



Alton National Cemetery  
Name of Property

Madison County, IL  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
1	0	structures
2	0	objects
4	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

Civil War Era National Cemeteries MPS

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/cemetery  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/cemetery  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

NA  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation \_\_\_\_\_  
walls \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof \_\_\_\_\_  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B.** removed from its original location.
- C.** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Levels of Significance** (local, state, national)

NATIONAL

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

MILITARY

SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance**

ca. 1862-1961

**Significant Dates**

1862

1940, 1941

1948, 1961

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

**Cultural Affiliation** (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

**Architect/Builder**

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Brockington and Assoc, Mt. Pleasant, SC

Alton National Cemetery  
Name of Property

Madison County, IL  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 0.48 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 692535 4309133  
Zone Easting Northing  
2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing  
4 \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Paige Wagoner, Historian and Edward Salo, PhD, Senior Historian  
organization Brockington and Associates, Inc. date \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number 498 Wando Park Blvd, Suite 700 telephone 843.881.3128  
City or town Mt. Pleasant state SC zip code 29464

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Kathleen Schlamel, Federal Preservation Officer, Department of Veterans Affairs  
street & number 811 Vermont Avenue, NW, Room 423 telephone 202.461.8254  
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20005

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Alton National Cemetery is located at 600 Pearl Street in Alton, Illinois, in Madison County. Situated on the west side of Pearl Street, the half-acre cemetery sits on a long, rectangular lot. Originally a soldiers' lot within the Alton City Cemetery, the U.S. government did not own the tract until 1940, when the Alton Cemetery Association donated the land for use as a national cemetery. As of May 2010, the cemetery contained 531 interments.

Located on a steep, grassy hill within the Alton City Cemetery, Alton National Cemetery consists of a rectangular half-acre lot divided into three sections separated by low concrete curbing. A long walkway aligns the north side of the cemetery, while another walkway separates the sections B and C (formerly A and B). Tall native trees shade the upper half of the cemetery. The cemetery reached capacity in 1961 and remains closed. The New Deal-era main entrance at the east boundary of the cemetery also incorporates a built-in rostrum and a storage area.

The cemetery contains the remains of veterans of the Civil War, Spanish-American War, Mexican War, World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Among the graves in Alton National Cemetery lie an estimated 200 Union soldiers, many of whom died of disease in Alton or onboard steamships traveling up the Mississippi River. The topmost burial section, farthest from the rostrum, includes many of the oldest gravesites, including the reinterred remains of Union soldiers and veterans of the Mexican War. The central section contains the remains of soldiers who served in the Civil War, Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, and Vietnam. Veterans of the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, and Korea are buried in the section nearest the rostrum.

Constructed in 1941, the entrance gate and two-story rostrum front on Pearl Street. Large wrought-iron entrance gates centered in a wrought-iron fence supported by concrete piers stretch across the eastern boundary of the cemetery and attach to the rostrum walls. A stylized leaf motif decorates the gates and wrought-iron fence. Two bronze plaques adorn the concrete piers flanking the gates. The name of the cemetery is on one plaque, and the other reads "United States of America" with an emblem of an eagle above the wording. All inscriptions are in bas-relief.

Composed of poured-in-place concrete, the two-story rostrum has a tripartite form consisting of a central block and two small wings. From the main gates, a set of brick stairs leads to the central block of the structure. A flight of stairs rises from each side of the central landing, leading to a

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second terrace, which opens onto the cemetery. Two sets of brick stairs lead to a concrete podium with a central concrete pier and wrought-iron railing. The podium faces west and overlooks the straight rows of white gravestones. At the top of the podium's walls, a geometrical design (a variant of the Greek-key motif) set in the concrete ornaments the outdoor space. Below the podium, a wide sidewalk separates the rostrum from the central flagpole, which is surrounded by two large shrubs.

A sidewalk extends up the north side of the cemetery and provides access to the three burial sections. The older sections, now B and C but originally A and B, are enclosed by low concrete curbing and are separated by a concrete walkway that splays out at each end. At either end of the walkway are short, squat concrete bollards with "U.S." stamped into the outward face; at the south end of the walkway, a few concrete steps lead down into the city cemetery. The curbing and walkway were likely put in at the same time the rostrum and entrance gate were constructed. At that time, section A (then C) was not yet being used for interments.

