

WILSON, L. W. U. S. NATIONAL CEMETERIES.

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L. W. Wilson,
Research Field Worker,
June 18, 1937.

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UNITED STATES NATIONAL CEMETERY

Information received from
Superintendent of the Cemetery
as told to him by
friends and relatives of those deceased
together with
letters and information
taken from his files
as furnished by the
War Department of these United States.

The Adjutant General's Office, Washington, D.C.,
June 20, 1932, addressed Mr. H. H. Williamson, Super-
intendent of the National Cemetery at Fort Gibson, Okla-
homa as follows:

"Fort Gibson was established April 24, 1824, in a
region which was about that period known in succession
as Arkansas Territory and "the Indian Territory," and
which was subsequently included in the Indian Territory,
now Oklahoma. It was in what was later the country of
the Cherokee Nation. After the passage of Act of May
24, 1824, changing the western boundary line of the Ter-
ritory of Arkansas, it was deemed expedient to remove
the military garrison at Fort Smith, then the most westerly
United States military post, further west. The point
selected for the new station became Fort Gibson, and was
first garrisoned by troops from Fort Smith, - five com-
panies of the 7th U. S. Infantry under Colonel Matthev

Arbuckle. It was named Fort Gibson in honor of Colonel George Gibson, then U. S. Commissary General of subsistence. The military post there in 1863 and a few years later was called Fort Blunt. It is said that the place was, previously to April 21, 1824, known as Ketowa.

LOCATION

It was on the left bank of the Neosho or Grand River, 60 miles northwest of Fort Smith and $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the Arkansas River.

CHRONOLOGY OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS

1824

April 21. Cantonment Gibson was established by Companies B, C, G, H and K, 7th U. S. Infantry, under Colonel Matthew Arbuckle.

1824-1832

Construction was in progress.

1832

Became Fort Gibson. Order # 11, Headquarters Army, Adjutant General's Office, dated 2-8-32.

1833.

February 14. A treaty is said to have been made with Indians regarding the use of land at or near the fort.

1835.

December 29. Another treaty is said to have been made with Indians regarding the use of land at or near the fort.

1857.

June 23. Troops withdrawn in the interest of the health of the soldiers. The time of the withdrawal is also stated as September 1857. (G.O. 6-Hq. A., June 19, 1857).

1857.

September 9. Buildings at the fort said to have been transferred to a representative of the Cherokee Nation.

1863.

Early in 1863, in the time of the Civil War, the old post was reestablished by Brigadier General James G. Blunt commanding the district of the Frontier and the 1st Division, Army of the Frontier.

May 15. The name of the post changed to Fort Blunt, by which name it was officially known at least until near the end of 1863.

1866.

February 17. The site was reoccupied as a military post by a detachment from the 1st Battalion of the 19th

United States Infantry Volunteers.

July 19. Another treaty is said to have been made with Indians regarding the use of land at or near the post.

1870.

January 25. A military reservation from public land surrounding Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation, was declared by the President of the United States and was announced in General Order No. 4 Department of the Missouri, dated at St. Louis, February 23, 1870. In that order the land was described. The area of the reservation was stated to be eight square miles and 421 acres.

1871.

September 30. The post was garrisoned up to September 30, 1870, when troops were withdrawn, only a Quartermaster's depot being continued there, 1872 (G.O. 22, Department of the Missouri, September 3, 1871).

1872.

July . The post was reoccupied by the troops of the 10th United States Cavalry under Colonel B. H. Grierson. After that time Fort Gibson was not again an important post.

1884.

Post Office, Fort Gibson, Telegraph station, Muscogee, Daily stage from Muscogee on MK&T Railroad, distant - eight miles.

1890.

October 1. Up to that time it was occupied in succession by different small detachment of soldiers, when finally evacuated by troops.

1891.

February 7. The reservation was relinquished by the War Department and turned over to the Interior Department under the provision of an Act of Congress approved July 5, 1884 (24 Stat., 103) providing for the disposal of reservations no longer needed for military purposes. From that transfer was excepted a strip of land 600 x 500 feet in the southwest corner, the site of the Fort Gibson National Cemetery."

The historic records show that this cemetery was established in 1868. Interments 2123; known 156; unknown 1967. The interments are mostly the remains of the soldiers who died prior to the war of 1861-5. These having been removed from the old Post Cemeteries at Fort Gibson, Fort Towson, Park Hill, Fort Arbuckle, Fort Sill and other points in the Indian Territory.

