

The Civil War at Spring Grove

As the Civil War raged on the southern and western fronts, only a year into the hostilities, Cincinnatians thought first of Spring Grove as a place to make a fitting burial for Ohio's casualties, even though the Cemetery was not ready to accommodate the magnitude of fatalities. Convinced that the last resting place of those who might die "in the defense of our Government . . . should be in a beautiful city of the dead," the U. S. Sanitary Commission met with Spring Grove's trustees early in 1862 to request donation of a 100-foot diameter circular lot with a 300-

grave capacity in a location near the charming lake Strauch had just created. Strauch's open lawns provided a fine site for the Union graves arranged in concentric circles around three shallow mounds and upturned cannon. Some Confederate dead are buried elsewhere at Spring Grove.

The Cemetery waived the usual interment fees for the Civil War lots, which quickly filled. On June 5, 1862, the Board, reluctant to donate more premium real estate, persuaded the state legislature to buy two similar lots for \$1,500 each with space reserved for "Ohio Soldiers who died in the

In 1862, Spring Grove donated a circular lot near the charming lake that Strauch had just created. SG



Military Service of the United States," those first interred in another military cemetery or on battlefields within army lines. Cemetery officials carefully recorded the name, age, company, and regiment of each of the 994 graves "that relatives, friends, and strangers may know in all time to come, that we for whom their lives were given were not unmindful of the sacrifice they made. . . . that we properly appreciate the obligations we are under to them for their efforts in aiding to secure to us and future generations the blessings of a redeemed and regenerated country." Only twenty-eight bodies were unknown.

The Ohio dead came to Spring Grove from Memphis, Pittsburgh Landing, Vicksburg, New Orleans, and even eastern fields, along with bodies left along Sherman's march to the sea. In 1866 by order of Ohio's Governor,

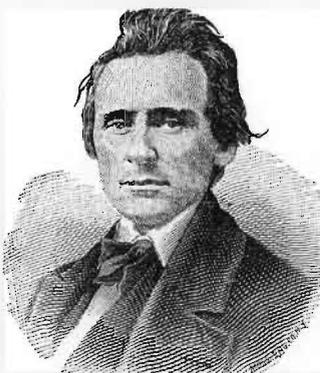
about 339 remains came from temporary graves at Camp Dennison, most having died of wounds in hospitals in or near Cincinnati. Reinterments continued as relatives claimed some of the war dead from mass graves, moving them elsewhere, and as those first buried in other military cemeteries and battlefield trenches were identified and moved here. One contemporary wrote that in the three mounds "sleep those who, from home and its endearments, started at war's alarm in defense of the Union . . . but here their dust sleeps peacefully." Until 1872, these individual, mounded burials had temporary numbered wooden pegs as markers, referenced by a roster in cemetery offices.

An officer's body lies at the center of each mound, still commanding an army of the dead. Colonel Elsner of the 50th Ohio, killed in Atlanta, lies in the mid-

dle of the first mound. Colonel Frederick Jones occupies the next circle; and General Robert McCook has the mound closest to the lake. The body of General Thomas J. Williams was added to lot C in 1867 "in consideration of his position and distinction of his family."

A number of the Civil War dead are also buried in family lots at Spring Grove. Colonel William Jones died alongside General Lytle in the battle of Chickamauga. Colonel Frederick Jones of the 24th Ohio fell in leading a charge at the battle of Murfreesboro. Other Union Generals at Spring Grove are Sidney Burbank and Thomas Tinsley Heath (both in sec. 14). Wesley Cameron, an architect, built a pontoon bridge across the Ohio River to transport Union soldiers south during the Civil War because Cincinnati had no other bridges in place. Many veterans who survived the war lie

The Fighting McCooks



Robert L. McCook

Robert L. McCook, law partner of the noted German lawyer Judge Johann B. Stallo, distinguished himself at the battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky, and was promoted to brigadier general. In 1862, while marching his brigade through northern



Alexander McCook

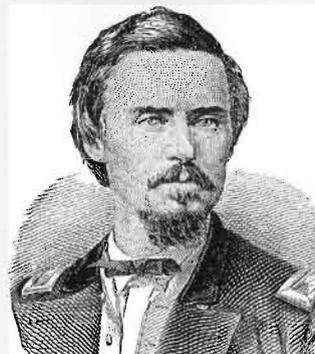
Alabama into Tennessee, McCook, who was ill and was riding in an ambulance, was ambushed by guerrillas. Fatally wounded he died August 6, 1862, at age thirty-four.

