

Federal and Confederate Soldiers Buried in City Cemetery

In the 19th century, a “Good Death” was one which took place at home with loving family members present. For Civil War soldiers there were no “Good Deaths.” The Civil War resulted in 650,000 deaths. Two per cent of the population died. Compared to our population today, that would equal 6 million deaths. The deaths of Confederate soldiers were three times greater than Federal soldiers with one in every five Southern men of military age being casualties of war.

Nashville City Cemetery opened for burials in 1822. Four acres had been purchased by the Corporation of the City of Nashville for a “public burial ground.” Two earlier cemeteries were unsatisfactory because graves from the Public Square had fallen into the river and graves from the Sulphur Springs area had sunk.

Being “public” meant that all citizens could be interred in the City Cemetery. By the time of the Civil War, the cemetery had grown to 27 acres and contained almost 16,500 graves. Buried at City Cemetery before the Civil War were Revolutionary War veterans, one Governor of Tennessee (Gov. Carroll), 14 Mayors of Nashville, many lawyers, judges, doctors and businessmen. Slaves, owned by men living in the City of Nashville, purchased lots, caskets and paid for their burials.. Nashville had quite a large population of free men of color who bought their own lots. Of the 20,000 in the Interments Books (1846-1979), 6,000 were African Americans. The Corporation paid for the burials of paupers, strangers and prisoners.

Being the only “public” cemetery, the graveyard was going to be forced to serve as the resting place for Civil War soldiers. Confederate soldiers were being buried at City Cemetery prior to the occupation by Federal troops of Nashville in February 1862. After the occupation, W. R. Cornelius, local undertaker, was employed by the Federal Army to bury both Confederate and Federal soldiers. Nashville would develop as a major hospital center with as many as 25 hospitals. There were going to be many deaths from wounds and disease.

CONFEDERATE BURIALS at City Cemetery during the war years

In a sketch, written by Cornelius for his granddaughter, he wrote that he had buried 2,260 Confederate soldiers in Nashville prior to the Federal occupation in February 1862. Cornelius’ list of these names does not exist today. There is no comprehensive list of CSA burials by Cornelius.

In the *Nashville Union*, dated November 2, 1865, W.R. Cornelius listed the burials of Confederate soldiers with their company, state regiment and date of death and also a few Federal soldiers, citizens, prisoners and refugees, The 421 burials on this list were from March 31, 1862 until August 20, 1865.

During the latter years of the war, 1864 and 1865 and into 1866, there is burial listing by W. R. Cornelius for many Federal soldiers and 147 CSA soldiers. This record is in the collection of the Tennessee State Library & Archives and was transcribed by Joan Pruett in 2009.

TSLA Website. Cornelius Federal Soldiers Burial Records. Click Index

FEDERAL BURIALS at City Cemetery during the war years

In the sketch for his granddaughter, W.R. Cornelius recorded that he had kept a complete record of the soldiers he had located on the battlefield and those who had died in hospitals.

“... We kept a complete record... we having marked the names on coffins, on head board and on clothing so that they might be easily identified. An account also was kept in book form at the office, of Company, Regiment, State, Date of Death and Cause... (After the war) Representatives of the Government were sent to Nashville to obtain reports of the dead for that department and my records were borrowed by them. They promising to return them to me. Without my knowledge or consent they were removed to Louisville, Ky., letters being sent me from there saying they would be returned. They were later taken to Washington, where all trace of them was lost, altho I made numerous efforts to recover them...”

According to records in Quarter Master files 1865, National Archives, “On or about March 1862, W. R. Cornelius, undertaker, was ordered by Captain Gillem, to bury the U.S. soldiers who had died in the Hospitals, in the southern portion of the City Cemetery, containing about 5 acres, being the same ground formerly used by the Confederate government for the burial of their dead.” When this area had no more space, Cornelius was ordered to bury the dead in a triangular space between the Nashville & Chattanooga and the Tennessee & Alabama railroads, containing about 3 acres. Two years later, on April 11, 1864, Cornelius requested more burial grounds. Captain Isom and Medical Director Surgeon Clendenin selected the grounds on the west side of Cherry Street, and south of the Nashville & Chattanooga railroad with about 11 acres. These two cemeteries were called U.S. Burial Ground – Due West of City Cemetery and U.S. Burial Ground – South West of City Cemetery.

In Military Service records for Death and Burial of Federal soldiers who died in hospital in Nashville, the City Cemetery was always listed even though the burial took place in one of the two U. S Burials grounds.

In a letter, written in September 1863, to the father of a deceased Federal soldier, the clerk at Cumberland Hospital, Nashville, provided exact details of how Federal soldiers were buried at U.S. Burial Ground – Due West of City Cemetery.

“... The graves are all marked by placing a cedar board at the head with the name, rank, Co., Regiment, and I think, date of death, cut in deep with a knife, in plain letters, then the letters are painted, so that a mark of this kind can be recognized in several years from now, for the cedar will last a very long time...”

FEDERAL DISINTERMENTS from original burial sites in Tennessee and southern Kentucky to Nashville National Cemetery

Montgomery C. Meigs served as the Quartermaster General of the U.S. Army during the Civil War. Although a Southern by birth, he was a Union man. By June 1864, the cemeteries in and around Washington were full, Meigs recommended that the estate of Robert E. Lee and his wife Mary Custis Lee, “Arlington,” be declared a military cemetery. In August, he personally supervised the burial of 26 soldiers around the rose garden adjacent to the house. In 1866 more

than 2,000 unknown Federal soldiers were buried in a mass grave in the center of the rose garden. General Meigs wanted to make certain that the house would never be the Lee home again. Arlington Cemetery was the first national cemetery for Civil War Federal soldiers.

