

Lexington National Cemetery
833 West Main Street
Lexington, Kentucky 40508

Description

The Lexington National Cemetery, established in 1863, consists of a lot within the 170-acre Lexington Cemetery in Fayette County. The national cemetery, containing 0.75 acre of land, is located in the southern border of the city cemetery, approximately 1,500 feet from the main entrance. The national cemetery site is somewhat triangular in shape, the graves being arranged in concentric arcs of circles, diverging in size from the apex of the triangle. The boundary lines of the national cemetery are marked with ten marble posts inscribed with the letters "US". These posts were erected in 1874

at a cost of \$500. No fence or wall surrounds the national cemetery. There is a 75-foot-high flagpole located within a circle, 40 feet in diameter, near the center of the lot. A bronze plaque identifying the cemetery is located within this circle. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones.



Civil War Activity in Area

During late 1863 and the early months of 1864, Kentucky was the scene of many small-scale engagements, most of which were officially described as skirmishes. Many actions took place in the vicinity of Lexington, Kentucky.

Confederate General John Hunt Morgan's cavalry defeated a Union cavalry force near Lexington in October 1862, entered the city, captured the garrison, and paroled the prisoners.

Morgan and some of his officers were later confined to a prison in Columbus, Ohio, from which they escaped in November of 1863. General Braxton Bragg had threatened to court-martial Morgan for disobeying orders; but, because the Confederacy needed leaders desperately, Morgan was restored to command. Then, in May 1864, Morgan informed the War Department that he was going to raid Kentucky. He moved out toward Lexington, leaving some troopers and infantry behind to destroy supplies and search for horses. The Confederate camp was suddenly overrun by Union troopers. Two hundred fifty Confederates were captured. Morgan considered turning back to deal with the threat closing in behind him, but he ultimately decided to push onto Lexington. Lexington was so poorly guarded that John Castleman, who rode in during the early morning hours, had some difficulty in finding anyone to hear his demand for surrender. After the railroad depot and some military storehouses were burned, the battery guarding the town surrendered. Here also, a considerable amount of looting occurred.



Bragg and other Richmond authorities later received reports from Kentucky, assailing Morgan's actions there. Several of his senior officers asked the War Department to investigate the charges; Morgan refused to do so. On August 30, the general was suspended from command and a court of inquiry was ordered for September 10. When a Union force was moving towards Bull's Gap, Morgan ignored his suspension and moved to intercept it. He established his headquarters in Greeneville, Tennessee, on September 3. Union commanders may have been told he was spending the night there. He was killed as he tried to reach his troops. Although born in Alabama, Morgan had strong Kentucky ties. He was educated at Lexington's Transylvania College. After Mexican War service, he manufactured hemp products and conducted a general merchandising business in Lexington. He became noted for the hard-riding raids that became his trademark, and many southerners called him the "Jeb Stuart of the West." He is buried in the adjacent city cemetery.

Lexington was also the site of a reception after the Rebels, under Kirby Smith, were elated by their victory at the Battle of Richmond, Kentucky. They were received amidst loud and continued applause, waving of handkerchiefs, throwing up of hats and hurrahs for rebel soldiers and the Confederacy. Smith savored his triumph in the heart of the Bluegrass at Lexington. He wrote to both General Bragg and President Jefferson Davis that Lexington was the place where a Confederate presence would "give the true men of Kentucky the opportunity for rallying to our standard." Kirby Smith's troops did not advance beyond Lexington, except for small forces he sent to Frankfort, Cynthiana, Covington and to the outskirts of Louisville and Shelbyville. He apparently was awaiting the coming of Bragg and the meeting of their forces. Kirby Smith had played his part—at least in his conception of the campaign—and now, if General Bragg could defeat Don Carlos Buell, Kentucky would be claimed for the Confederacy.



The Lexington National Cemetery had first been used as a government burial ground in 1861, the first burial being Amos Barr, 14th Infantry, on November 28, 1861.

The national cemetery was established in 1863, the original reservation consisting of 0.37 acre donated by the Lexington Cemetery Company, Inc. When arrangements for the care of the scattered dead in Kentucky provided for their reinterment in the Lexington National Cemetery, an agreement was made with the cemetery company to purchase an additional 0.38-acre unoccupied portion of the area in which original burials had been made.