LITTLE ROCK NATIONAL CEMETERY

St. John's Hospital in Little Rock, c. 1870. Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.

Civil War Little Rock

Though Arkansas was one of the last states to secede from the Union, pro-Confederate activity began in February 1861, when state militia seized the federal arsenal in Little Rock.

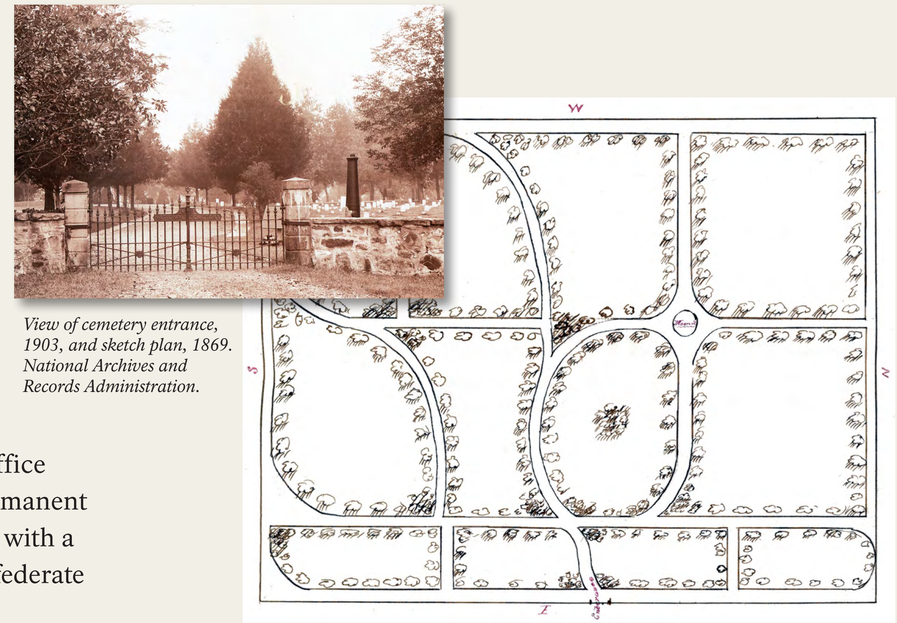
The first major battle in the state occurred in March 1862, at Pea Ridge, near the Missouri border. In July, Union forces occupied the eastern city of Helena, on the Mississippi River. Five months later, the Battle of Prairie Grove near Fayetteville, secured Union control of northwest Arkansas.

After the Confederates failed to retake Helena in July 1863, the Union Army marched on the state capital of Little Rock. Between August 25 and September 10, 1863, forces led by Union Gen. Frederick Steele fought a series of engagements that ended with the Battle of Bayou Fourche, east of the city. General Steele seized Little Rock, the fourth Confederate state capital to fall, and Union forces occupied it for the rest of the war.

The army established a hospital at St. John's College. By 1865, the hospital had treated nearly 5,000 patients.

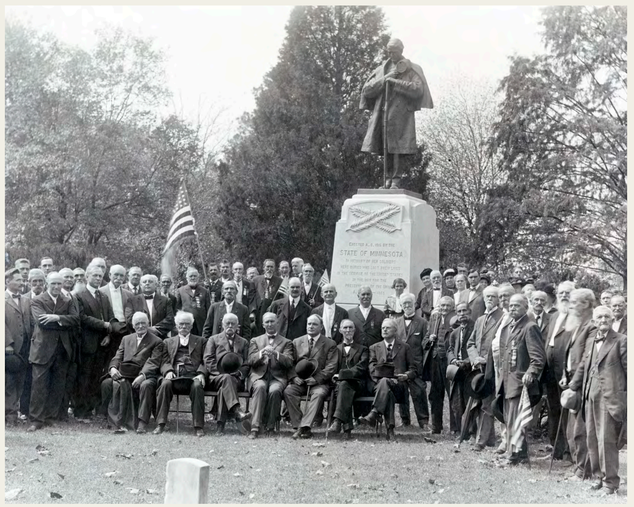
National Cemetery

The Union Army buried their dead in the southeast corner of the new city cemetery—now Oakland-Fraternal Cemetery. In 1868, the federal government purchased additional land adjacent to the original burials and the 12.1-acre property was designated Little Rock National Cemetery. Remains were brought here from DeValls Bluff, Lewisburg, Marks Mills, Pine Bluff, Princeton, and other Arkansas towns and battlefields. About half the 5,409 remains were buried as unknowns.



View of cemetery entrance, 1903, and sketch plan, 1869. National Archives and Records Administration.

In the 1870s, the U.S. Army Quartermaster General's Office built a lodge for the cemetery superintendent, placed permanent marble headstones on graves, and enclosed the cemetery with a stone wall. The old Confederate Cemetery, now the Confederate Section, was deeded to the federal government in 1913.



Veterans and dignitaries at the Minnesota Monument dedication, September 22, 1916. Minnesota Historical Society.

Minnesota Monument

In 1913, the Minnesota Monument Commission selected St. Paul sculptor John K. Daniels to create monuments to be placed in five national cemeteries. Daniels designed two monuments that reflected Minnesotans' perception of the noble character of their fallen soldiers, and the cause for which they fought. The Little Rock monument honors the valor and sacrifice made by thirty-six Minnesota soldiers buried here.

Funded by the state legislature, the bronze figure was dedicated September 22, 1916. The ceremony was attended by the Minnesota and Arkansas governors, Little Rock's mayor, and Union and Confederate veterans. Minnesota erected identical monuments at Andersonville and Memphis national cemeteries. The second monument designed by Daniels was placed at Jefferson Barracks and Nashville national cemeteries.

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