The variety of gravemarkers at Alton National Cemetery reflects the history and evolution of government headstones. After the War Department created the first organized system of marking graves in 1861, a concerted effort was undertaken to recover the dead from their temporary wartime burial places and accomplish permanent reburial. Public sentiment turned toward a more permanent mode of marking graves, and in 1873 Secretary of War William W. Belknap approved the first stone design for national cemetery markers.

For the known dead, the War Department adopted a slab design of marble or durable stone 4 inches thick, 10 inches wide, and 12 inches high. The stone was polished and the top slightly curved. The number of the grave, rank (above private), name of soldier, and soldier's home state were engraved on the front face. While not part of the original design, the majority of the headstones from this time period feature a recessed shield in which the inscription appeared in bas relief.<sup>1</sup> This marker, referred to as the Civil War type, was originally designed for members of the Union Army but was eventually used for the eligible deceased of the Indian Wars and Spanish-American War. A small block of marble with the number of the grave cut at the top marked the graves of the unknown dead. The War Department discontinued the use of stone

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<sup>1</sup> E-mail/conversation, Jennifer Perunko, Historian, National Cemetery Administration, July 2009; and Kelsey R. Cass, "None Else of Name: The Origin and Early Development of the United States National Cemetery System" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont University, 2001), 43-46.

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blocks for unknown soldiers in 1903 and adopted the same stone design for both known and unknown soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

Following World War I, a board of officers composed of Assistant Secretary of War J. M. Wainwright, Army Chief of Staff General John J. Pershing, and Quartermaster General Harry L. Rogers adopted a new design to be used for all graves except those of veterans of the Civil War and Spanish-American War. The General-type stone consisted of a slab design of American white marble with a slightly rounded top. The inscription on the front face included the soldier's name, rank, regiment, division, date of death, and home state. A religious emblem, the Latin cross or Star of David, was authorized for use on each stone.<sup>3</sup> Over the years other "emblems of belief" have been authorized for use on the General-type headstone.

In 2008, NCA undertook a project to replace or place in its national cemeteries large cast-iron plaques of the Gettysburg Address. Such plaques were originally placed in the national cemeteries about 1909-10, but were never installed in national cemeteries built after mid century. Additionally many had been removed over the years. The new plaques, cast at the Rock Island Arsenal like the original, were installed in 2009 as part of the bi-centennial celebration of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. The plaque at Alton National Cemetery was placed in the front, center of Section A, facing the flagpole and rostrum.

The numbers shown for contributing resources within the property reflect the following:

**Sites:** Cemetery

**Structures:** Rostrum/entrance building

**Objects:** POW/MIA flagpole (c.1998); Gettysburg Address plaque (2009)

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<sup>2</sup> Cass, "None Else of Name."

<sup>3</sup> Cass, "None Else of Name."

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### **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Alton National Cemetery is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** for its association with the development of the Civil War-era national cemeteries. Created in 1862, the Alton Cemetery soldiers' lot originally served as a final resting place for Union soldiers. The lot became the property of the federal government in 1940 and was officially designated as a national cemetery in 1948.

#### **Establishment of Alton, Illinois**

In 1818, Rufus Easton established Alton as a river town. Easton operated a passenger ferry service across the Mississippi River to the opposite Missouri shore. Located on steep limestone bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, Alton stood on an ideal site.<sup>4</sup> Its location near three rivers—the Illinois, the Mississippi, and the Missouri—offered commercial advantages and opportunities for successful financial enterprises. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Mississippi-Ohio river system offered the best means of transportation within the central United States, and a large network of river trading developed between the cities of Alton, St. Louis, Missouri, and New Orleans, Louisiana. After the advent of steam power, shipping became a major industry in Alton.<sup>5</sup>

While Alton served as an economic center, it was also the location of several events that foreshadowed the coming Civil War. On November 7, 1837, a mob murdered abolitionist printer Elijah P. Lovejoy while he was attempting to protect his Alton-based press from being destroyed a third time. Alton was also the site, on October 15, 1858, of the seventh Lincoln-Douglas debate.<sup>6</sup> In 1861, Alton was a growing and prosperous town with a population of approximately 9,000 residents and thriving businesses.

