QUINCY NATIONAL CEMETERY

An early-twentieth century reunion of Company E, 50th Illinois Infantry, in Camp Point, Illinois. The regiment was organized in Quincy in 1861. Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County.

Civil War Quincy

Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina on April 12, 1861. Three days later, President Abraham Lincoln called for volunteers to suppress the rebellion. Men in Quincy, Illinois, rushed to volunteer for federal service.

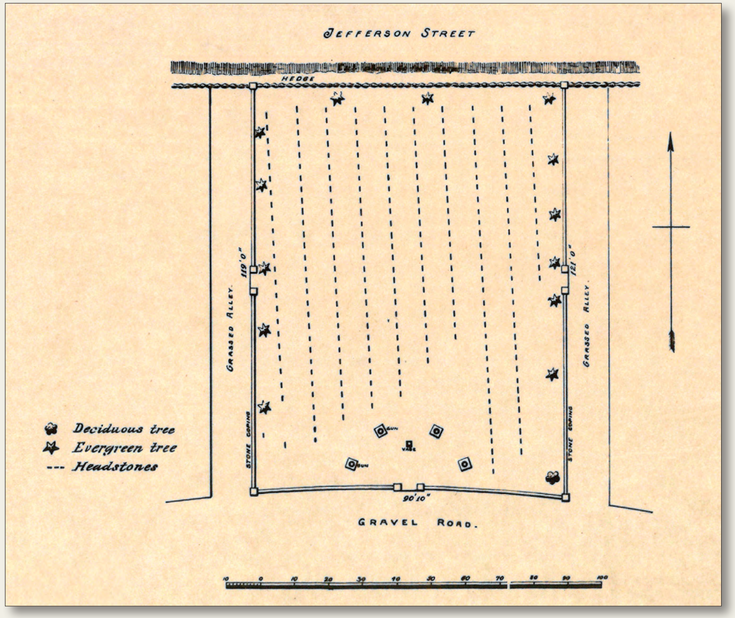
Located on the Mississippi River and served by railroads, the city was an excellent staging area for soldiers headed south. The U.S. Army constructed a permanent barracks in Franklin Square, the heart of the city.

As the Civil War began in earnest, wounded troops required medical care. Quincy's first hospital opened in July 1861 in a former chair factory. A second opened in a three-story brick factory. Finally, the U.S. Army occupied and converted the Quincy College campus into hospital space. Many sick and wounded soldiers died in these facilities.

Soldiers' Lot

In 1861, the U.S. Army began burying its dead in a lot within Woodland Cemetery. This cemetery had been established in 1847 by Quincy founder and former Illinois Gov. John Wood. By the end of the war, the 12,000-square-foot lot contained 242 graves, including six unknowns.

In 1870, the lot was officially donated to the federal government. Stone curbing enclosed three sides. Four gun monuments marked the south entrance. The local chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, a Union veterans' organization, in 1882 successfully lobbied to have the property designated a national cemetery. When the first superintendent appointed here was charged with fraud, the secretary of war canceled the position. Thereafter, the government paid the Woodland Cemetery Association to care for the gravesites.



Soldiers' lot plan at Woodland Cemetery, 1892. National Archives and Records Administration.

Soldiers' lot in Graceland Cemetery, 1933. National Archives and Records Administration.

National Cemetery

Woodland Cemetery's location on a ridge above the Mississippi River led to erosion problems. Faced with a choice between building a retaining wall or moving the dead, the U.S. Army concluded it was best to relocate the graves. In fall 1899, the federal government purchased a lot in Graceland Cemetery, east of downtown, from the Quincy Cemetery Association. The remains of 287 soldiers were reinterred in the new 0.45-acre soldiers' lot—no longer classified as a national cemetery. The federal government contracted with the association to maintain its property.

By 1924, a part-time caretaker was appointed to oversee the soldiers' lot. In 1936, it was redesignated Quincy National Cemetery. Over the years, modern development, including the extension of Maine Street through the private cemetery in the 1970s, has separated the two burial grounds.