



Montgomery County Planning Department
The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Montgomery County Burial Sites Inventory

Historic Preservation ID:

HP-348

Name:

Harrison Island Civil War Burials

Description:

Civil War burials associated with the Battle of Balls Bluff.

Community:

Religious:

Family:

African American:

Other Site Type:

Civil War battlefield burials

Number of Burials:

unknown

Visible Markers:

Formal Entrance:

Cemetery Sign:

Active:

Earliest Year:

1861

Latest Year:

1861

Is the Site Extant?:

Is the Location Sensitive?:

Sensitive Contact:

Sensitive Reason:

Location Confidence:

Approximate

Location Confirmed:

Volunteer Forms and External Web Links (Montgomery Planning is not responsible for content. Links provided for informational purposes only)

2006 Survey Summary:

Montgomery Preservation, Inc.:

FindaGrave.com:

Maryland Tombstone Transcription Project:

Other Website:

<https://mht.maryland.gov/secure/Medusa/PDF/Montgomery/M%3B%2016-32.pdf>

Master Plan Historic Resource No.: Historic Resource:

Confirmed by Planning Board: Confirmation Date: Site Survey Date: Revision Date:

Site Surveyor Name:

Data Originator:

Notes:

The farmhouse on the island was used as a field hospital during the Battle of Balls Bluff in October 1861. Multiple contemporary accounts mention Union casualties buried on the island.

Technical information about the locational information shown in the online map.

Public Display Scale: _____ Is there a Restriction on Sharing Information?:

1: 0

GIS Source Date: GIS Source Datum: Boundary Type:

Horizontal Accuracy: GIS Data Source:

Additional Information:

“The dead and wounded were collected in an old house on Harrison’s Island, and were ferried across to the Maryland shore as rapidly as possible during the night, and were then put on canal-boats and taken down to Edwards Ferry, where the wounded were sent to their different regimental hospitals, while the dead were laid on stretchers and on shutters and doors taken from the house on the island, and placed in a row on the porch of the old store near the ferry.” 20th Massachusetts pg 61-62.

“I reported with the men at the hospital on the island.” Patch 1958: 42

“The detachment of the Tammany regiment that remained on the island in consequence of the accident heretofore mentioned —consisting of Companies B, Lieut. James McGrath commanding ; D, Capt. Isaac Gotthold, commanding; F, Capt. J. W. Tobin, commanding; G, Capt. John Quinn commanding; and I, Capt. David Hogg commanding — were on active and arduous service from the moment of their arrival on the island until 2 pm. Of the succeeding day in taking care of and conveying the wounded to the hospital, and in standing in the intrenchments as a guard under a heavy and incessant fire from the enemy.” Patch 1958:49.

“Meanwhile others of us were removing the wounded and burying the dead on the island. I was told off as one of the burying party. For any boy of seventeen it would have been a trying task. It was so for me who had rarely seen a corpse and never one from violence. Sunk in the mud, or sprawling on wet grass, the naked or half-clad bodies were fearful in their pallor, grimy with dirt and horrible with gaping wounds. Some features were placid and peaceful as though death was welcome, while others were twisted and contorted as if unbearable pain had come at the end, but all were ghastly in my eyes. A sense of duty and the wish to care duly for the bodies of our slain comrades kept me up to the work without murmur or any sense of repulsion. It was a serious training in the art of war, which made a deep impress on my future life.

Near our trenches was the body of a man, naked save for his trousers, who had been shot through the forehead as he came out of the river, after swimming across. Covered with mud and slime, blood oozing out of the wound, he lay on the river bank, head up and mouth open. As he was taken up for burial, one of the men said that he opened his lips, and so must be alive. A heartless man said, “Take him along with the others. He’ll never get well.” Mahoney cried out, “You d. . . . brute, I’d like to kill you! You must bury me before him.” The unconscious man was carried back to the Maryland shore and sent to the hospital, where I was later told he fully recovered. I shuddered to think how near we had come to burying a man alive.” Greely 1927: 40-41.

“Forty-seven bodies were buried upon the battle-field, twelve were brought over to Harrison’s Island, and almost twenty were left for the enemy to bury.” Story of the Fifteenth pg 95.

“When I got upon the island they commenced with him, and while they were extracting the bullets from his thigh, he said: ‘ Chaplain, will you find my wallet and put those bullets in? I shall want them some time.’ From that time throughout he has been bright, cheerful and hopeful.” Story of the Fifteenth pg 104.

