

Stop #1 – Richard B. Hill (grave #6670)

Introduction

Welcome to the 2016 Fredericksburg National Cemetery Luminaria. Between 1861 and 1865 it is estimated that more than 700,000 men died during the Civil War, America's most costly conflict. More than 20,000 of those men died within 30 miles of where you now stand: in winter camps in Stafford and Spotsylvania counties and at no fewer than six battlefields: Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, Mine Run, and North Anna River. Most Union soldiers who had died fighting in the South had been buried hastily on the field of battle if indeed they had been buried at all.

Many families in the North had been touched by the war, with fathers, sons, brothers, friends, and neighbors who had died in the struggle. As soon as the war ended, the Northern people demanded that the government collect the remains of the nation's fallen defenders and give them the proper interment that had been denied them during the war. The government responded by creating 73 national cemeteries throughout the country, including the one we are at tonight.

Creation of Fredericksburg National Cemetery

Beginning in 1866 (*150 years ago*), and working until 1870, burial crews scoured battlefields throughout the South gathering in the remains of 300,000 Union soldiers. Five percent of those—15,000 men—were buried here on Marye's Heights. The government purchased 12 acres of ground for the cemetery, terraced the front slope, and added a flagpole. Later, it would enclose the cemetery with a brick wall, erect headstones over the graves, and beautify the grounds with trees, flowers, and monuments. By 1880, the job was largely complete.

Superintendents

The United States Army Quartermaster Department hired former noncommissioned officers to administer the cemeteries and gave them the title of “superintendent.” Applicants were selected based on a variety of factors, not least of which was neat handwriting and sobriety, with disabled soldiers receiving first consideration. The superintendents' job was to protect and maintain the cemeteries under their charge. This included supervising the work of from one to three employees, soliciting bids from contractors, purchasing supplies, maintaining records and correspondence, and greeting visitors. In return, the superintendents received a salary of between 60 and 75 dollars a month, free housing, and fuel to heat the house, which, in this case, was the stone lodge that stands just inside the cemetery entrance.

Superintendent Richard Hill

The Army administered Fredericksburg National Cemetery until 1940 when it turned the property over to the National Park Service. During its 74-year ownership, the Army hired 13 superintendents to manage the property, five of whom were later buried here. This is the grave of one of those superintendents.

Richard Hill was born in England, but came to the United States shortly before the Civil War. He served honorably in the 2nd Ohio Heavy Artillery, surviving two combat wounds. He served as superintendent at Poplar Grove National Cemetery in Petersburg, Virginia, in the 1890s before being transferred to Fredericksburg. While on duty in Petersburg, Hill lost an infant son, Arthur, and the boy was interred at the cemetery there. Nine years later, while serving here, Hill's wife, Mary Ann, died. The bereaved superintendent had his wife buried here and then had Arthur's remains transferred here to be buried next to his mother's. When Hill himself died in 1920, his surviving children interred him here in a plot next to his wife and infant son. They are the only father, wife, and son buried in this cemetery, though there are other family combinations.

Now, if you will follow me, I'll lead you to the next stop.....