

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The landscape of Poplar Grove National Cemetery, established in 1866 and containing approximately ninety-nine percent Civil War burials, retains many of its character-defining features dating from its initial development by the War Department during the latter nineteenth century. These features, including the burial plan, brick inclosure wall, lodge, rostrum, and marble grave markers, are standardized features that characterize Poplar Grove as part of the national cemetery system in general and the Civil War-era national cemeteries in particular. Poplar Grove also retains several later features and modifications made during the early and mid-twentieth century under War Department and National Park Service (NPS) administration. Although well kept, the cemetery landscape today has a barren feeling that has resulted largely from past efforts to minimize maintenance, and in particular from the loss of small-scale features and plantings. The alteration of the grave markers to lie flush with the ground, undertaken in 1934, has been the most dramatic alteration, and one that sets Poplar Grove apart from other Civil War-era national cemeteries. The immediate setting of the cemetery retains much of its historic rural character, despite some suburban development.

Aside from documenting the existing condition of the cemetery landscape, this chapter of the Cultural Landscape Report provides an overview of the cemetery's environmental conditions, regional context, and setting (immediate environs). It is based on the site history and on fieldwork completed in June 2006, discussions with Facility Manager Jerry Helton and Ranger Betsy Dinger-Glisan, and on the park's GIS database. For the purposes of this report, the cemetery landscape (area owned or managed by NPS) is organized into six parts: approach road, Odom tract, inclosure (perimeter), lodge grounds, service yard, and burial grounds. Also included is a brief overview of current cemetery operations pertaining to the landscape. The chapter is supported by an existing conditions plan and current photographs.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Poplar Grove National Cemetery is located in the Rohoic District of Dinwiddie County, approximately one-half mile south of the Petersburg city limits and roughly halfway between Interstate 85 to the west and Interstate 95 to the east. While much of Dinwiddie County is rural in character, the area surrounding Poplar Grove is best described as exurban—a patchwork of fields, woods, suburban residential development, and light industry. The county, part of the Richmond Metropolitan Statistical Area, experienced a growth rate of over ten

percent during the 1990s, with a population of 25,173 in 2004. The city of Petersburg declined in population by a corresponding percentage over this period, to 33,091 residents in 2003.¹

The cemetery is part of Petersburg National Battlefield's sixteen-mile Siege Line Tour, the park's secondary tour route through the Union Army's fortifications that ring Petersburg to the south [see Figure 0.1]. The Siege Line Tour follows Flank Road (Route 676), originally completed by the Civilian Conservation Corps as a park road in 1934, extended to Vaughan Road (Route 675) in c.1944, and then completed through the Federal Left Flank west of Squirrel Level Road in the 1960s. The NPS transferred ownership of Flank Road east of Vaughan Road to the City of Petersburg in 1973, but the newer section in the Federal Left Flank remains in park ownership. Poplar Grove is stop #11 on the Siege Line Tour, located one-half mile south of Flank Road on Vaughan Road, a two-lane state highway.

The landscape of the Siege Line Tour in the vicinity of Poplar Grove is characterized by cultivated fields, scattered farm buildings, and suburban houses developed after 1950. South of the cemetery are the sites of several fortifications from the Union Army's secondary siege line, including Fort Clarke and Fort Siebert. These sites are privately owned and are not part of Petersburg National Battlefield. Northeast of the cemetery is Cerny Pond, a ten-acre water body constructed after 1955. Beyond the pond and about 2,500 feet east of the cemetery is the CSX "S" Line railroad and Collier Yard. This line was the Petersburg & Weldon Railroad during the Civil War and later became the Atlantic (or Seaboard) Coast Line Railroad. It is a 126-mile corridor between Petersburg and Raleigh, North Carolina. Much of the line south of Collier Yard was abandoned in 1985, but is currently being studied for reconstruction as part of the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor.² The railroad and much of the modern development in the vicinity are not visible from within the cemetery.

CEMETERY SETTING

Poplar Grove National Cemetery is surrounded by woods, fields, and suburban houses [see 2004 aerial photograph, Figure 1.85]. The land surrounding the cemetery on all sides except a portion of the south side was historically a single farm owned in the early years of the cemetery by the Flower family, and subsequently by Blaha, Odom, and Taylor, among others. The farm once straddled Vaughan Road, but the portion to the east, across from the entrance to the cemetery, has been subdivided since the 1970s and developed with a number of single-family houses. [Figure 2.2] East of Vaughan Road to either side of the

cemetery approach road, the land remains in active agricultural use as cultivated fields. The farmstead associated with the Flower-Blaha-Odom farm is located at the back of the field to the south of the cemetery approach road. [Figure 2.3] The barn and adjoining pasture enclosed by a split-rail fence is visible from the cemetery gates. [Figure 2.4] To the east is a field that is screened from the cemetery by a successional hedgerow along the NPS boundary that has grown up since the 1950s. East of this field is a large tract of mixed woods on land that belonged in the early years of the cemetery to Helen Farley, and subsequently was owned by Chandler, Bethune, and Richardson [see Drawing 5, also Figure 1.85]. For most of the cemetery's history, this parcel has been wooded.