The slain hero was one of the famed "fighting McCooks," a family of Scotch Irish origin. The family came from Steubenville, where Daniel McCook, the patriarch, contributed eight sons to the Union Army, four of whom

rose to the rank of general. He had a law practice with Edwin Stanton, later Lincoln's Secretary of War. When the Confederacy seceded, Daniel enlisted at age 63 and was killed at Buffington fighting Morgan's Raiders. His son Robert joined the fight. General Alexander McDowell McCook, Robert's brother similarly died. The family erected a temple modeled after the



Choragic Monument to Lysicrates in Athens. Over seventeen-feet tall and nine feet in diameter, the circular, domed structure designed by Michael Garrit of the Hinsdale Doyle Granite Company, has twelve Corinthian columns and panels engraved with the names of the family's twelve children, topped by two memorial urns dedicated to the parents. Twenty graves surround the structure. CHS



Daniel McCook

at Spring Grove, the most notable being Major General Joseph Hooker.

Early in 1863, Cincinnatians organized to erect a monument near the soldiers' section. A voluntary subscription raised \$15,000 in gold for a statue and base — a cash value of \$25,000. In 1864, the noted thirty-eight-year-old sculptor Randolph Rogers completed a simple statue of a Union soldier on guard, titled "The Sentinel" or "The Soldier of the Line." Rogers also made sculptural reliefs of battle scenes for the family monument of General William H. Lytle for a fee of \$3,210.

The Lytle monument and Rogers's "Sentinel," ten feet tall not including its base, are conspicuous focal points on two ends of the Civil War section; but critics found them inadequate to

commemorate each of the Ohio dead. The *Commercial* complained in April 1867, that although the "Sentinel" was "evidence of the love and respect of a generous people for the fallen defenders of our country, yet it is not *inscriptive*." Critics judged it but a "counterfeit presentment," a generic image, not real commemoration. Deteriorating wooden pegs marked the graves until four-inch marble squares were placed to mark each then-mounded grave, minimal identification and poor commemoration. Deliberately made small and inconspicuous by meager funding, these markers remain even more anonymous than the standard vertical stones in other Civil War cemeteries, but they did fit into Strauch's ideal of not cluttering the landscape.

Spring Grove's Civil War section is now easily identified by three, thirty-two-pound cannons placed vertically in the middle of each of the mounds and then surrounded by some rustic stonework, which disintegrated and has since been removed. The cannons, however, proved controversial. One visitor described them "planted . . . muzzle upward, as if to shell the moon, or take a crack at a shooting star, reminding the beholder of the chimney of a low-water 'dinky' on the Ohio River." In 1870, Major General Hooker wrote Brigadier General Philip George Cooke, Commander of the Department of the Lakes, about pieces of artillery marking "the last resting place of the soldiers who had fallen in the battle in the last rebellion." These pieces of artillery might be "proper monuments for the dead

Fighting Joe Hooker



On a hillside above the Civil War sections lies the famous "Fighting Joe Hooker," who held higher rank than any of the other generals buried in Spring Grove. Born in Hadley, Massachusetts, Hooker studied at West Point and became a Mexican War hero. He was dubbed "Fighting Joe Hooker" after an Associated Press dispatch sent out during the Seven Days' Battles described the combat under the title "Fighting-Joe Hooker," a headline which other editors

picked up omitting the hyphen. After Burnside's defeat at Fredericksburg, Hooker was given command of the Army of the Potomac. He suffered defeat from Robert E. Lee at Chancellorsville, losing about 17,000 men. Yet his troops idolized Hooker for his military skills as well as for the amenities of female companionship he regularly provided for them; such women were dubbed "hookers." On the knoll overlooking Geysers Lake, Hooker rests beside his wife, Olivia Augusta Groesbeck whom he met at a ball at the Burnet House, the city's grand hotel, she died shortly after their marriage. Their lot is marked by a large sarcophagus of polished Scotch granite. (sec. 30) CHS

