



Finding Maggie

Over the years, when people see me doing geophysics, I have been asked some interesting questions.

“Are you looking for Jimmy Hoffa?”

“Are you looking for gold?”

“Do you look for coins on the beach?”

Well, on a recent work trip, I finally had a target that really had my heart.

I was scheduled for a Brownfields project in Dubuque, Iowa. The closest airport where I could ship our equipment using Southwest Air Cargo was Chicago, which also gave me an opportunity to spend some time with my mom, who is now 87 years old.

Since I already had the equipment with me, I thought that if the opportunity presented itself, I might try to solve a family mystery of my own.

The only problem was that my mom also had my heart, so I spent my time with her and my family and left myself only a few hours before my flight home to try to accomplish my little project.

I was looking for my great-great-aunt, **Margaretha “Maggie” Petersen**.

Maggie was my great-grandfather Peter Petersen's younger sister. Through some recent ancestry research, I had learned more about her story. She died in 1903 at only 15 years old.

Her story really pulled me in.

At 15, Maggie had left her family in Milwaukee and was working as a maid for a family in West Bend, Wisconsin.

From the family history I have been able to piece together, Maggie apparently fell in love with her boss, the head of the household. She believed he loved her and that they would leave and start a life together. Instead, she was rejected.

Maggie took her own life with the common suicide elixir of the time, carbolic acid, while still at her place of work in West Bend.

Her family didn't initially know what had happened to her. They were expecting her home and became concerned when she didn't return. Eventually, they learned of a misidentified young woman who had died in West Bend. Maggie's mother and sister-in-law traveled there, identified her, and brought her back to Milwaukee for burial.

She was only 15 years old.

I had seen many old family photographs over the years, but I had never seen Maggie until my cousin sent me this beautiful photograph of her confirmation, along with the newspaper article describing her death.



Suddenly, she wasn't just a name in an ancestry record or a tragic story in an old newspaper.

GIRL SUICIDE IDENTIFIED.

RAN AWAY FROM HER HOME IN
MILWAUKEE.

MARGARETH PETERSEN WAS HER NAME.

It is Thought That Fear Drove Her
From Home.

The mystery surrounding the girl "Viola Atherton," who committed suicide in the home of Fred. Schuler in this city a week ago today, was cleared last Friday when her body was identified by her mother and sister-in-law. The name of the girl or child, for she was but a child, was Margareth Petersen, and she was a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Hans Petersen, residing just outside the southwestern city limits of Milwaukee in the town of Lake.

The identification of the remains was the saddest scene we have ever seen and it was no wonder that those present, only a few persons, had their eyes filled with tears. Lying over the casket with tears rolling down her cheeks in torrents, the mother sobbed and cried and bemoaned the fate of her offspring. "Oh, Maggie, Maggie, how could you do it! Oh dear, Oh dear, why did you do it!" were the words with which she bemoaned her child. But, lying there among a bed of flowers, generously given and nicely arranged, she seemed but to smile at the grief manifested by her mother. When somewhat quieted down the mother gave an account of the disappearance.

Margareth Peterson left her home



a week ago last Monday afternoon while her parents had gone to the depot to see off some relatives. Margareth had visited relatives at Port Washington a few weeks prior to her death and delayed in coming home, telling her parents that there had been a wreck on the road. The Port relatives were in Milwaukee after that and when questioned about the wreck knew nothing about it. This, in connection with the girl staying out late one night last week, made the parents suspicious and they told her on leaving home that they would enquire at the depot about the wreck. But when they returned the girl was gone. Although enquiries were made she could not be found. On Friday morning a neighbor read an account of the mysterious suicide at West Bend in a Milwaukee morning paper. Knowing that Maggie was missing she took the paper to the Petersen's and they in turn reported the case to the police. Telephone connections with the local authorities partly established the identity, but this was completed when the mother and sister-in-law viewed the remains. They arrived here on the 3:20 P. M. train Friday and at once went to Detunco's undertaking rooms, where the body had been placed the evening before. The bottle which still contained a portion of the carbolic acid which ended the youthful life, was also identified as one taken from the home of her parents, having been in the household for nearly a year.

