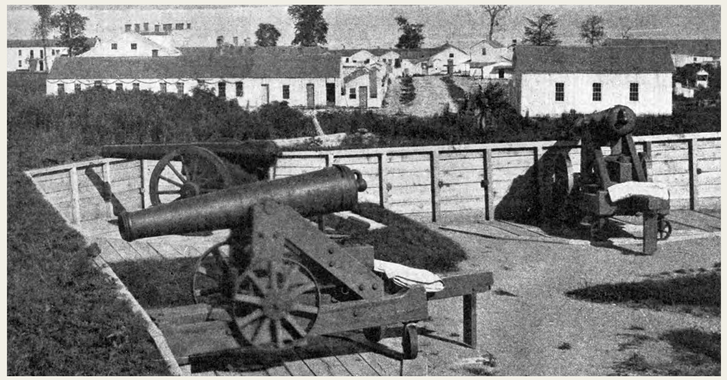
CONFEDERATE STOCKADE CEMETERY

Confederate Prison

On November 15, 1861, the War Department leased one half of Johnson's Island, in Sandusky Bay, Ohio, and began constructing a 15-acre prison camp on the southeast shore. When complete, the prison complex included a 14-foot-tall board stockade that enclosed thirteen barracks, one of which served as a hospital. Each barracks had two external kitchens. Forty structures outside the complex housed prison staff. A redoubt with artillery looked down on the prison to guard against insurrection.



The redoubt at Johnson's Island, c. 1863. Miller's Photographic History of the Civil War.

In June 1862, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton ordered that all Confederate officers held at Camp Chase prison in Columbus, Ohio, be moved to Johnson's Island. It became the official prison for Confederate officers; however, non-officers were held there, and officers were interned elsewhere.

Over the course of the war, about 12,000 prisoners were confined on Johnson's Island. Compared to other Civil War prison facilities, a remarkably low number—239—died, despite the harsh climate and remote location. The first recorded death was David T. J. Wood on May 6, 1862; William Michael, who died in June 1865, the month the prison closed, was the last.

Confederate Stockade Cemetery, c. 1901. Sandusky Library Archives Research Center.

The Cemetery

Prisoners who died at Johnson's Island were buried in a cemetery about a half mile from the prison. The soft, loamy island soil made digging easy, but 4-5 feet below ground was solid bedrock, which prevented burials at customary levels of 6 feet. Each grave was marked with a wooden headboard.

After the war, friends or relatives removed more than twenty bodies. Marble headstones—206 total—were erected in 1890 through the efforts of a group of Georgia journalists who visited the cemetery and reported in state newspapers the lack of permanent markers. Many of these headstones remain in place today.

The cemetery after the headstones were placed, pre-1910. Sandusky Library Archives Research Center.

Mary Patton Hudson

In 1905, the Robert Patton Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), bought the cemetery and adjacent lot from private owners. This purchase linked the cemetery and Mary Patton Hudson, the chapter's leader, for more than twenty years. Mrs. Hudson, known for her determination, worked diligently on behalf of the cemetery. After the Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead was authorized in 1906, Mrs. Hudson immediately began lobbying for cemetery improvements including a new fence. Commissioner William Elliott declined to pay to enclose a cemetery the federal government did not own. Mrs. Hudson refused to relinquish the property.

To honor the soldiers buried on Johnson's Island, Mrs. Hudson raised the money to erect a large monument in 1910—a bronze statue of a Confederate soldier sculpted by Moses Ezekiel. Her crusade to improve and beautify the cemetery continued until her death in 1920. In 1931, the UDC donated the cemetery to the U.S. government.

Unveiling "The Lookout" statue in 1910. Sandusky Library Archives Research Center.

Mary Patton Hudson, c. 1905. Mrs. Hudson sent this photograph to Commissioner Elliott, "So he would know who he was talking to." National Archives and Records Administration.