The portion of the Flower-Blaha-Odom farm bordering the cemetery to the north and east was developed in c.1972 with a gravel access drive and two ranch-style houses. The access drive branches off the cemetery approach road and extends north and east, following the NPS property line [see Drawing 5]. The woods along the north side of cemetery were partially cleared for construction of the drive, leaving a narrow strip of woods on NPS property. Construction of the drive crossed a primary drainage from the northwest corner of the cemetery. The drive, along with the adjoining power line, recently slashed wetlands, and vineyard, is partly visible from within the cemetery. [Figure 2.5] The two houses were built in the woods east of the cemetery, approximately seventy-five feet from the cemetery inclosure wall. [Figures 1.26, 1.27]

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Poplar Grove National Cemetery lies in the western extreme of Virginia's Inner Coastal Plain physiographic province, a broad upland with level areas, swamps, and minor valleys and ravines cut by numerous small streams. The region includes the Fall Line, a transitional zone between the Tidewater (Coastal Plain), and the Piedmont (Appalachian Plateau). The drop from bedrock of the plateau to the sediments of the Coastal Plain is generally not visible except where soils have been worn away, such as in the bed of the Appomattox River west of downtown Petersburg, with its rapids and ravine walls of seventy feet and more. Poplar Grove is located approximately five miles south of these rapids, where the Fall Line is characterized by the overlap of Coastal Plain sedimentary soils on the underlying Appalachian Plateau bedrock.³

Native surface soils within the cemetery and along the approach road are Mattaponi and Slagle sandy loams, which are moderately well drained and very deep soils formed in loamy and clayey sediments deposited by ancient rivers and seas. [Figure 2.1] Depth to bedrock is generally more than sixty inches. These soils are prone to wetness due to slow to moderately slow permeability; allow for

medium surface runoff; and have a rooting depth of more than sixty inches. Ph ranges from strongly acid to extremely acid. Both Mattaponi and Slagle are considered good soils for hardwoods and conifers.⁴ Initial development of the cemetery probably resulted in some intermixing of these soils, but probably did not alter the overall composition. No record was found suggesting that substantial amounts of topsoil were imported to the site. Trees commonly found on Mattaponi soils include Loblolly pine, white oak, Virginia pine, and sweetgum; on Slagle soils, loblolly pine, sweet gum, southern red oak, water oak, and yellow poplar (tuliptree).⁵

The climate in this part of Virginia is classified as humid subtropical, with short winters and long summers. Poplar Grove is located on the boundary between U.S.D.A. Plant Hardiness Zones 7A and 7B, with minimum low temperature of zero to ten degrees (Fahrenheit). Average daily maximum temperatures reach a high of eighty-nine degrees during July. Precipitation averages between three and four inches per month, with a total yearly average of 45.76 inches. Snowfall totals 10.4 inches in an average year.⁶

There are no known rare or endangered animals or plants within or adjoining the cemetery. [check]

CEMETERY LANDSCAPE

APPROACH ROAD

At approximately one-half mile south of Flank Road (Siege Line Tour), the entrance drive to the cemetery, known in national cemetery terminology as the approach road, branches from Vaughan Road and extends southeast in an arc to the cemetery gateway for a total length of 1,025 feet. [Drawing 5] Within the cemetery, the approach road becomes the main drive. The head of the approach road is surrounded by woods and is marked by a standard park sign identifying Poplar Grove National Cemetery. A cluster of private mailboxes is at the north corner of the road. [Figure 2.8, see also Figure 2.2]. Proceeding from Vaughan Road to the cemetery, the approach road crosses private land for the first seven hundred feet through a right-of-way granted to the federal government in 1877 (the road was built as part of the cemetery in c.1866). The right-of-way is usually referred to as crossing just one parcel (former Flower-Blaha-Odom farm); however, the entrance at Vaughan Road extends onto the adjoining farm to the north, once owned by the Blaha family. The width of the right-of-way was not documented in the 1877 deed, but the National Park Service Regional Solicitor determined in 1976 that the historical usage is a sound basis upon which to

determine the width.⁷ Together with the land to either side of the roadbed historically maintained by NPS, the park usage amounts to approximately thirty feet in width. The approach road enters NPS property at seven hundred feet from the intersection with Vaughan Road (325 feet from the cemetery gate), beyond a private driveway built in c.1972 that branches to the north. This part of the approach road was acquired in 1991 as part of the 3.7-acre Odom tract.