“October 17, Lieutenant Derby writes: “ We are fortifying the island and are to have reënforcements and hold it in case of attack . I was up till three o’clock this morning overseeing the throwing up of intrenchments. The ruins of the old stone barn make a good fort.”” Story of the Fifteenth pg 60.

“Arriving at the island, we found that the firing we had heard was no boys’ play. Quite a number of Company H’s men lay wounded in the only house there was. It was then and there that we first witnessed the horrors of war.

Leaving our blankets and overcoats in the ruins of an old barn, we embarked, or rather my company crowded itself on to the only boat there was for conveying us to the Virginia shore.” Story of the Fifteenth pg 77.

“As it became dark, the wounded were crowded together in and about the two farm houses, which were used as hospitals. “No light had been provided or could be found until Surgeon Haven discovered two inches of candle in an old bottle, by the light of which Lieutenant-Colonel Ward’s limb was amputated.” “It was a sad sight to see a brave officer in that position.” More candles were afterwards found in a closet. Surgeon Bates, who rose for this work from a sick bed to which he had been confined for several weeks, attended to the wounded on the Maryland shore. Surgeon Haywood of the Twentieth Massachusetts was with Assistant-Surgeon Haven on the island. Chaplain Scandlin was also very devoted in his attentions to the wounded and dying. The transportation of the wounded to the Maryland shore was continued until the noon of Tuesday, October 22.” Story of the Fifteenth pg 93-94.

“We struck a barn-yard. Long ricks of straw and hay were on our right, under which men, horses, cannon, and provisions were crowded for shelter, and as we got on a little farther, an extraordinarily high hedge, around a queer barn, commenced in grand style of hewn stone but never completed, being a central octagon of fifty feet diameter, and two wings, one from the south face and one from the east, and full of soldiers eating raw pork and hard bread, and belonging to Hincks's regiment (Nineteenth Massachusetts).

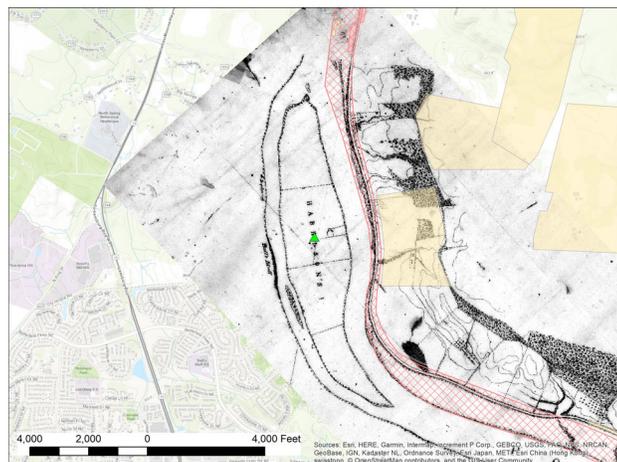
Hamilton, William R. "Ball's Bluff: From the Diary of the Late Major L.H.D. Crane, Third Wisconsin Volunteers," The United Service. A Monthly Review of Military and Naval Affairs, n.s. vol. 17 (January 1897). Pg 15

The farm - house had been used by the surgeons, and the larger room upon the lower floor I found completely covered with blood, and in one corner, feet, hands, and arms were piled like pig's feet in a butcher's shop, while in an old shabby building adjoining (the inevitable “ old house ” which the people here never tear down or burn up but leave to use for a wood-shed, or granary, or to bacco-house, or nigger-quarters, until it passes fitness for any earthly use and then suffer it to lie and rot in its place) lay the bodies of the men who had been operated on and died on the island. Out in the rain, close by were also several dead bodies, and all —ex necessitate—naked. The men were digging a trench to bury them in one corner of the yard, under a large chestnut tree, as we came away.

Hamilton, William R. "Ball's Bluff: From the Diary of the Late Major L.H.D. Crane, Third Wisconsin Volunteers," The United Service. A Monthly Review of Military and Naval Affairs, n.s. vol. 17 (January 1897). Pg 16

NB: a building shape matching the barn description above is on an 1865 map.

Images:



Civil War Era Map of Harrison's Island, approximate location of possible burials shown as a green triangle

Date 04/08/2022

Photographer Brian Crane

MARKER ID

GIVEN NAME

FAMILY NAME

DEATH YEAR