LOCATION

The War Department describes the location as being about one and one-half miles northeast of the Kansas and Arkansas Railroad Station of Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, on the north fork of the road leading to Tahlequah and about the same distance east from the site of old Fort Gibson.

It would be described today as being about one-half mile east on Highway 62, from the intersection of the main street of Fort Gibson, thence north about one-half mile and thence some 300 yards east to the north entrance.

RESERVATION

A part of the old Fort Gibson reservation situated on the east bank of the Neosho (or Grand) River within the limits of the lands of the Cherokee Nation. The Fort Gibson reservation was placed under the War Department by Executive Order dated December 22, 1890, and this was later modified to except the cemetery site, 600 feet long by 500 feet wide, in the southwest corner of the reservation, and reserve same to the War Department by Executive Order dated February 7, 1891.

While the reservation being 500 feet wide and 600 feet long includes the road or driveways outside of the rock wall which surrounds the cemetery proper, in reality the cemetery is 460 feet wide by 539 feet long. The area is about seven

acres and is enclosed by stone walls and iron gates.

It has a natural slope of three degrees each way from the center. The flag staff is located in the center of this plot.

INTERMENTS AS OF FEBRUARY 1936

In February 1936 the records reveal that there was 2682 interments of which 2208 are unknown. There are 132 World War Veterans buried in this cemetery, some having been brought back from France. Be it understood that all World War Veterans are known.

REPORT ON THIS CEMETERY IN 1871

The stone wall, which is at present, must have been constructed in the early 80's. Reports indicate that in 1871 around the cemetery was a white picket fence and at that time Osage Hedge bushes were being planted within and along the fence. This report also makes mention of four entrances; each entrance being located about half-way between each of the corners of the plot and crossed, or at least met at what is now known as the "Officer's Circle," in the center.

The Superintendent's Lodge was of frame construction and was located on the outside of the picket fence on the north side of the cemetery.

IMPROVEMENTS MADE BY WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
1936-1937

A new frame barn was constructed, a gate was built in each wall and a concrete walk was laid on one side of the drive from the main entrance to and around the Officer's Circle in the center of the cemetery, another from the gate to the rear of the Superintendent's lodge. Rehabilitated the Superintendent's lodge with brick and concrete which was previously constructed of stone under the Meigs Plan of Superintendent's Lodges for all National Cemeteries. (The stone lodge was built within the stone wall in the early 80's.).

Including the above, the Works Progress Administration in cooperation with the War Department has expended approximately \$3000 in the way of improvements. Mr. H. H. Williamson is the Superintendent and also had charge of the Works Progress Administration project.

PERPETUATION OF MONUMENTS AND VAULTS
CONSTRUCTED IN EARLY DAYS OF BRICK AND NATURAL STONE

In many instances, natural stone was used for headstones and monuments with names and dates as well as epitaphs chisled thereon. These stones have become broken, crumbled, cracked, illegible, etc., from time to time, as well as the marble slab over the brick base construction of the vaults.

The War Department has replaced these intermittently with their standard headstones and in these instances only the names and the date of death is placed thereon which is taken from the records in the office of the War Department at Washington, D. C., and is substantiated by the records of the Superintendent of the cemetery.

It is a question as to whether or not even the dates on the headstones of today are correct or at least the same as they were on the original stones. This, I understand, has been going on not only with the present Superintendent, but with all those preceding him. The Field Worker has been advised that the War Department, when removing a stone, a vault or a monument, that any inscriptions thereon must be chisled off and if need be, the stones broken up so that no one can read them. Upon observation, it is found that a number of these stones have been carried away and thrown over the stone wall near the new frame barn in the northeast corner of the cemetery.

There is only one vault with brick construction base and marble slab in the Officer's Circle that is original. This is the vault of Jefferson Ferdinand Didier who died May 30, 1837. The inscription thereon designates that he

came from Baltimore, Maryland. The significance of this date of death is that he died on what we now call our "Memorial Day" and thus he died 100 years ago our last Memorial Day this year (1937). This marble slab indicates that it came from Baltimore and was manufactured by Goddess and Benton. The original monument of sandstone construction in the Officer's Circle is that of Charles O. Collins who died August 17, 1846. The inscription indicates that he was born in New York in 1807 and that he died at Fort Gibson, Indian Territory. One side of the stone bears C.O.C., A.D., August 1, 1845, (more than a year before date of death).

The significance of this inscription of C.O.C. is that on the northwest corner of the old stone Barrack's building at Fort Gibson is the same inscription C.O.C. These initials were placed on the building there presumably in the days of it may be constructing the Fort and/that Charles O. Collins possibly had charge of the construction of these buildings as he was Quarter-Master in the Army.