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<sup>4</sup> Don Morrison, "Alton's Disaster in War Between States," *Alton Telegraph* in the Alton, Illinois Collection at the Missouri Historical Society.

<sup>5</sup> Charlotte Stetson, *Alton, Illinois: A Pictorial History* (St. Louis: G. Bradley Publishing, Inc., 1986), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Newton Bateman and Paul Selby, *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois* (Chicago: Munsell Pub. Co., 1900), 13, 263; Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas, and Edwin Erle Sparks, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858* (Springfield, Illinois: Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1908), 449.



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### **Civil War in Alton, Illinois**

Within a week of President Lincoln's appeal for 75,000 volunteers for the Union Army in April 1861, the citizens of Alton began to enlist in the Union Army. Alton and the rest of Madison County answered President Lincoln's call for volunteers and sent three companies of soldiers to Springfield, Illinois. On April 25, 1861, the 9th Regiment, Illinois Infantry Volunteers absorbed the companies. This regiment remained in service until the end of the war and participated in 110 military engagements, including the Battle of Shiloh.<sup>7</sup>

During the Civil War, Alton served as a site for the Union's confinement of captured Confederate soldiers. In February 1862, Alton's abandoned state penitentiary became a military prison for captured Confederates (Alton Military Prison Site, listed on the National Register in 1974 [Site #74000766]). Located along the Mississippi River, the long, rectangular prison contained 256 cells. By April 1862, a flood of new prisoners overcrowded the prison, with the Union Army confining 791 Confederate soldiers in the 256 cells. Throughout the war, new prisoners arrived on a daily basis, and imprisoned Confederates made several attempts to escape the crowded building by digging tunnels.<sup>8</sup>

In 1863, an epidemic of smallpox broke out in the prison. Overcrowding made the elimination of the disease nearly impossible, and some historians believe that as many as 5,000 prisoners in the Alton prison died over the course of the war. A nearby island in the Mississippi River, named Sunflower Island, became a hospital for the sick and a burial ground for the deceased prisoners. While many bodies remained on Sunflower Island, the Union Army removed some of the Confederate dead to an old prison burying ground near North Alton.<sup>9</sup>

The Union Army interred Confederate soldiers in the Prisoner's Cemetery, situated 2.5 miles north of the city's center. Prior to the Civil War, the State of Illinois purchased a 2-acre plot of

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred Leavell Jr., "An Early History of Alton, Illinois, 1817-1865" (M.A. thesis, Southern Illinois University, 1966), 86-87. For a history of the 9th Regiment, Illinois Infantry Volunteers, see Marion Morrison, *A History of the Ninth Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry* (Monmouth, Illinois: J. S. Clark, printer, 1864).

<sup>8</sup> Harold Meisenheimer and Peggy Bradbury, *Alton Penitentiary in the Civil War* (Alton, Illinois: H. Meisenheimer, 2008); Jann Cox, *Alton Military Penitentiary in the Civil War: Small Pox and Burial on the Alton Harbor Islands* (Alexandria, Virginia: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Grover Brinkman, "Unbelievable Image of Smallpox Island," *Journal of America's Military Past* 14, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 101-104.

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land for use as a cemetery for deaths that occurred at the Illinois State Penitentiary, and had buried approximately 30 convicts in the cemetery. When the penitentiary converted into a military prison, the cemetery became a repository for the remains of Confederate prisoners. Between 1862 and 1865, 1,354 Confederate soldiers were buried in the cemetery. Wooden stakes and headboards marked each prisoner's grave, and a picket fence enclosed the cemetery. The U.S. government hired civilian undertakers and military surgeons to keep records of the name, unit, cause of death, and grave number of each soldier; however, the records changed hands many times during the war, and the number system became confused. In the 40 years after the war, the Confederate cemetery fell into disrepair and served as a cow pasture, and local residents used the wooden stakes and headstones as firewood. In 1905, Congress passed legislation that established a commission for the marking of Confederate graves at northern prisons. Two years later, the local Sam Davis Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy petitioned the federal government to purchase the property and surround it with an iron fence. In 1909, the United Daughters of the Confederacy constructed a gate. A couple of years later, the federal government erected a tall granite obelisk on the site to mark the burials; bronze plaques set at the base of the obelisk were inscribed with the names of the dead.<sup>10</sup>

