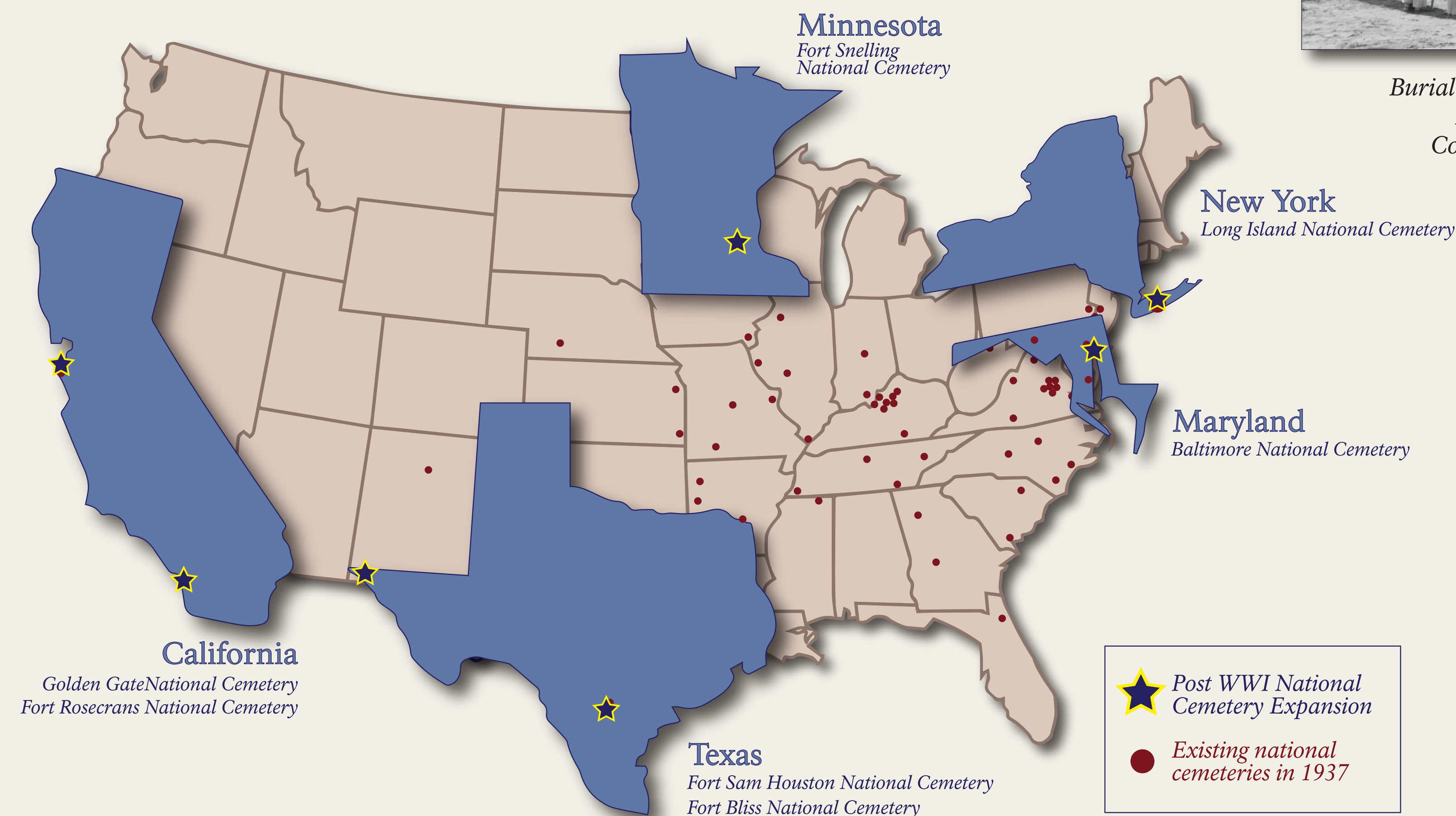


FORT SNELLING NATIONAL CEMETERY

National Cemeteries for World War Veterans

The U.S. Army managed the National Cemetery System until its transfer to what is now the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 1973. It established cemeteries out of necessity during the Civil War (1861-1865), primarily in the South, usually expanding or supplementing existing cemeteries to provide additional burial space. Cemeteries were concentrated east of the Mississippi River and were relatively small in size. They were inadequate to meet the needs of twentieth-century veterans, whose population spiked with service in the Spanish-American War (1898-1902) and World War I (1917-1918). Internal Army studies, spurred by veterans' groups, led to the first major expansion of the system. Seven national cemeteries were constructed using Works Progress Administration (WPA) funds in 1934-1939 in locations determined by the population of veterans eligible for burial benefits. VA still uses this methodology to guide its cemetery development today. Expansion was timely, as World War II (1941-1945) ushered in a volume of veterans never before seen in the nation's history.



Burial of first World War II repatriation, October 29, 1947 (Adolph W. Greenfield, USMC) Hennepin County Library Collection, Minneapolis Star and Tribune Photographs (M/A 0359)



Fort Snelling aerial photograph from 1949. NCA History Collection.

Post Cemetery to National Cemetery

A small post cemetery had existed at Fort Snelling since 1826 and by the 1930s it contained several hundred graves. The growing veteran population in the St. Paul-Minneapolis region spurred veterans' groups to petition Congress to establish a new national cemetery. In 1937, the War Department was authorized to allocate 180 acres in the southwest corner of the Fort Snelling military reservation for a new cemetery. WPA laborers began developing 40 acres into burial sections, constructing a lodge, utility buildings, and gates in a Stripped Classicism architectural style. Workers erected a Kasota stone lodge and pumphouse (now the Public Information Center) at the southwest corner. A flagpole was built in 1940, encircled by a road. From the flagpole, roads extend into the cemetery's original area, creating wedge-shaped sections. The central axis, Mallon Road, is lined by flags, granite markers, and regularly spaced deciduous canopy trees.