

Seeking Confederate Ancestors in Richmond, Virginia

by John McLuckie, WDCFHC Volunteer

Do you have ancestors that served in the Southern army during the civil war? If they died in a battle or in a civil war hospital of wounds or disease, in the Richmond area, they may be buried at Oakwood Cemetery. The Oakwood Cemetery was mainly for enlisted men, one of the largest burial sites for southern soldiers during the American Civil War. Over 17,000 dead were buried in numerically recorded graves in this cemetery. While the number of daily internments (about 75 per day) taxed the efforts of the burial details, records were kept of the location and the identity of the deceased if known. It is estimated that there are about 8000 unknown soldier burials just at this cemetery. The officers were buried in Hollywood cemetery, also in Richmond.

Recently, I accompanied John Lowe, a family historian and descendant of Private William D. Lowe of the 13th Mississippi Infantry Regiment in search of his final resting place. He was seeking the grave of his great-great uncle who was one of 3 brothers who served in Company E of the 13th Mississippi Infantry Regiment. Two of the brothers survived into the 20th century. One lost an arm at the battle of Antietam and the other, the family historian's great grandfather, lived out his life in Oklahoma.

Research on the Fold 3 web site had given us the date of death and some hospital records. We traveled to the Library of Virginia which has microfilm copies of the burial record books from the 1860's. The burials were recorded and copied into alphabetized record books which listed the name of the deceased, his unit, cemetery section, row and grave number. There were over 28 temporary and permanent hospitals in the Richmond area whose dead needed burial during the Civil War.

Oakwood Cemetery is today owned by the City of Richmond and maintained by the department of Parks and Recreation. The cemetery is a modern functioning cemetery still holding burials and covering 176 acres, maintained with a full time staff. Like any other publicly funded project, it lacks funds to do everything that needs to be done to preserve the heritage. The Confederate section covers 7.5 acres. Finding a single grave in an area that size proved to be difficult. While the sections were well marked the individual row markers were nonexistent or difficult to read when found. The cemetery staff had given us the general area of his burial, but after some study and searching the rows, we located the numerical marker #122 in row N. A genealogical find occurred for the Lowe family. The majority of the graves are marked by number only. In some cases family have sought out the grave of their ancestor and have placed modern gravestones, perhaps one or two per 100 burials. Civil War heritage groups are making an effort to improve the markers that have weathered and been damaged over the last 155 years. In the case of Private William D. Lowe efforts are being made to provide a soldier's gravestone paid for by his descendants.

I encourage anyone who believes that they have ancestors who served in the Civil War to investigate the unit history and records that exist. They may be the key to learning more about your ancestor and preceding generations.

By John McLuckie, 2-G Nephew of Robert James Dunn, born in Ireland and veteran of the 53rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry.