BATON ROUGE NATIONAL CEMETERY

Civil War Baton Rouge

Control of the Mississippi River and New Orleans was vital to the Union war effort. In April 1862, Union gunboats steamed up the river. The vessels evaded the guns of Confederate-held forts located below New Orleans, and the city surrendered without a fight on April 28.

Union vessels anchored at Baton Rouge, March 1863. Library of Congress.

Knowing that Baton Rouge would fall next, Louisiana Gov. Thomas O. Moore ordered that all cotton stored in the city be moved or burned. Residents of the capital city fled as barges of blazing cotton were set adrift on the river. The Union Army captured Baton Rouge on May 7, 1862.

That August, the ironclad gunboat C.S.S. *Arkansas* and infantry commanded by Confederate Gen. John C. Breckinridge attempted to retake the city. On August 5, the Confederates successfully pushed Union troops to the city's outskirts. When fighting resumed the next day, the Union held the line and the Confederates retreated. Baton Rouge remained in federal control for the rest of the war.

Postcard view of cemetery, after 1910. National Cemetery Administration.

National Cemetery

Union soldiers killed in the Battle of Baton Rouge were the first burials here. Soldiers and sailors who died in city hospitals followed. The property was designated Baton Rouge National Cemetery in 1867.

The federal government enlarged the cemetery by purchasing an additional 8 acres. The U.S. Army removed the remains of soldiers buried in Plaquemine and Iberville parishes and Camden, Arkansas, and reinterred them here.

Improvements in the 1870s included a Second Empire-style brick superintendent's lodge, flagstaff, and gun monuments flanking the entry road. The lodge was replaced in 1931.

Section 3 contains several private, pre-Civil War burials from the old Baton Rouge Army Post Cemetery. In 1882, remains from that cemetery were exhumed and reinterred here.

Massachusetts Monument

Massachusetts funded a monument to honor its Civil War troops—thirteen infantry regiments and seven artillery batteries—who served in the U.S. Army Department of the Gulf. The 40-foot-tall granite obelisk was built by J. N. White and Sons of Quincy, Massachusetts, at a cost of $5,000.

On November 15, 1909, Massachusetts Gov. Ebenezer Draper, with fifty-nine officials and Union veterans, travelled to Baton Rouge to dedicate the monument. Louisiana Gov. Jared Y. Sanders and Baton Rouge Mayor Robert L. Pruyn participated in a ceremony that included music, speeches, a military salute, and the playing of "Taps."

Dedication of the Massachusetts Monument, 1909. John Teunisson Photograph Collection, Louisiana State Museum.