

Cypress Hills National Cemetery
625 Jamaica Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11208

Description

The Cypress Hills National Cemetery, established in 1862, is located in Kings County. The national cemetery consists of three areas: the national cemetery along Jamaica Avenue, the Union Grounds, and the Mount of Victory Plot. The latter two are situated to the east of the Cypress Hills Cemetery, a private cemetery located approximately one mile north of the national cemetery. The main entrance to the national cemetery is located at the center of the south side on Jamaica Avenue and is protected by ornamental iron gates constructed in 1886. Wrought iron fencing encloses the area along Jamaica Avenue and for a small distance around each corner, and the remainder of the main cemetery is enclosed by chain link fencing.



The lodge is located to the right of the main entrance to the national cemetery, and a utility building is situated just east of the lodge. Between these two buildings rests the flagpole. A rostrum is located at the terminus of the main drive north of the entrance on Jamaica Avenue. The Union Grounds are enclosed by wrought iron fencing along the south side only, and a flagpole is located in the northeastern portion of the grounds. The Mount of Victory Plot is located to the southeast of the Union Grounds. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones.

The lodge, constructed in 1887, is located along Jamaica Avenue in the national cemetery. It was designed by Montgomery C. Meigs, but departs from the more typical Second Empire design adopted for the lodges. With its L-shaped plan, projecting front bay, and multi-gables, it is more reminiscent of the Queen Anne style. The first floor of the two-story brick building contains four rooms and an enclosed porch, and the second floor contains three rooms and a bath. There is also a finished basement. The lodge has a pitched roof rather than the mansard typical of the lodges built in the 1860's and 1870's.



The roof of the lodge is slate and the roof over the garage addition is reinforced concrete slab. In 1933, a one-story addition was constructed, adding an office, a workshop/storage room, and garage space for two vehicles, as well as public restrooms. Cemetery superintendents/directors resided in the lodge until 1974. A fire set by vandals damaged the first floor in 1984. In 1990, a long-term lease was negotiated with the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (CHLDC), a non-profit organization whose operations focus on the redevelopment of the Cypress Hills Area. Under the terms of the lease agreement, the CHLDC assumed responsibility for refurbishing the building and for future maintenance. This organization uses the lodge for an office, meeting room and museum.

The brick and concrete utility building, with an asphalt shingle roof, was constructed in 1938.

A limestone classical revival rostrum, 20 feet, 2 inches by 14 feet, 6 inches, with a clay tile roof, was constructed in 1939. It is located at the northern end of the main axial drive from the entrance gate.

Noted Burials

There are 24 Medal of Honor recipients interred in the Cypress Hills National Cemetery. The markers at their graves are inscribed with an enlarged gold-leafed replica of the medal of the awarding service and the words "MEDAL OF HONOR." The names and grave locations are as follows:

Frederick W. Gerber, Sergeant Major, U. S. Engineers, 1839-1871 - Section 2, Grave 1601.

James Webb, Private, Company F, 5th New York Infantry - Section 2, Grave 7410.

John Cooper (a.k.a. John Mather), Coxswain, U. S. Navy - Section 2, Grave 5022.

Valentine Rossbach, Sergeant, 34th New York Battery - Section 2, Grave 5427.

Patrick Golden - Section 2, Grave 4316.

James Dougherty, Private, U. S. Marine Corps - Section 6, Grave 12374.

John Nihill - Section 2, Grave 6640.

Christopher Freemayer, Private, Company D, 5th U. S. Infantry - Section 2, Grave 5259.

Henry Rodenburg, Private, Company A, 5th U. S. Infantry - Section 2, Grave 5825.

Henry Wilkens, First Sergeant, Company L, 2nd U. S. Cavalry - Section 2, Grave 5325.

Edward P. Grimes, Sergeant, Company F, 5th U. S. Cavalry - Section 2, Grave 7210.

Louis Williams, Captain of the Hold, U. S. Navy - Section 6, Grave 12616.

Bernhard Jetter, Sergeant, Company K, 7th U. S. Cavalry - Section 5, Grave 1.

Anton Olsen, Ordinary Seaman, U. S. Navy - Section 2, Grave 9158.

John Mapes Adams (a.k.a. George Lawrence Day), Sergeant, U. S. Marine Corps
Section 2, Grave 8262.

