

Grafton National Cemetery  
431 Walnut Street  
Grafton, West Virginia 26354

## Description

The Grafton National Cemetery, established in 1867, is located in Taylor County. The cemetery is surrounded by a low stone wall, approximately three feet high, with entrance gates on three of the four sides. The front entrance gate is flanked by three impressive stone pillars, rectangular in configuration, with pyramidal caps. The cemetery is rectangular and is landscaped into three terrace levels (the original site being a steep hillside), all connected by a stairway/walkway that bisects the cemetery from the Walnut Street entrance to the rear entrance.



The rear entrance was formerly used by persons arriving by train, as the tracks and platform border that side of the cemetery. Another smaller walkway runs from the Cemetery Lane entrance to the plaza of the middle terrace. These walkways have the effect of dividing the cemetery into six separate areas. At the center of the middle terrace is the flagpole. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones.

A stone administration building with an asphalt shingle roof, as well as a wood and stone maintenance building with an asphalt shingle roof, are located near the southwestern corner of the cemetery.

## Noted Burials

Thornsbury Bailey Brown, the first Union soldier to be killed in the Civil War by a Confederate, is buried in Section F, Grave 1226. Private Brown of Captain George R. Lotham's "Grafton Guards" was mustered into Federal service as a member of Company B, 2nd Virginia (Restored) Infantry. Brown was shot and killed by a sniper on May 22, 1861, on the west side of Grafton. Originally buried in a private plot, his body was moved to the national cemetery in June 1903.

## Significant Monuments/Memorials

Thornsbury Bailey Brown Monument – A 12-foot-high obelisk monument commemorating Private Brown. The monument in the national cemetery was placed on his grave in 1928 by the United Daughters of Union Veterans. A monument to his memory also stands where his life was taken, on the spot what was then called "Fetterman," approximately three to four miles from the national cemetery.



There are three plaques within the national cemetery which were manufactured circa 1880. Two are inscribed with the language of the Act to Protect and Establish National Cemeteries. (See full text in Appendix A). One is located to the left of the entrance steps, and the other is located near the administration building.

The third plaque, located on the right side of the entrance steps, 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).

There are three plaques located near the administration building, each of which is inscribed with a verse of "Bivouac of the Dead" by Theodore O'Hara (see full text in Appendix C). The plaques read as follows:

ON FAME'S ETERNAL CAMPING GROUND,  
THEIR SILENT TENTS ARE SPREAD,  
AND GLORY GUARDS WITH SOLEMN ROUND,  
THE BIVOUAC OF THE DEAD

REST ON EMBALMED AND SAINTED DEAD  
DEAR AS THE BLOOD YE GAVE  
NO IMPIOUS FOOTSTEP HERE SHALL TREAD  
THE HERBAGE OF YOUR GRAVE

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



Outside the cemetery perimeter wall along the front sidewalk is a plaque inscribed as follows:

#### NATIONAL CEMETERY

The first National Military Cemetery in West Virginia is located on Walnut Street in Grafton. Established in 1867 for permanent burial of Civil War dead. Bailey Brown, the first Union soldier killed in the War, is buried here.



#### Civil War Activity in Area

During the Civil War, Grafton was a major rail terminus and an important link in communications to the west.

It was the intention of Civil War veterans to dedicate the national cemetery on May 30, 1868, to mark the day of May 30, 1861, when General B. F. Kelley entered Grafton to start the opening land engagement of the Civil War. However, a three-day rain that left the ground muddy caused Captain Daniel Wilson to postpone the dedication ceremonies.

Trains and army ambulances bearing bodies from nearby battlefields streamed into Grafton until bodies were piled high on the ground awaiting reburial. Due to the large number of unburied dead, the dedication was postponed again.

On Sunday afternoon, June 14, 1868, Captain Wilson aligned veterans in military formation at Compton's Corner and headed by a small martial band, the procession moved down St. John Street, across the "Boardwalk" to the Grafton House, then across the railroad bridge to West Grafton. There, that section's citizenry joined the parade to march out Pearl Street to the cemetery. There were so many unburied still were lying on the ground that the procession continued past the cemetery to Handley's Grove.

The small band was composed of Thomas Gough, Fifer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry; George Hammond, musician of the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry; Snare Drummers Clinton Albright, Millard Carr, Henry Lippencott, and Edward W. Walters; and Bass Drummer Joseph N. Shahan.

At the grove, Captain Wilson introduced the Reverend George Davidson, Pastor of the Baptist Church, who asked the divine blessings. At the conclusion of the prayer, the Honorable Jacob B. Bristol was introduced as the orator to give the First Memorial Day Address. He paid a beautiful tribute to the dead and the living, whom he said had served their nation in its greatest crisis to keep it "one undivided."

The idea of a national Memorial Day was conceived by Mrs. John A. Logan, wife of General John A. Logan, Civil War figure and Congressman from Illinois. She was deeply impressed after seeing a woman dressed in mourning clothes reverently place a garland of spring blossoms on the grave of a loved one. She related the tender scene to her husband and spoke of a national holiday for the dead of the nation. General Logan, in turn, introduced a bill in Congress on April 8, 1868, proposing to set aside May 30 as Memorial Day.

Decorating the graves with flowers began in 1869, when Mayor William Mallonee issued a proclamation asking all citizens "to lay aside their tasks at bench, forge, and shops and join the Civil War veterans in observance of 'Flower Strewing Day,' Monday, May 30<sup>th</sup>." He requested those who grew flowers to donate liberally to children who would retrieve them and place them on the graves. Flower Strewing Day retained its name until 1882, when Reno Post No. 7, Grafton Unit of Grand Army of the Republic, was organized. It adopted the more appropriate name of Memorial Day. Thus, Grafton became known as "Memorial City." Each Governor of the State of West Virginia is the principal speaker once during his term of office, and a great number of nationally-known people have appeared here in the same role.

The Memorial Day Program is made possible by an appropriation by the West Virginia State Legislature of \$2,000 yearly to help defray the expenses and transportation of high school bands, printing of programs, speakers expenses, etc. School children from kindergarten to high school seniors take part in the line of march and assist in decorating the graves with flowers. May 30<sup>th</sup> has also become "Homecoming Day" for many former citizens of Grafton and Taylor

County, who come from all sections of the country to honor the war dead. Memorial Day and Homecoming in Grafton has grown to merit national acclaim and is said to be the only celebration of like nature in the nation.