

PROSPECT HILL SOLDIERS' LOT



Mourners at Alexandria National Cemetery, Virginia, c. 1865. After 1873, standard marble headstones replaced the wood headboards seen here. Miller, Photographic History of the Civil War (1910).

Civil War Dead

An estimated 700,000 Union and Confederate soldiers died in the Civil War (1861-1865). As the death toll rose, the U.S. government struggled with the urgent but unplanned need to bury fallen Union troops. This propelled the creation of a national cemetery system.

On September 11, 1861, the War Department directed officers to keep “accurate and permanent records of deceased soldiers.” Federal authority to create military burial grounds came in an Omnibus Act of July 17, 1862. Cemetery sites were chosen where troops were concentrated: camps, hospitals, battlefields, railroad hubs. By 1872, 74 national cemeteries and several soldiers’ lots contained 305,492 remains. About 45 percent were unknown.

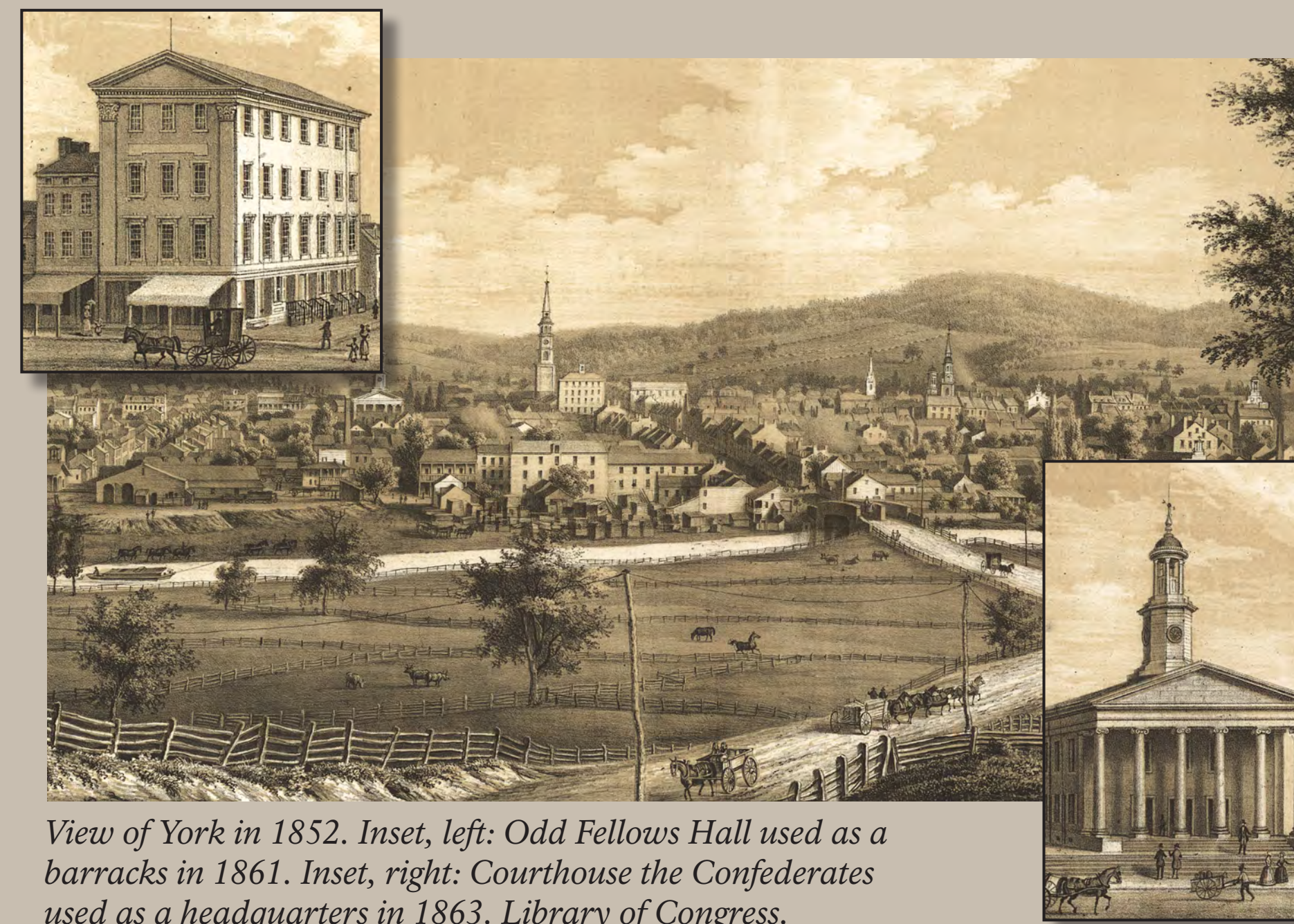
The U.S. government established soldiers’ lots at private cemeteries in northern states. National cemeteries, in contrast, were built throughout the South where most Civil War action occurred. While the army reported dozens of lots containing Union dead in the 1870s, the National Cemetery Administration maintains only fifteen. The number of graves ranges from less than ten to nearly 400 in these lots.

