NEW ALBANY NATIONAL CEMETERY

"Falls of the Ohio" in the Civil War

The towns of Jeffersonville and New Albany, Indiana, are located near the falls of the Ohio River across from Louisville, Kentucky. This location made them critical to the Union war effort. Jeffersonville was home to Camp Joe Holt, a recruiting and training center for Indiana and Kentucky troops. In 1864, the U.S. Army completed Jefferson General Hospital, where more than 16,120 Union soldiers were treated.

Jeffersonville also served as a Union supply depot. Southbound ammunition, rations, uniforms, wagons, and other provisions were transported by railroad through Louisville, or shipped down the Ohio River.

All or parts of seven Indiana regiments—five infantry and two cavalry—originated in New Albany. In 1862, the Union Army converted several schools and other buildings into hospitals. Dr. Thomas Fry was ordered to New Albany to supervise these facilities. He recommended a cemetery be established near the hospitals.

Camp Joe Holt, c. 1866. Indiana Historical Society.

New Albany 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 tireless 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

Established in 1862, the first burials at New Albany National Cemetery were Union soldiers who died in local hospitals. By 1869, this 5-acre tract contained 2,807 interments. Most remains were removed from sites along the Ohio River and its tributaries in Indiana, Kentucky, and West Virginia.

The cemetery was soon enclosed by a stone wall, and contained a flagstaff and a rostrum. By the 1870s, a brick Second Empire-style lodge was completed for the superintendent and his family. Two gun monuments flanked a central walkway. The existing rostrum replaced the original one in 1931.

By law, the secretary of war appointed a "meritorious and trustworthy" superintendent to manage the cemetery. John Jay Smith, formerly a sergeant in Company H, 33rd U.S. Infantry, was selected for the position here on August 20, 1868.

Cemetery in 1904. A temporary frame lodge (1868) is visible behind the brick lodge (1871), where it was reused as a summer kitchen. The brick lodge was replaced in 1941, but it was razed in 1985. National Archives and Records Administration.