

CORINTH NATIONAL CEMETERY



Union soldiers and supplies at the Corinth railroad depot, c. 1862. Library of Congress.

Civil War Corinth

Corinth was founded in the 1850s at the crossing of the Memphis and Charleston, and the Mobile and Ohio railroads. During the Civil War, Union and Confederate forces fought for control of this important railroad center.

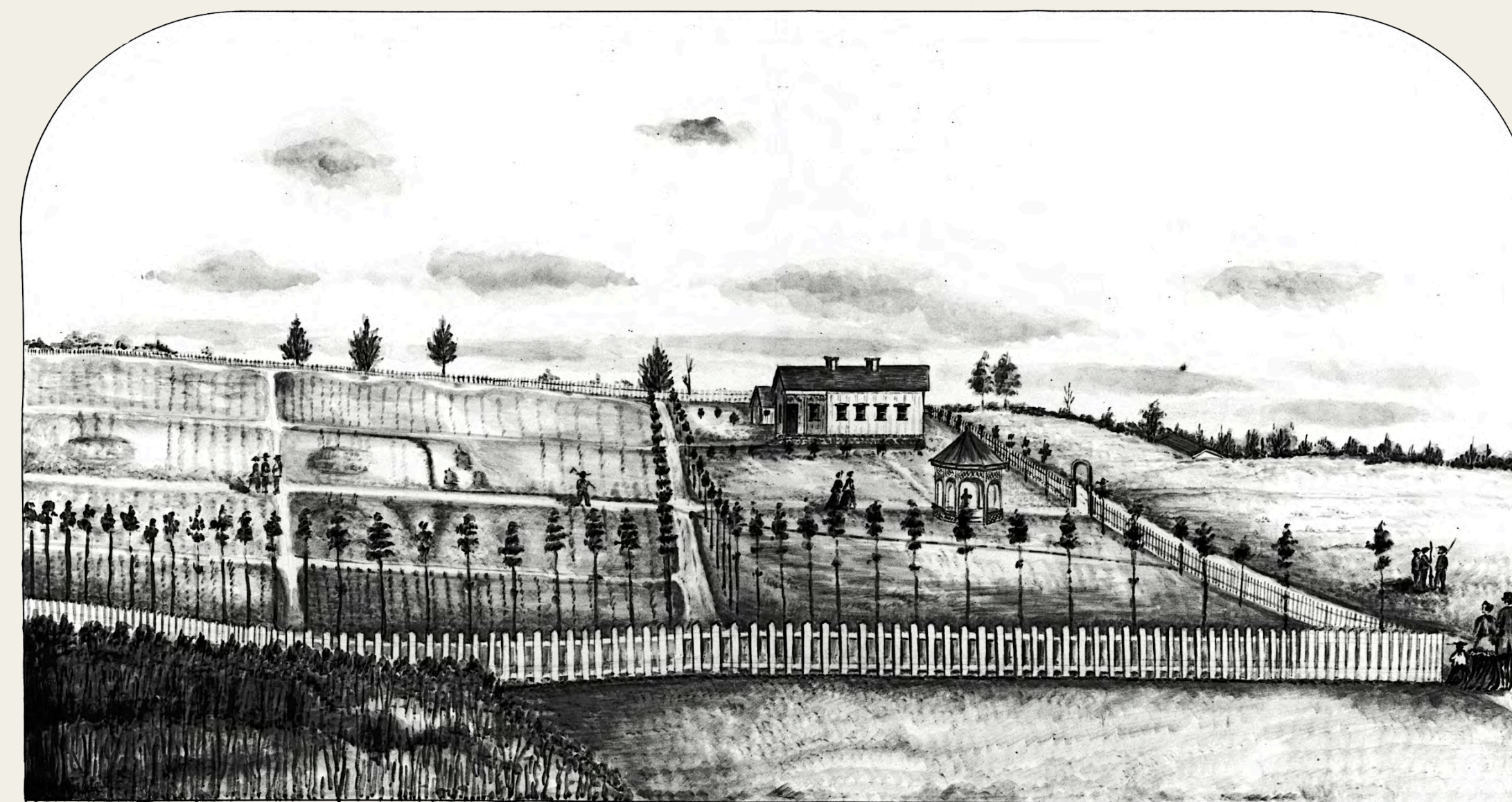
After Nashville, Tennessee, fell to the Union in early 1862, Confederate forces withdrew south to the town. After their defeat at Shiloh in April, Confederate troops again retreated to Corinth where they came under siege. Eventually Union forces captured the town and spent months fortifying it.

In October 1862, Confederate Gen. Earl Van Dorn tried to retake Corinth. His troops pushed Union forces from the outer fortification into the town center but they were ultimately repelled by artillery and small arms fire. The Union Army left Corinth in January 1864, leaving behind burned buildings and damaged rail lines.

“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 information on the locations of Union graves. Citizens, chaplains, soldiers, and officers replied.



Corinth 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.

Whitman made three major expeditions across the region, stopping at hundreds of battlefields and engagement sites. Because of his 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

In 1866, the U.S. government purchased 20 acres, less than a mile southeast of the city, on which to establish Corinth National Cemetery. Remains from northern Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee were reinterred here by state affiliation. Whitman's 1869 cemetery plan indicates that soldiers from Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin were buried in Sections A-D. Unknown soldiers were buried on the east and west perimeters. Dead from the Battle of Brice's Crossroads, some 50 miles to the south, were interred by the cemetery entrance.

An 1867 law directed the secretary of war to appoint a “meritorious and trustworthy” superintendent to manage each national cemetery. Corinth's first superintendent was Joseph Berrigan, formerly a private with the 43rd New York Infantry.

In the 1870s, the U.S. Army placed marble headstones on the graves, and erected a brick lodge for the superintendent. The lodge was replaced in 1934.



Groundskeeping among unknown grave markers at Corinth, 1892. National Archives and Records Administration.