York at War

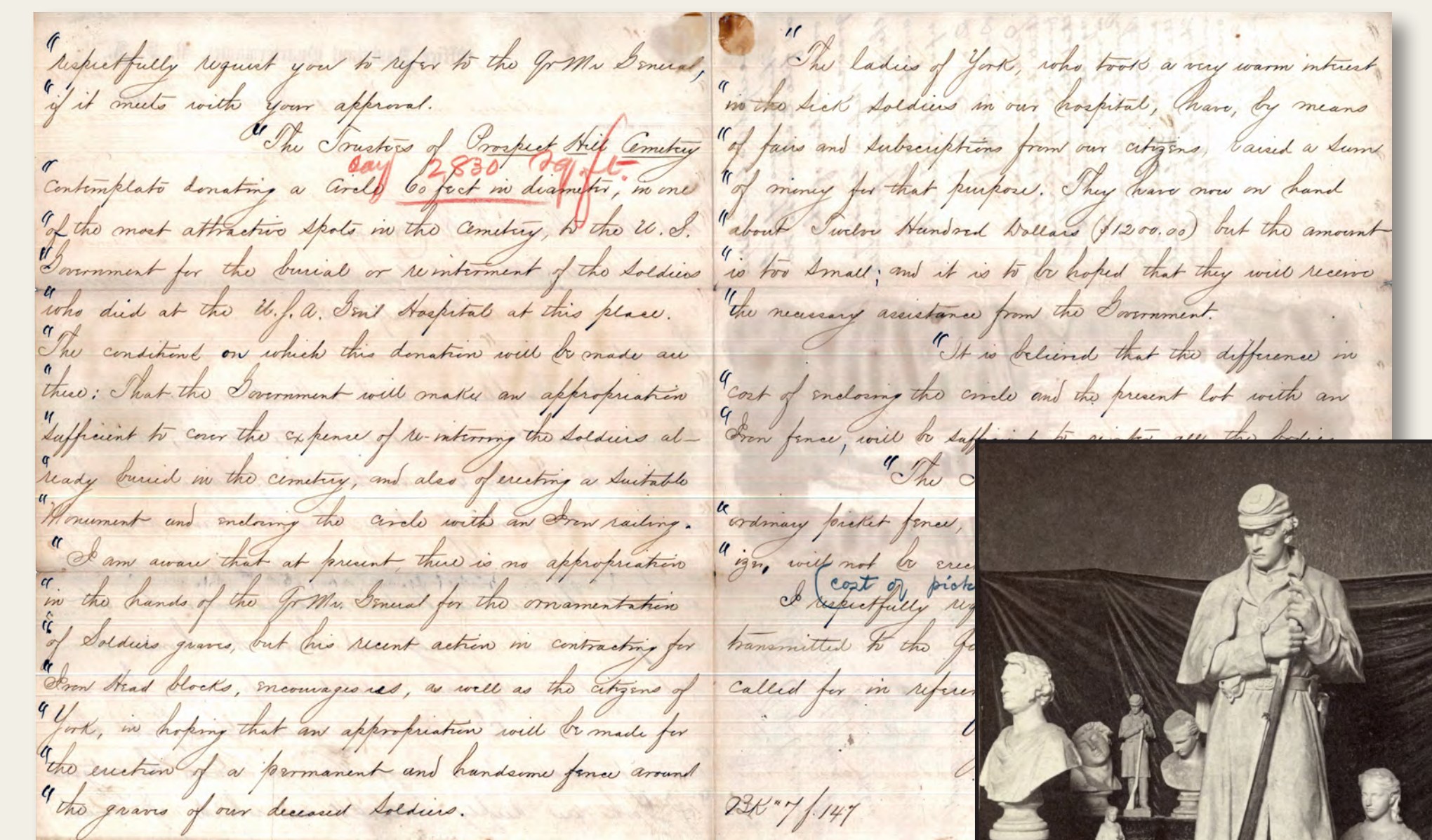
On April 23, 1861, less than two weeks after Confederate forces attacked Fort Sumter in South Carolina, Gov. Andrew G. Curtin established Camp Scott at York, Pennsylvania. By early May, six regiments were lodged in the Odd Fellows Hall and buildings at the fairgrounds. The army recruited or trained all or portions of seventeen Pennsylvania regiments in York.

In June 1862, a U.S. General Hospital was established in the city. Barracks constructed on the public common were adapted to accommodate more than 1,000 beds. The hospital had treated 14,000 patients by the time it closed in summer 1865. Many of the 193 soldiers who died in York were buried at Prospect Hill Cemetery.

During the Gettysburg Campaign, in summer 1863, Confederate forces briefly captured York. Citizens met with Confederate Gen. John Gordon the day before he arrived. They agreed to surrender if Gordon would spare the city. The Confederates occupied York for two days, took money and supplies, but did no damage.



View of York in 1852. Inset, left: Odd Fellows Hall used as a barracks in 1861. Inset, right: Courthouse the Confederates used as a headquarters in 1863. Library of Congress.



December 1866 letter conveying the trustees’ proposal to move the remains of U.S. soldiers to “one of the most attractive spots” in Prospect Hill Cemetery. National Archives and Records Administration. Right: Scale model of Union soldier at sculptor’s studio, c. 1867. Library of Congress.

Soldiers’ Lot

Prospect Hill Cemetery, a rural-style burial ground, was established in 1849. By 1870, some 163 Union soldiers were interred in a northwest-corner lot. All but two were known. Most graves were marked with wood headboards. A few had marble headstones purchased by family or friends. In 1873, the War Department authorized reinterment of these remains in a prominent lot near the cemetery entrance. Names of the dead were inscribed on two concentric granite curbs within the new soldiers’ circle, rather than on standard government-issued headstones.

The Ladies Aid Society and citizens of York raised \$3,000 to build a memorial here. A. J. Brashears & Son of York installed it in 1874. The granite base supports a 15-foot-tall bronze soldier. Irish-born sculptor Martin Milmore designed this and many other Civil War monuments found in northern states. The York soldiers’ lot, with four cannon, is enclosed by a granite post-and-chain fence.