Margareth Peterson was but 15 years old last April. Her parents resided in Chicago for nearly ten years and then the family moved to Mauston, Wis., where the father worked at the carpenter trade. Owing to ill-health he was obliged to give up his occupation and then they moved to Milwaukee, where Mr. Peterson is employed as a hog fattenor. Last spring she was confirmed and shortly after started in to learn the millinery trade; this fall she was again to take up the same kind of work and was to have started work on the day she disappeared from home, but on account of the company spoken of above, stayed at home so that her parents could go to the depot with them.

The manner of her death and the circumstances connected therewith were brought in this paper last week.

The remains were shipped to Milwaukee last Saturday morning and the funeral took place the day following. Beside her parents, who appear to be very respectable people, the deceased leaves one sister and four brothers.

THE INQUEST.

The inquest which was held before Justice W. P. Rix last Thursday brought out the facts as we published them in our last issue. The jury, composed of F. A. Schnurr, F. Schloemer, Henry Lemke, Walter Lohr, Mich. Immel and Ed. Emmett, brought in a verdict that the deceased came to her death by her own hands by taking carbolic acid.

She was Maggie.

A 15-year-old girl who had fallen in love, had her heart broken, died away from her family, and whose mother ultimately had to travel to West Bend to bring her home.

More than 120 years later, I wanted to find her.

My research led me to Pilgrim's Rest Cemetery in Milwaukee. Cemetery records indicated that Maggie was buried in **Section L, Lot 63, Grave 14**.

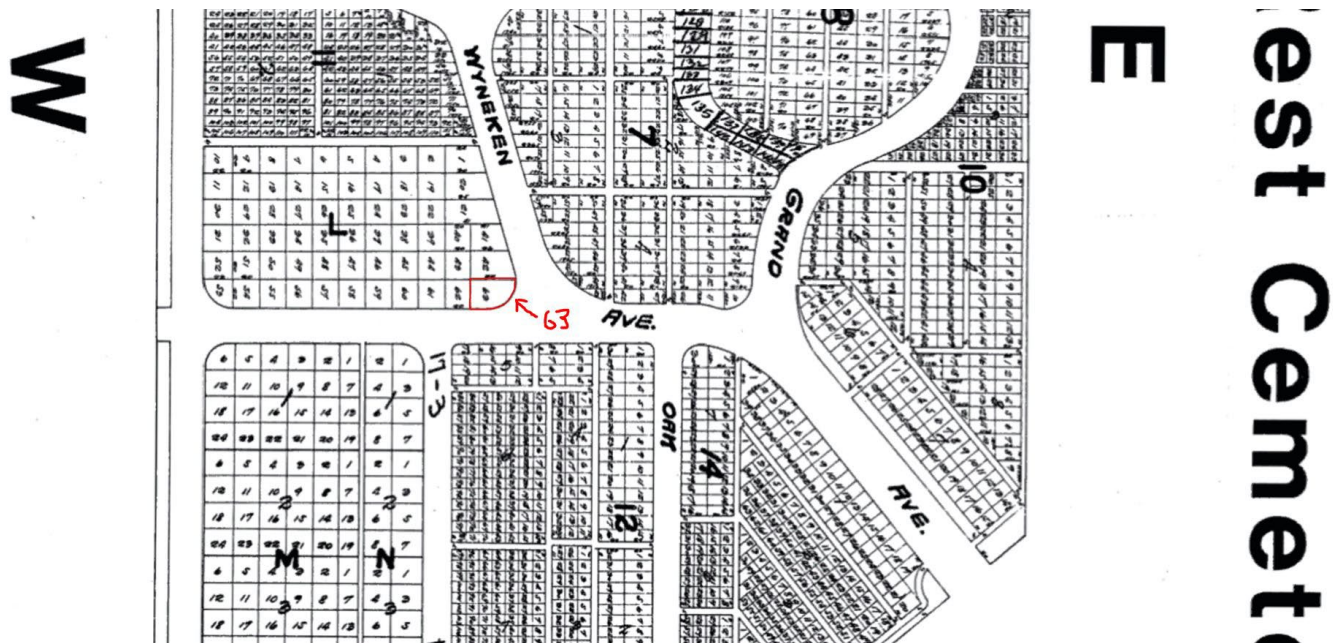
That sounded easy enough.

