MOUNT PLEASANT SOLDIERS' LOT

Mourners at Alexandria National Cemetery, Virginia, c. 1865. After 1873, standard marble headstones replaced the wood headboards seen here. Miller, Photographic History of the Civil War *(1910).*

Civil War Dead

An estimated 700,000 Union and Confederate soldiers died in the Civil War (1861-1865). As the death toll rose, the U.S. government struggled with the urgent but unplanned need to bury fallen Union troops. This propelled the creation of a national cemetery system.

On September 11, 1861, the War Department directed officers to keep "accurate and permanent records of deceased soldiers." Federal authority to create military burial grounds came in an Omnibus Act of July 17, 1862. Cemetery sites were chosen where troops were concentrated: camps, hospitals, battlefields, railroad hubs. By 1872, 74 national cemeteries and several soldiers' lots contained 305,492 remains, about 45 percent were unknown.

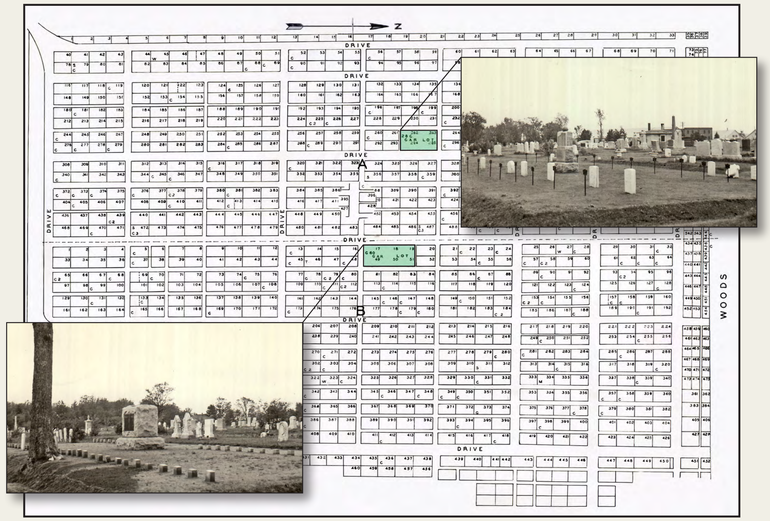
The U.S. government established soldiers' lots at private cemeteries in northern states. National cemeteries, in contrast, were built throughout the South where most Civil War action occurred. While the army reported dozens of lots containing Union dead in the 1870s, the National Cemetery Administration maintains only fifteen. The number of graves ranges from less than ten to nearly 400 in these lots.

Augusta at War

On April 22, 1861, ten days after Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, Gov. Israel Washburn addressed the Maine General Assembly. The governor requested, and the assembly authorized, 10,000 recruits for three years' service and $3 million to train and equip them. Companies of volunteers began to arrive in Augusta. By December 1861, six infantry regiments, one cavalry regiment, and an artillery battery had trained here and departed for the war's front line.

In 1862, a rendezvous was designated at Augusta for new recruits. Known as Camp Keyes, barracks and other structures were constructed on farmland overlooking the capital city. Camp Keyes served briefly as a hospital until this function moved to Camp Cony, a former cavalry barracks. The latter was expanded and renamed Cony General Hospital. It was Maine's only U.S. General Hospital where sick and wounded Union soldiers were treated throughout the Civil War.

Field, staff, and line officers of the 19th Maine Volunteer Infantry, c. 1865. Maine State Archives.



Mount Pleasant Cemetery plan, 1941, with NCA property shaded green. Maine State Library. Insets: Mid-twentieth century photographs of the eastern division lot (left) and the western division lot (right). National Cemetery Administration.

Soldiers' Lot

Mount Pleasant Cemetery was established in 1853 on Augusta's "Burnt Hill." Half of its 12 acres was to be sold to families; the other half was to be available to the public at no cost.

Over time, the city donated ten lots within Mount Pleasant Cemetery to the U.S. government for Union soldiers who died in local hospitals. Six adjacent lots (17-19 and 49-51) were in the cemetery's eastern division. An 1874 inspection reported sixty burials here. The other four lots (262-263 and 294-295), in the western division, would eventually contain the remains of twenty-nine soldiers—sixteen known and thirteen unknown.

In 1906, the federal government placed a granite die-and-base monument in the eastern division lot to mark fifty-five graves. The Seth Williams Post No. 13, Grand Army of the Republic, a Union veterans' organization, erected a monument in the western division lot.