



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Soldiers' Cemetery and Protest

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Image: Alexandria National Cemetery. Photo, Library of Congress.

In 1862, the U.S. Congress passed and President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation authorizing the establishment of military cemeteries. That same year, Alexandria National Cemetery, located at 1450 Wilkes Street and seen in this Civil War-era photograph, was one of 14 sites designated as burial grounds for soldiers.

Of the 3,533 Civil War veterans buried at Alexandria National Cemetery more than 200 soldiers were African Americans who had served with the United States Colored Troops. But some of them had originally been buried at the Freedmen's Cemetery on South Washington Street, which opened in 1864.

In December 1864, 443 African American soldiers being treated at L'Ouverture Hospital in Alexandria signed a letter of protest because their fallen comrades were not being buried at the Soldier's Cemetery, as the national cemetery was often called. They wrote in part, "As American citizens, we have a right to fight for the protection of her flag, that right is granted, and we are now sharing equally the dangers and hardships in this mighty contest, and shair (sic) the same privileges and rights of burial in every way with our fellow soldiers, who only differ from us in color."

Their protest was heard and their requests were granted. Future burials of African American soldiers were made at Alexandria National Cemetery, and the following year 122 soldiers of color who had been buried at Freedmen's Cemetery were removed and re-interred at Alexandria National Cemetery.



"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.