The one-lane approach road is approximately eleven feet wide with mown shoulders, and is paved in asphalt with a sand top coat. [Figures 2.9, 2.10] The land approximately ten feet to either side of the pavement was historically planted with an allee of deciduous trees spaced at twenty-five foot intervals. Today, only scattered specimen trees remain from this allee, which was originally planted in 1879 and last replanted in 1931. These mature trees are identified by circular metal inventory tags, probably installed in the late 1930s by NPS as part of the cemetery master plan completed in c.1941. The allee has largely been replaced by volunteer red cedars and deciduous woods [see Drawing 5]. Through the right-of-way, the approach road borders working agricultural fields, except for a triangular woodlot at the intersection with Vaughan Road that has grown up since 1970. Through the NPS Odom tract, the approach road borders woods, mown field, and a parking lot.

ODOM TRACT

The Odom tract is a 3.7-acre parcel acquired in 1991 by NPS from the National Park Foundation, which received the property through donation from Roberta Odom that same year. The tract borders a private entrance drive to the Blaha and Peterson houses to the west and north, built in c.1972. On the south, the tract extends one hundred feet to the south of the approach road [see Drawing 5]. Prior to park acquisition, the land was part of the Flower-Blaha-Odom Farm. The land was historically fields, but the main part of the tract north of the approach road fell out of agricultural use by the 1960s. Since the 1970s natural succession has given way to woods of loblolly pine and mixed deciduous trees. The southern edge of the woods along the approach road was cleared in c.1995 for construction of a visitor parking area measuring approximately 175 feet long by forty feet wide. [Figure 2.11] The parking lot is surfaced in asphalt with a sand top coat, and has separate entry and exit at the east and west ends, with a narrow island separating the lot from the approach road. The lot, which dominates the view of the cemetery entrance as visitors enter from the approach road, can accommodate parking for two buses and approximately ten cars. [check] Aside from remnant allee trees, the parking lot, and its associated signs and trash receptacles, there are no known cultural features in the Odom tract north of the approach road.

The park maintains the one-hundred foot strip south of the approach road in the Odom tract mostly as mown field [see Figure 2.4]. The western part of this strip, west of a red cedar hedgerow, is used as part of the adjoining privately-owned cultivated field. East of the hedgerow and adjoining the approach road is the Odom cemetery, a small (0.05 acre) family burial plot established in 1971 and platted in 1972. [Figure 2.12] Surrounded by a cyclone fence, the cemetery contains two headstones, one with two graves dating to 1971 and 1981, and the other with two graves dating to 1971 and 1993. A government-issued grave marker is located at the foot of the grave of Lester Grady, who served in the Navy. The cemetery was acquired by NPS as part of the Odom tract in 1991 based on the condition that family members would be allowed access to the cemetery, and on the intent that the park would maintain the cemetery according to NPS standards.

INCLOSURE (PERIMETER)

The original 8.13-acres of Poplar Grove National Cemetery are enclosed by a four-foot high red brick wall measuring a total length of 2,700 feet. The wall, known as an inclosure in national cemetery terminology, was completed 1876. It is divided into 132 twenty-foot long sections divided by piers capped with sandstone caps. [Figures 2.13] These sandstone caps are a recent restoration, replacing concrete caps that were installed in c.1937. [check] The mortar in portions of the wall, especially along the top course and the base in wet areas, is deteriorated.

At eight low points, there are drainage openings in the wall that originally fed from a system of brick gutters and culverts along the cemetery drives [see Drawing 5]. Today, grass swales drain into these openings. Several contain brick or concrete spillways that extend beyond the wall, including one at the cemetery low point (northwest corner) that feeds into a culvert that runs beneath the private access drive into wetlands to the north. This drainage often backs up, resulting in standing water remaining within the cemetery often for days after a heavy rain.

The cemetery gateway, built as part of the inclosure wall in 1876, consist of wrought-iron swinging gates hung from granite posts with chamfered edges and pyramidal crowns. [Figure 2.14] The gateway has a central vehicular entrance with paired gates flanked on each side by pedestrian entrances with single gates. The vehicular gates swing inward to iron stops at former edges of the drive. Cast metal shields with the inscription “U. S. National Cemetery” are affixed to the piers to either side of the vehicular entrance. These were added after 1933.

The inside face of the inclosure wall abuts the cemetery lawn without obstructing vegetation. Outside of the wall, NPS-owned land ranges from approximately two to fifteen feet in width. The outside face of the wall abuts a cleared area of approximately five feet. Beyond this cleared area are naturalized plantings and woods. The woods on portions of the west and south sides of the cemetery provide solid walls of vegetation, while the woods on the north, east, and the western part of the south side are thin and allow screened views to the adjoining houses, fields, and roads. The thinness of the woods on the north boundary is due in part to a blow-down that occurred in 1994. The woods consist primarily of loblolly pine, red maple, sumac, sweet gum, and oak. Several large loblolly pines along the north enclosure are declining or dead. English ivy, escaped from plantings on the interior face of the inclosure wall made in 1888, is a common ground cover in these woods along with poison ivy. [Figure 2.15, see also Figure 2.13] There are some remnant red cedars outside of the wall planted in 1937 as screening, notably south of the lodge grounds. The corners of the pre-1991 cemetery property are marked by stone boundary posts installed in 1877, along with later pipes and orange stakes. [Figure 2.16] Remnant post and barbed-wire fencing, installed in 1937 to protect plantings made outside of the inclosure wall from livestock, is located along sections of the boundary, notably south of the Lodge grounds.

