

Salisbury National Cemetery
202 Government Road
Salisbury, North Carolina 28144

Description

The Salisbury National Cemetery was established in 1865. It is located in Rowan County, about one-half mile southwest of downtown. The main entrance is situated near the center of the north side and is protected by a double wrought iron gate with a pedestrian gate on each side, all supported by cast iron piers. Another wrought iron entrance gate supported by stone piers is located on Railroad Avenue near East Monroe Street, from which an avenue extends south to the flagpole. A pedestrian gate, supported by concrete piers, is located in the southeast corner of the cemetery off Monroe Street. There are also two iron gates supported by concrete columns located along Clay Street in the southeastern corner of the cemetery. One is for pedestrians, and the other is used by maintenance personnel. An opening in the perimeter wall near Section A also provides pedestrian and equipment access to the newest burial area (Sections L and M). The older portion of the cemetery is enclosed by a substantial stone wall with a coping of granite. An area along Railroad Avenue, extending from the main entry to the pedestrian gate, is enclosed by wrought iron fencing, and from the pedestrian gate to the southwest corner, including the newest burial sections, the area is enclosed by black chain link fencing. Pigeon Creek, a surface water drainage ditch, runs east and west through the cemetery. Two concrete pedestrian bridges with black screw pipe railing cross the creek. There is also a vehicular bridge over the creek which serves the roadway leading to the burial trenches at the south end of the cemetery. A concrete culvert bridge with wood and steel guard rails serves to cross the creek along the service road leading to the newest burial area. The lodge, now used as the administration building, is located southeast of the main entrance, and a utility building is located to the south of the lodge. A committal service shelter is situated on the left side of the roadway in the section near Railroad Avenue and East Monroe Street. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones, except for Sections G and H, which are marked with flat granite markers.

The lodge was constructed in 1934. It is a two-story brick and concrete structure with frame stucco gables on the second story. The mansard roof is made of Ludowici tile shingles. The building contains seven rooms (1,742 square feet) plus an unfinished basement (882 square feet). The first floor consists of two offices, a kitchen, and a display room, and the second story



contains three bedrooms and a bath. The windows on the first floor are six-over six, and on the second floor are six-over-six double hung. There is a screened front porch. Cemetery superintendents and directors resided in the lodge until October 1989. The building is now used as the cemetery office.

The brick, stucco and concrete utility building, 37 feet 6 inches by 21 feet 6 inches, containing public toilets, was constructed in 1929. The roof is tin. The building contains two overhead garage doors, and the windows are six-over-six double hung. It was originally used as a stable, forage house and tool house. The loft has a pine floor. A garage was subsequently added. A project was completed in 1998 consisting of renovation of approximately 190 square feet of the building to provide for a staff rest room and a storage room and construction of an addition of approximately 600 square feet to provide for a foreman's office, employee lunch area and locker room, and a new public restroom. In addition, a 250-square-foot covered connecting passageway with roll-up doors for vehicle access between the burial areas and the maintenance yard and an opening in the wall to provide pedestrian access to the public restroom were included in this project.

The flagpole is located in the circle near the northeast addition to the cemetery.

Significant Monuments/Memorials

Federal Monument to the Unknown Dead - A granite obelisk and base, 50 feet, 2 inches in height, with a base of 18 feet by 18 feet, erected by an Act of Congress approved March 3, 1873, (General Orders No. 47) to the memory of the unknown soldiers who died in the Confederate prison at Salisbury. The monument is located near the southwest corner of the cemetery. The shaft is crowned with a laurel wreath and the four sides are ornamented with laurel leaves. At the foot of the shaft are a helmet, sword and shield, bearing the National crest, coat of arms, and stars. Grouped with these is a chain with broken bracelets, suggesting the condition of the dead prisoners and their happy release from captivity. Just above the shield is a veiled tablet, indicating that the dead were unknown. Above the tablet is a small laurel crown enclosing the words "Pro Patria." On December 29, 1874, a contract was entered into with Mr. Alexander McDonald of Mount Auburn, Massachusetts, for the erection of this monument for the sum of \$9,500. The contract provided for its erection by December 31, 1876.



Maine Monument - Granite, 25 feet in height, with a granite statue on top, erected in 1908, and located near the southwest corner of the cemetery. At the four corners of the first base, which is made of Vinalhaven granite, are mortars of highly polished black granite from St. George. The second base, cut from Lincolnville white granite, has cut on the front "One Country, One Flag." At each corner is a polished column of black granite. On the front of the die, facing north, is the new state seal in shield form of bronze. On the four sides of the first cap is the word "Maine" in large raised letters and at each corner a large star. On the front of the cap the army is represented by a stack of guns. On the other sides are



representations of the cavalry by crossed swords, the navy by anchor, and the artillery by crossed cannons. Four large balls of polished black granite are placed at the corners. Upon the pedestal stands a soldier with a gun at parade rest, which is cut from Lincolnville white granite. The statue which was cut in Quincy, Massachusetts, stands seven feet, six inches high. The total cost of the monument was \$4,755.56.

