who will be collecting oral histories related to Eastern. This much wider set of data will allow us to address many additional collaborative questions, including:

- Did/how did overburial practices changed through time?
- Is there evidence for spatial variation in overburial practices within Eastern, and how might this variation differentially affect descendants?
- Can ground penetrating radar detect evidence of multiple burials within a single grave lot?
- Can georeferencing historic records with new archaeological mapping improve our ability to relocate family members for descendants?
- How does overburial at Eastern affect living descendants, and has this trauma been generationalized?
- Can the socioeconomic or racial identities of those interred in specific areas within Eastern be identified, and have these areas these been differentially impacted by overburial?
- What draws volunteer caretakers to Eastern, and how do they view the cemetery and their work within it?
- How can we best support and advocate for Eastern now and in the future?

In the spirit of community-engaged scholarship best practices, these ongoing and future research questions were developed as an outcome of the current study and through consultations and discussions with community members and descendants. As such, this ongoing project has and will include several co-developed public outcomes, including public research talks, open community forums, a community planning workshop, and a public white paper report, which build on our current findings, and we look forward to presenting the results of this work in future academic and public settings.

As initial steps, this analysis demonstrates the challenges and importance of seeking information about the needs, experiences, and priorities of dispersed descendant communities. Although Eastern's history of violence has resulted in cross-generational impacts, it also remains a meaningful place within the lives of many. We hope for our research to contribute further knowledge about the site, expand access to the remaining records, and provide documentation of those impacted by Eastern as a way to acknowledge the site's traumas and to identify the power of the place to be more than this in the future.

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