

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

1. Name

historic Grafton National Cemetery

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 431 Walnut Street not for publication

city, town Grafton vicinity of congressional district Second

state West Virginia code 54 county Taylor code 091

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
☒ district	☒ public	☒ occupied	☐ agriculture	☐ museum
☐ building(s)	☐ private	☐ unoccupied	☐ commercial	☐ park
☐ structure	☐ both	☐ work in progress	☐ educational	☐ private residence
☐ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	☐ entertainment	☐ religious
☐ object	☐ in process	☐ yes: restricted	☒ government	☐ scientific
	☐ being considered	☒ yes: unrestricted	☐ industrial	☐ transportation
		☐ no	☐ military	☒ other: cemetery

4. Owner of Property

name United States Veterans Administration

street & number 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.

city, town Washington vicinity of state D.C.

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Veterans Administration Land Management Service

street & number 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.

city, town Washington state D.C.

6. Representation in Existing Surveystitle V.A. Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? ☒ yes ☐ nodate Continuing ☒ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Veterans Administration Historic Preservation Office

city, town Washington state D.C.

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent
☐ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Grafton National Cemetery is located at 431 Walnut Street in a quiet residential area of Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

The national cemetery covers exactly three acres, the same area it had when dedicated in 1868, with 2,110 burial sites. The cemetery is surrounded by a low (approximately three feet high) stone wall, with entrance gates on three of the four sides. The front entrance gate is flanked by three impressive stone pillars, rectangular in configuration, with pyramidal caps. The cemetery is rectangular, and is landscaped into three terrace levels (the original site being a steep hillside), all connected by a graceful stairway/walkway that bisects the cemetery from the Walnut Street entrance to the rear entrance. Another, smaller walkway runs from the Cemetery Lane entrance to the plaza of the middle terrace. These walkways have the effect of dividing the cemetery into six separate areas. At the center of the middle terrace is a large flagpole and, to its left (or west) is a plaque containing the wording of the act of Congress for "the preservation and maintenance" of the cemetery, dated 1875. On the lower terrace of the cemetery are two more standing plaques, containing excerpts from the poem "Bivouac of the Dead." Along the east and west walls of the cemetery are five memorial areas, dedicated to cenotaphs for those service men whose bodies were lost at sea or otherwise never recovered.

All of the grave markers on the upper and middle terrace levels are small white stone markers, rectangular in shape but with rounded, or arched, tops. Only the lower level contains private, individual markers, or monuments. This latter group includes the twelve feet high obelisk monument to Thornbury B. Brown, and an interesting four feet high monument the top surface of which appears to be draped with an United States flag, carved into the marble. There are about six other standing monuments in this lower section of the cemetery. The standard grave markers are all arranged in uniform rows.

On the west end of the cemetery, at the middle level, stands the Caretaker's House, an one and a half story stone building with a gable roof of asphalt shingles. This building, built c.1900, serves as an office for the cemetery's business activities. This building was stated to be "an architecturally significant element" of the cemetery by Carol Shull, Acting Keeper of the National Register. Another building, the original Superintendent's Lodge, designed by General Montgomery Meigs, once stood on the grounds but was demolished in 1957.

The national cemetery is landscaped in an appealing manner, with plentiful vegetation and flora, as well as trees and bushes placed in appropriate sites throughout the cemetery. This landscaping gives the cemetery a tranquil, secluded appearance that is quite appropriate to its function as a resting place for West Virginia's honored dead.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
☐ prehistoric	☐ archeology-prehistoric	☐ community planning	☐ landscape architecture	☐ religion	
☐ 1400–1499	☐ archeology-historic	☐ conservation	☐ law	☐ science	
☐ 1500–1599	☐ agriculture	☐ economics	☐ literature	☐ sculpture	
☐ 1600–1699	☐ architecture	☐ education	☒ military	☒ social/	
☐ 1700–1799	☐ art	☐ engineering	☐ music	☐ humanitarian	
☒ 1800–1899	☐ commerce	☐ exploration/settlement	☐ philosophy	☐ theater	
☐ 1900–	☐ communications	☐ industry	☐ politics/government	☐ transportation	
		☐ invention		☐ other (specify)	

Specific dates 1867–68

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Grafton National Cemetery is significant as the only national military cemetery in the state of West Virginia, and as the burial place of several thousand West Virginians who died fighting to preserve the Union during the American Civil War,¹ including that conflict's first victim.² As noted in Section 6, the Grafton National Cemetery has been officially determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.³

Explanatory Notes

¹The Grafton National Cemetery, located along a quiet residential street in the small town of Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia, was set aside by an act of the 39th Congress in 1867 as a National Military Cemetery for the interment of Union war dead in honored ground. This action was the result of a two year long campaign by West Virginia Governor Arthur I. Boreman, at the behest of state veterans groups. The cemetery was dedicated on June 14, 1868 by Governor Boreman (the state's first governor). Remains of Union soldiers were removed from temporary graves in Clarksburg, Wheeling, from the Rich Mountain Battle site, Fayette, Marion, Kanawha, and Grant counties, as well as several Union dead who had fallen in Kentucky. There were also a few Confederate dead buried in the cemetery at that time.