Pennsylvania Monument - A bronze statue on top of a dome of a Union prisoner of war, erected in 1909, and located near Section C. From a granite base of 20 feet by 20 feet, the monument rises to a height of 40 feet. This monument was erected by authority of an Act of the Pennsylvania Legislature approved June 13, 1907, to commemorate the patriotic devotion, heroism, and self-sacrifice of the officers and soldiers of the Pennsylvania volunteers who died while confined as prisoners of war in the Confederate military prison at Salisbury and were interred among the unknown Union soldiers and sailors in the 18 trenches by the southeast side of the monument. Rough hewn granite blocks form battered corner columns, inside of which on three sides Roman arches spring from black granite pillars. On the east side is a solid wall of granite blocks. A terraced granite roof with four convex lower slopes supports a massive cupola-like base for the statue atop. Historical records indicate that the Pennsylvania monument was used at one time as a rostrum.



All Wars Monument - A cast stone monument located near the flagpole, was donated by the Rowan County Veterans Council on May 27, 1990, and contains plaques of each service designation (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard).



In the southwest corner of the cemetery is the site of 18 burial trenches containing the remains of 11,700 Union soldiers who died while imprisoned at the nearby Salisbury Confederate Prison. Each trench is marked with a headstone at each end with the inscription "U. S. Unknown Soldier." The longest trenches are 240 feet long. Surrounding the burial trenches are graves of 412 Civil War soldiers, most of whom are unknown. As you enter this area, there is a plaque which was erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy on which is inscribed a map of the burial trench area and a drawing of the Salisbury Prison.



A cast-bronze plaque located in the exhibit room in the administration building is similar to those found in many other national cemeteries established during the Civil War. In many cases, the plaque is affixed to a monument made of an original cast-iron seacoast artillery tube, secured by a concrete base. A report, circa 1904, found in the National Archives, which describes each national cemetery and lists buildings, etc., shows that at the Salisbury National Cemetery there were "gun monuments, in good condition." It is possible that this plaque was affixed to a gun monument and

was subsequently removed. The plaque is inscribed as follows:

E PLURIBUS UNUM
UNITED STATES
NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY
SALISBURY
ESTABLISHED 1865
INTERMENTS 12115
KNOWN 90
UNKNOWN 12025

The exhibit room in the administration building contains displays about the Salisbury Confederate Prison, including a model made by junior high school students, sketches of the prison, and a burial map of the 18 burial trenches containing the burial sites of 11,700 Union soldiers who died in the prison. Other military memorabilia are displayed, as well as military uniforms from different eras. There are also service flags, one for each branch of service.

Civil War Activity in Area

Salisbury was a major military depot, housing the trainloads of materials that had been sent south from Richmond. Fearful that Raleigh would fall, Governor Zebulon B. Vance had sent large quantities of state property to the Salisbury warehouses. In addition, the town contained several military hospitals, an ordnance plant, and a state district headquarters for the Commissary of Subsistence.

Brigadier General Bradley T. Johnson was in command of the Confederate forces at Salisbury. On the morning of April 12, 1865, he was absent, as he had been ordered to Greensboro, and the job was given to Brigadier General W. M. Gardner, who had perhaps between 500 and 800 men to hold the town. Gardner had one experienced officer to rely upon, Colonel John C. Pemberton, an ordnance inspector who had formerly held the rank of Lieutenant General while commanding at Vicksburg. Gardner put his force across the Mocksville road along Grant's Creek, a few miles north of Salisbury. He removed the boards from the bridge and awaited the enemy. At daylight on the 12th, they appeared with startling suddenness. Finding his way blocked by Gardner's men, Major General George H. Stoneman sent detachments up and down the creek to cross and hit the Confederate rear. Simultaneous with these moves, details from the 8th and 13th Tennessee Union Cavalry relaid the flooring on the bridge. This allowed Miller's (first name unknown) brigade to charge across and hit Gardner in the center. Within 20 minutes it was all over. The small Confederate band scattered through the town and to the woods beyond.