"The Sentinel"



"The Sentinel," called a "galvanized hero," was cast in bronze in the famed Royal Foundry of Ferdinand von Miller in Munich, the same place that finished the Tyler-Davidson Fountain a few years later. The bronze was about a third more expensive than marble, known not to weather well in the American climate. Spring Grove's "Sentinel" was the first of several Civil War monuments the sculptor subsequently designed in a similar style. It established a conventional form, often copied through the next three decades for war monuments in cemeteries, on town commons, and in courthouse squares — North and South. James G. Batterson of Hartford, Connecticut, a firm which produced many of Spring Grove's monuments, made the granite foundation. "The Sentinel" stands at Spring Grove "as if guarding the slumbering dead . . . bayonet brought to a port, challenging the intruder — but their slumbers will not be disturbed." CHS

on the field of battle" but were "out of place entirely in a beautiful cemetery" where the dead should rest in peace. Strauch told Hooker that the public wanted the authority to remove the artillery. He offered, "If the Government did not feel able or willing to put up suitable monuments" instead of the decommissioned cannon, "citizens would do it by subscription." A proprietor himself, Hooker understood that Cincinnatians "do not wish to have [Spring Grove] disfigured by such uncouth looking objects." On their behalf, he asked the Government to "ornament the place and not disgrace it;" but federal authorities refused to have the so-called "great evil removed."

To honor those who fought in the Civil War, Cincinnati staged its first Decoration Day celebration in 1868. General J.

Warren Keifer, local G. A. R. (Grand Army of the Republic) commander, led veterans "three hundred muskets strong," brass bands, city police, and the public in parade through city streets from the armory to Plum Street Depot, "a dark and dreary underground place, really nothing more than the abandoned White Water Canal roofed in." There, marchers and the crowd boarded trains to Spring Grove. Two railroads charged a quarter for a round-trip for those not willing or able to walk four miles. Getting off at Winton Place, bands played "Yankee Doodle" and other patriotic tunes, until the Cemetery's gates where they switched to the "Death March" with muffled drums. It was a gay, festive day, the crowd composed mostly of women and children, dressed in bright colors, not mourning.

Refreshment stands lined the tree-shaded Spring Grove Avenue, and vendors sold flowers.

At Spring Grove, an estimated crowd of 12,000 heard patriotic oratory from General H. L. Burnet and others. Reverend B. L. Chidlaw thanked God for "subduing the rebellion." General Keifer summarized the day's spirit: "We emerge from the war on to a higher plane of civilization. Our flag is the synonym of freedom everywhere. . . . We stand on a new career of progress and prosperity." To end the program the Ladies of the Floral Committee led the crowds around the mounds of graves, strewing them with flowers.

In 1872, a sunny, balmy day greeted veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic. Cemetery ceremonies began at noon with the singing of "America" and "Who Shall Care for Mother Now?" before Colonel David H. Moore's oration; the Doxology and Benediction ended the program. The crowd came with hand-picked flowers to place on the graves. The *Enquirer* reported that a "human tide" flooded the Cemetery all afternoon, arriving by streetcar, carriage, and foot.