LODGE GROUNDS

The lodge grounds, consisting of the area at the cemetery entrance bounded by the lodge, Division F, and the main drive, is the cemetery's assembly area [see Drawing 5]. The lodge is a one and one-half story Second Empire-style stone former residence constructed in 1871-872 according to a standardized plan developed by Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs. [Figure 2.17] The 'L'-plan building, with overall dimensions of 20 by 33 feet, has dressed random-course ashlar walls, six-over-six sash windows, an open front porch, and a green-painted standing-seam metal roof that replaced an earlier slate roof. Affixed to the front of the building is a standard plaque with Lincoln's Gettysburg address. At the rear of the lodge is a one-story kitchen wing built in 1914. Since c.2001, the lodge has not been used as a park residence. It presently serves as a public contact station.

South of the lodge is the public restroom building (utility building), a plain Colonial Revival-style building constructed in 1929 according to plans by the Quartermaster General Third Corps Area, Baltimore [see Figure 2.17]. The white-painted stucco-faced tile building, measuring 24 by 14 feet, has a green-painted standing seam metal gable roof with stylized eaves returns, two utility rooms,

three-light single sash windows, four-light paneled doors, and separate rest rooms for men and women. The building's septic field is located in the lawn to the east [check]. The restrooms are screened from the rear yard of the lodge by a wood plank privacy fence added in c.1970, and a concrete walk connects through this yard to a rear entrance on the lodge. A gravel path built on fill, probably added at the same time as the fence, provides the primary public route to the restrooms [see Figure 2.17]. This path blocks the drainage swale that extends from the lodge downspouts to the nearby drain opening in the inclosure wall.

At the east side of the lodge grounds is a bandstand, known in national cemetery terminology as a rostrum. Completed in 1897, the rostrum reflects the Aesthetic Movement in its decoration. It is an octagonal structure sixteen feet in diameter, with a six-foot high brick base, iron steps, and a cast and wrought-iron iron superstructure with a concave metal roof. [Figure 2.18] The grounds between the rostrum and the lodge consist primarily of open lawn with scattered red cedar trees and two boxwood shrubs. These boxwood shrubs, located near the main drive, are probably remnants of plantings made in c.1871 that encircled a turn-around drive that existed until c.1929.

SERVICE YARD

The service yard, a small section at the entrance to the cemetery north of the main drive, is the cemetery's maintenance area [see Drawing 5]. The service yard is defined on the west and north sides by the inclosure wall, and is open on the remaining sides. To the east, the service yard abuts the graves in Division E. At the rear of the yard, close to the inclosure wall, is the garage (utility building) that replaced several earlier outbuildings. It was built in 1929 at the same time as the restroom building and in a similar Colonial Revival style according to plans by the Quartermaster General Third Corps Area, Baltimore. [Figure 2.19] Originally designed as a stable and garage with a loft, it is a one story building measuring 38 feet by 22 feet, with two sets of swinging garage doors, six-over-six sash windows, unpainted stucco siding, and a standing-seam metal gable roof with eaves returns. At the rear of the building is a later frame shed addition. The garage is presently used to house the cemetery's maintenance equipment.

A wide gravel drive, used for maintenance vehicles and as a staging area, extends from the main drive to the garage. It is paved in asphalt with a gravel top coat matching the main drive. West of the drive and garage is an open area of rough lawn used to park maintenance vehicles. In this area is a wellhead that replaced an earlier well located in the existing service drive in c.1974; a picnic table for park staff, a single red cedar tree, and an aged Southern magnolia at the corner of the

service drive and main drive. This magnolia is one of a pair shown in a 1904 photograph that once flanked a much narrower service drive.

BURIAL GROUNDS

The burial grounds constitute the majority of the cemetery area at 7.13 acres. The plan of the burial grounds is a radial design organized around a central flagstaff, with circular and radiating drives [see Drawing 5]. The plan is not conspicuous in the landscape due to the flush position of the grave markers, and to the turf surface of the drives and walks. On the east and west sides of the cemetery, the plan transitions to a rectilinear design that follows the property boundaries. Drives define the limits of the thirty-one burial sections. These sections were originally organized into six divisions lettered A through F corresponding to the four cemetery quadrants along with two outlying sections. In c.1957, the divisions and sections were reorganized into twenty blocks. There are no markers in the cemetery identifying either the blocks or the divisions and sections.