### **Alton City Cemetery's Soldiers' Lot**

While Confederates were buried in a cemetery in North Alton, the Union Army interred the Union dead separately in a lot at the Alton City Cemetery. The Alton City Cemetery stands on the tall limestone bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River and the city of Alton. Believed to be the third-oldest cemetery in Illinois, the Alton City Cemetery dates to 1845. The grounds originally belonged to a Major Hunter, and a portion of the land had been used for burial purposes prior to the cemetery's incorporation. The cemetery contains the remains of more than 19,000 people, many of whom hold a significant place in the town's history.<sup>11</sup> Set among picturesque hills and towering trees, one of the most notable features of the cemetery is the monument to Reverend Elijah P. Lovejoy. The towering classical obelisk honors Lovejoy, an active abolitionist and editor of the *St. Louis Observer*, who was killed by a pro-slavery mob in Alton in 1837.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Stetson et al., *Alton Remembered* (St. Louis: G. Bradley Publishing, Inc., 1986), 82.

<sup>11</sup> "1205 East Fifth Street, Alton Cemetery," in the Property Files at the Illinois Room, Hayner Public Library, Alton, Illinois.

<sup>12</sup> Stetson, *Alton, Illinois*, 19.

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During the Civil War, the Union Army buried the remains of Union soldiers from the local post hospital and passing steamboats traveling up the Mississippi River in the city cemetery's soldiers' lot, with the earliest known interment occurring in 1862.<sup>13</sup> A report made by Captain James Campbell, Assistant Quartermaster General at Springfield, Illinois, reported that many Union soldiers found burial in the Alton City Cemetery. By April 1866, the Union Army had interred 163 Union soldiers in the city-owned soldiers' lot. The deceased included two Union officers, 149 Union soldiers, and 12 unknown soldiers. The cost for interring the bodies was \$978.<sup>14</sup>

During the Civil War, the War Department funded the maintenance of the Alton Soldiers' Lot and that of other plots that held the remains of soldiers in city-owned cemeteries, under the appropriation "Cemeterial Expenses." The federal government paid the Alton City Cemetery \$30 a year to care for the plot. After the Civil War ended, the War Department planned to relocate the 163 Union soldiers interred in the soldiers' lot to Springfield National Cemetery. However, the community protested and exerted sufficient influence to prevent the removal of the remains to the capital city.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the U.S. government continued to maintain the Alton Soldiers' Lot. Several veterans groups also took an active interest in its maintenance. For example, in 1890, the Grand Army of the Republic constructed a monument at the soldiers' lot. The Parrott gun mounted on a rough granite base was inscribed "The Union Dead."<sup>16</sup> The cannon is no longer present.

### **The Creation of National Cemetery System**

The creation of the national cemetery system in the United States traces back to the Civil War. The coming of the Civil War found the civilian population of the United States wholly unprepared for conflict. No less unprepared for war were the military authorities of the Union Army. The rapid expansion of the U.S. Army to meet the war's demands created unprecedented

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<sup>13</sup> United States War Department, "Alton National Cemetery," 1952.

<sup>14</sup> Report of the Inspector of National Cemeteries of the United States, 1869.

<sup>15</sup> "Brief Resume of Soldiers' Lot at Alton, Illinois," in the Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>16</sup> United States, *Annual Reports of the War Department* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), 485.

