

# FINN'S POINT NATIONAL CEMETERY

## Fort Delaware

Fort Delaware on Pea Patch Island, in the Delaware River, was part of a system of permanent fortifications built between 1817 and 1861 to protect the U.S. coastline. Built over ten years, the fort protected the ports of Philadelphia and Wilmington. It was the largest and most powerful of the coastal strongholds. When fully armed, Fort Delaware was equipped with more than 150 cannon.

With Abraham Lincoln's election as president in November 1860, "slave states" began to agitate toward secession. Voters in Delaware rejected Lincoln and overwhelmingly supported the southern Democratic candidate. Nonetheless, on January 3, 1861, the state legislature unanimously rejected secession.

When Jefferson Davis became president of the Confederate States of America a month later, only twenty-one soldiers, without artillery, were posted at Fort Delaware. By June, the garrison had grown to 250 soldiers with forty-seven artillery pieces. However, it soon became clear the Confederate navy was not a threat.

In July 1861, eight Confederate prisoners of war arrived at the fort. It served as a prison for the rest of the war.



Fort Delaware, from sheet music "Sounds of Fort Delaware," 1864. Library of Congress.

## Burying Union Dead

Union soldiers, many of whom were prison guards, died at Fort Delaware. They were buried in a post cemetery established outside the fort walls on Pea Patch Island.



The wall and gate in 1903. National Archives and Records Administration.

In addition to the island cemetery, the U.S. Army established a cemetery at Finns Point, New Jersey, in 1863, for the burial of Confederate prisoners who died at Fort Delaware. The remains of more than 2,000 prisoners and ten guards were transported from the island and buried here during the course of the Civil War.

In May 1875, the governor of Virginia wrote the secretary of war requesting information about Confederate graves on government land. This letter initiated an inspection of the Finns Point and Pea Patch Island cemeteries.

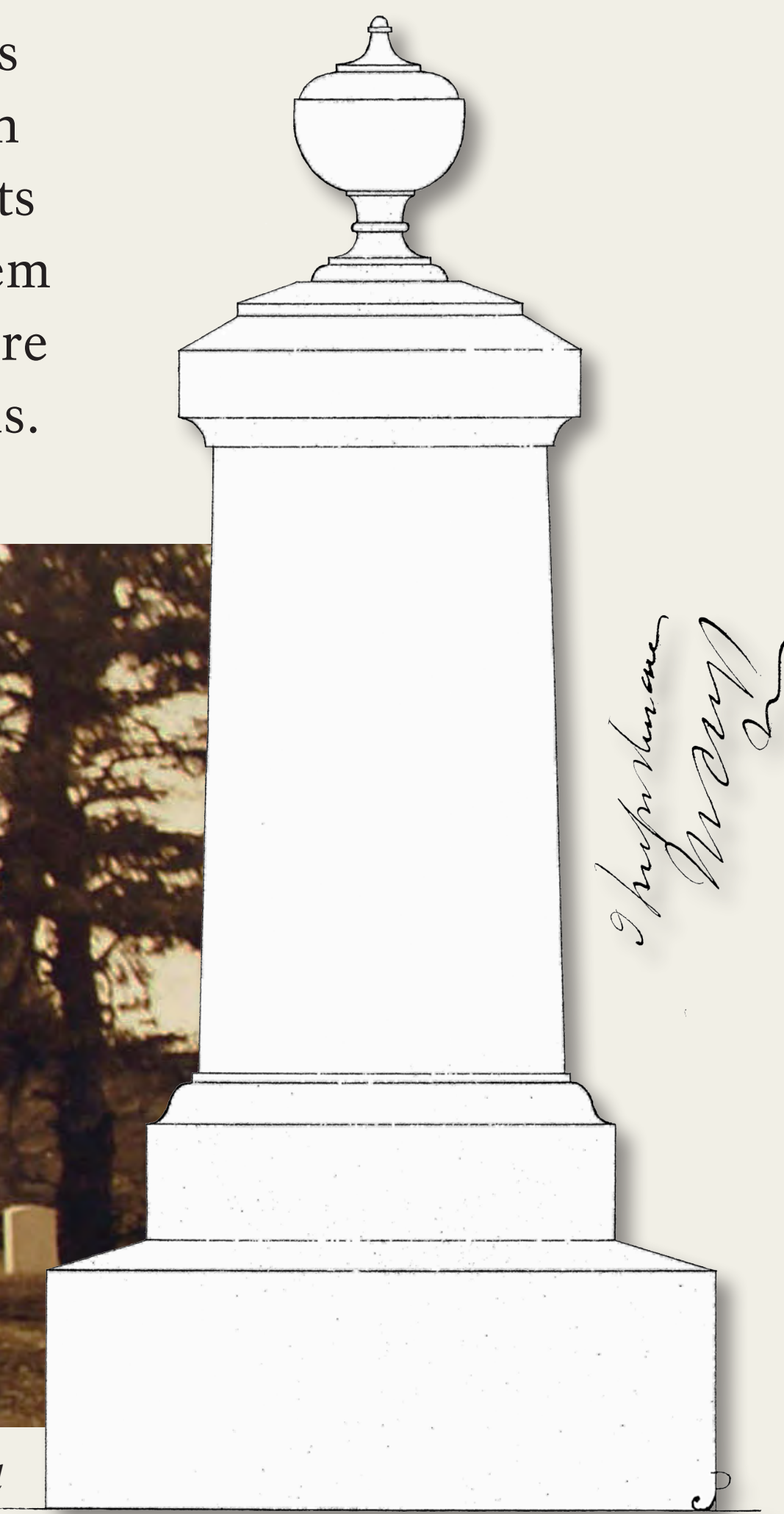
As a result, the federal government decided to remove all burials from the island. By November the remains of 209 Confederate prisoners and 135 Union soldiers were reinterred here at Finn's Point National Cemetery.

In 1878, the army completed the Second Empire-style superintendent's lodge. A year later the government erected a simple marble obelisk dedicated to the 135 federal soldiers buried in the cemetery. It is inscribed with the names of 105 known dead. A cast-concrete temple-shaped structure was built to shelter the monument in 1936.

The 4.5-acre cemetery was enclosed by a stone wall in the 1880s. Cast-iron tablets bearing stanzas of the poem "Bivouac of the Dead" were also placed on the grounds.



The Union Monument, 1933 (above), and concept drawing signed by Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs (right). National Archives and Records Administration.



No. 46  
Scale 1/2" = 1 foot