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Residents once again wait for news on Pond St. site

By: Sarah Blazonis

[Like](#) SYRACUSE, N.Y. -- If you're not familiar with Syracuse's North Side, it's hard to tell this shuttered building with the empty parking lot used to be the Pond St. Wegmans. But longtime residents remember a time even before the store, when it was the site of St. Joseph's Cemetery.

"The cemetery was pretty well run down," remembered Don Little, Jr. He says he's lived on the Northside for all of his nearly 70 years. "Used to come by it everyday when I was going to North High, which isn't here anymore, either."

Founded in 1859, the graveyard was the final resting place for some of the city's earliest settlers.

"By 1953, it had fallen into serious disrepair, so the decision was made that the community as a whole would benefit if St. Joseph's Cemetery was moved to Assumption Cemetery," said Matthew MacVittie, assistant curator of history for the Onondaga Historical Association.

Crews began removing remains in 1965. The age of some made it hard to determine exact numbers, but between 4,000 and 6,500 bodies are believed to have been removed -- one of the biggest burial relocations in the city's history.

Records say that since caskets in the mid-1800s were basically made of wood and glue, only about 25% of the remains exhumed were identifiable. The rest were buried in a common grave at Assumption now marked with a monument.

Many suggestions were floated as possibilities for the site. When Wegmans expressed an interest in the late 1960s, many residents were excited about the possibility of a neighborhood supermarket, but a small group took legal action against the move.

"Some people felt that it was sacred ground even though the cemetery had been moved," said MacVittie.

Residents say the store did change the neighborhood for the better when it opened in 1970.

"I think it sort of made it a little closer knit group. Then, as years went on, the neighborhood changed a little bit, but this parking lot was always full," said Little.

"I just hope that the city will open up a new store quickly so we could have another convenient store right here," said Takieme Jackson. He lives across the street from what used to be the store and says there was a feeling of disappointment among neighbors when it closed.

Wegmans representatives have said they're still considering proposals for the site, so folks will have to wait a little longer to find out who will be their new neighbor.

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