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.

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.