Of the 1215 Civil War dead interred at the Grafton National Cemetery, 664 are unknown. All burials, however, are dignified by an individual stone grave marker. The markers for the Civil War burials have a variety of inscriptions, some including name, rank, when killed, etc. An example is the grave of "Manual Webster, Sergeant, Company B, 51st Virginia Infantry, Killed August 5, 1864." Others bear only the name and regiment of the deceased, while some of the unknowns, though giving no name, do name the unknown's regiment. In all probability, the most moving inscription in the cemetery is a portion of a poem by the 19th century poet Theodore O'Hara, inscribed on a plaque in the lower section of the cemetery. It reads:

"On fame's eternal camping grounds,
Their silent tents are spread,
And glory guards with solumn round
The bivouac of the dead."

Today, the burials in Grafton National Cemetery represent men from thirty-two West Virginia counties and twenty four states of the Union, including veterans of every American war since the Civil War. There are a total of 2,073 burials in the cemetery.

Being West Virginia's only National Cemetery, the Grafton National Cemetery has been the focal point of special attention by West Virginians. Every governor of West Virginia (excepting Gov. Farnsworth, who served only six days) since Governor Boreman has participated in and given memorial addresses at the cemetery on Memorial Day at least once during his term.

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There is also the tradition of "Flower Strewing Day," begun by the citizens of Grafton shortly after the dedication of the cemetery. Every Memorial Day, known in Grafton as "Flower Strewing Day" (though unofficially since 1882) a parade begins in downtown Grafton and winds its way to the national cemetery. Leading the parade are a host of Grafton's little girls, all dressed in white and carrying floral arrangements. Upon reaching the cemetery, the white-clad children scatter throughout the cemetery and, pausing before each marker, lay a flower upon the grave. A memorial service is then held, officiated by a prominent individual. Over the past 113 years, these individuals have included U.S. Senators, generals, and, as stated above, every governor of West Virginia save one.

On May 15, 1938, the U.S. Post Office issued a special commemorate stamp for the Grafton National Cemetery.

2. The Grafton National Cemetery is the location of the grave of Private Thornbury Bailey Brown, the first Union soldier to be killed in the Civil War by a Confederate. Private Brown, of Captain George R. Latham's "Grafton Gaurds", was mustered into Federal service as a member of Company B, 2nd Virginia (Restored) Infantry. While on sentinal duty, Brown was shot and killed on May 22, 1861 in what was then Fetterman, now that part of Grafton where the national cemetery is located.

Originally buried in a private plot, the body of Private Brown was moved to its present location in the Grafton National Cemetery in June of 1903 and buried at the spot where he fell. In 1928 a twelve feet high obelisk was placed on his grave by the United Daughters of Union Veterans.

3. As a result of Federal regulatory procedures concerning the protection of historic properties, the Grafton National Cemetery was officially determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places by Carol D. Shull, Acting Keeper of the National Register, on March 10, 1980.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Charleston Gazette-Mail, "Bivouac of the Dead", by Ferrell Friend, June 1, 1980.
Fairmont Times-West Virginian, May 15, 1938, Fairmont, W.Va.
Martinac, Paula, "Interview with Grafton Mountain Statesman, July, 1980.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Three (3)

Quadrangle name Grafton, W.Va.

Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

UMT References

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The cemetery is exactly three acres in area and is completely enclosed by a stone wall. The entrance to the cemetery is designated 431 Walnut Street, said street running the entire length of the southern boundary of the cemetery. The entire length of the west

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Michael J. Pauley, Historian

organization Historic Preservation Unit

W.Va. Dept. of Culture & History date September 30, 1981

street & number Cultural Center

Capitol Complex telephone (304) 348-0240

city or town Charleston

state West Virginia

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☒ national ☐ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Commissioner of W.Va. Dept. of Culture & History

date October 15, 1981

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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Stutler, Boyd B., "Memorial Day at Grafton National Cemetery", Civil War Release #87,
May 7, 1961, West Virginia Archives, Charleston, W.Va.

Webb, Sandra, "Grafton National Cemetery", National Cemetery Data, Preservation
Office, Veterans Administration, Washington, D.C., 1977

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Verbal Boundary description and justification

boundary is bordered by Cemetery Lane, while the entire length of the north boundary is paralleled by the B & O Railroad tracks and right-of-way. The east end of the cemetery is bordered by the east wall, which separates the cemetery property from private properties to the east.