Decoration Day quickly became the one occasion when cemetery gates opened to the public, giving all ready access without tickets and minimal restrictions, and disruptive behavior abounded. In 1871 and 1872 Spring Grove posted additional policemen "to preserve order in and about the grounds" and "to suppress any attempt to sell intoxicating liquors in the immediate vicinity" and in 1881 the Board complained that the occasion resulted in damages to proprietors' lots which the public "wantonly injured" with

William H. Lytle



One of forty Union generals buried at Spring Grove, General William H. Lytle, a veteran of the Mexican War, died when serving with the Tenth Ohio Volunteers in the battle of Chicamauga on September 20, 1863. Before the war he had written a poem, "Anthony and Cleopatra," in which the main character was a soldier who died in battle. Like the main character in his

poem, Lytle died in battle. The only son of a distinguished family, he had never married. With his death the family name ceased to exist. His death at age thirty-six produced a major demonstration of grief. So many people lined the streets for his funeral on October 22, 1863, that the funeral cortege did not reach Spring Grove until dusk.

General Lytle's monument, designed by the noted sculptor Louis Verhagen is a severed, fluted column of Carrara marble from Italy, symbolic of life cut short, topped by a patriotic eagle, bowed in grief rather than in a traditional, triumphal pose. Erected in 1865, acid rain took a toll of the detail. The monument, which is near the entrance to the Cemetery, was duplicated in 1915 by G. J. Garnhorn in granite. It also commemorates Lytle's grandparents who died in 1821 and 1831 and other family members. CHS



Until 1872, these individual, mounded burials had wooden pegs as markers, referenced by a roster in cemetery offices. The pegs were later replaced with marble markers, placed flush with the turf. SG

“good order being violated with impunity.”

For years the ceremony remained much the same, at times augmented with the reading of long poems composed by local women. Sometimes, children “went from grave to grave

dropping upon the green mounds the fresh and fragrant flowers so emblematic of the life of man,” singing songs written for the occasion. When Rutherford B. Hayes was Ohio Governor from 1868 to 1876, he celebrated Decoration Day at Spring Grove. Workers set out massive, twenty-five-year-old aloe plants, donated to adorn the soldiers’ lot during summers, at the same time as the Cemetery banned “indiscriminate” individual plantings in this area. Yet the “gala” ceremonies were criticized for their cost, when the money spent could have “shown . . . gratitude in a more substantial and more respectable manner” by providing for needy widows and orphans of the war.

Although it was the one annual occasion when the Cemetery was “thrown open” to the public, attendance at Decoration Day ceremonies declined in the 1880s, attracting crowds of about 5,000 annually, less than half that of the years



By the late nineteenth century attendance at Decoration Day ceremonies declined attracting much smaller crowds but the pomp and circumstance remained with participants from the Grand Army of the Republic, veteran officers, orators, bands, and military companies in full dress. CHS