Outside of the Officer's Circle some original vaults of brick base construction with marble slab top, exist. One of these contain the remains of Lieutenant J. C. Baldwin, 3rd Regiment, Infantry, died July 25, 1835 and another is that of Lieutenant James H. Taylor of the 3rd Regiment, died

October 17, 1835, (a double vault). The marble slab top indicates that Lieutenant Baldwin died at Fort Towson and that Lieutenant Taylor drowned in the Cossitot River in Arkansas.

There is a vault of original construction which contains the remains of Charles L. Minor, Lieutenant, who died October 31, 1833. The inscription indicates that he was a native of Fredericksburg, Virginia, and that the slab was placed over his body in testimony of the respect of his many virtues and was dedicated by the command to which he was attached. Charles L. Minor also served as Assistant Quarter-Master in the staff of the Army.

I make mention of these original tombs and vaults so as to show beyond a reasonable doubt that when these become crumbled or possibly the inscriptions become illegible and the stones cast aside, regulation headstones will be placed here, letting go forever the inscriptions and epitaphs that were placed on the original headstones, tombs and vaults. In some instances the original headstones were broken off in the ground due to mowing of the grounds with an old mowing machine drawn by a mule, thus, making it necessary for these to be replaced. These replacements were usually headstones of unknown soldiers. Even today, if you will carefully

scrutinize many of these headstones you will see them nicked and chipped off, which is due to the method of mowers being used in the past years. This condition has been remedied by an up-to-date rubber-tired, power-driven mowing machine. I only make mention of this to bring out the point that the Superintendents prior to the present Superintendent, Mr. H. H. Williamson, was more or less careless in this connection.

VISIT TO THE NATIONAL CEMETERY AT FORT GIBSON

As previously mentioned as to the route taken from Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, we reach the entrance. On either side of this entrance outside of the rock wall is a very beautiful parking ground; just inside of the wall is the Superintendent's stucco lodge. A white ribbon of concrete which you follow will lead you to the curving around the flag pole where there is a circle of graves known as the "Official Circle" and these are marked with some of the oldest and most impressive tombstones. After reaching the circle and turning to the right and continuing in this direction around the Official Circle, you come to the following:- John P. Decatur who was Sutler of the United States Army and died November 12, 1832.

Lieutenant Richard H. Long of the 5th United States Infantry, who died January 30, 1849. This headstone was placed many years ago for on it is written: "A Tribute of Regard from Five of his Classmates."

Captain Charles O. Collins whom I have previously mentioned.

A recent headstone, which is the present authorized stone of the War Department, is placed at the head of James Henry, son of Daniel McManus, who died June 27, 1853.

A relatively old headstone is placed at the head of Kate Ketchum and the inscription denotes that she was the "beloved child of Daniel and Katherine McManus" who died at the age of two years and three months. Beyond a reasonable doubt, she was the sister of James Henry, previously mentioned. A verse chiseled thereon reads as follows:

"Here sleep, sweet niece,
In Heavenly Peace,
Secure from earth's alarms,
To friends in woe, 'tis sweet to know,
Thou sleeps't in Jesus arms."

J. Mc M.

A regulation World War Veteran's tomb is placed at the head of George Graham, son of Lieutenant-Colonel Mason, United States Army, who died August 1, 1842.

A stone which bears the lot number of 2106 is at the head of Hiram R., son of Commissary Sergeant, F. R. Read. No death date is shown.

A headstone that has been placed in recent years on lot number 2108, I have no record to substantiate, but I can see marks of the possibility of a vault having at one time been placed here and for some reason unknown to me, having been removed and this stone placed in its stead. This stone stands at the head of the grave of Flora, the wife of Lieutenant D. H. Rucker. The inscription thereon shows that she died June 26, 1845. I have been told that Flora married Lieutenant Rucker in 1845 and that she died in 1849. Thus, you will notice a discrepancy in the date shown on this headstone and that told me by parties who seemingly knew otherwise from seeing the inscription on the slab of the old vault.

A regulation stone as designated by the War Department is placed at the head of Talahina R., wife of General Sam Houston. Sam Houston at one time lived two miles across the Grand River from Fort Gibson and was a frequent visitor to the barracks at Fort Gibson in 1829-32, leaving in 1832 going to Texas. Talahina R. was a beautiful Cherokee girl whose name was Talahina Rogers. She was the first wife of General Sam Houston who was the leader in making the present state of Texas a Republic by effecting a treaty with General Santa Anna defeated at the battle at San Jacinto.

