

March 26, 2025

To: City of Winnipeg councillors



The Sisters of Misericordia operated an orphanage and home for unwed mothers in St. Norbert called the Asile Ritchot from 1904 to 1948. This institution primarily served pregnant girls and young women from Winnipeg who were too poor to afford other services. The home also served babies and children up to the age of five, again mostly from Winnipeg. Many of the girls, women, and babies came through the Misericordia Hospital system, although the Sisters also found babies left on their doorstep when they got up in the morning.

Although the Sisters expected to be looking after 30 children at a time, they were quickly overrun. There were so many children at the institution it led to overcrowding and deplorable conditions.

Infectious diseases, poor nutrition, a lack of staffing, and possibly getting water from the Red River led to a high number of deaths at the institution.

A stunning total of 3,383 *children* died at the Asile.

Many of those children were buried in the Asile's Cemetery in Lemay Forest. They were buried in communal, unmarked graves.

While the identified remains and a few others were exhumed and moved in 1974, according to archival records and testimony, the children were left behind and are still in the cemetery. It would seem the communal graves for the children went beyond the cemetery borders. According to past practice, other people likely brought their loved ones to be buried near the cemetery because it was consecrated ground. There is also a possibility that other burials exist in the rest of the forest.

The children were forgotten over time but we know about them now and they should never be forgotten again. They should most certainly not be lying in a cemetery on private land but be protected in a public space, commemorated and given in death the attention they did not receive in life.

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OURS-Winnipeg member