It wasn't.

When I arrived, it was clear that many of the graves had not been tended in years. Some headstones were knocked over, others were badly weathered, and many graves appeared to have no marker at all.

I went to another cemetery that maintained the records and was given a map.

Unfortunately, I was told that there was no individual grave map for Section L. All I knew was that Lot 63 contained 16 graves and Maggie was supposed to be in Grave 14.

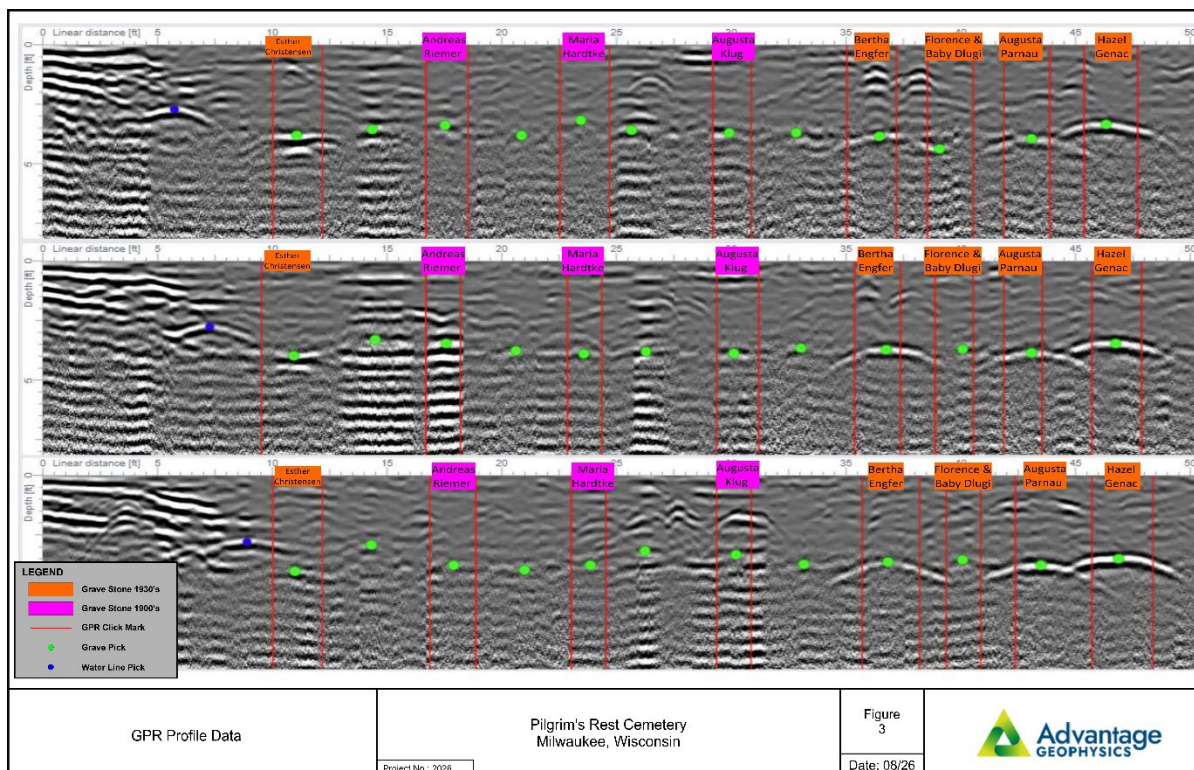
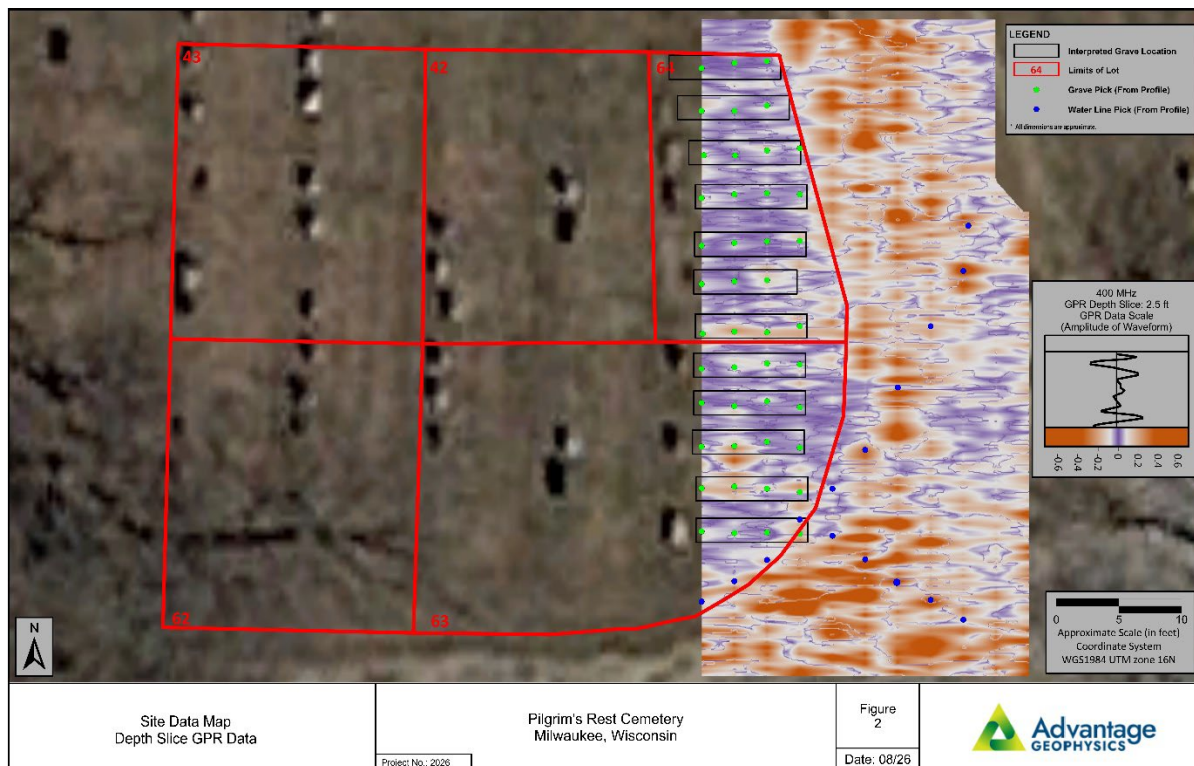