Drives and Walks

The drives (wider routes of circulation) and walks (narrower routes and the spaces between the grave rows) are all turf, except for the main drive, which has been paved in asphalt since 1931. Generally the circulation in turf is today referred to as walks, while the term drive is reserved for the paved main drive. The turf drives and walks blend in with the larger lawn and are therefore difficult to discern in the landscape. [Figure 2.20] All of the drives and walks remain, except for the central walk in division A (north of flagstaff), which was filled with graves between 1896 and 1918. The radiating drives with the exception of the main drive are designated by letter, A through F. The main drive is approximately eleven feet wide and has a pea gravel top coat on the asphalt that has mostly worn away. [Figure 2.21] The drive encircles the flagstaff in a tear-drop shaped loop, an alignment that replaced the original circle when the drive was paved in 1931. At the south side of the loop there is thirty feet of concrete curbing, added at the time of the 1931 paving and realignment to avoid grading over the adjoining headstones.

Cemetery Center

The center of the cemetery is the ceremonial and symbolic heart of Poplar Grove. It consists of a forty-foot wide plain circular lawn with a forty-foot tall white-painted iron flagstaff at its center. [Figure 2.22] This flagstaff, lower in height than the surrounding trees, consists of three sections connected by bolted flanges, an iron base and square concrete pad, and a small ball finial. As originally installed in 1930 (replacing earlier iron and wood flagstaffs), this pole was approximately twice the height and was secured with four cable guy wires. The flagstaff is

illuminated by a contemporary floodlight concealed by a boxwood shrub at the head of the main drive. To either side of the flagstaff are interpretive signs in brushed aluminum frames installed in c.1957, measuring approximately six feet tall by four feet wide. One sign contains the burial register (known burials), the other an illustrated plan of the cemetery by block, with text on the history of the cemetery and a drawing of Poplar Grove Church, the namesake of the cemetery. The church faced the flagstaff to the north in Division C (Block IX) prior to its removal in 1868. To the south of the signs are two square concrete pads, the origins of which are not known.

Along the outer edge of the encircling drive north of the flagstaff is an upright cannon, known in national cemetery terminology as a gun monument. This is one of four matching gun monuments that were installed symmetrically around the central circular drive in 1869; three were removed in c.1974. The remaining gun monument was the main one, identified by a standard bronze plaque indicating the burial record tally to date and the name of the cemetery. The black-painted monument is a thirty-two pound Columbiad cannon tube from Fort Monroe in Hampton, Virginia. It is set vertically on a cracked, three by six foot concrete pad, and measures six feet-seven inches tall, with a ball cap. In front of the cannon is a pyramidal stack of shot (nineteen cannon balls). Also along the outer edge of the encircling drive are six small iron markers (tablets) with raised letters A through F identifying the radiating drives. [Figure 2.23] These markers, measuring four by five inches and mounted on a low pipe pole, were installed in c.1957.

Grave Markers

The grave markers at Poplar Grove, numbering approximately 5,615, are all flush or nearly flush with the surface of the ground. The vast majority, known as Civil War-type markers, are Vermont white marble installed in 1877 to replace painted wooden headboards. These marble markers were originally upright but were laid flush with the ground in 1933, and then were raised slightly above grade in 1957. Most are set directly in the ground without a foundation. There are two types of Civil War-type markers at Poplar Grove: slab headstones for known burials, and square posts (known as blocks in national cemetery terminology) for unknown burials. The extant Civil War headstones, numbering around 2,106 or ninety percent of all headstones (see table below), are approximately twelve inches wide, eighteen inches long, and three inches thick, with an inscription in bas relief set within a sunken six-pointed shield. The inscription is in upper-case block lettering and indicates name, state, rank (for officers) and grave number, but not the date of death. [Figure 2.25, see also Figures 2.20, 2.24]. The name is inscribed in an arc, and the size of the shield varies depending on the size of the

inscription. Two variations on this style, with different fonts, were used for later graves or replacement markers through the 1930s. [Figure 2.26]

The blocks, measuring six inches square and originally designed to be six inches above grade, feature just the grave number incised into the top surface. [Figure 2.27] There were originally 3,355 blocks set in 1877; since then, approximately seventy-eight have been replaced with headstones of various types, leaving approximately 3,277 blocks, or fifty-eight percent of all grave markers in the cemetery. The block grave marker was discontinued by the War Department in 1904.

In addition to the standard grave markers, there are three [check] Civil War graves that are marked by a private (rather than government-furnished) headstone, and approximately four others that are just a simple slab with incised lettering. The private markers are larger marble slabs with distinctive lettering, and funerary and Masonic symbolism. Like the government headstones, these private markers were cut and laid flush with the ground in 1933. Two of the private headstones are located along the central loop of the main drive, adjoining the concrete curbing added in 1931. [Figure 2.28]

A third type of headstone, introduced in c.1939, is rectangular and designed to lay flush with the ground.⁸ [Figure 2.29] These marble headstones, measuring approximately twenty-four inches long by twelve inches wide and four inches thick, have incised inscription with name, state, rank, organization, and dates of death, and usually feature a religious symbol at the top, such as a cross. This new style was used for new burials and for replacement stones scattered throughout the cemetery. A variation of this headstone, executed in bronze, marks the single grave of a Medal of Honor recipient, which replaced a Civil War-type marker at some point after 1940.

