NATCHEZ NATIONAL CEMETERY

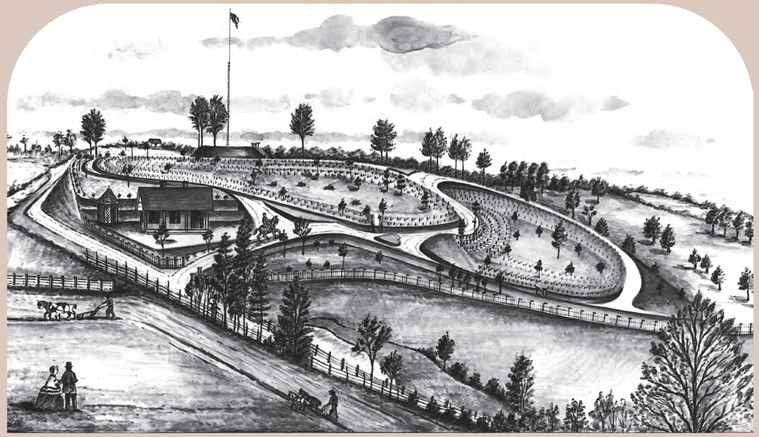
Civil War Natchez

In 1860, Natchez was one of the wealthiest cities in the United States. Within the surrounding Adams County, population 14,000, nearly 70 percent were enslaved. A few individuals held the vast majority of those slaves. Forty-one wealthy individuals each owned eighty-nine or more slaves.

When the Civil War began, fifteen companies of Confederate militia formed in Natchez. Wealthy planters equipped many of them with uniforms and weapons. In May 1862, after capturing New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Union gunboats steamed up the Mississippi River and briefly occupied the city. Union troops returned to Natchez on July 13, 1863, and held it throughout the war.

The Union Army used at least two Natchez buildings as military hospitals—Natchez Marine Hospital and "The Gardens," a plantation house. One army report listed a city hospital and a pest house in Natchez used by the military. During the war, 1,784 Union personnel died and were buried in the city.

Men gather at the Natchez courthouse to enlist in Confederate service, c. 1861. Thomas H. and Joan Gandy Photograph Collection, Mss. 3 778, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.



Natchez National Cemetery, from Brvt. Lt. Col. E. B. Whitman's final report, c. 1869. Whitman used the phrase "Harvest of Death" in his exhaustive report to describe the work of collecting the dead. National Archives and Records Administration.

"Harvest of Death"

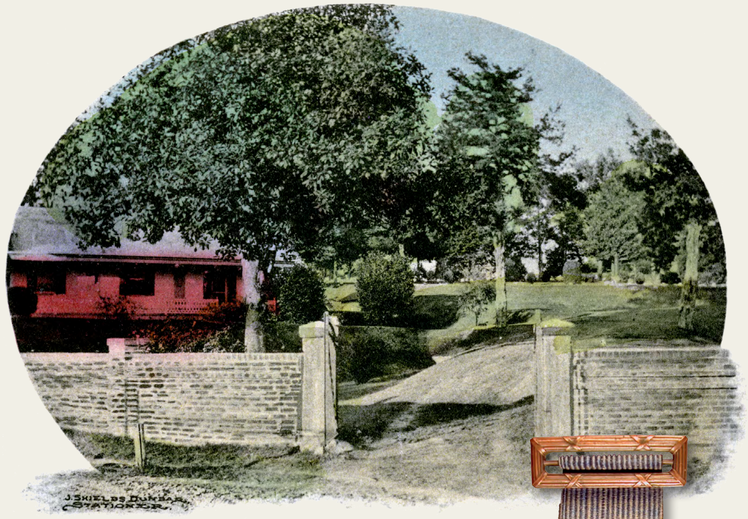
Early in 1866, Capt. E. B. Whitman began gathering information in preparation for the reinterment of Union soldiers buried in the Military Division of Tennessee. This huge district included Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

Captain Whitman, later lieutenant colonel, placed newspaper notices seeking locations of Union graves. Citizens, chaplains, soldiers, and officers replied. Whitman made three major expeditions across the region, stopping at hundreds of battlefields and engagement sites. Because of his work, thousands of Union dead were moved to twelve new national cemeteries.

In May 1869, Whitman submitted a detailed summary of this difficult project to the quartermaster general. The report contained sketches and site plans of each cemetery, and data on interments and service affiliations.

National Cemetery

In 1866, the government purchased 11 acres near Natchez City Cemetery. Remains were brought here from elsewhere in the city, and sites in Mississippi and Louisiana. By the 1870s, the remains of 3,085 soldiers were interred in the cemetery. The identities of only 305 were known. The cemetery was enclosed by a brick wall about 1880. In 1931, the original brick lodge was replaced, and an octagonal rostrum constructed.



Postcard view of cemetery entrance, c. 1906. National Cemetery Administration.

One Civil War Medal of Honor recipient, Landsman Wilson Brown, is buried here. His commendation was for gallantry aboard the U.S.S. *Hartford* during the Battle of Mobile Bay on August 5, 1864. A native of Natchez, he died in 1900 (Section G, Grave 3152).

Civil War Navy Medal of Honor. Naval History and Heritage Command.