So, with the limited time I had left, I pulled out the GPR and started collecting data.

And I made a mistake that anyone who has spent enough time doing field work can probably appreciate.

I surveyed the wrong area.

I found about 12 graves with the GPR, but when I got home and really started digging into everything, I realized that Maggie wasn't beneath the area I had surveyed.



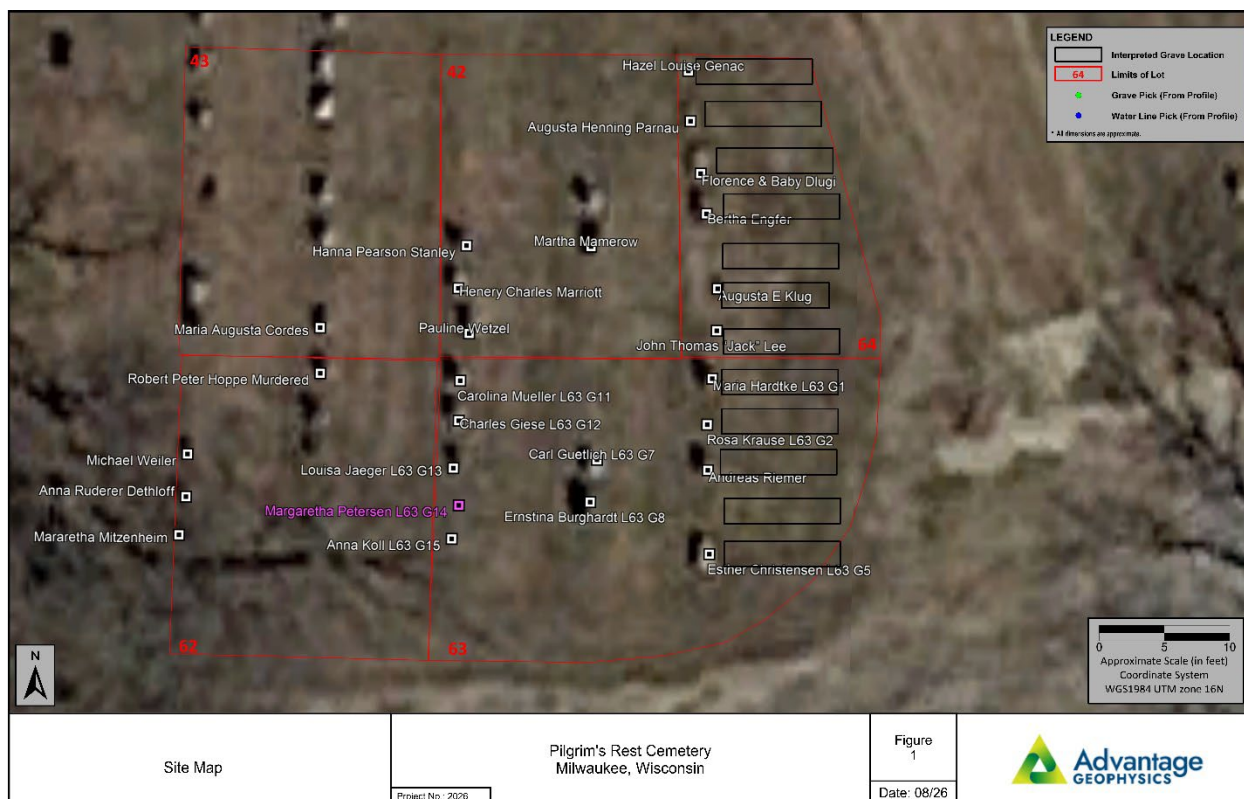
Now I had to find her the hard way.

I had only a limited number of photographs from the cemetery, so I started comparing every headstone I could see in my photographs with information on Find a Grave.

That was much harder than I expected.

Many of the headstones are more than 100 years old. Some are weathered, some are broken or lying down, and others are almost impossible to read.

One by one, I started figuring out who they were.



I compared the names with the cemetery map, grave records, my field photographs, Google Earth imagery and the information I could find online. The fall imagery in Google Earth was especially useful because the leaves were gone and more of the cemetery could be seen.

Eventually, the pattern started to make sense.

I even determined that a Lot 64, which wasn't shown on the cemetery map I had been given, actually existed within the area identified on that map as Lot 42.

Once I could identify enough of the surrounding graves, I could reconstruct the numbering.

And eventually...

I found Maggie.



Not with the GPR like I had planned. I found her by combining cemetery records, old maps, photographs, aerial imagery, surviving headstones, Find a Grave and a lot of persistence.

The GPR data I collected wasn't wasted, either.

Although I hadn't surveyed over Maggie's grave, the data provided a great demonstration of what we can do with GPR in cemeteries. Numerous responses in the GPR profiles correlate very well with known grave locations, including graves without obvious surface evidence.

I even identified what appears to be a shallow water line crossing over Esther Christensen's grave. That anomaly had me scratching my head for a while, but its shallower depth and unusual angle relative to the graves eventually helped separate it from the grave responses.

This is actually the type of work we have done professionally at Advantage Geophysics. We have used geophysics in searches involving burial sites and murder victims, as well as cemetery inventories associated with roadway projects.

This time, though, it was personal. And like most field projects, this one reminded me of a few things:

- **Do the record research first.**
- **Give yourself enough time to do the work.**
- **Make sure you are collecting data in the right place.**
- **If you aren't sure where your target is, survey a bigger area if you can.**
- **And take more field photos. Always take more field photos.**

There is also something about this story that I can't stop thinking about. In 1903, Maggie's family didn't know where she was. Her mother eventually had to travel to West Bend, find her daughter, and bring her home.

More than 120 years later, I went looking for Maggie again.

This time, I found her.

#geophysics #GPR #groundpenetratingradar #familyhistory #genealogy #cemetery
#AdvantageGeophysics #lovewhatyoudo