

Keokuk National Cemetery  
1701 J Street  
Keokuk, Iowa 52632

## Description

The Keokuk National Cemetery, established in 1862, is located in Lee County, two miles west of the city of Keokuk. The cemetery is divided into two sections, the eastern section and the western section. Each section has its own entrance gate and each contains a flagpole. The superintendent's lodge is located in the eastern section, and the administration/service building is situated just inside the entrance to the western section. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones.

The eastern section, which is the original cemetery, is located adjacent to the Oakland Cemetery, owned and operated by the city of Keokuk. The entrance gate to this section is located on 18th Street and is protected by wrought-iron gates supported by stone posts. In 1871, the grounds were enclosed by a wrought-iron picket fence, four and one-half feet in height. In 1949, the entry gates, pillars, and fence were replaced by the standard design being constructed in national cemeteries at that time.

The superintendent's lodge was constructed in 1870 and was designed by Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs from the original standard plan for Civil War era national cemeteries. It is a one and one-half story brick and stone cottage, Second Empire design, with a slate mansard roof and dormer windows. The first floor windows are arched (rusticated brick arches with six-over-three windows). This is a unique feature to the standard Meigs lodge that occurs only in the Keokuk National Cemetery. The second floor windows, replaced in 1954, are six-over-six dormer windows. The first floor contains an office, living room, dining room and kitchen, and the upper level contains two and one-half bedrooms and a bath. The corners of the lodge have rusticated quoins. There is a basement and an enclosed porch. A brick addition to the kitchen was constructed in the 1930's.



A brick and concrete maintenance building, 16 feet by 24 feet, with a shingle roof, was constructed in 1937 and is located near the lodge. This building is now used for storage.

The entrance gate to the western section is located on J Street and is protected by wrought iron gates supported by stone posts. The grounds are enclosed by wrought iron fencing and chain link fencing.

The brick administration/maintenance building, located in this section, was constructed in 1982. The roof is metal.

## Noted Burials

There is one Medal of Honor recipient buried in the national cemetery: John F. Thorson, Private First Class, U. S. Army, Company G, 17th Infantry, 7th Infantry Division - Section D, Grave 71. 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

One commemorative monument in the Keokuk National Cemetery is located in Section D in the eastern section of the cemetery. It was erected in 1912 by the Women's Relief Corps of Keokuk, and consists of a tall granite shaft, suitably inscribed, and surmounted by a life-size figure of a Civil War soldier standing at parade rest on the top. The monument measures five feet nine inches square at the bottom and two feet four inches square at the top.



In Section B in the eastern section of the cemetery is a copper case with a glass top containing the cornerstone of the old Estes House (hotel) that stood on the corner of 5th and Main Streets in the City of Keokuk. This Estes House was turned into a general hospital during the Civil War and was the largest of the Keokuk military hospitals maintained during the Civil War. The building was razed in 1929, and the cornerstone was removed and brought to the cemetery in memory of those who died in the hospital. An inscription reads as follows:



CORNERSTONE OF THE OLD ESTES HOUSE  
FIFTH & MAIN KEOKUK, IOWA  
SITE OF ARMY HOSPITAL APRIL 17, 1862 - OCT. 1, 1865  
ERECTED TO THE MEMORY OF THE SOLDIERS WHO  
DIED IN THE OLD GENERAL HOSPITAL AT KEOKUK  
AND ARE BURIED IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY

A bronze wreath erected by the American War Dads and Auxiliaries of Iowa is located in Section D.



## Civil War Activity in Area

The location of Keokuk at the confluence of the Des Moines and Mississippi Rivers provided transportation facilities for the produce of Iowa farms so necessary for the war's execution. Many young men from Iowa farms and villages passed through Keokuk enroute down the "Father of Waters" (Mississippi River) to the battlefields of the South.

The first Civil War camp in Iowa was Camp Ellsworth, established near Keokuk in May 1861. It was here on May 14, 1861, that members of the 1st Iowa Volunteer Infantry were mustered into service. Three other military assembly centers; Camp Rankin, Camp Halleck and Camp Lincoln, were also established at Keokuk, in 1861 and 1862. The 3rd Regiment of the Iowa Volunteer Infantry was mustered into service in June 1861. Between August 30 and September 14, the 3rd Regiment Iowa Volunteer Cavalry was formed. In 1862, the 17th and 19th Regiments of the Iowa Volunteer Infantry were organized and mustered in at Keokuk.

As the war progressed, casualty lists of the sick and wounded brought a more somber aspect to the war effort activities at Keokuk. Five Army general hospitals, capable of accommodating more than 1,500 sick and wounded soldiers, were established to care for casualties brought up the Mississippi River from the battlefields of the South.