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problems of administration and organization. The War Department continued to rely on the prewar procedures for the proper care, identification and burial of soldiers.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to the Civil War, local commanders handled all burials of deceased enlisted soldiers at local post cemeteries. While officer casualties were generally returned home to their families for burial, other enlisted personnel received interment at the nearest military post. Responsibility for the identification, burial, and proper registration of the soldiers' graves remained in the hands of the post commander or Quartermaster General. As the Civil War progressed, the military's burial system proved inadequate to handle the steadily increasing number of casualties.<sup>18</sup>

After the First Battle of Manassas, on September 11, 1861, the War Department issued General Orders No. 75, which directed the Quartermaster General to supply all general and post hospitals with books and forms on the preservation of mortuary records, to provide materials for headboards to be placed over soldiers' graves, and to ensure the interment of the dead in appropriate cemeteries. However, General Orders No. 75 had several limitations. For example, the order assumed a system of burial sites and national cemeteries, which at the time did not exist. It also made no provisions for the acquisition of federally controlled cemetery sites and assigned no responsibility for the identification and retrieval of deceased soldiers.<sup>19</sup> It would take the Army several more months to fully understand the magnitude of the endeavor.

In April 1862, the War Department issued General Orders No. 33 to overcome the problems of the previous order. While General Orders No. 33 improved how the Army handled the dead, the question of burial space remained. As the war continued, bodies from local battles poured into local hospitals and cemeteries, which became overburdened and unsanitary. After the American public began to complain about how the dead were treated, Congress acted in July 1862 by passing legislation giving President Lincoln the authority to purchase cemetery grounds for national cemeteries. The legislation of 1862 laid the foundation for today's system of national cemeteries. While the formulation of policies and procedures was left to the president, future action on matters pertaining to military cemeteries would be influenced by practical considerations during hostilities.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cass, "None Else of Name," 21-22.

<sup>18</sup> Cass, "None Else of Name," 21-22.

<sup>19</sup> Cass, "None Else of Name," 21-22.

<sup>20</sup> Cass, "None Else of Name," 23.

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Although the 1862 act authorized the president to secure cemetery lands for soldiers who died during service, a Joint Resolution of Congress passed in 1866 specifically stated that interment in a national cemetery was reserved for those Union soldiers who died during the war. Questions still remained, however, and ambiguities such as burial of the Confederate dead and survivors of the Civil War forced lawmakers to enact legislation that would give structure to the national cemetery system itself.<sup>21</sup> On February 22, 1867, Congress approved *An Act to Establish and to Protect National Cemeteries*, which provided structure for the national cemetery system and presented separate Army regulations for the burial grounds. This act gave a legal basis to the system and committed Congress to find a responsible fiscal policy to support it.<sup>22</sup>

The title of national cemetery provided a burial place for all honorably discharged veterans of previous wars. While the earliest of these cemeteries were located on or near battlefields or hospitals, they proved to be inaccessible to some eligible veterans. New cemeteries in areas throughout the country became necessary.<sup>23</sup>

In 1931, a countrywide survey was made of all soldiers' lots maintained by the War Department in public/private cemeteries. The following is an excerpt from the report made on the Alton City Cemetery's Soldiers' Lot:

This plot is located in Alton City Cemetery, Alton, Illinois, and is cared for by the Government for the sum of \$30.00 annually. There is no record of the Plot in the "United States Military Reservation, Etc." and it is not known whether or not the Government owns the land on which this Plot is located. There are 213 occupied graves and there is sufficient space for additional graves. Most of the graves are marked with headstones and markers have been requested for those not marked. During an inspection made February 16, 1931, this Plot was found to be in good condition except that the sod needed improvement.<sup>24</sup>

While the Alton Soldiers' Lot remained a city-owned cemetery without the title of national cemetery, the federal government continued to maintain the lot, paying for its upkeep.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cass, "None Else of Name," 30.

<sup>22</sup> Cass, "None Else of Name," 31.

<sup>23</sup> Cass, "None Else of Name," 31-32.

<sup>24</sup> "Brief Resume of the Soldiers' Lot at Alton, Illinois."

<sup>25</sup> "Brief Resume of the Soldiers' Lot at Alton, Illinois."

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#### **Establishment of Alton National Cemetery**

In a January 19, 1938, letter, the Alton Cemetery Association offered to donate the Alton Soldiers' Lot to the U.S. government for use as a national cemetery. By March 1, 1938, the Assistant Secretary of War and the Quartermaster General recommended acquisition of the land offered by the Alton Cemetery Association. Six days later, the Assistant Secretary of War forwarded the acquisition request to the Judge Advocate General for remark and recommendation. The judge had no legal objection to the transfer of the deed. Subsequently, the Alton Cemetery Association offered to donate, without cost to the United States, an additional tract of land to the east of the Soldiers' Lot provided that the U.S. government would construct a permanent rostrum or speaker's stand for use on Memorial Day. Seeing the opportunity to expand the cemetery, the U.S. government accepted the offer, and the Army drew up preliminary plans for proposed improvements and extension of the Soldiers' Lot. Funded as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project, the cemetery improvements, including the construction of a new rostrum and gates, totaled \$21,224 for the state's share and \$1,906 for the sponsor's share. On June 13, 1940, the Illinois state legislature approved House Bills Nos. 31 and 32 authorizing the conveyance of the title to the United States. The following October, the land officially became property of the United States.<sup>26</sup>

After considerable negotiations during the period between 1937 and 1940, title to the Alton Soldiers' Lot transferred to the U.S. government. Correspondence relative to the acquisition indicates that use as a national cemetery was the initial intent for the site, as the words "national cemetery" appeared several times within written statements. The War Department also listed the plot as a national cemetery in its "List of Military Reservations" in February 1941. As the construction on the new rostrum began in 1941, the words "U.S. National Cemetery" were placed on the structure.<sup>27</sup> The first interments since the government's acquisition occurred in 1941, when the remains of 49 Union soldiers buried in a separate section of the Alton City Cemetery were moved to the soldiers' lot.<sup>28</sup> Despite the military's use of "national cemetery" in the records of the soldiers' lot and on the newly constructed rostrum, by the beginning of the 1940s the site had not officially been designated a national cemetery.

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<sup>26</sup> "Brief Resume of the Soldiers' Lot at Alton, Illinois."

<sup>27</sup> "Brief Resume of the Soldiers' Lot at Alton, Illinois."

<sup>28</sup> Dean W. Holt, *American Military Cemeteries* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1992), 20-21.

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Preparation for the construction of new entrance gates and a rostrum for the cemetery began in March 1941. Construction began on April 17 after a personal inspection of the cemetery by the Quartermaster Corps and WPA representatives. The Quartermaster Corps provided the materials, and the WPA provided the labor. During summer and fall 1941, WPA workers built elaborate wrought-iron gates and a large concrete rostrum on the east side of the cemetery, fronting Pearl Street, for the cost of \$25,000.<sup>29</sup>

The New Deal-era rostrum stands at the entrance of the cemetery and serves as a receiving room for veterans' burials as well as a podium used during national holidays. Composed of rough concrete, the rostrum has a tripartite form consisting of a central block and two small wings. From the main gates, a set of brick stairs leads to the central block of the structure. A flight of stairs rises from each side of the central landing, leading to a second brick terrace, which opens onto the cemetery. Two sets of brick stairs lead to a concrete podium with a central concrete pier and wrought-iron railing. The podium faces west and overlooks the cemetery's gravestones. At the top of the podium's walls, a geometrical design set in the concrete ornaments the outdoor space. The rostrum is typical of Depression-era architecture in its severe geometry, classical symmetry, stripped concrete, and use of stylized leaf and geometrical motifs.

In August 1948, the Allied Veterans Council, the City of Alton, U.S. Senators Scott Lucas and Charles Brooks, and Representatives Charles Price and William Stratton of Illinois, raised the issue of the official status of the Alton Soldiers' Lot. At the time, it was not the policy of the U.S. Army to favorably consider the establishment of a national cemetery within a commercial cemetery, in order to avoid the expansion of the site and construction of a superintendent's lodge and other buildings required by law in national cemeteries. While the Army considered removing the inscription "U.S. National Cemetery" from the rostrum, fears of criticism from local veterans groups discouraged the idea. Instead, the Army worked to have the Soldiers' Lot in Alton City Cemetery officially announced as a national cemetery.<sup>30</sup>

After its official designation as Alton National Cemetery in 1948, the cemetery inventoried the existing plot in October of the same year. According to U.S. Army correspondence, "There will be no superintendent for this cemetery; the property has been and will continue to be cared for by the caretaker of the civilian cemetery, under contract with the U.S. Army negotiated by this

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<sup>29</sup> "Work to Start April 17 on Cemetery Gate," *Alton Evening Telegraph*, March 21, 1941.

