

Brief History of Camp Chase

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Shortly after the bombing of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, thousands of men were headed toward Columbus, Ohio to volunteer to fight for the Union Army. Camp Jackson was formed where Goodale Park now stands, in the "Short North" of downtown. Due to the number of recruits coming to Columbus, it was decided to move the camp away from town.

Camp Chase Union Military Camp was established May 27-28, 1861, four miles west of the then boundaries of Columbus, on the National Road (Route 40). Camp Chase was named for Salmon P. Chase, former Governor of Ohio, and President Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury.

There were other camps in the area, but none as large as Camp Chase. Before the end of the Civil War there would be:

1. Camp Thomas - located about where The Ohio State University now sits
2. Tod Barracks - north of the railroad station on North High St. (Union Station)
3. Camp Wallace - northeast of Camp Thomas, but in operation only a short time period
4. Camp Delaware - south of Delaware, Ohio; a camp for colored recruits.

Camp Chase Military Camp served four purposes during the war:

1. It was first used as a training installation for Union troops who were located south of the Western Reserve (near Cleveland) and north of Hamilton, County, Ohio (Cincinnati).
2. It was a prison for Confederate captives.
3. It served as a place of detention for Union soldiers, paroled from Southern prisons.
4. It served as a place to receive mustering-out pay for Northern regiments at the termination of their enlistment.

Camp Chase was located on a flat tract of ground that was known as "The Racegrounds" prior to the war. The land was originally owned by Michael L. Sullivant, son of Lucas Sullivant, who founded Franklinton after the Revolutionary War. Michael Sullivant sold the land that now lies between West Broad St. and Sullivant Ave., Hague Ave. to approximately Wilson Rd. to a John G. Holloway of Kentucky. Holloway leased the land to the Federal government for the military camp. The camp would consist of 160 acres, would be under national, not state, control, and would be under the command of General George B. McClellan. The camp was laid out by General W.S. Rosecrans, under McClellan's direction. At one time, Camp Chase held 27,000 Union troops and the prison once contained 9,146 prisoners.

The original prison was built to house 250 prisoners, and was located in the southeastern corner of the camp, where Wicklow and Palmetto Streets intersect with Hague Ave. today. The prison was enlarged two times; at the height of the Civil War, there were

9,146 men held in the area. It is generally believed that the gate to the original prison lies at the proximity of home plate on West High School's ball field. The prison was guarded by 650 guards, working in shifts and walking the catwalk around and above the 12-foot high wooden fence surrounding the compound.

The first prisoner brought to Camp Chase arrived June 29, 1861. On July 5, 1861, the first batch of Secessionist captives brought from the field was a party of 23, mostly wealthy and influential citizens of Virginia. They were released a few days later as political prisoners were kept for only a short time in the early days of the war.

"The History of the City of Columbus, Capital of Ohio" by Alfred E. Lee reported that in December, 1861, a contract for provisioning the camp was awarded to Messers. Louis and Jacob Zettler at \$11.65 per hundred rations. The Zettlers were members of the family that still operates a chain of hardware stores in Columbus.

During the early years of the war many prisoners were exchanged. In some cases, Confederate Officers were allowed to walk to downtown Columbus, and even allowed to wear sidearms. The officers, being literate, were also allowed to sit in on the State Legislature sessions.

On September 19, 1862, General Lew Wallace and staff arrived for the purpose of organizing men into a corps for service against the Indians. He collected paroled men passing through to join his regiments, which settled at Camp Wallace, northeast of Camp Thomas. Lew Wallace later became the Governor of New Mexico, and wrote the book "Ben Hur".

In June and July, 1863, the 88th Regiment O.V.I. was reformed and became the guards of Camp Chase. Also in that month, a contract was awarded to Russell B. Demorest to supply 2000 cords of firewood at \$3 per cord to Camp Chase. Captain and Assistant Quartermaster of the U.S. Army Frank Ernest and Mr. Demorest signed the contract. Demorest was a farmer with large holdings located at Demorest and Briggs Roads.

On July 5, 1865, the Camp Chase Prison Commandant notified the United States War Department that Camp Chase was free of prisoners. All available equipment, along with remaining ill soldiers, were transferred to Dayton, Ohio where the Veteran's Affairs Department is still in existence.