Daniel Joseph Daly, Private, U. S. Marine Corps - Section 5, Grave 70.

Peter Stewart, Gunnery Sergeant, U. S. Marine Corps - Section 2, Grave 7303.

Edwin S. Martin - Section 2, Grave 5966.

Mons Monssen, Chief Gunner's Mate, U. S. Navy - Section OS, Grave 190.

Johannes J. Johannessen, Chief Watertender, U. S. Navy - Section 2, Grave 7425.

Eugene P. Smith, Chief Watertender, U. S. Navy - Section 2, Grave 7742.

Wilhelm Smith, Gunner's Mate First Class, U. S. Navy - Section 2, Grave 9492.

Wilbur E. Colyer, Sergeant, U. S. Army, Company A, 1st Engineers, 1st Division - Section 2, Grave 8588.

John Schiller, Private, U. S. Army, Company E, 158th New York Infantry - Section 5, Grave 3.

Significant Monuments/Memorials



French Cross - A gray granite monument in the shape of a French cross approximately 12 feet high, in memory of 25 sailors of the French fleet who died while on duty in American waters during World War I, located near the rostrum. An ammunition ship blew up in New York Harbor. Of the 25 sailors, 22 are buried in the area of the monument, and three were returned to France. The 22 individual graves are marked by gray granite headstones with a bronze plaque on top and the interment data inscribed in French.

Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) Monument - This monument is located in the foreground of the rostrum. It is approximately three feet square. At the top of the left side is inscribed an Indian head with Army, Navy, and Marine insignias to the right.



Eagle Monument - A pyramid of field stones erected in the Mount of Victory Plot was constructed by laborers of the Cypress Hills Cemetery in about 1934. A large stone eagle with wings outspread, which was the property of the cemetery, was erected atop the pyramid by the Londino Construction Company, Bronx, New York, during the same year.



Ringgold Monument - A large obelisk monument located in the Union Grounds, erected by the officers and soldiers of Colonel Benjamin Ringgold's command.



British Navy Monument - A large granite monument at Grave 36, Section 2, bears the names of 14 officers and men of the British Navy who perished on the coast off Sandy Hook, New Jersey, on December 30 or 31, 1783. Inasmuch as a treaty of peace between Great Britain and the United States was signed on September 3, 1783, ending the Revolutionary War, perhaps the ship bearing these men might have been homeward bound when disaster overtook it. A document dated April 20, 1908, to the Commanding Officer at Fort Hancock, New Jersey, from the Constructing Quartermaster at Fort Hancock, reported that a few days prior, laborers unearthed a brick vault while making an excavation for a new road. The vault was opened and found to contain the skeletons of a number of men. The Construction Quartermaster felt that since the vault was constructed of old English brick and that it was covered with about ten feet of sand, he believed the remains to be those of English soldiers or sailors who were probably buried there during the Revolutionary War. A century and a quarter later, their remains were disinterred and were reinterred in a single grave in the Cypress Hills National Cemetery. The date of reinterment was March 5, 1909. The headstone, inscribed with their names, was erected in 1939.



There is a commemorative area known as the "Garfield Memorial Site," located within the Union Grounds. Its location was marked by an oak tree planted November 3, 1881, by the James A. Garfield Oak Society of Brooklyn, New York, in memory of President Garfield. This Society was formed almost entirely of Germans residing in the Eastern District of Brooklyn. The tree was subsequently enclosed with an iron fence with gate and gate posts inscribed with "JAMES A. GARFIELD SHOT JULY 2, 1881, AND JAMES A. GARFIELD DIED SEPTEMBER 19, 1881." The inscription on the gate read: "ERECTED BY J.A.G. OAK ASS'N. - NOVEMBER 13, 1881." An article in the New York Times for November 14, 1881, regarding the tree planting, read as follows:

"The James A. Garfield Oak Society, formed almost entirely of Germans residing in the Eastern District of Brooklyn, met at Cypress Hills Cemetery yesterday to plant an oak in honor of the martyred President. A procession, consisting of fully 1,200 men, formed at 11 o'clock on Meserole Street and took up the line of march toward the cemetery. Among those who participated were members of the Grand Army of the Republic of the Eastern District, numbering 86 men; the Sixteenth Ward Battery, 1100 men, with two guns; the Germania Schuetzenbund, 500 strong; the John Blaum Association, 50 strong; the Nineteenth Ward Battery; the Veteran Cadets, numbering 69, and the Soldiers and Sailors Union, 40 strong. The program at the cemetery consisted of an overture by the Columbia Band, a war song by the Schwaebischer Saetgerbund, an English oration by Col. Lewis R. Stegman, the newly elected Sheriff of Kings County, and the solemn planting of the oak, accompanied by a salute of 21 guns, fired by the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Ward Batteries. Then followed a German oration by Hewrr Thomsen, and the ceremonies ended with the playing of a dirge by the band. The throng of spectators at the cemetery was immense, and great interest was manifested in the proceedings. The members of the various societies wore badges bearing the words 'We mourn our loss,' and all were dressed in uniform. In his address Col. Stegman traced the careers of Lincoln and Garfield and showed how much alike they were and how, from humble beginnings, they had risen to the highest office in the great American Nation. Col. Stegman spoke also in eloquent terms of the soldier life of the late President Garfield. It was late in the afternoon when the exercises terminated."

The iron fence enclosing the Garfield memorial has been removed, and the area is now enclosed by shrubs. In September 1944, the memorial was damaged by a storm. The oak tree was uprooted, and gates, railing, and marble posts were broken. In October 1944, orders were given to dismantle the railings and posts. A new oak tree was planted in November 1944, and four maple trees replaced those damaged by the storm.

As you enter the cemetery, there are two plaques, each inscribed with a verse of Theodore O'Hara's "Bivouac of the Dead" (see full text in Appendix A). The inscriptions read as follows:

Plaque No. 1 ON FAME'S ETERNAL CAMPING GROUND
 THEIR SILENT TENTS ARE SPREAD
 AN GLORY GUARDS, WITH SOLEMN ROUND
 THE BIVOUAC OF THE DEAD

Plaque No. 2 THE MUFFLED DRUM'S SAD ROLL HAS BEAT
 THE SOLDIER'S LAST TATTOO
 NO MORE ON LIFE'S PARADE SHALL MEET
 THAT BRAVE AND FALLEN FEW

There are two plaques near the main entrance. One is inscribed with the language of An Act to Establish And Protect National Cemeteries (see full text in Appendix C). The second plaque is inscribed with General Orders No. 80 of the War Department issued by the Adjutant General's Office in Washington, September 1, 1875, by order of the Secretary of War (see full text in Appendix B). The plaques were constructed circa 1880.

Civil War Activity in Area

When originally established in 1862, the Cypress Hills National Cemetery was located within the boundaries of the private Cypress Hills Cemetery, which had been established in 1849.

At a meeting of the Cypress Hills Cemetery Board of Directors on April 21, 1862, the following minute was approved: Mr. Miles's (William) received a proposition from A. J. Case, undertaker, respecting a place for the burial of the United States soldiers who die in this city and vicinity, and when it was suggested to appropriate a portion of the cemetery grounds for that purpose, the members present concurred. Mr. Miles was a naturalized citizen born in Wales, who was destined to serve as a member of the Board and as an officer (without compensation) for more than 50 years and who, before his death, provided a liberal endowment toward the perpetual care and maintenance of the cemetery. The site set aside for the burial of Civil War dead occupied 2.7 acres and was known as the "Union Grounds." In March 1870, pursuant to that resolution, the Cypress Hills Cemetery Corporation conveyed, gratis to the federal government, the Union Grounds. The Government purchased, at 20 cents per square foot, 120 additional lots, and the whole was designated "Cypress Hills National Cemetery."

In the early 1880's, the War Department proposed to Congress a special appropriation for expansion of the Cypress Hills National Cemetery. Objections by Congress to the price asked by the Cypress Hills Cemetery Company for the desired tract led to the purchase of land outside the cemetery company limits. A parcel, consisting of 15.4 acres, located approximately one mile from the Union Grounds, was purchased in 1884 from Mr. Isaac Snediker. The Mount of Victory Plot, consisting of .06 acre, was donated to the United States by the state of New York. Title was conveyed by deed dated September 17, 1941 (Public Law 682, 76th Congress). These three separate plots, consisting of 18.2 acres, make up the Cypress Hills National Cemetery.