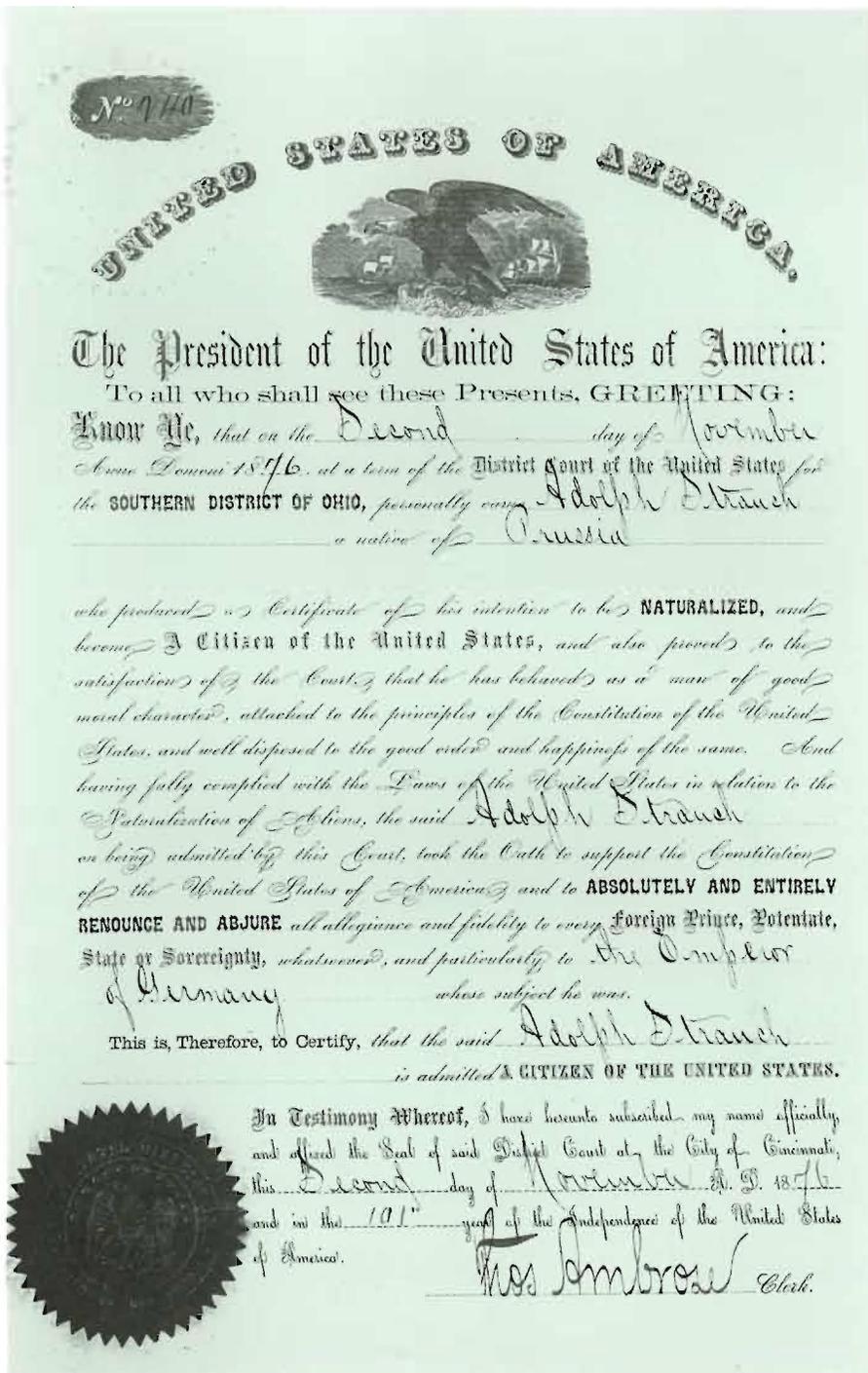


Citizens lined the parade route east over Fifth Street to Main, south to Fourth, west to Elm, north to Sixth, and west to the Plum Street Depot, where marchers boarded special trains of the Hamilton and Dayton Railroad and the Marietta Railroad for the Winton Place Station and Spring Grove. CHS

immediately after the war and only about a third of those visiting the Cemetery for an outing on that day. Pomp and circumstance remained, however, with the Grand Army of the Republic, the Loyal Legion, a company of the German Battalion, the Colored Battalion, two companies from the Newport barracks, veteran officer orators, bands, and military companies in full dress and bearing arms.

The Civil War had consequences for the Cemetery workforce as well. In 1864, the Board allocated \$500 to pay a "representative" or "substitute" for Strauch rather than let him be drafted into the Union army, even though he was not a citizen. In 1866, directors agreed to give preference to employing veterans at the Cemetery even if disabled, "believing that a one armed soldier can act as Watchman equally as well as a man with both arms."

In 1882, General R. N. Batchelder, Quartermaster General in charge of National Cemeteries, asked the Board to sell the federal government twenty acres in another corner of the grounds in which the bodies of the Union dead already buried at Spring Grove and elsewhere could be reinterred. The plan was to move the cannons and to discontinue the existing three mounds. Although directors, hoping to recoup some of the increasingly valuable lake-side land for private lot sales, agreed to make the transaction for \$3,000 per acre, Congress refused to appropriate funds, and the Civil War section remains intact.



In 1864, the Board allocated \$500 to pay a substitute so Strauch would not be drafted even though he was not a citizen. He became a naturalized citizen in 1876. CHS