

Rock Island National Cemetery
Rock Island Arsenal
Moline, Illinois 61265

Description

The Rock Island National Cemetery, established in 1863, is located at the extreme south-east end of the Army's Rock Island Arsenal on the Mississippi River in Rock Island County. The main entrance, constructed in 1993, is located on the north side along Rodman Avenue. It has stone walls with piers 20 feet wide on each side of the drive and is constructed of the same limestone ashlar pattern as the historic arsenal buildings elsewhere on Rock Island. Iron fencing and limestone piers form one-quarter of a circle on each side of the stone walls. The flagpole is located south of the main entrance. The administration/maintenance building is situated to the west of the flagpole circle, and a committal service shelter is located between the flagpole and the cemetery entrance. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones, except for Sections O and P, which are marked with flat granite markers.

The cemetery grounds were originally enclosed by a light wooden picket fence that was later replaced with an iron fence. The original entry gate, as well as the iron fence surrounding the cemetery, had to be dismantled in 1972, due to their dilapidated condition. Portions of the fence are on display inside the Rock Island Arsenal Museum, and portions have been erected at several locations within the Arsenal, including around the commanding officer's residence. A cast iron eagle from the fence that originally surrounded the cemetery is on display in the administration building at the cemetery.

The brick administration/maintenance building with a flat roof was constructed circa 1971. A brick addition for vehicular storage, with a gable roof, was completed in 1987.

The committal service shelter with wood columns and a copper roof was constructed in 1987. The structure, surrounded by a stone wall, is used for interment services and special ceremonies.

Noted Burials

At the end of the historic walkway are located the graves of Brigadier General Thomas J. Rodman and his wife, Martha Ann, as well as those of Colonel David Matson King and his wife, Marguerite F. Both Rodman and King were commanding officers of the Rock Island Arsenal. The Rodman gravesite, designated by the Secretary of War, is marked by a large obelisk monument with a wrought iron enclosure. General Rodman was a distinguished Civil War officer and was commanding officer of the arsenal from 1865 until his death in 1871. He has been called "the father of Rock Island Arsenal," as the arsenal was planned under his supervision. The three Civil War era cannon surrounding General Rodman's grave are especially significant, as they were cast by a process invented by General Rodman. Iron cannon fabricated by this method were cast around a water-cooled



or air-cooled core so that the barrel cooled first and was compressed by contraction of the outside metal. Crystallization of the metal was regulated thereby so that guns made in this manner would withstand considerable internal pressure without breaking. The result was a stronger, safer cannon that was more reliable and longer lasting than other guns of the era. The life of a gun was increased 11 to 20 times when cast by the Rodman process. General Rodman also developed a new gunpowder formula which laid the groundwork for the modern pellet powder. By 1860, he had begun to develop powder to fit the caliber of the gun by devising a formula whereby gunpowder could be compressed into disks. These disks, referred to as perforated cake powder, were approximately one or two inches thick and pierced with holes. The perforated powder burned slower than ordinary cannon powder. Rodman's perforated cake powder also provided more thrust and a more uniform pressure along the gun's bore, thereby reducing the strain on the gun and increasing its firing distance. General Rodman, a native of Indiana, graduated from West Point in 1841 and was commanding officer of the Watertown Arsenal in Massachusetts prior to assuming command of the Rock Island Arsenal in 1865.

Colonel King was Commanding Officer of the Rock Island Arsenal from 1921 to 1923. He graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1893, ranking 12th in a class of 51. He died at the Rock Island Arsenal on January 27, 1932. The graves of Colonel King and his wife contain a wrought iron enclosure.



There are two Medal of Honor recipients buried in the cemetery. Their graves are marked with special markers 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:

Frank Peter Witek, Private First Class, U. S. Marine Corps Reserve - Section E, Grave 72.

Edward J. Moskala, Private First Class, U. S. Army, Company C, 383d Infantry, 96th Infantry Division - Section E, Grave 293.

Significant Monuments/Memorials

The historic arch, which originally spanned the main entrance gate and made from melted-down Civil War weaponry, is located near Section I of the cemetery. Atop the arch is a bronze plaque inscribed as follows:

UNITED STATES
NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY
ESTABLISHED 1863
INTERMENTS 289
KNOWN 280
UNKNOWN 9



The arch leads to a walkway, along which are plaques inscribed with selected verses of Theodore O'Hara's "Bivouac of the Dead" (see full text in Appendix C). There are seven plaques containing the following selected verses of this poem:

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.

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

NO RUMOR OF THE FOE'S ADVANCE
NOW SWELLS UPON THE WIND
NO TROUBLED THOUGHT AT MIDNIGHT HAUNTS
OF LOVED ONES LEFT BEHIND

NO VISION OF THE MORROW'S STRIFE
THE WARRIOR'S DREAM ALARMS
NO BRAYING HORN NOR SCREAMING FIFE
AT DAWN SHALL COME TO ARMS

THE NEIGHING TROOP, THE FLASHING BLADE
THE BUGLE'S STIRRING BLAST
THE CHARGE, THE DREADFUL CANNONADE
THE DIN AND SHOUT, ARE PAST

YOUR OWN PROUD LAND'S HEROIC SOIL
SHALL BE YOUR FITTER GRAVE
SHE CLAIMS FROM WAR HIS RICHEST SPOIL
THE ASHES OF HER BRAVE

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



There are two additional plaques near the end of this walkway. One is inscribed with the language of the Act to Protect and Establish National Cemeteries, and one 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 texts in Appendixes A and B).

