SPRINGFIELD NATIONAL CEMETERY

Civil War Springfield

Federal troops occupied Springfield, Missouri, in June 1861. In August, when Confederate forces marched on the city, Union Gen. Nathaniel Lyon led his army out to meet them.

On August 10, 1861, the Confederate army commanded by Gen. Sterling Price defeated Lyon's troops at Wilson's Creek. The courthouse, Methodist church, and many other Springfield buildings were pressed into service as hospitals for the Union wounded.

After the spring 1862 Battle of Pea Ridge in Arkansas, the U.S. Army established a General Hospital in Springfield. The city was already a pivotal Union supply depot. The Confederates attacked Springfield on January 8, 1863, but were defeated. The city saw no more major Civil War engagements.

Battle of Wilson's Creek, c. 1861. Library of Congress.

Cemetery entrance and original Second Empire-style lodge, 1903. National Archives and Records Administration.

National Cemetery

Springfield National Cemetery was established in 1867 on a 5-acre tract purchased from the city. Remains of Union dead from Lebanon, Newtonia, Springfield, and Wilson's Creek battlefields were reinterred here. By 1868 it contained 1,514 graves, about half unknown. In 1911, Congress authorized the secretary of war to take ownership of the adjacent 2.7-acre Confederate cemetery. The existing superintendents' lodge and rostrum, built in the 1940s, replaced the original ones.

Three Civil War Medal of Honor recipients are buried here. Corp. Harrison Collins, 1st Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.), captured a Confederate flag at Richland Creek, Tennessee, December 24, 1864 (Section 26, Grave 1357B).

Musician Orion P. Howe, a wounded 14-year-old drummer with the 55th Illinois Infantry, stayed on the battlefield until he was able to tell Gen. William T. Sherman that his regiment needed ammunition, Vicksburg, Mississippi, May 19, 1863 (Section 4, Grave 207A).

Capt. Patrick Pentzer, 97th Illinois Infantry, accepted the surrender of a Confederate general and a flag at Fort Blakely, Alabama, April 9, 1865 (Section 24, Grave 1696).

Civil War Army Medal of Honor. Gettysburg National Military Park.

Monuments

There are two Union Civil War monuments here. Dedicated on Memorial Day 1873, a 24-foot-tall pedestal and shaft topped by a marble figure of a Union soldier honors troops killed in the Battle of Springfield. Dr. Thomas Jefferson Bailey, former slave owner and staunch Unionist who died in 1869, had bequeathed funds to erect it.

The second honors Gen. Nathaniel Lyon, the U.S. commander at the Battle of Wilson's Creek. Lyon, who was killed in action, was the first Union general to die in the Civil War. Citizens of Springfield raised funds for the 14-foot-tall marble column erected in 1888. Lyon is buried in Eastford, Connecticut.

Postcard view of cemetery with Union Monument (foreground) and Lyon Monument (background), c. 1907. National Cemetery Administration.