Members of the Short Creek Quarterly Meeting of the Quaker Church, living along the Ohio River, learned of the pending auction of 4631/2 acres of Camp Chase and other land on Sullivant's Hill, now known as the Hilltop. Five of the Quaker men came in 1870 to look at the land and formulated their dream of a Quaker settlement. They returned in 1872, and on January 23 purchased 400 acres for \$87.50 per acre. The men and their purchases were:

1. J.C. McGrew - 80 acres
2. Robert Hague - 80 acres

3. Miller Gibson - 100 acres
4. William Binns - 100 acres
5. John Watson - 40 acres.

In 1874, John Hussey came to Columbus and purchased the remaining 631/2 acres. Soon, other Quakers joined the original settlers - John Cowgill, Herbert Haldy, William H. Harris and son Warren, Joseph Miller, Lewis Ong and son Joseph, Nathan Petit, and John Watson. As one can see, many of the Hilltop's streets are named for these Quaker settlers. The Ohio State Journal noted on January 23, 1872: "The purchase of the grounds so familiarly known as Camp Chase, by a party of the Society of Friends, marks an epoch in the history of events. It is fitting that the followers of William Penn's example should thus occupy the spot that once was the scene of military activity in preparing for the bloody fray. The sound of fife and drum have long since died away from its bounds, and its fertile acres are to become the homes of those who are not inspired by war's dread alarms, and who believe in a reign of universal peace".

It is also noted that one day, J.C. McGrew's son, Will, was plowing a field (where Westgate Park is now located) and turned up between 30-40 new horseshoes. From this, they concluded the camp blacksmith shop was on this sight.

In 1905, much of Camp Chase land was sold to a real estate agency and subdivided for housing. The last tract of this land was sold for \$2250 per acre. In a 1936 interview, Will McGrew, then age 88 and son of original land owner J.C. McGrew, stated: "There isn't a single oldline Quaker living on land occupied by Camp Chase. The Quakers came, lived their lives and passed away, leaving behind an impress of quiet piety, shedding a benediction over the entire section".

Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery was located on the southernmost portion of Camp Chase Military Camp, on a dirt road known as Sullivant's Free Pike. Dead Confederate soldiers were laid to rest here, most succumbing to disease. A pest house was located near Hague Ave. and the first alley north of Sullivant Ave. Dying men were brought here in hopes of containing epidemics of Smallpox, Dysentery etc. Many of the dead were buried in mass graves. Some of the single graves were marked with names, but not many. The small cemetery soon fell into disrepair. In 1868, William H. Knauss went to North Carolina and Virginia on business. A friendship was formed between him and an ex-Confederate who was acting as his guide. They soon determined that they both were wounded in the battle of Fredericksburg. The Confederate lost a leg. A friendship was formed, and both agreed to return to their homes determined to assist the comrades of the other, as best they could. Upon coming to Columbus in 1893, Knauss learned of the Confederate cemetery on the west side of the city where over 2000 ex-Confederates had died while imprisoned at Camp Chase, and that the burial place was in very bad condition. The gates and gateposts had crumbled; the grounds were overrun with weeds and all sorts of stray animals. Knauss arranged with Mr. Henry Briggs, owner of a farm

opposite of the cemetery, to have it cleaned up; in the spring a few friends distributed some flowers about the place.

The following year, 1895, a small memorial service was planned by Knauss. The trees were trimmed, the gates and gateposts reset, and the brush once again cleared. Three days before the planned service, all participants backed out, fearing reprisals from friends. However, the following years, 1896 and 1897 saw a more favorable atmosphere prevailed, and almost 1500 persons attended the 1897 service. By 1902, the annual Memorial Service was turned over to the local chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy. In 1912, the Robert E. Lee Chapter organized the services; later the Dixie Chapter, U.D.C. In 1995, on the 100th Anniversary of the services, the Hilltop Historical Society was asked to assume organization of the memorial services. Due to inclement weather on the Confederate Memorial Day in April, the U.D.C. decided to hold services on the second Sunday in June, a practice that still stands. Services begin at 3:00 PM.

In 1908, the present headstones were set, a project of the Commission for the Marking of Confederate Dead across the country. The headstones are placed in numerical order beginning on the west side of the cemetery. It is impossible to determine if there is a body to match each headstone; hence disinterment is not allowed. The cemetery is administered by the Dayton National Cemetery, and there is a hired caretaker under contract with the federal government.

In 1999, the Hilltop Historical Society wrote a grant proposal and received a Longaberger Initiative Bicentennial Historical Marker for Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery. The marker is one of the Hilltop's 2003 Ohio Bicentennial projects. The descriptive marker is placed on the west of the entrance of the cemetery.

Excerpts: "Men and Women of Camp Chase" - Paul Clay, Lois Neff, and Patti Ongaro; "Westgate Friends Church History - 100 Years" - Allison Skipper, Church Historian; and "The Story of Camp Chase" - William H. Knauss, Blue and Gray Magazine, David Roth, Publisher.