CONFEDERATE BURIALS IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY

The Old Confederate Cemetery

Confederate forces occupied Little Rock, Arkansas, from 1861 until September 1863, when the Union Army captured it after a forty-day campaign. As they occupied the city, both armies reported soldiers dying almost daily from injury or disease. Confederate soldiers were buried at Mount Holly Cemetery and other sites near the hospitals, including Little Rock City Cemetery, now the Oakland Fraternal Cemetery. The U.S. government also acquired several adjacent lots in this cemetery. These lots were designated Little Rock National Cemetery in 1868.

Little Rock Confederate Cemetery, c. 1911. Souvenir program, 1911 UCV Reunion in Little Rock.

The Confederate burial ground next to the national cemetery was forgotten for many years. Then, in 1884, members of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Union veterans' organization, cleared the cemetery and marked graves with small, flat-top headstones. Later that year, Mount Holly Cemetery trustees had the remains of 640 Confederate soldiers buried at that cemetery reinterred here. The next year, the trustees erected a squat obelisk monument on the grassy mound above the mass grave.

Ladies' Memorial Association

In June 1884, the city granted the Ladies' Memorial Association (LMA) responsibility for the land containing the Confederate burials. The association was composed of local women sympathetic to the Southern cause whose goal was to honor Confederate graves.

In the years that followed, the LMA had Confederate remains exhumed from cemeteries in and near Little Rock and reinterred here. It also permitted burial of Confederate veterans in the small cemetery and helped pay to bury indigent veterans who died at the Arkansas Confederate Home in Little Rock.

Eventually the LMA merged with the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), to form Memorial Chapter No. 48. The UDC chapter maintained the cemetery and erected a rostrum in 1907 for use during Confederate Memorial Day ceremonies.

Ladies' Memorial Associations existed thirty years before the UDC. These Southern women created Confederate cemeteries, erected monuments and decorated graves. LMA ribbon, c. 1892. Helena Museum, Helena, Ark.

The Cemeteries Merge

On February 7, 1913, the City of Little Rock deeded the Confederate cemetery, along with other property, to the secretary of war with the restriction that the cemetery only be used for the burial of Confederate veterans. The congressional act authorizing the transfer also required that "a suitable gate or entryway" be cut through the wall that separated the Confederate and national cemeteries, and that "organized bodies of ex-Confederates" should continue to use the cemetery for events. The Confederate cemetery was to be treated with the same care as the national one.

The 1907 rostrum erected by the UDC, 1925. National Archives and Records Administration.

A few years after the transfer, the U.S. government furnished pointed-top headstones in place of the small flat-top headstones. Headstones replaced later are inscribed with the Southern Cross of Honor, authorized by the War Department in 1930. The United Daughters of the Confederacy created the cross medal in 1898 and bestowed it upon Confederate veterans or their families. The emblem on the headstone is a simplified version of what appears on the medal.

Burial restrictions on the Confederate cemetery were revoked after 1938, to allow any U.S. veteran to be interred in the former Confederate cemetery.