

Crown Hill National Cemetery
700 West 38th Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46208

Description

The Crown Hill National Cemetery, established in 1866, is located within the 555-acre Crown Hill Cemetery in Marion County. The national cemetery, containing 1.4 acres, is situated on the western half of a gently-sloping hill and is actually Section 10 of the private cemetery. A bronze plaque in the eastern corner identifies the national cemetery. A drive passes along the base of the hill the entire length of the circumference of the national cemetery. On the summit of the hill at the northern end of the national cemetery is a circular plat, 40 feet in diameter, in the center of which stands a flagpole, which was erected in 1938. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones.



Noted Burials

John F. Wilson, the first survivor of Union service during the Civil War was laid to rest in Grave No. 709 of the national cemetery On October 7, 1869. He was once a private in Company E, 70th Indiana Volunteer Infantry.

Significant Monuments/Memorials

Women's Relief Corps, Grand Army of the Republic Monument – A soft limestone monument, manufactured by James F. Needler, an Indianapolis stone cutter. The monument is located near the southern end of the national cemetery.

There are two monuments, each made of an original cast-iron seacoast artillery tube and secured by a concrete base. One is located on the southern end of the national cemetery and the other in the northern portion of the cemetery near the flagpole. A bronze plaque is affixed to the monument located on the south side and is inscribed as follows:

UNITED STATES
NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY
CROWN HILL
ESTABLISHED 1866
INTERMENTS 708
KNOWN 672
UNKNOWN 36

There are three plaques inscribed with selected verses of Theodore O'Hara's "Bivouac of the Dead." The locations of the plaques and the selected verse from the poem (see full text in Appendix C) inscribed on each are as follows:



Near the northwest corner

REST ON EMBALMED AND SAINTED DEAD
DEAR AS THE BLOOD YE GAVE.
NO IMPIOUS FOOTSTEP HERE SHALL TREAD
THE HERBAGE OF YOUR GRAVE.

At the southern end of the cemetery

THE MUFFLED DRUM'S SAD ROLL HAS BEAT
THE SOLDIER'S LAST TATTOO.
NO MORE ON LIFE'S PARADE SHALL MEET
THAT BRAVE AND FALLEN FEW.

Along the eastern boundary

ON FAME'S ETERNAL CAMPING GROUND
THEIR SILENT TENTS ARE SPREAD.
AND GLORY GUARDS WITH SOLEMN ROUND
THE BIVOUAC OF THE DEAD

A plaque located just to the south of the flagpole is inscribed with the language of the Act to Establish and Protect National Cemeteries (see full text in Appendix A).



Civil War Activity in Area

During the Civil War, soldiers who died while stationed in the various camps near the city of Indianapolis, Indiana, were buried in the city cemetery later known as "Greenlawn Cemetery." Nearly all of these men had been stationed in Indianapolis during the war and had died of disease at City Hospital; others were mortally wounded on the field of battle and transported to Indianapolis, where they later died. From June 8, 1861, until January 28, 1866, one wagon after another traveled between the hospital and the old cemetery, carting these honored dead to this place of rest. They were buried in the chronological order of their death dates, and a white headboard was placed at each grave upon which was clearly painted the soldier's name, rank, and unit of service. These burials were made under the direction of General James A. Ekin, who was stationed there. With the expansion of the city, it soon became apparent that Greenlawn Cemetery would be abandoned in a few years.

On February 3, 1866, board members of the three-year-old Crown Hill Cemetery Association met to discuss a federal request that land be provided which would be suitable for the interment of Union Soldiers. Two months later, they sent a proposal to Washington offering such

a burial location. The resolution suggested that a section (valued at a selling rate of \$15,000) be donated for this purpose, provided that the United States "improve the same in conformity with the rules and regulations of the cemetery." On August 27, the Crown Hill management met with Brigadier General James A. Ekin, a Government representative who presented a letter stating that, in accordance with the orders of the Quartermaster General, he was to make arrangements as may be necessary to remove the remains of deceased Union soldiers at Indianapolis to the Crown Hill Cemetery. He further stated that although the Quartermaster General appreciated their offer of the land on the condition that the United States shall spend funds for improvement and ornamentation, he was not authorized to accept this proposition because there was no fund at his disposal out of which such an expenditure could be made. General Ekin had been instructed to arrange for the purchase of the lots at a price not greater than \$1,000 with the understanding that the Crown Hill Cemetery management would agree to expend at least a similar sum in improvements and ornamentation in the immediate neighborhood of the U. S. lots. General Ekin had served with the 12th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry and was eventually commissioned to a brigadier general without increase in pay for his work with the quartermaster service during the latter years of conflict.