Footnote:

This spelling of Talahina is the correct spelling as given on the marker and is further substantiated by records in Supt's. office.

Talahina was originally buried at Wilson Rock, Indian Territory, and was later removed to this cemetery and placed in the Officers' Circle. It is further substantiated as being the grave of Talahina by Dr. McBride and a Mr. Holden of Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, now deceased, who viewed the remains and emphatically stated that she was the wife of General Sam Houston, before the body was removed to the National Cemetery.

Mr. Holden operated a newspaper at Fort Gibson for a number of years and his widowed wife lives to tell of Talahina. No death date is shown.

A monument of Samuel H. Benge; born January 28, 1832 and died October 23, 1902. This is the original tombstone and placed on lot number 2464. It is a private monument but of course, when it was placed, it immediately became the property of the Government.

Alice Rockwell lies on lot 2113. This stone has the imprint of a shield which designates it is a Civil War date regulation stone. No death date is shown.

On lot number 2233 is J. H. Elliott, Major, United States Army. It is said that Major J. H. Elliott was of General Custer's famous 7th Cavalry Regiment. No death date is shown.

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The next headstone is that of some unknown officer, officer's wife or child and it bears no inscription.

Lot number 2301 is that of George W. Kerlin, Captain, Illinois. This is a regulation Civil War stone as it bears the shield. No death date is shown.

A relatively old regulation stone of Emma De Russy, died July 10, 1881.

The headstone of Lidia Esterfield who died July 23, 1878 states she was the wife of John Esterfield and was evidently the mother-in-law of William Thomas. I am unable to ascertain whether or not Superintendent William Thomas was Superintendent of the cemetery at the time that Lidia was buried, but it is surmised that he was and for this reason she was buried in the Officers' Circle.

The headstone of Dr. John Esterfield is on lot 2283. Born February 9, 1786, and died November 22, 1872.

Dr. Esterfield must have been the father-in-law of William Thomas.

A relatively old headstone being placed on a sandstone base on lot number 2304 is that of George H. Thomas born March 21, 1877 and died December 27, 1878, and is the son of William Thomas, Superintendent.

There has been recently placed a headstone at the

about whom
head of the grave of one / many interesting stories have
been written. It is the headstone of that of Vivia. The
original headstone was of sandstone and it bore only the
name of Vivia. United States Inspectors requested that
this sandstone marker be removed on account of deterioration
and replaced with the regulation marble marker and the name
Vivia Thomas is inscribed on this stone and shows that she
died January 7, 1870. This is an addition to the original
stone.

It has been said that Vivia was a Boston girl who
attired herself in men's clothing and followed her lover
to Fort Gibson where he was serving in the United States
Army. As the story goes, Vivia also enlisted in the Army.
Under the cover of darkness she shot her lover and slipped
back to her tent. It was never known that she had committed
this act until she confessed to the priest on her death bed.
There is no question, it seems, as to her right to being
allowed to sleep in the Officers' Circle.

On lot number 2109 stands the headstone of Billy Bowlegs.
It is a relatively old headstone and indicates that he was
Captain in Indian Territory. Billy Bowlegs was the only
officer in the Indian Regiment to be buried in the Official
Circle, as most of the Indians joined with the Confederacy.

There has been some dissention as to whether or not the Billy Bowlegs mentioned here was the same Billy Bowlegs who was a Seminole Indian who came from Florida.

The stone at the head of Lieutenant William R. Hoyt, Vermont, lot number 2109-A, is a regulation Civil War headstone bearing the shield. It shows no death date.

The next stone is that of Spencer S. Stephens, 2nd Lieutenant, 3rd Ind. H. G. Kansas Infantry, born 1835, died 1912. This is a private stone and of course, became the property of the Government upon its placement in the cemetery.

A headstone of Mary Eliza Mix. Died at Fort Gibson, May 26, 1844. Aged 51 years, 2 months, 10 days. This stone was placed years ago. It is said Mary Mix was a spy in the pioneer days.

A regulation stone is placed at the head of Dixon S., son of Lieutenant Miles, United States Army, died November 7, 1835.

* A stone which was placed a number of years ago on lot number 2112 and bears the inscription J. P. Willets, Captain, Indian Territory.

A private double stone erected at the head of the grave of D. D. Hitchcock, Assistant-Surgeon, 2nd Ind. Home Guards,

Kansas Infantry, born December 19, 1822 and died July 17, 1867, and his wife, Hannah Worcester, born January 29, 1834, died January 12, 1917.

The next is an old tombstone at the head of Walter Stop, Lieutenant, Indian Territory, lot number 2114.