There are two monuments, each made of an original cast-iron seacoast artillery tube and secured by a concrete base. One is located in Section SE and one in Section SW. Each base contains four sets of five cannonballs at the corners.



Civil War Activity in Area

The Rock Island National Cemetery is located within Arsenal Island, a military installation owned and operated by the United States Army. The entire arsenal island is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. A small portion of the Rock Island Arsenal was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1988, and includes the Thomas J. Rodman designed or influenced stone structures and the north central shore of the island that was set aside as a staff residential area under General Rodman's plan.

The first presence of the Federal Government on the island of Rock Island was in the early 1800's. The War Department had instructed the army to build a number of military posts on the upper Mississippi River to deter British and other foreign trading outfits from operating in the river valley. Rock Island was selected as a site for one of the forts, Fort Armstrong. Construction began in 1816. Fort Armstrong became the headquarters for military operations during what would be known as the Black Hawk War. This war officially ended in 1832. The army abandoned the fort in 1836, but the Government retained Rock Island as a government reservation. In 1840, an ordnance depot was established at the old post and remained until 1845, when its stores were transferred to St. Louis. In 1856, the last of several fires destroyed the abandoned post. After the depot had closed in 1845, up until 1863, the Federal Government had placed civilian agents or custodians in charge of Rock Island. On July 11, 1862, the United States Congress passed an act that established an arsenal on the island of Rock Island.

In the following year, the U. S. Army Ordnance Department started construction of a storehouse on the western tip of the island. This storehouse, known today as the Clock Tower Building, was the first permanent arsenal building erected. During the Civil War, the Union Army's Ordnance Department had company on the island. Two separate army units operated on Rock Island during the last two years of the Civil War. In 1863, the Army Quartermaster Department began to build a prisoner of war camp on the north central section of Rock Island. Union Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs ordered that a prison barracks be built large enough to accommodate 10,000 prisoners of war. In late August 1863, construction began near the north central shore of the island. The Rock Island Prison Barracks received its first Confederate prisoners of war (468) on December 3, 1863. They had been captured in the Battle of Lookout Mountain in southeastern Tennessee. Within a few weeks, the prison population rose from 468 to over 5,000 and eventually grew to 8,594. The Confederate prisoners were guarded by troops of the 4th Regiment of the Veterans Reserve Corps; the 37th Iowa Regiment; various "100 day" volunteer regiments; and the 108th U. S. Colored Infantry Regiment. The 4th Invalid Corps Regiment was a veteran reserve organization composed of wounded Union soldiers who were no longer fit for regular military service. Under the command of Colonel Richard H. Rush, the 4th Invalid Corps were the guards at Rock Island prison when the camp received its first Confederate prisoners in December 1863. Shortly thereafter, Colonel Johnson arrived at Rock Island and assumed command of the prison barracks in January 1864, and the 37th Iowa Volunteers

Regiment arrived to supplement the guard force. This regiment, known as the "gray beard" regiment, was comprised of men too old for conscription. George Washington Kincaid, an Iowa pioneer settler and member of the state's first constitutional convention, sought first federal, then state, permission to form a unique regiment of men too old to enlist in the Regular Army. Iowa Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood granted his approval and appointed Mr. Kincaid the commanding officer of the 37th Iowa Volunteers. The regiment of "gray beards" was exclusively composed of men 45 years of age or older. The regiment contained 428 men over the age of 50, 145 of which were in their 60's, and one man who was 80. The regiment of "gray beards" was to be used exclusively as garrison and guard troops. They had earned praise for their provost and garrison duty in St. Louis, Missouri, and Alton, Illinois, but none was received at Rock Island. Inspectors of the barracks reported that the men were decrepit, old, and the most unpromising subjects for soldiers' guards.

On September 24, 1864, the U. S. 108th Colored Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Bishop, arrived by train to assume guard duty at the Rock Island Prison Barracks. The regiment's recruits, primarily from the slave population of north and west central Kentucky, enlisted for a three-year term of service. The 108th remained at Rock Island until May 1865.

After the camp opened in December 1863, the death toll from disease increased steadily. Union guards also died of disease or exposure to the elements while serving guard duty. A Confederate cemetery had been established adjacent to the prison compound and was relocated to its present site in February 1864. The bodies of dead Union soldiers not claimed by their families were reinterred in the current Rock Island National Cemetery.

In 1865, the U. S. Army Ordnance Department decided to build a manufacturing arsenal at Rock Island and selected Brevet Brigadier General Thomas J. Rodman to command the arsenal. He welcomed the opportunity to build a well-designed national arsenal at Rock Island. Construction of the first manufacturing shop buildings began in 1866 and continued until the last stone shop was completed in 1893.