

CONFEDERATE BURIALS IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY



Citizens Volunteer Hospital in Philadelphia was one of many facilities where Confederate prisoners captured at Gettysburg were treated, c. 1865. Library of Congress.

The Confederate Section

All of the Confederate prisoners of war buried here died in a Civil War military hospital in or near Philadelphia. All were originally interred near the hospital where they died. In the late 1880s, the dead were moved here from three Philadelphia cemeteries—Glenwood City, Odd Fellows, and Mount Moriah—and Rural Cemetery, in nearby Chester.

The War Department established Philadelphia National Cemetery in March 1885 and moved Union and Confederate burials here from several area cemeteries. The Confederate remains were placed in a single section without headstones.

In 1897, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) in Philadelphia approached the cemetery superintendent about donating a monument to the Confederate section. The Union veterans' organization in Germantown, Pennsylvania, protested.

The UDC abandoned its plan for a grand obelisk; instead the obelisk was erected in the Confederate section of Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, Virginia. Three years later, the UDC placed a small tablet memorial to 224 unknown Confederate dead at Philadelphia National Cemetery.

The Monument

The Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead began documenting burials in July 1906. No one was able to explain to the Commission how the UDC arrived at the number of 224 unknown listed on the tablet. Few records accompanied the burials moved from Rural Cemetery, which had the greatest number of Confederate burials in the area. Many records were incomplete and documentation of remains removed to other states was contradictory. The Commission agreed that graves could not be matched with individuals.



The monument dedication, 1911. Confederate Veteran, December 1911.

In fall 1911, James T. Maxwell & Sons of Philadelphia completed the granite monument. The plaques affixed to the monument list the names of 184 Confederate prisoners that the Commission documented as being buried at Philadelphia National Cemetery. The UDC Philadelphia chapter held the dedication ceremony on October 12, 1912, the anniversary of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's death. The elaborate event featured music, hymns, prayers, poetry, and a stirring oration delivered by John Shepherd Beard, a notable Philadelphian. The ceremony ended with a thirty-gun salute and the playing of "Taps." According to newspaper accounts, some 1,000 people attended the unveiling.

Toward Reconciliation

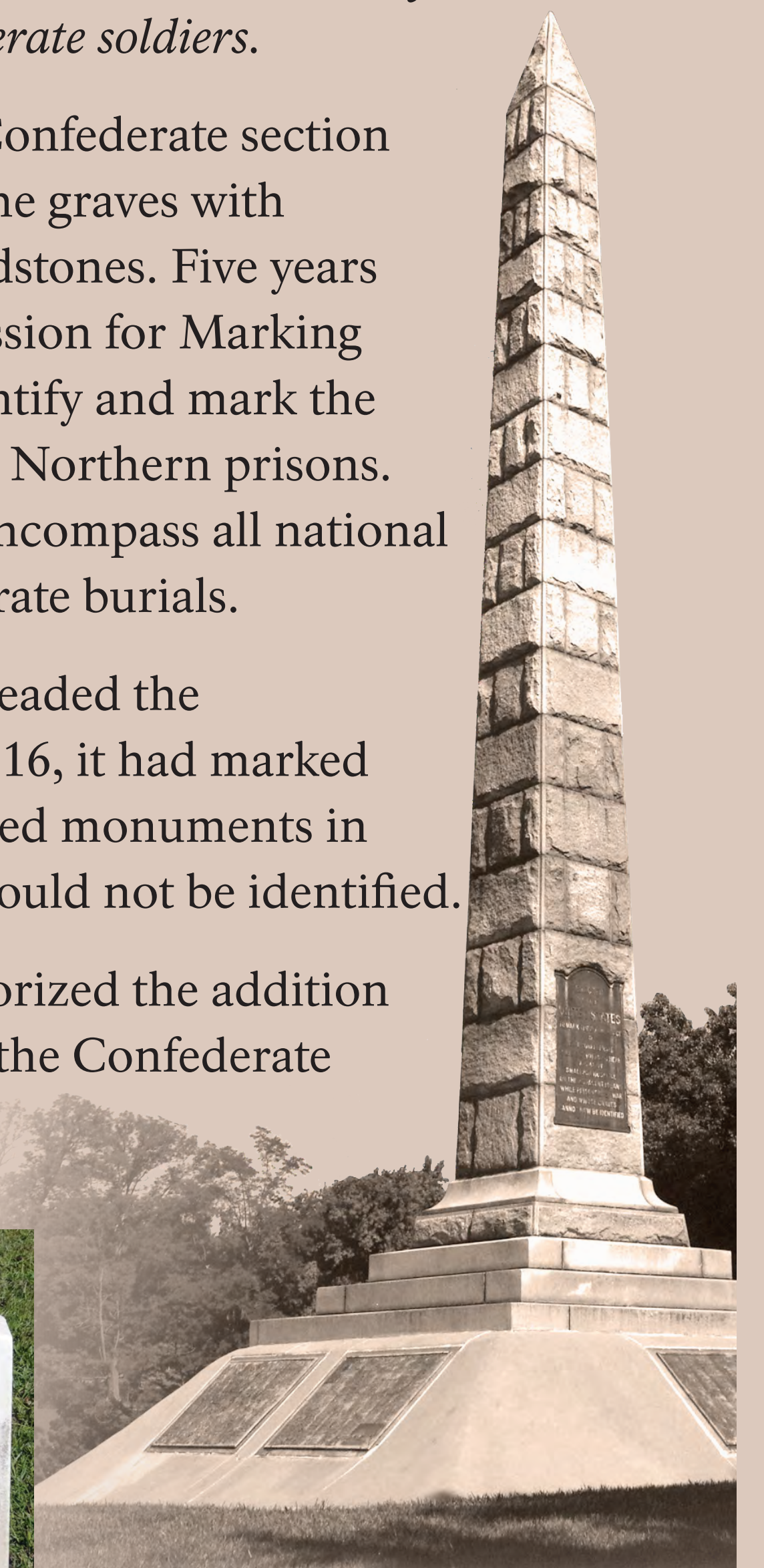
On May 30, 1868, the Grand Army of the Republic decorated Union and Confederate graves at Arlington National Cemetery. Thirty years later President William McKinley proclaimed:

The Union is once more the common altar of our love and loyalty, our devotion and sacrifice . . . Every soldier's grave made during our unfortunate Civil War is a tribute to American valor . . . in the spirit of fraternity we should share with you in the care of the graves of the Confederate soldiers.

The War Department created the Confederate section at Arlington in 1901, and marked the graves with distinctive pointed-top marble headstones. Five years later, Congress created the Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead to identify and mark the graves of Confederates who died in Northern prisons. Its mission was later expanded to encompass all national cemeteries that contained Confederate burials.

Four former Confederate officers headed the Commission over its lifetime. By 1916, it had marked in excess of 25,500 graves and erected monuments in locations where individual graves could not be identified.

In 1930, the War Department authorized the addition of the Southern Cross of Honor to the Confederate headstone.



North Alton Confederate Cemetery Monument, 1909, Alton, Ill.

Original Commission headstone (left) and headstone with Southern Cross of Honor (right).



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
National Cemetery Administration

To learn more about benefits and programs for Veterans and families, visit www.va.gov