

National Cemetery Burial Ledgers: Reproduction & Indexing Project, 2009-2012

Historic burial ledgers documenting national cemetery interments from the 1860s to the 1960s are valuable for the genealogical information they contain, as well as being antique artifacts. Concerns over limited access and safekeeping led the NCA History Program to design a project for the electronic reproduction of 60 ledgers and greater access to their content for federal managers and public researchers.

Public Law 37 - *An Act to Establish and to Protect National Cemeteries*, enacted on February 22, 1867, is the first legislative reference to a “register of burials.” The oversized, leather-bound books are the oldest “system”

National Cemetery, at <i>City Point, Va</i>														
Burial No. <i>34</i>	NAME.	RANK.	CO.	REGIMENT.			DATE OF DEATH.			GRAVE MARK.		REMARKS.		
				NUMBER.	STATE.	ARM.	MONTH.	DAY.	YEAR.	SECTION.	NUMBER.	ORIGINAL PLACE OF BURIAL.		No. of DISINTERMENT.
											Locality.	State.		
<i>2443</i>	<i>Hayson, G.</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Mass</i>	<i>7th</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Point of Rocks</i>	<i>Va</i>		
<i>34</i>	<i>Hayman, P.A.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Sept</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>1865</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>City Point</i>	<i>Va</i>		
<i>182</i>	<i>Heathwill, W.</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Conn</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>1865</i>	<i>1</i>				
<i>100</i>	<i>Heary, Andrew</i>	<i>Sr.</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>Pa</i>	<i>5th</i>	<i>Sept</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>1</i>				

of recording military burials. Much of the ledger data is found in NCA’s current tracking system: the electronic Burial Operations Support System (BOSS). Ledger entries include a soldier’s name, date of death, regiment, and grave location. Many Civil War soldiers were buried near where they fell in battle or in temporary cemeteries, and sometimes that location is also recorded in the ledgers. Due to the age of these

documents and the absence of modern personal identifiable information (such as Social Security numbers of living service members) the ledgers are considered public records. Multiple ledgers exist for some cemeteries. Beginning in the late 1990s, the form of cemetery burial data began to evolve to keep up with technology, most recently posted on the internet-accessible Nationwide Gravesite Locator (NGL: <http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov/>).

Between 2009 and 2011, NCA reproduced ledgers by digitization—photographing or scanning each page—and storing it as a high-resolution graphic file format. NCA then transferred 60 fragile, hand-written ledgers for 36 of its oldest cemeteries to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) as required by law. NARA was already the steward of more than 156 U.S. Army ledgers documenting burials at more than 146 facilities.

The digitized ledgers are a convenient source of primary data but entries stored in photographic form are not electronically searchable by name or other information. To maximize the value of these records, in 2011 NCA formally partnered with Ancestry.com to index the entries—nearly 114,000 individuals were extracted from 9,344 pages in all—at no cost to the government. Ancestry.com is a popular subscription source for primary records; it and NARA have partnered for many years to make public-domain records available online. NCA’s project prompted NARA to elevate as a priority the reproduction-and-indexing of its ledgers under contract to Ancestry.com. The combined collection encompasses more than 556,000 individuals contained in more than 216 historic ledgers. VA/NCA staff will have free online access to the indexed ledgers to answer questions from the public and others.

To facilitate the stewardship of national cemetery heritage during the Civil War sesquicentennial and beyond, NCA obtained authorization from Ancestry.com for personnel at the 14 national cemeteries overseen by the National Park Service, associated with pivotal Civil War events, and the two Army-run national cemeteries, to have access to the online ledgers at no cost. Ancestry.com launched access to the burial ledger records on its website in conjunction with Veterans Day 2012.

For more information, visit these links:

- Project [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- List of [cemetery burial ledgers](#) available online at Ancestry.com
- VA [Press Release](#), January 10, 2013