

CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY GOVERNMENT LOTS

Civil War Washington City

Over the course of the Civil War, the nation's capital was transformed. The dignified government city Pierre Charles L'Enfant laid out in 1791 was hardened into a sprawling military center. Encircled by strong defenses, the District of Columbia was among the most-heavily fortified cities in the world from 1861-1865.

As fighting continued and Union casualties rose, the U.S. Army created a medical center to care for injured soldiers flooding the city. A lone hospital served the city in April 1861. Five years later, there were 100 or more. The two largest hospitals—Freedman and Lincoln—each housed in excess of 2,000 patients. Armory Square, Carver, Emory, and Mount Pleasant hospitals each contained 1,000 or more beds.

Washington City's population skyrocketed when 30,000 fugitive slaves arrived in search of freedom and opportunity. When the Compensated Emancipation Act became law on April 16, 1862, it became the first emancipated city in America. Thousands of freedmen enlisted here and served in the U.S. Colored Troops.



A ward in Armory Square Hospital, Washington, D.C., c. 1863. Library of Congress.



Watercolor of Congressional Cemetery by Benjamin Latrobe, c. 1812. Considered America's first architect, Latrobe is credited with the cenotaph design seen here. Originally painted white, the geometrical memorial markers were constructed from Aquia sandstone. Library of Congress.

The Burial Ground

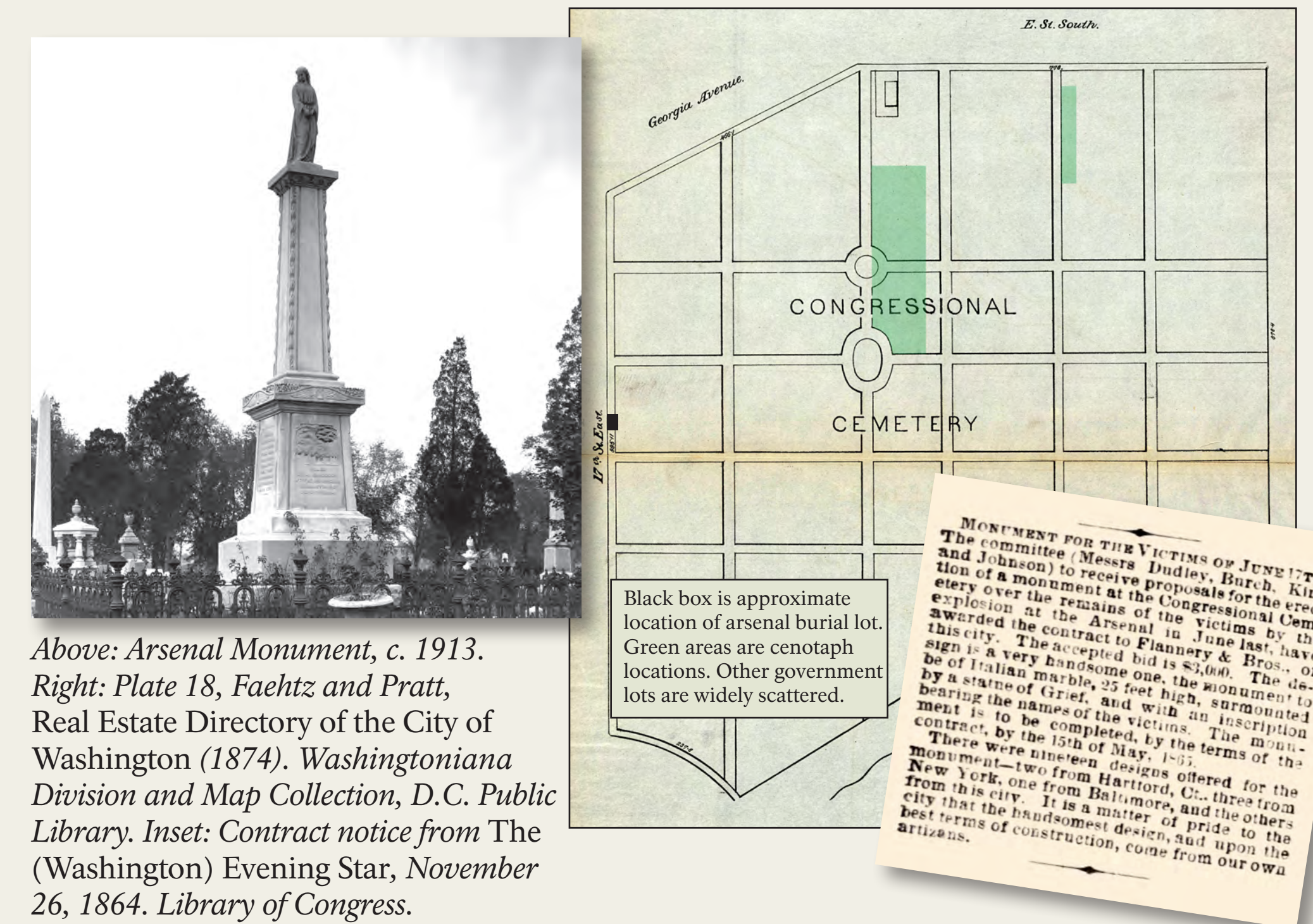
Congressional Cemetery was established as Washington Parish Burial Ground in 1807. It started on 4.5 acres in the southeast quadrant of the city bounded by E, G, 18th, and 19th streets. In 1816, the landowner, Christ Church, identified 100 gravesites in which to bury U.S. Congress members who died in the city. Eligibility later extended to other government officials.

About 1820, it became the practice here to memorialize notables with a "cenotaph." A headstone marks a grave; a cenotaph usually does not. Of the 169 cenotaphs here, about fifty mark a burial. By 1876, Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia surpassed Congressional Cemetery as the preferred destination for deceased national leaders.

U.S. government property within Congressional Cemetery is made up of many separate lots—806 sites contain 469 burials. These are marked with government-issued headstones, cenotaphs, or other private memorial objects.

Civil War Burials

In 1868, the U.S. Army reported seventy-nine Union soldiers interred in Congressional Cemetery. The men likely died at military facilities nearby. Most Union soldiers who died in the Washington area were buried in the national cemetery established in August 1861 at the Soldiers' Home (now Armed Forces Retirement Home, Washington, D.C.), and after 1863 at Arlington National Cemetery.



Above: Arsenal Monument, c. 1913. Right: Plate 18, Faehtz and Pratt, Real Estate Directory of the City of Washington (1874). Washingtoniana Division and Map Collection, D.C. Public Library. Inset: Contract notice from The (Washington) Evening Star, November 26, 1864. Library of Congress.

A government lot in Congressional became the final resting place of young women killed in the June 17, 1864, Washington Arsenal explosion. Their funeral, attended by President Abraham Lincoln and hundreds of mourners, took place two days later. Fifteen victims were buried in Range 97-98, Sites 142-146; two others were interred in family plots in the cemetery. A year after the tragedy, the 26-foot-tall, white marble Arsenal Monument was erected to honor the women. Funded by private donations and designed by Lot Flannery, it is inscribed with the names of the twenty-one victims below the allegorical female figure of "Grief."