

GREEN MOUNT SOLDIERS' LOT



Mourners at Alexandria National Cemetery, Virginia, c. 1865. After 1873, standard marble headstones replaced the wood headboards seen here. Miller, *Photographic History of the Civil War* (1910).

Civil War Dead

An estimated 700,000 Union and Confederate soldiers died in the Civil War (1861-1865). As the death toll rose, the U.S. government struggled with the urgent but unplanned need to bury fallen Union troops. This propelled the creation of a national cemetery system.

On September 11, 1861, the War Department directed officers to keep “accurate and permanent records of deceased soldiers.” Federal authority to create military burial grounds came in an Omnibus Act of July 17, 1862. Cemetery sites were chosen where troops were concentrated: camps, hospitals, battlefields, railroad hubs. By 1872, 74 national cemeteries and several soldiers’ lots contained 305,492 remains. About 45 percent were unknown.

The U.S. government established soldiers’ lots at private cemeteries in northern states. National cemeteries, in contrast, were built throughout the South where most Civil War action occurred. While the army reported dozens of lots containing Union dead in the 1870s, the National Cemetery Administration maintains only fifteen. The number of graves ranges from less than ten to nearly 400 in these lots.

Vermont at War

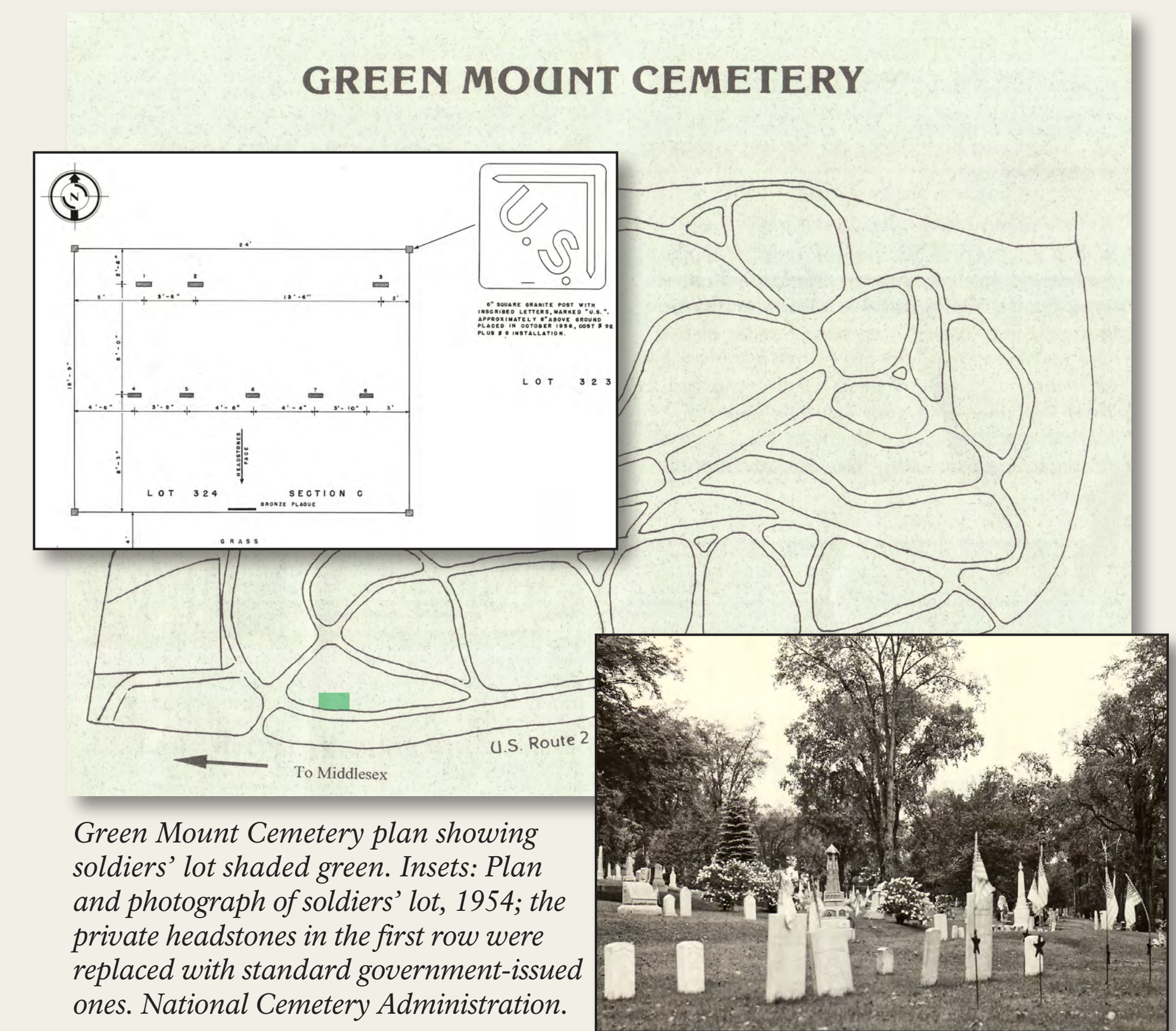
On April 23, 1861, eleven days after Confederate forces assaulted Fort Sumter in South Carolina, Gov. Erastus Fairbanks asked Vermont legislators to help fund the federal response. “The United States government must be sustained and the rebellion suppressed,” he said. After a brief debate, the state legislature appropriated \$1 million to the Civil War effort. Montpelier raised only one regiment, but Vermont’s capital city was home to one of the state’s three U.S. General Hospitals.

Sloan General Hospital, the smallest but most modern of the three, opened in June 1864. Vermont Surgeon General Samuel Thayer Jr. chose the site on a hill near a good spring and with access to the railroad. The hospital’s 496 beds were divided among twelve buildings. The complex included an administration building, dead house, and chapel. It opened after the Battle of Cold Harbor, Virginia (May 31-June 12, 1864), and was among the first hospitals to care for more patients with battle wounds than disease.

During the Civil War, Vermont’s three general hospitals cared for 8,574 patients. Sloan closed in December 1865. In just more than eighteen months, 1,670 patients were treated here. Of the 174 who died, some were buried in town.



Sloan General Hospital, Montpelier, c. 1865. Courtesy of Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont.



Green Mount Cemetery plan showing soldiers’ lot shaded green. Insets: Plan and photograph of soldiers’ lot, 1954; the private headstones in the first row were replaced with standard government-issued ones. National Cemetery Administration.

Soldiers’ Lot

Green Mount Cemetery was established in 1854 on 35 acres in Montpelier. The city deeded 450-square-feet in this cemetery to the federal government on March 28, 1866. The Lot 324 reservation, located along the front of the cemetery, is identified by square granite corner markers inscribed with “U.S.”

Two graves containing Union soldiers were here in 1868, and the number doubled in 1874. The eight interments recorded today make it one of the National Cemetery Administration’s smallest soldiers’ lots.

The graves are marked by standard, round-topped government-issued marble headstones. This design was approved by the secretary of war in 1873 to mark the graves of known Union soldiers.