Salisbury was a rich prize. Stoneman took it over quickly, placing guards at various points to enforce his orders against pillaging. For quite some time the citizens had been expecting the raiders. Since the last week in March the "excitement" in town had been "almost perpetual." Each day brought a new rumor of Stoneman's closeness and those townspeople who expected no clemency because of the prison in their midst "drowned" themselves in feeling of profound despair. Soon after entering Salisbury, General Stoneman sent out a strong detachment to capture the long railroad bridge over the Yadkin River, some six miles above town. From strong entrenchments on the north side of the river, a hastily assembled Confederate force of approximately 1,000 defended the bridge. This enemy position on the bluffs overlooking the trestle

appeared so formidable to the Federals that they decided against a major assault. After feeling out the defenses and receiving in return strong Confederate artillery fire, the cavalymen pulled back to Salisbury. Since they left the long bridge intact, their return to town was not marked by "wild cheers" or "war whoops of victory."

On April 12 and 13, General Stoneman destroyed the public buildings and military stores he had captured in Salisbury. First, he had the contents of the Confederate supply depot thrown into the streets so that the "poor whites" and Negroes could get what they wanted. Then all that was not carted away was burned. The men of the 12th Ohio were given the duty of leveling the Confederate prison. Most of the town's citizens were glad when the soldiers set fire to the prison, the scene of so much unalleviated suffering and so many deaths. Also destroyed were four cotton mills, 7,000 bales of cotton, an extensive steam distillery, railroad shops, 15 miles of track, a tannery, and ordnance works. All that remained of the Confederate prison was a small guard's cottage and the flag that had flown over the gates. As flames engulfed the large quantity of ordnance stores, the air was rent by the noise of exploding shells. Columns of dense smoke marked the city by day, while huge flames leaping skyward made the conflagration plainly visible at night for miles around.

In 1863, Salisbury had been designated by the rebel authorities as a place for the incarceration of Union prisoners of war. It was chosen for the prison site because of its proximity to the railroad (250 yards north). Among the first buildings to be constructed were a cotton mill (1841) and several cottages for brick workers. The Confederacy erected mess halls, hospital quarters, and a "dead house" (where the bodies of the prisoners were placed to await burial). The prison pen was built on the edge of the town and was not of sufficient area to comfortably accommodate the prisoners of war sent to that place. The prisoners were huddled together in a small prison pen, without shelter or proper food and clothing. An agreement was arranged by General John A. Dix, U. S. Army, and General D. H. Hill, Confederate Army in July 1862 to release all prisoners of war. If one side had more than the other, the excess number could not take up arms again. For those involved in an even trade, they could go back to fighting. There were, of course, charges and countercharges of parole violations, and the agreement lasted only about six months before it completely broke down. From early 1863, the number of prisoner exchanges grew fewer and the number of prisoners of war multiplied on each side. Some exchanges were negotiated by the military commanders on the battlefield, until General Ulysses S. Grant ordered this practice stopped in 1864. In 1865, realizing that the war was coming to a close, Grant relented and consented to a policy of even exchange. When the exchange of prisoners was stopped, the Salisbury Confederate prison facility was no longer adequate for the large number of prisoners, and conditions rapidly deteriorated. In early October 1864, there were 5,000 prisoners at Salisbury. By mid-November, this number had swelled to about 10,000. By late 1864, over 10,000 men crowded its six-acre compound, which was large enough to handle only a fraction of that number. This over-taxing of facilities and a shortage of supplies had resulted in a staggering mortality rate. As a consequence of these conditions, Confederate authorities decided to remove the prisoners as soon as a safe place could be found for them. Out of the 10,000, over 5,000 fell victim to starvation and disease. When it became apparent that the Confederacy was losing the war, the remaining Union prisoners were sent to Richmond, Virginia, and Wilmington, North Carolina. By March 1865, all of the prisoners, except the infirm, had been evacuated.

The small guard's cottage which remained after the prison was destroyed stands today on Bank Street in Salisbury, and the flag that had flown over the gates was taken by Union soldiers but was returned and is now on display in the Rowan Museum. An old escape tunnel still runs under the streets of Salisbury as a grim reminder of the desperate need to escape the terrible conditions of the prison.

All trace of the prison had been swept away when the cemetery was inspected on November 1, 1868. At that time the cemetery was situated on a small hill in which the Union soldiers were buried in 18 trenches, averaging 240 feet in length, parallel to each other. In the trenches, it is estimated that there were 11,700 bodies, all unknown. The number of burials from the prison pen could not be accurately known, as no records could be found. The inspector stated that to have buried this large number in such a limited space shows that in the trenches they were placed one above another. Some few were buried in coffins, but the great mass was not. It was stated that a Major McGee, the commander of the place, used what plank was at his control for coffins, but that his requisitions for additional plank for this purpose were disregarded by the rebel authorities. To protect the trenches, a rough stone curb was placed around each one, one foot high and one foot broad. A plaque mounted on a granite base showing the location of the burial trenches was erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in October 1992.