In a letter dated May 24, 1866, O. P. Morton, the Governor of Indiana, proposed plans for the proper care of the remains of the soldiers interred in the state of Indiana, particularly in Indianapolis. He stated that several hundred soldiers who died in the area were buried close together and their graves only temporarily marked. He further stated that the trustees of the Crown Hill Cemetery had offered to donate to the Government suitable grounds, valued at over \$15,000, for burial of the soldiers, provided the Government would improve the same in conformance with their rules and regulations, to the amount of \$5,000.



General Ekin was placed in charge by the Quartermaster General to make arrangements for the reinterments. By letter dated November 15, 1866, General Ekin reported that the final arrangements had been made.

Although the Government had accepted the offer of the Crown Hill Cemetery to donate the burial grounds, there was no legal authority for the Government to expend funds for improvements, so the grounds were purchased for \$5,000 with the understanding that the full amount was to be spent ornamenting the grounds. General Ekin and Governor Morton selected the plat, known as Section 10, in the Crown Hill Cemetery, consisting of 1.4 acres.

Mr. William Weaver of Indianapolis, formerly the Government undertaker, had kept records of interment of the soldiers from the commencement of the Civil War and was familiar with their burial sites. He was awarded the contract (approximately \$10 per person) for the disinterments and reinterments. Captain James Wilson, for the Quartermaster General, reported that there were 709 interments (694 white and 15 black). The contract stipulated that the original coffins would be placed in new boxes (7 feet by 20 inches by 17 inches), with the headboards nailed thereon, to be interred in the Crown Hill Cemetery in separate graves, seven feet by two feet and two feet apart.

When General Ekin arrived in Indianapolis on October 17, 1866, to begin the work, it was hastily determined to pay suitable honors to the soldiers with grand and imposing ceremonies in which the executive and judicial authorities of Indianapolis and a large concourse of military officers and civilians from every part of the state would participate. The arrangements of the solemn and interesting occasion were under the direction of the Grand Army of the Republic. The Governor decided to have the body of one soldier lie in state in the rotunda of the State House and ceremonies would be held to properly befit the solemn dedication of the cemetery. The first body was removed on October 19, 1866. The remains of Matthew Quigley, formerly a member of Company A, 13th Regiment, were placed on a catafalque in the rotunda under the dome of the State House, which was handsomely decorated with regimental colors and flags draped in mourning. The coffin was enveloped in a large American flag and covered with ever-green wreaths. Low-gas jets were kept burning and the effect was exceedingly solemn. The colors draped were those belonging to the 11th, 13th, 15th, 66th, 70th, 79th, and 100th Regiments. A guard of honor was kindly furnished by a Lt. Colonel Harris, commanding the U. S. arsenal, and consisted of a Corporal Kelly and eight privates. At 2 p.m., the ceremonies for the burial of Quigley commenced. The pallbearers were furnished by the Grand Army of the Republic. The procession formed at the south entrance of the State House. The Grand Army of the Republic and a band formed in open ranks and the procession, in the following order, moved to the carriages in waiting, the band playing the dirge for the dead: the military guard, the draped colors, the coffin, the state officers, and city clergy. The procession moved from the State House east to Pennsylvania Street, thence north to North Street, where carriages were waiting for those on foot. When the cortege reached the cemetery, the bell from the lodge tower tolled solemnly until the procession entered the gates and slowly marched to the selected grounds. Around the open grave and in the rain, the assembled people stood with uncovered heads, the military guard saluting the corpse with the regulation salute, as it was slowly lowered into the vault.

Colonel Shlater of the Governor's staff called upon Reverend Mr. Day of the First Baptist Church, to open the ceremonies with prayer. After the prayer, General Ekin read an address, followed by the reading of a poem by Reverend Mr. Foster. Governor Morton, stepping from his carriage, made his speech expressing his thanks for the honor done to the heroic dead with references to the Trustees of the Crown Hill Cemetery, General Ekin, the Secretary of War, and the Quartermaster General. Captain Brouse of the 100th Regiment, dismissed the assembly with the benediction, after which the military squad fired the regulation salute of three volleys. Thus, the ceremony ended. When the transfer of the remains was completed, markers were placed at each new grave.