<sup>30</sup> "Brief Resume of the Soldiers' Lot at Alton, Illinois."

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office and Fifth Army.”<sup>31</sup> At the time of this correspondence, the cemetery had 312 interments and 215 additional grave spaces. The Army estimated that the remaining space would permit burials until 1970.<sup>32</sup>

#### **Alton National Cemetery to the Present**

On August 12, 1961, Alton National Cemetery Division Chief Thomas M. Bardford informed Alton’s newspaper, *The Telegraph*, that the cemetery was closed to future burials. Sixty-eight reserved gravesites remained at the time of closure.<sup>33</sup> The cemetery would still be maintained, but no new burials were permitted. Under the National Cemetery Act of 1973, the U.S. Army transferred control of Alton National Cemetery to the Veterans Administration (which became the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1989).

In 2006, a local Vietnam veteran, Richard Baird, gathered a group of local high school students to clean up the cemetery and encourage future caretaking of the grounds. Baird also appealed to the city for the installation of lights, a new road, and additional parking at the cemetery.<sup>34</sup> Two years later, in summer 2008, the headstones were raised and realigned, and the ground resodded. More recently, the rostrum was restored. The director of the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis County supervises the cemetery.<sup>35</sup>

As of May 2010, 531 veterans and their dependents were buried in Alton National Cemetery. The U.S. flag flies daily over the ordered rows of white marble headstones in honor of the lives and deeds of those who answered the call of duty. Set within one of Illinois’ oldest cemeteries, Alton National Cemetery reflects the people willing to fight in battles both foreign and domestic under the American flag. The grounds have been maintained and preserved to serve as both a memorial and a tribute to the American heritage.

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<sup>31</sup> “Brief Resume of the Soldiers’ Lot at Alton, Illinois.”

<sup>32</sup> “Brief Resume of the Soldiers’ Lot at Alton, Illinois.”

<sup>33</sup> “National Cemetery Full; Closed to Future Burials,” *Alton Evening Telegraph*, August 12, 1961.

<sup>34</sup> Linda N. Weller, “Vet Wants to Improve Cemetery,” *The Telegraph*, February 13, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Don Huber, “Wreaths at Alton National Cemetery,” *Alton Telegraph*, January 27, 2008.



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## **GEOGRAPHICAL DATA: UTM REFERENCES**

NAD27 UTM ZONE 15  
NW 746072 4308268

## **GEOGRAPHICAL DATA: VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The boundaries are indicated on the accompanying base map.

