

CAMP CHASE CONFEDERATE CEMETERY



Camp Chase, c. 1864. Ohio Historical Society.

Camp Chase Prison

When President Abraham Lincoln called for volunteers to suppress the Southern rebellion in April 1861, thousands of men rushed to Camp Jackson in Columbus, Ohio. Authorities established Camp Chase after volunteers overwhelmed Camp Jackson, which had been hastily set up in a city park. Camp Chase remained a Union training camp throughout the war but assumed another function in June 1861, when the first prisoner arrived. By November, Camp Chase held nearly 300 prisoners, many of them Northern civilians charged with aiding the Confederacy.

On February 16, 1862, Fort Donelson, a Confederate stronghold on the Cumberland River west of Clarksville, Tennessee, surrendered. Faced with housing 15,000 prisoners, the federal government turned several training camps, including Camp Chase, into prison camps. When prisoner exchanges ceased in summer 1863, the Camp Chase population exploded to more than 2,000 men. Camp Chase operated for the duration of the war, but by July 1865 all remaining prisoners had been released.

The Prison Cemetery

By the time Camp Chase closed in 1865, more than 2,000 Confederate soldiers were buried here in graves marked with wooden headboards. After the war, family and friends removed 126 bodies. Later, the remains of ninety-nine Confederates buried in Columbus City Cemetery and at Camp Dennison, near Cincinnati, were reinterred here. In 1879, the U.S. government bought the property.

Privately funded improvements and annual memorial observances began in 1893 under the direction of William Knauss, a former Union soldier. Knauss hired Henry Briggs, a local farmer, to maintain the cemetery. He also installed the memorial boulder.

Knauss formed the Camp Chase Memorial Association to solicit funds to decorate the Confederate graves and erect a formal monument. The existing granite arch topped by a zinc soldier was erected in 1902.

In 1908, after determining that individual graves could be identified, the Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead installed headstones. The Commission also erected metal fencing atop the stone wall and the decorative entrance gate to better secure the cemetery.



The monument, c. 1940. Urns on either side of the soldier were replaced later. National Archives and Records Administration.

Toward Reconciliation

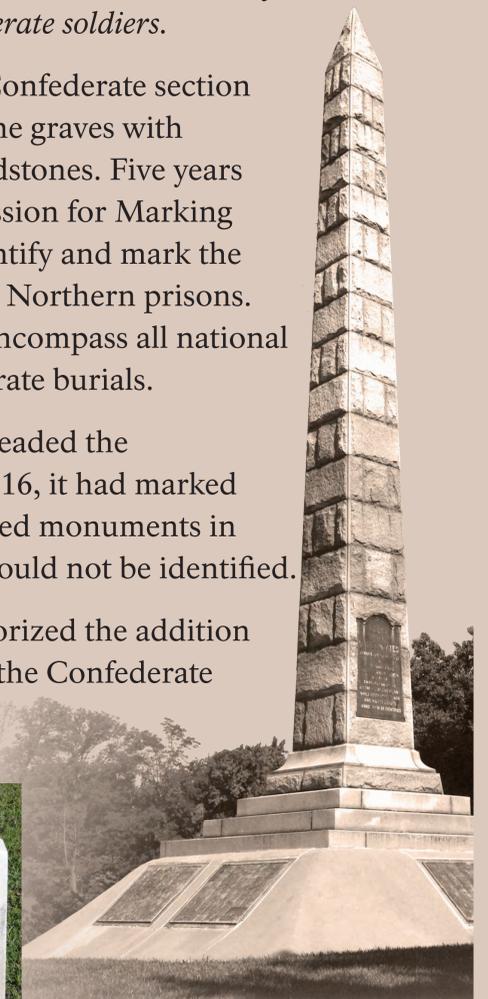
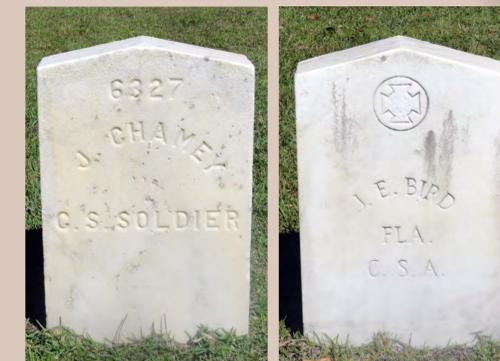
On May 30, 1868, the Grand Army of the Republic decorated Union and Confederate graves at Arlington National Cemetery. Thirty years later President William McKinley proclaimed:

The Union is once more the common altar of our love and loyalty, our devotion and sacrifice . . . Every soldier's grave made during our unfortunate Civil War is a tribute to American valor . . . in the spirit of fraternity we should share with you in the care of the graves of the Confederate soldiers.

The War Department created the Confederate section at Arlington in 1901, and marked the graves with distinctive pointed-top marble headstones. Five years later, Congress created the Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead to identify and mark the graves of Confederates who died in Northern prisons. Its mission was later expanded to encompass all national cemeteries that contained Confederate burials.

Four former Confederate officers headed the Commission over its lifetime. By 1916, it had marked in excess of 25,500 graves and erected monuments in locations where individual graves could not be identified.

In 1930, the War Department authorized the addition of the Southern Cross of Honor to the Confederate headstone.



North Alton Confederate Cemetery Monument, 1909, Alton, Ill.
Original Commission headstone (left) and headstone with Southern Cross of Honor (right).