

DANVILLE NATIONAL CEMETERY

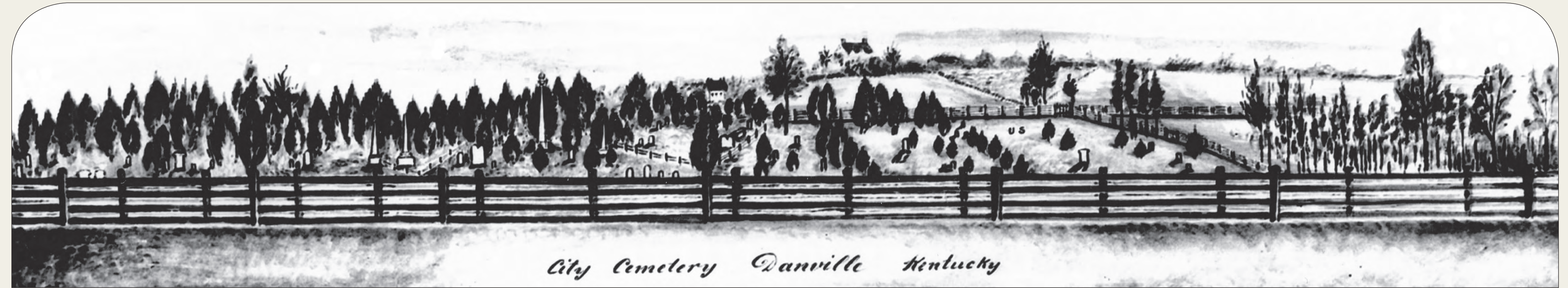
“One Great Hospital”

Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg invaded central Kentucky in summer 1862 with the goal of occupying it and mobilizing more troops for the South. Union Gen. Don Carlos Buell met Bragg’s troops at Perryville, 10 miles west of here. The October 8, 1862, Battle of Perryville resulted in 7,000 casualties, a number that overwhelmed the hamlet with dead and wounded.



Union troops enter Danville just before the October 8, 1862, Battle of Perryville. Harper’s Weekly (November 8, 1862).

Wounded Union soldiers were taken to nearby towns, including Danville. Centre College became the main hospital. However, most every available building—courthouse, churches, shops, businesses, stables, and homes—was employed to care for more than 4,000 men. One Indiana doctor wrote, “Danville was one great hospital.” The Union Army occupied Centre College through June 1863. Many soldiers died of wounds. More succumbed to typhoid fever, dysentery, and pneumonia. To keep up with the pace and number of deaths, soldiers were assigned to perform burial duty.



Danville National Cemetery, from Brvt. Lt. Col. E. B. Whitman’s final report, c. 1869. Whitman used the phrase “Harvest of Death” in his exhaustive report to describe the work of collecting the dead. National Archives and Records Administration.

“Harvest of Death”

Early in 1866, Capt. E. B. Whitman began gathering information in preparation for the reinterment of Union soldiers buried in the Military Division of Tennessee. This huge district included Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Captain Whitman, later lieutenant colonel, placed newspaper notices seeking locations of Union graves. Citizens, chaplains, soldiers, and officers replied.

Whitman made three major expeditions across the region, stopping at hundreds of battlefields and engagement sites. Because of his work, thousands of Union dead were moved to twelve new national cemeteries. In May 1869, Whitman submitted a detailed summary of this difficult project to the quartermaster general. The report contained sketches and site plans of each cemetery, and data on interments and service affiliations.



Danville National Cemetery, c. 1940. Headstones in the private Danville Cemetery are visible in photograph, back right. National Cemetery Administration.

National Cemetery

Prior to 1869, ten federally established or public cemeteries in Kentucky contained the remains of Union soldiers. The work of reintering the dead was almost complete when the army changed its plan and reduced the number of cemeteries in the state to six.

Soldiers who died in Danville hospitals were buried in the northwest corner of the city cemetery (now Bellevue Cemetery), established in the 1840s. In June 1868, the city deeded sixteen lots to the government. By 1874, the new national cemetery contained 358 burials, including fourteen soldiers removed from nearby Hustonville and Millersburg.

The city cemetery association maintained these sections as the number of graves did not warrant a full-time federal superintendent. The army installed blocks inscribed with ‘U.S.’ at the corners of the national cemetery to identify property boundaries. Later it added a flagstaff and four cast-iron plaques featuring General Orders No. 80, which laid out rules for visitors, and three stanzas from the poem “Bivouac of the Dead.”