A fourth type of headstone, used at Poplar Grove for replacements and reinterments beginning in c.1960, is the “General” type headstone, without the base stem and laid flush in the ground. [Figure 2.30] There are approximately nine of these headstones at Poplar Grove. The General, introduced after World War I, is the current standard headstone used by the Department of Veterans Affairs in national cemeteries. Although similar in shape to the Civil War-type headstones, these new slabs have no recessed shield, incised rather than raised block lettering, a religious symbol at the top, and date of death.

Approximate Tally of Existing Grave Markers ⁹

Type	Number	Percent of Headstones (Total 2,338)	Percent of all grave markers (Approx. 5,615)
Civil War-type headstone	2,105	90%	37%
Civil War-type block	3,277	n/a	58%
Private/other headstone	7	>1%	>1%
Rectangular flat headstone	216	9%	4%
Medal of Honor bronze marker	1	>1%	>1%
“General”-type headstone	9	>1%	>1%

The slab headstones are generally aligned with the length of the grave, except in several instances where it is in line with the row, perpendicular to the length of the grave. The exact position of the headstones relative to the underlying grave is not known for certain, although for most, the top of the stone is probably at the head of the grave, bordering the walk or drive.¹⁰ The blocks were apparently sunk within their pre-existing location at the head of the graves.

The grave markers at Poplar Grove are overall in fair condition with respect to their legibility. The park keeps the grass trimmed off the stones, raises those that sink below grade, and has cleaned stains and algae from roughly half of all stones. The heaviest stained stones are generally in shady and wet locations. With respect to their physical condition, the stones are in poor condition characterized almost universally by heavy chipping along the edges resulting from impact by mowers. Others are cracked and eroded. [Figure 2.31, see also Figures 2.24-2.30]. Without a firm foundation, many of the stones have settled and drifted out of alignment in their rows. [Figure 2.32]

Vegetation

Vegetation within the burial grounds consists of specimen trees and shrubs; there are no herbaceous beds or ground cover other than grass. Specimen trees within the burial grounds, numbering approximately seventy-eight, are widely and informally distributed across the landscape, with concentrations along the inclosure wall and main drive. [Figure 2.33, see also Drawing 5] There are a few large areas without any trees, notably in division A (block II), division B (blocks VI, VII), and division E (block XVIII). The trees are generally planted in the walks and along the edges of the drives, although some are planted within the

rows, causing upheaval of gravestones. [Figure 2.34] The dominant tree is red cedar (38) followed by holly (9), red maple (5), willow oak (5), and loblolly pine (4). Species numbering three or fewer include ash, pignut hickory, red oak, Southern magnolia, sugar maple, sweetgum, tulip-poplar, white-cedar (false cypress), and yellow birch [check] [see Appendix H]. The trees generally are between fifty and eighty years old, with a few specimens more than one hundred years old, and several trees younger than thirty years old. Specimens notable for their age and large size include two water oaks in the southeast corner in divisions A and B (blocks IV, VIII), a Southern magnolia north of the flagstaff in division A (block IX), four loblolly pines in division D (blocks XIV, XVI), and a white cedar in division C (block xi). [Figure 2.35] The loblolly pines are most likely a second generation to the many loblolly pines that existed at the time of the cemetery's initial establishment. The trees are generally in good condition, although one of the loblolly pines is nearly dead, and a number of the red cedars are declining.

Shrubs within the burial grounds are maintained in their natural habit, and are limited to boxwood and crape myrtle that in part or whole date prior to NPS administration. The crape myrtle are in a cluster of four along drive D near the flagstaff, with a few individual specimens scattered elsewhere. There are two aged boxwoods between Sections E (Block XVIII) and D (Block XVI), and one on the main drive, as well as a young boxwood concealing the flagstaff floodlight. The aged boxwoods are remnants of an allee of boxwoods planted in c.1871.

OPERATIONS OVERVIEW

Poplar Grove National Cemetery is a unit of the National Cemetery System, one of fourteen administered by NPS across the country. In addition, the cemetery is stop #11 on the Siege Line Tour of Petersburg National Battlefield that follows Flank Road from the Jerusalem Plank Road on the east to Church Road on the west. Poplar Grove is located approximately one-half mile south of Flank Road on Vaughan Road (State Route 675), a minor two-lane road. A standard park sign is located at the head of the approach road that leads to the cemetery entrance. Visitors generally arrive by car or bus and park in the lot outside of the cemetery gateway. Cars are allowed to drive into the cemetery along the main drive if necessary for reasons of accessibility. If two cars need to pass on the main drive within the burial grounds, they must ride over gravestones. Aside from the park sign on Vaughan Road, the cemetery is only identified by two small shield-shaped plaques on the gateway that read "U. S. National Cemetery." The name Poplar Grove is not indicated.

