

## Alexandria Times

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# Alexandria's National Cemetery

Every day, but especially Memorial Day weekend, visitors flock to Arlington National Cemetery to pay their respects to those who served our country. Those visitors might not know that Alexandria's National Cemetery pre-dates its neighbor in Arlington.

Alexandria National Cemetery, located at 1450 Wilkes St., was established in 1862 as one of the original 14 burial sites for Union soldiers during the Civil War. African American soldiers made its burial sites the subject of one of the first recorded civil rights protests, and the federal government also erected a unique building for its superintendent that it replicated at other national cemeteries.

Congress and President Lincoln authorized the establishment of 14 National Cemeteries in 1862. That same year, the federal government established Alexandria National Cemetery. There are 3,533 Civil War veterans buried there today.

More than 200 of the Civil War Veterans buried at the cemetery were African Americans who served with the

United States Colored Troops. Local officials originally used the Freedman's Cemetery as a resting place for African American veterans. In December 1846, 443 African American soldiers receiving treatment at L'Oveture Hospital in Alexandria signed a petition arguing for the inclusion of their fallen comrades in Soldier's Cemetery, which Alexandria National Cemetery was often called. The petition argued:

"As American citizens, we have a right to fight for the protection of her flag, that right is granted, and we are now sharing equally the dangers and hardships in this mighty contest, and shair (sic) the same privileges and rights of burial in every way with our fellow soldiers."

The federal government listened to their protest and granted their request. In 1865, the War Department moved 122 soldiers of color buried at Freedmen's Cemetery to Alexandria National Cemetery.

Alexandria National Cemetery also has an unusual architectural feature. Called a



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Alexandria National Cemetery in 1876.

Meigs Lodge, the structure is one of dozens built with the direction of Gen. Montgomery Meigs, quartermaster general during and after the Civil War. Meigs intended the building to house the superintendents of national cemeteries.

The lodges often featured a late Victorian Second Empire design with a mansard roof. The Alexandria Meigs lodge has the mansard roof, and like many of its siblings, is L-shaped with one-and-a-half

stories. The superintendent's office is on the first floor and the living quarters are on the second. In 1878, a fire severely damaged the first lodge at Alexandria National Cemetery. The federal government rebuilt the building. In 1995, the National Register of Historic Places added the Alexandria National Cemetery to its list.

*Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.*