In Nashville, General Thomas wanted to establish a cemetery for the Federal dead in the area of the fighting of the Battle of Nashville. General Thomas was the Federal commander during the Battle of Nashville, December 15 & 16, 1864. A site was considered on Charlotte Pike but the price per acre was too expensive and the land was not located near a railroad. A second site, 65 acres, was chosen on Gallatin Pike which had the Louisville and Nashville Railroad directly running through the property. Transportation would then be available for the relocation of the remains by railroad or turnpike. The property was purchased, from George Maney and Craighead heirs, in July 1866.

Because of the efforts of Chuck Sherrill and Wayne Moore, TSLA, the original Federal Burial Sheets in the National Archives were digitized. These records document the removal and reburial of Federal soldiers from 251 burial sites to the Nashville National Cemetery. Natalie Goodwin was engaged by TSLA Friends to transcribe these records and enter them in a database. Federal Burial Sheets report the dis-interments from church yards, farms, country lanes, City Cemetery, U.S. Burial grounds located near the City Cemetery, Pest House in Nashville and from graveyards in towns in Tennessee including Gallatin & Clarksville, and as far north as Bowling Green, Kentucky. The dis-interments began in October 1867 and concluded in January 1868. Roll of Honor, published in 1869, by the U.S. Quartermaster's Department, under the direction of Montgomery C. Meigs, listed the total number reburials as 16,485, of which 3,999 were unknown, had taken place at the Nashville National Cemetery. Federal Burial sheets reported the number of 3,021 removals from the Nashville City Cemetery and 8,592 removals from the two U.S. Burial Grounds, located near the City Cemetery. In total, there were 11,613 removals from the three graveyards in the area of Fort Negley to the Nashville National Cemetery. These figures included Federal soldiers, both white and USCT (United States Colored Troops).

TSLA website. Federal Civil War Burial Sheets Project

CONFEDERATE CIRCLE at Mt. Olivet Cemetery

The concern of ladies in Nashville about the deteriorating condition of the graves of Confederate soldiers at City Cemetery led to an effort to remove and rebury them. In March 1869, the Ladies Memorial Association purchased a handsome site, almost in the middle of Mt. Olivet Cemetery, for the final resting place of CSA soldiers who had been buried in the vicinity Nashville. There was ample space for 2,000 graves. In May 1870, the Ladies held a dedication of the ground where 1,360 soldiers had been re-buried. In the years to come, a tall obelisk, topped with a statue of a Confederate soldier, was placed in the middle of the Confederate Circle. At the time of the re-burials, markers were not placed on the graves. No interment records have been located at Mt. Olivet Cemetery or in other collections which list the names of those re-interred in the Confederate Circle in 1869.

CONFEDERATE BURIALS at City Cemetery in Family Lots

The Sexton recorded in the Interment Books the Civil War burials which took place in private family lots at the City Cemetery. Included in this list would be CSA General Zollicoffer and Lt. Henry Middleton Rutledge Fogg who were both killed at the Battle of Mills Creek (Dripping Springs) in January 1862 in Kentucky. Their bodies were allowed by the Federal Army to be returned to Nashville for burial at City Cemetery. CSA Joseph Pollard, from Montgomery, Alabama, died from wounds at the Battle of Stones River. His tombstone was identified on a 1908 Plat map in the Woods family lot. Fred Zahn, Metro Historical Commission, was able to probe the lot and find the broken pieces of his tombstone which have been repaired and re-set. After the conclusion of the war, some families made efforts to dis-inter and re-bury their soldier kin at City Cemetery. Included in this list would be Lt. Gould, killed during an altercation with General Forrest, Thomas Callender killed at Hoovers Gap and John T. Wheat, son of the second rector of Christ Church, killed at Shiloh. White Turpin died on January 17, 1864, from wounds received at the Battle of Nashville. He was initially buried by W.R. Cornelius the next day. In 1866, his mother re-buried his remains to a private plot and erected a fine marker over his grave. Major General Bushrod Johnson was reburied, next to his wife, in 1996.

To view the names and tombstones for Federal navy men and CSA soldiers buried in family lots, visit www.thenashvillecitycemetery.org On Home Page, in the heading, click-on INTERMENTS. Scroll to Veterans Buried in City Cemetery. Click-on Civil War. Federal or Civil War. CSA for burials in family lots.

Fletch Coke
Fort Negley presentation
December 12, 2015
Posted on City Cemetery website
www.thenashvillecitycemetery.org

Federal and Confederate Soldiers Buried at City Cemetery

Presentation at Fort Negley. By Fletch Coke

December 12, 2015

To view presentation ~ www.thenashvillecitycemetery.org

Additional Suggested Readings:

Nashville City Cemetery (Second Edition 2010)

Order on-line on www.thenashvillecitycemetery.org

Neff, John R., Honoring the Civil War Dead (2005)

Faust, Drew Gilpin, This Republic of Suffering (2008)

Hoobler, James A. Cities Under The Gun: Images of Occupied Nashville & Chattanooga (1986)

Nashville City Cemetery website:

Civil War Interments www.thenashvillecitycemetery.org

TSLA website:

Federal Civil War Burial Sheets

Record of re-interments of Federal soldiers from original burial sites in Tennessee and southern Kentucky to the Nashville National Cemetery October 1867 to January 1868.

Burial Records of Federal Soldiers by Cornelius and Company
(During 1864, 1865 and 1866)