Poplar Grove National Cemetery is open year-round to the public daily from dawn to dusk. A park ranger is stationed in the lodge contact station on a part-time basis from mid-June through mid-August to provide interpretation and assist with inquiries into burials and grave locations. [current visitation numbers?] The lodge is no longer used as a staff residence, and is not outfitted for visitor orientation or interpretation. Exterior interpretive materials are limited to a standard national cemetery plaque dating prior to 1933 on the front of the lodge with Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, a cemetery plan and burial register posted in large signs installed in c.1957 to either side of the flagstaff, and a sepia-tone brochure that discusses the establishment of the cemetery and the search and recovery program. Interpretation of the landscape and development of the cemetery is generally provided verbally by park rangers. The main public event at the cemetery is Memorial Day, when each grave is decorated with a small United States flag and a ceremony is held near the rostrum on the lodge grounds. Visitor amenities are limited to public restrooms. There are no benches within the cemetery, aside from a staff picnic table in the service yard.

Maintenance of the landscape is under the direction of the Facility Manager of Petersburg National Battlefield. There is currently no dedicated maintenance staff, but rather on average three to five park staff or inmates routinely mow and clean the site once every three weeks from April to November. Cemetery maintenance operations are housed in the garage and adjoining service yard.

Maintenance work is primarily focused on lawn mowing and trimming, which is done by riding mowers and power trimmers. The park does not have an approved program of fertilization or herbicide use for the lawn. Hazard trees are removed as needed, but are not currently being replaced, pending an approved landscape treatment plan. In addition to vegetation maintenance, the park cleans and levels some of the grave markers each year with seasonal staff, but total annual time spent on this is usually no more than fifty hours. In the inclosure (perimeter outside of the wall), the park clears a narrow corridor to allow access to the wall for inspection purposes, and to clean the drains of debris. The park does not maintain the adjoining woods. Along the cemetery approach, the park maintains the parking area, the Odom family cemetery, and mows the shoulders along the approach road. The NPS-owned Odom tract woods are not actively managed, although the area nearest the cemetery is used to dump yard waste.

ENDNOTES

¹ U. S. Census, “State and County Quick Facts,” Dinwiddie County, City of Petersburg, online at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/51/51053.html>, accessed 12/13/2005.

² Federal Register, “Environmental Impact Statement: Rail Corridor—Petersburg, Virginia (Collier Yard) to Raleigh, North Carolina (Boylan Wye), 22 May 2003, volume 68, number 99, online at www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-IMPACT/2003/May/Day-22/i12812.htm.

³ Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. “The Natural Communities of Virginia, Classification of Ecological Community Groups, Second Approximation (Version 2.1), online article at <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/dnh/ncoverview.htm>; U. S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service in cooperation with Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, *Soil Survey of Dinwiddie Area, Virginia* (n.p.: USDA, August 1996), 4.

⁴ U. S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service in cooperation with Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, *Soil Survey of Dinwiddie Area, Virginia* (Washington, D. C.: U.S.D.A., August 1996), map 18 and pages 34-35, 41, 105.

⁵ *Soil Survey*, 99; U.S.D.A. Plant Hardiness Zone Map at <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/hzm-ne1.html> (accessed 25 September 2006).

⁶ *Soil Survey*, 90.

⁷ William W. Redmond, NPS Regional Solicitor, Philadelphia, to Associate Regional Director, Operations, Mid-Atlantic Region, 9 March 1976, Poplar Grove administrative records, Hickory Hill headquarters, Petersburg National Battlefield. Deed, J. Wesley Friend, Commissioner, to the United States of America, 30 April 1877, Deed Book XIV, 429 Dinwiddie County Records, copy in Herbert Olsen, “Poplar Grove National Cemetery History” (Unpublished report, 31 May 1954), 94.

⁸ The earliest modern rectangular headstone is for a 1939 burial at grave 1745; those for unknown graves do not contain a date of death.

⁹ Tally based on digital photographic inventory of existing headstones (excluding blocks), 2005, Petersburg National Battlefield; on sixty interments made between 1896 and 1957; and on 2,200 headstones and 3,355 blocks originally installed in 1877. The number of grave markers does not correspond with the total number of interments, since numerous graves have multiple remains.

¹⁰ Archeological testing is needed to determine the location of the grave markers relative to the coffins/remains. When the Civil War-style stones were originally installed, they were apparently positioned at the head of the grave, even though some of the pre-existing headboards were located in the middle of the grave.



General Note: All existing conditions photographs keyed to Drawing 5 (existing conditions plan)

Figure 2.1: Soils map showing Mattaponi sandy loam (12A, B) and Slagle sandy loam (17B) within cemetery and along approach road. U. S. Department of Agriculture in cooperation with Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, *Soil Survey of Dinwiddie Area, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S.D.A., August 1996), detail of map 18.