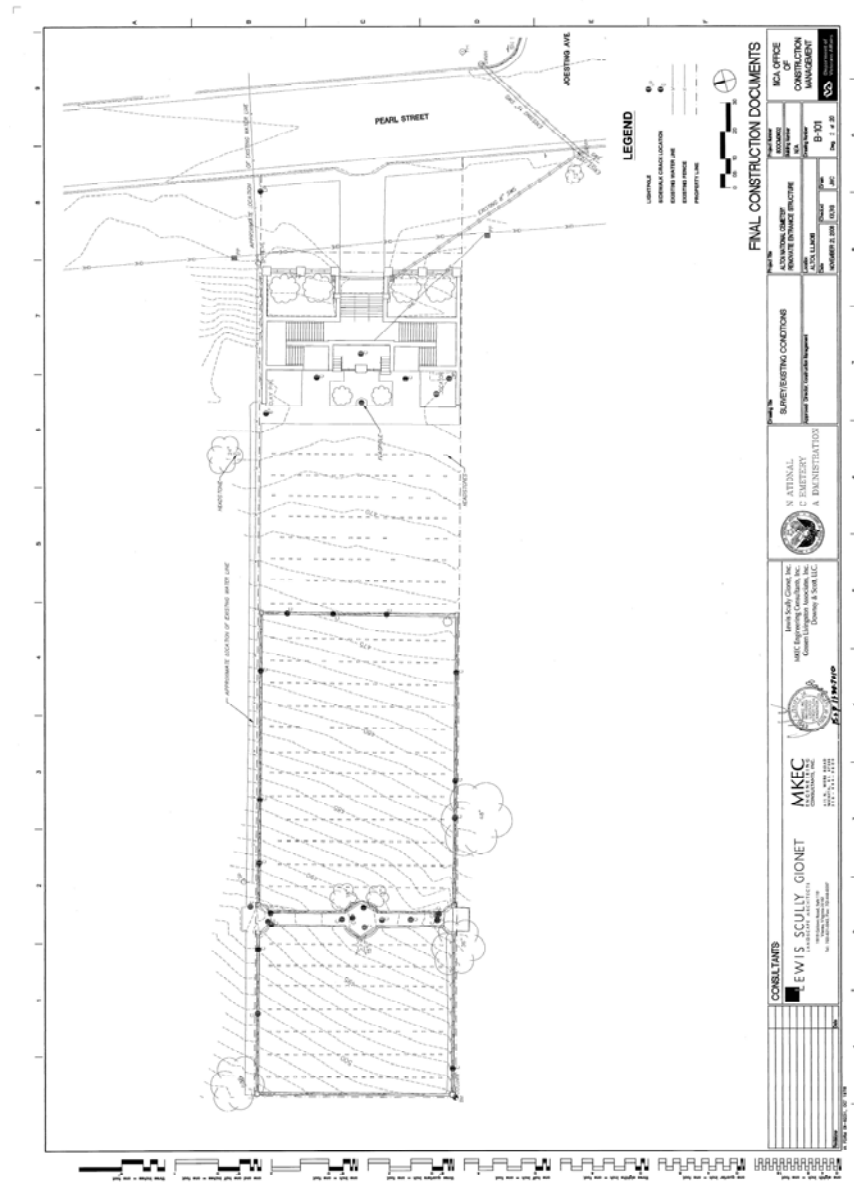
## **GEOGRAPHICAL DATA: BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The National Cemetery Administration recognizes the above as the existing boundaries of the cemetery.

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Site plan of Alton National Cemetery

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### **ALTON NATIONAL CEMETERY**

Madison County, Illinois

Paige Wagoner, Photographer

Date of Photographs: April 22, 2009

VIEW OF: "Alton National Cemetery" plaque at main entrance, view looking west  
PHOTO 1 of 28

VIEW OF: "United States of America" plaque at main entrance and fence, view looking southwest  
PHOTO 2 of 28

VIEW OF: Central bay of rostrum, east elevation  
PHOTO 3 of 28

VIEW OF: Stairs from first level to second level, view looking north  
PHOTO 4 of 28

VIEW OF: Grave locator, view looking southeast  
PHOTO 5 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking west  
PHOTO 6 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking southwest  
PHOTO 7 of 28

VIEW OF: Gravesite of Lynn D. Rives  
PHOTO 8 of 28

VIEW OF: Gravesite of Percy F. Brooks  
PHOTO 9 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking southwest  
PHOTO 10 of 28

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VIEW OF: Gravesite of Denver W. Hardesty  
PHOTO 11 of 28

VIEW OF: Gravesite of George Schneider  
PHOTO 12 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking northwest  
PHOTO 13 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking west  
PHOTO 14 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking northeast; note concrete curbing  
PHOTO 15 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking southwest  
PHOTO 16 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking northeast  
PHOTO 17 of 28

VIEW OF: Walkway between sections B and C with curbing and corner blocks, view looking south  
PHOTO 18 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking northwest  
PHOTO 19 of 28

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VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking northeast; note curbing and walkway  
PHOTO 20 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking northwest  
PHOTO 21 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking west  
PHOTO 22 of 28

VIEW OF: Detail of wrought-iron fence, view looking west  
PHOTO 23 of 28

VIEW OF: Brickwork on stairs, view looking south  
PHOTO 24 of 28

VIEW OF: Decorative detail on concrete, view looking north  
PHOTO 25 of 28

VIEW OF: Podium, view looking northeast  
PHOTO 26 of 28

VIEW OF: Podium, view looking northwest  
PHOTO 27 of 28

VIEW OF: Cemetery, view looking north  
PHOTO 28 of 28