

Cold Harbor National Cemetery  
Route 156 North  
Mechanicsville, Virginia 23111

## Description

The Cold Harbor National Cemetery, established in 1866, is located on Virginia State Highway No. 156, about nine miles east of the city of Richmond, Virginia. The cemetery is approximately square in shape. The main entrance was formerly used for pedestrian access only. In 1932, a ten-foot-wide entry with iron gates was installed within the wall for equipment access to the utility building. From the main entrance at the center of the south side, a concrete walk extends to the flagpole. The entire cemetery is enclosed by a brick wall, four feet six inches high and approximately 980 lineal feet. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones.

The lodge was constructed in 1870 from a design by Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs and is Second Empire in style. It is an L-shaped, stone structure with a slate mansard roof (now covered with aluminum shingles). The main portion is one and one-half stories with dormer windows projecting from the mansard roof. The first floor contains an entry porch, living room, dining room, kitchen, and office. The upper story contains two bedrooms and a bath. The lodge contains a partial basement. There is a total of 1,364 square feet of living space. The windows on the first story are six-over-six double hung, while the upper-story windows are casement types with two panes in each casement. The interior retains much of the original fabric. It is finished with hardwood floors and plastered walls and ceilings. A brick and frame kitchen lean-to addition on the rear was constructed in the early 1900s. In 1925, a concrete front porch floor replaced the wood floor. A buff-colored brick garage with stone inserts was added in the 1950s.



A brick and concrete pump house, 11 feet by 7 feet, was constructed in 1927. A brick and concrete utility building with comfort station, 26 feet, 6 inches by 11 feet, 6 inches, was constructed in 1933. The roof is clad with asphalt shingles. A brick and concrete gasoline storage building, eight feet five inches by eight feet, was constructed in 1936. Its roof is clad with asphalt shingles.

## Noted Burials

There is one Medal of Honor recipient buried in the Cold Harbor National Cemetery. Sergeant Major Augustus Barry, is buried in Section A, Grave 309. He served with the 16th U.S. Infantry and died on August 3, 1871. He was superintendent of the cemetery at the time of his death. His grave is marked with a special marker inscribed with an enlarged gold-leafed replica of the medal of the United States Army and the words "MEDAL OF HONOR."

## Significant Monuments/Memorials

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Monument - A tall granite monument, bearing the figure of a soldier at parade-rest, was erected in the southwest corner of the cemetery in 1909 by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



New York State Monument - A large commemorative monument erected in 1909 under the auspices of the New York State Monuments Commission bears a large bronze plaque listing the names of 219 members of the 8th New York Heavy Artillery who were killed or died of wounds received in the Battle of Cold Harbor. It is 11 feet, 4 inches high, and has a bronze tablet measuring 5 feet by 3 feet, 4 inches, on which are



recorded the casualties of the regiment. The monument cost \$1,143 and was dedicated on the 46th anniversary of the engagement. The 8th Heavy Artillery originally was organized at Lockport, New York, as the 129th New York Infantry and recruited principally in Niagara, New Orleans, and Genesee counties. As part of Major General Winfield Scott Hancock's 2nd Corps, it was commanded at Cold Harbor by Colonel Peter A. Porter, who was killed there. He was succeeded in command by Colonel Willard W. Bates.



At the extreme north end of the plat are two large burial mounds, one containing the remains of 568 and the other of 321 unknown Union soldiers. Between these two mounds, the United States erected a white marble sarcophagus in 1877, which is five feet, two inches in height. The inscription is in tribute to the memory of some of the unknowns interred in the cemetery and reads as follows: "Near this stone rests the remains of 889 Union soldiers gathered from the Battlefields of Mechanicsville, Savage's Station, Gaines's Mills, and the vicinity of Cold Harbor."

There is a monument, seven feet six inches in height, made of an original cast iron sea-coast artillery tube, secured by a concrete base. The inscription on the cast bronze plaque affixed to the monument reads as follows:

UNITED STATES  
NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY  
COLD HARBOR, VIRGINIA  
ESTABLISHED APRIL 30TH, 1866  
INTERMENTS 1952  
KNOWN 673  
UNKNOWN 1279



## Civil War Activity in Area

According to *Battlefields of the Civil War*, in 1864, Old Cold Harbor was little more than a country crossroads distinguished by a rather seedy looking tavern. Strategically, however, it gained importance when both Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee recognized its significance controlling the roads leading toward the Chickahominy River and Richmond. Beyond the Chickahominy, a series of massive fortifications protected the approaches to the Confederate capital. Neither commander wanted the next major test to take place around these entrenchments.

In May 1864, the armies commanded by Lee and Grant locked in a series of brutal engagements. The Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, North Anna River, and Totopotomoy Creek became places of mass carnage as both sides waged what most hoped would be the last battles of the war. By June 1, 1864, Lee and Grant had shifted their attention to the Old Cold Harbor crossroads on the north side of the Chickahominy River. Grant ordered an attack for dawn on June 2, but it was postponed for a day. On June 3, Grant decided on a head-on assault. It was probably the greatest mistake of his military career. By then Lee was ready. The fighting opened at 4:30 a.m., with a charge all along the two armies' entrenchments. Having had two days to prepare, the Confederates were well fortified. The attack was a head-on crash against the Rebel lines, relying on the sheer weight of numbers to breach them. In less than an hour, thousands of Grant's men fell dead or were wounded. According to one participant, "The dead covered more than five acres of ground about as thickly as they could be laid." By the end of the day, the Union army had lost over 6,000 men.

The battle took place on approximately a two-and one-half-mile-front, although the armies stretched for six miles from south to north, with the Union army facing west. Grant's total strength was over 100,000 men, but less than 50,000 were actually engaged in the struggle. Lee's total strength consisted of less than 60,000 men, but only half were involved in the action of June 3. From June 1-12, the Union losses totaled 12,700; Confederate losses were conservatively estimated at 4,000.

The battle at Cold Harbor proved to be Lee's last major victory in the field and, although it was a military defeat as far as Grant was concerned, it turned out to be one of the most important and significant battles fought during the Civil War. The results of this battle changed the course of the war in the east from a war of maneuver to a war of siege. It also influenced the strategy and tactics of future wars by showing that well-selected, well-manned entrenchments, adequately supported by artillery, were practically impregnable to frontal assaults.