Figure 2.2: Suburban development (c.1980) on Vaughan Road opposite the cemetery entrance, view looking northwest from the cemetery approach road with the cemetery sign in the foreground. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.3: Cultivated fields of the Flower-Blaha-Odom farm with the farmhouse in the distance, view from the approach road looking southeast. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.4: The barn and pasture associated with the Flower-Blaha-Odom farm, view from the approach road near the cemetery gates looking southwest. The mown field in the foreground is NPS property (Odom tract). SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.5: The private access drive to the Blaha and Peterson houses (c.1972), view looking from the northwest corner of the cemetery, with partially cleared land in the distance. The orange stake marks the NPS property boundary. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.6: The Blaha house (c.1972), view looking northeast from the cemetery with the cemetery inclosure wall in the foreground. Note large open area and lack of screening vegetation. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.7: The Peterson house (c.1972), view looking east from the cemetery with the cemetery inclosure wall in the foreground. SUNY ESF. The trees screening the house from the cemetery are mostly on NPS property. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.8: The approach road entrance to Poplar Grove National Cemetery, view looking south on Vaughan Road showing NPS sign and cluster of private mailboxes. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.9: The approach road in the right-of-way, view looking west toward Vaughan Road from the private entrance drive (at right) showing asphalt pavement with sand top coat, private agricultural field, and mix of remnant allee and volunteer trees along the road. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.10: The approach road (c.1866), view looking east toward the cemetery through the NPS Odom tract showing asphalt pavement with sand topcoat, irregular mown shoulder, and mix of remnant allée and volunteer trees. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.11: The visitor parking area (c.1995), view looking east from the approach road toward the cemetery gateway. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.12: The Odom cemetery (1971), view looking southeast from the approach road with mown field in the Odom tract in the background. The split-rail fence is on the adjoining private property. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.13: The inclosure wall (1876), view looking northwest from the topographic low point near the northwest corner of the cemetery showing drain opening. Visible in the background is the c.1972 private drive to the Blaha and Peterson houses. Note lack of vegetation allowing views out. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.14: The main entrance gateway (1876), view looking west from inside the cemetery. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.15: Woods in the north enclosure, view looking west along the north boundary illustrating groundcover of English ivy and open understory allowing views out. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.16: A typical stone boundary marker (1877) with later pipe and stake markers. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.17: The east side of the lodge (1871-72) with rear kitchen wing (1914), and restroom building (1929), view looking west across the lodge grounds from the rostrum with the main drive at right. The front of the lodge faces the main drive. Also visible is wood privacy fence and the gravel path to the restrooms (c.1970). SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.18: The rostrum (1897), view looking southeast from the main drive during a Memorial Day ceremony. Betsy Dinger-Glisan, Petersburg National Battlefield, 2005.



Figure 2.19: The garage (1929), and east end of the service yard, view looking northwest across the main drive and Division E. Note large boxwoods at left. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.20: Characteristic turf drive and walks, looking northwest toward main drive in Division A between sections E and D (Blocks II & III). The wider space is a drive, the narrower space between the rows of grave markers are walks. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.21: The main drive, view looking east from near the rostrum showing asphalt paving with gravel surface coat. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.22: The center of the cemetery, view looking northeast from the main drive showing the flagstaff (1931), tear-drop shaped loop in the main drive (1866, altered 1931), and interpretive signs (c.1957). SUNY ESF, 2006. [need better photo]



Figure 2.23: The remnant gun monument, view looking northwest. Note bronze shield, presently painted black. SUNY ESF, 2005. [need better photo]



Figure 2.24: An iron sign (c.1957) identifying radial drive/walk "E," with headstones in the background. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.25: Typical Civil War-type headstone lying flush as a ledger stone, at grave #43 in Section A. This stone has been recently cleaned. Petersburg National Battlefield, 2005.



Figure 2.26: Later type of Civil War-type headstone, at grave 3294-A. This stone was installed in 1931 for the reinterment of Union soldiers found at The Crater. Petersburg National Battlefield, 2005.



Figure 2.27: Typical Civil War-type blocks (unknown graves) in Section F, looking north. These reflect raising that was done in 1957. Note heavily chipped edges. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.28: Two of the five private markers, view looking southwest from the central loop on the main drive. Note concrete curbing added in 1931. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.29: Flat headstone used beginning in c.1939, located in Section A. Note staining and chipping. Petersburg National Battlefield, 2005.



Figure 2.30: Typical standard “General”-type national cemetery headstone, installed at some point after 1960 as a replacement stone for grave 220 in Section A. Note heavy chipping along the edges. Petersburg National Battlefield, 2005.



Figure 2.31: Original Civil War-type headstone illustrating erosion and staining of the marble. Petersburg National Battlefield, 2005.



Figure 2.32: Grave markers dating from 1918 to 1942 in Division F (Block XX), view looking north showing various types along with staining and alignment problems. Note red cedars, planted in 1937. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.33: General view of specimen trees, view looking northeast from main drive and service drive, with holly in center foreground, red maples to right, and tall loblolly pine in left distance. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.34: Mature sweet gum in grave row in Division D (Block XIV), view looking west showing heaving of adjoining headstones. SUNY ESF, 2006.



Figure 2.35: White-cedar or false cypress (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*) in division C (block XI), view looking northeast. The tree is probably more than one hundred years old. The adjoining tree is a red maple, one of the youngest trees in the cemetery. SUNY ESF, 2006.