

FLORENCE NATIONAL CEMETERY

Civil War Florence

When Atlanta fell to the Union Army in September 1864, Gen. William T. Sherman began his “March to the Sea.” Fearing the Union Army would free prisoners held in southern Georgia, Confederate authorities moved them. Some 10,000 Union prisoners of war were relocated to the unfinished Florence Military Prison in October.

A 16-foot-tall log stockade enclosed the hospital, tents, and other simple structures. A swampy stream running through the 23-acre prison provided the only source of water.

During the six months the prison operated, more than 25 percent of the 12,000 prisoners died. The bodies were buried in one of two nearby cemeteries. Former prisoner Robert H. Kellogg recalled:

[The dead] were piled one upon another until the wagon was filled. A party of prisoners was at work every day digging trenches where the bodies of the dead soldiers were to be laid.



Florence Military Prison, 1864, by Pvt. Robert Knox Sneden. Virginia Historical Society.



Postcard view of cemetery, c. 1923. National Archives and Records Administration.

National Cemetery

In 1865, the U.S. Army quartermaster general designated the original 3.76-acre prison cemetery as Florence National Cemetery. It contains not only the bodies of Union prisoners who died in Florence, but soldiers removed from Charleston, Cheraw, Darlington, and Marion, South Carolina.

By 1874, of the remains of 2,969 men here, only 168 were known. The federal government had erected a brick superintendent’s lodge, flagstaff, and two gun monuments. In 1877, a brick wall enclosed the cemetery. A second lodge was built in 1906, but the army removed it in 1970.

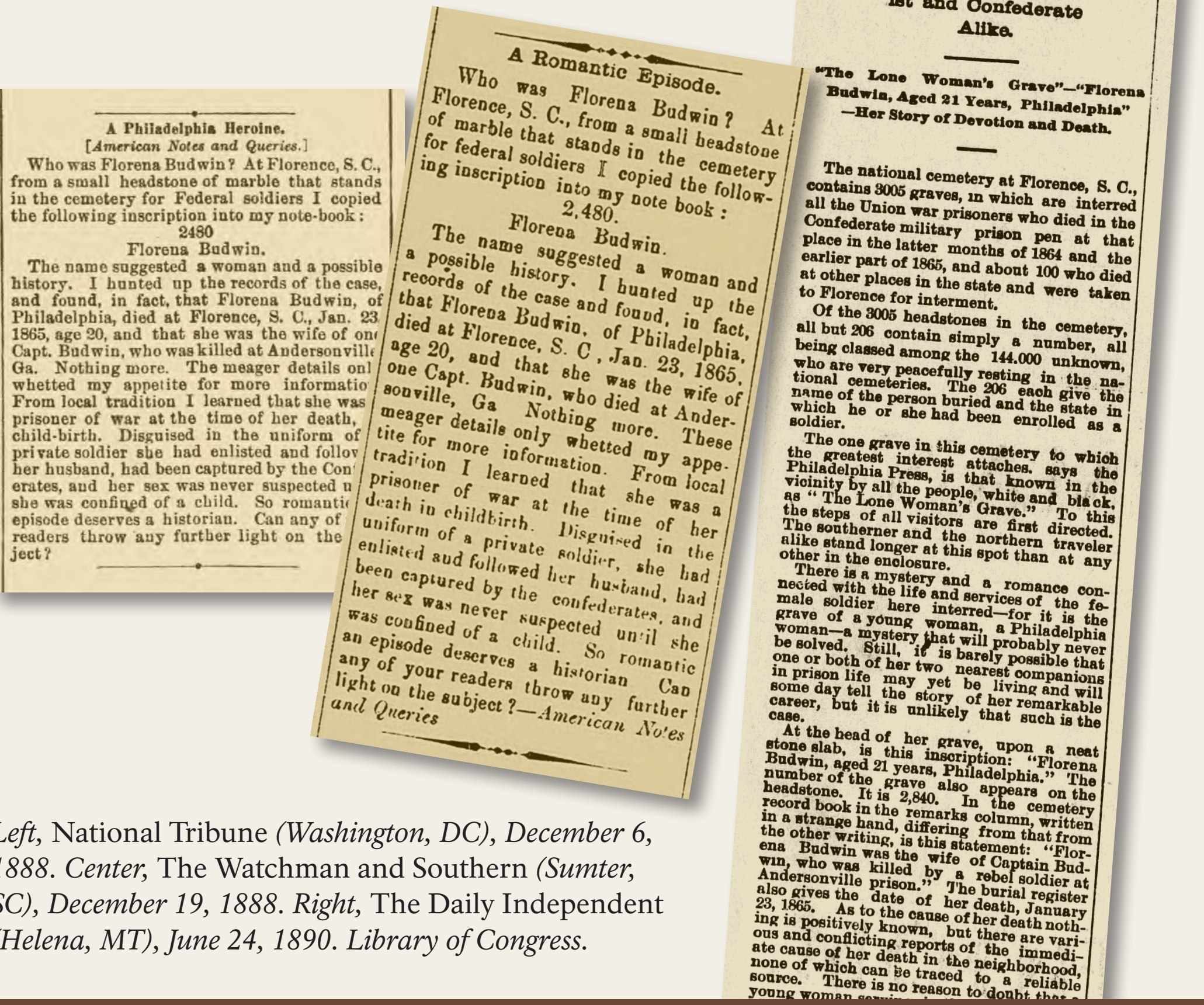
The secretary of war, by law, appointed a “meritorious and trustworthy” man to manage each cemetery. To qualify, an individual must have been an army enlisted man disabled in service. Phillip R. R. M. Sattes was the first superintendent at Florence. While a private in the 1st Kentucky Infantry (U.S.), Sattes was twice wounded in action.

“The Lone Woman’s Grave”

For decades, the only woman buried at this national cemetery was Florena Budwin—likely an alias. Purportedly married to a Union officer from Pennsylvania, Budwin disguised herself as a man in order to enlist.

She and her husband were said to have been confined at Georgia’s Andersonville Prison, where he died. She was moved with other Union prisoners to Florence in fall 1864. When she fell ill, the camp doctor discovered her secret. Budwin was moved into quarters separate from the men. Sympathetic women of Florence gave her food and clothing. After recovering, she remained at the prison as a nurse.

Budwin died in January 1865 and was buried here (Section D, Grave 2480). Her story fascinated the public, and it appeared in newspapers nationwide for years.



Left, National Tribune (Washington, DC), December 6, 1888. Center, The Watchman and Southern (Sumter, SC), December 19, 1888. Right, The Daily Independent (Helena, MT), June 24, 1890. Library of Congress.

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
National Cemetery Administration

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