Number 2115 - Kinney, Assistant-Surgeon, Indian Territory.

This stone bears no other name other than that of Kinney, first name being unknown. However, the records in the Superintendent's office indicates that his name was "Doc" Kinney but the Government assuming that only physicians and surgeons were called "Doc" that this was true of Kinney and thus they left off the name of "Doc."

Number 2116, Isaac P. Simonton, Captain, United States Army.

Number 2117, a small headstone, six inches square, which was placed at the head of all unknown years ago throughout the cemetery and this is the only one of its kind in the Officers' Circle.

A tombstone of granite on sandstone base, a private stone, at the head of James P. Owen, indicates he was born in 1837 and died in 1904. He was a private in Company A, 14th Missouri Cavalry and also served as 1st Lieutenant and R.Q.M. 46th Missouri Infantry.

We now come to a stone which evidently was purchased and placed at the head of Flora, not the Flora previously mentioned, but the daughter of Superintendent A. and Mary M. Hyde, born August 11, 1830, and died October 10, 1882. This stone is placed on a sandstone base and on the top of the marble is chiseled the image of a babe who lies asleep in sweet repose.

A regulation stone is placed at the head of Charles B. Welch, Assistant-Surgeon, United States Army, died August 2, 1834.

A seemingly old stone on lot number 2094, is that of James West, Lieutenant, United States Army. No death date is shown.

The next is the latest regulation stone placed at the head of John W. Murray, Pennsylvania, 2nd Lieutenant, of the United States Infantry and died February 14, 1831. Lieutenant Murray served at Fort Gibson under General Matthew Arbuckle.

A relatively old stone on lot number 2096 is placed at the head of Frederic Thomas, Lieutenant, U. S. Army. No death date is shown.

Continuing, you come to the regulation stone of

Thomas C. Brockway, Connecticut, 2nd Lieutenant, United States Infantry, September 28, 1831. He, too, served under General Matthew Arbuckle. Lieutenant Murray has the distinction of being the oldest buried in this cemetery. However, there were others who were buried the same year.

A late regulation headstone is at the head of John Nicks, who came from North Carolina. He was a Lieutenant-Colonel of the 7th United States Infantry and died December 31, 1831. The information gained by the field worker is that a great deal of history is attached to John Nicks due to the fact that at one time he was Sutler of the United States Army at Fort Gibson, was the 2nd postmaster appointed in the Indian Territory, was the first postmaster appointed at Fort Gibson and that he fought in the French and Indian War in 1812 before he became Lieutenant-Colonel under General Matthew Arbuckle. John Nicks was postmaster when he died.

The vault of Jefferson Ferdinand Didier I have previously mentioned.

After leaving the Officers' Circle you look about over the cemetery seeing the towering Cedars and other giant trees which have endured through the years and which makes the place beautiful and admirable and here in the shade of these rustic old trees, pillars of stone mark the graves of the unknown

dead as well as the known. A sacred and hallowed spot to their memory. Here and there you will see a few stones which beyond a reasonable doubt cost many hundreds of dollars, erected at the graves by their loved ones, rather than have the regulation stone as furnished by the Government. (This is permissible).

In the southwest corner is the original vault with brick constructed base and marble top for Mrs. Virginia L. Bacon, wife of Lieutenant J. D. Bacon, United States Army and eldest daughter of Major B. L. Beal, United States Army, died November 14, 1844. This marble slab is beginning to crack and I note that it has been under repair and it is the opinion of the field worker that it will only be a short time until the U. S. Inspectors will request that this vault be removed and a headstone erected, unless some pressure is brought to bear otherwise.

Just fifteen lots east of the vault of Virginia L. Bacon is a similar vault and on the marble slab is inscribed the following:

"Beneath this tablet is deposited all that was mortal of Mrs. Elizabeth A. Alexander, wife of Lieutenant Edmund B. Alexander, U. S. A., who died at Fort Towson, November 1, 1834."

Beneath the inscription of the above is a verse of eight lines.

Near the middle of the south side of the cemetery is a vault of brick base construction and marble slab on which is inscribed, "In Memory of Charles A., only son of Charles C. and R. L. Bosworth, died September 12, 1889, aged 23 years and 8 months." Below this inscription is a verse of four lines. The marble slab over this vault is nearly broken in two and minor repairs have been made and it might be that in a short time this vault will be removed and a headstone substituted unless steps are taken to prevent it.

Referring back to where I made mention of a double vault of Lieutenant A. C. Baldwin and James B. Taylor, the marble slab, on which the inscriptions are chiseled, is beginning to crack.