

# Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery

As visitors pass through the iron gates at the entrance of the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, most are left awestruck and speechless from the beauty, solemnity and sacredness of the ground that has been hallowed by so many brave Americans. There are soldiers buried here from virtually every state, the North and the South, privates to generals, black soldiers and white soldiers, unknown soldiers, foreign soldiers, women and children - all types of victims of war have found their final resting place here.

Located just a few miles south of the City of St. Louis, Missouri, in 1826 Jefferson Barracks became the first operational military installation west of the Mississippi River. It only made sense to name the complex in honor of President Thomas Jefferson, who had died earlier that same year, due to Jefferson's role in obtaining the land as part of the Louisiana Purchase years before.

By the 1840s, Jefferson Barracks was the largest military establishment in the United States. When the American Civil War erupted in 1861, many of the most well-known and prominent leaders of the war had been assigned to Jefferson Barracks while in the Federal Army. In fact, at one time or another, approximately 220 Civil War Generals served duty at the base, such as Union General Ulysses S. Grant, Confederate General Robert E. Lee, and American President Zachary Taylor.

During the Civil War, Jefferson Barracks served as a training post for the Union Army and a major military hospital in the nation. Because of its strategic location near a major city on a vital river and railroad transportation system, many times during the war Jefferson Barracks was treating more sick and wounded soldiers than any other hospital in the nation; many of these soldiers never left and were ultimately buried on the grounds.

Due to the overwhelming number of deaths during the war, a law was passed and authorized by President Lincoln for the purchase of cemetery grounds as a national cemetery for the soldiers who died in service of the country. The law also ensured that those who died were given secure, suitable burial-places in which they may be properly entombed.

Today, the old cemetery of Jefferson Barracks contains approximately 20,000 gravesites, with nearly 3,300 unmarked and unknown graves. The site is more than a national cemetery; it is a historical park containing restored military buildings, museums, historical reenactments and military history programs. Admission to the park is free and many people visit the highly treasured grounds to pay their respects to those who paid the ultimate price for our country's freedom.

## Source(s):

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