

# Lost Civil War Soldier Search Party

By Joe Maniscalco

Somewhere out in Green-Wood Cemetery's rolling 478 acres lie the lost remains of American soldiers who died clashing with their own countrymen, their own neighbors, and sometimes even their own brothers in the blood baths of the Civil War.

On May 17, Green-Wood Cemetery historian Jeff Richman will lead a team of volunteers in an effort to track them down and give them the reverence and respect that they deserve.

"We're looking to get as many people as we can," says Richman. "We have over 200 sections in the cemetery, so we have plenty to go around."

Through tireless research, Richman has been able to establish that by 1899, there were 2,225 Union soldiers interred at the cemetery.

Today, Richman believes that there may be as many as 4,000 civil war-era soldiers buried at Green-Wood Cemetery.

Time and primitive 19th century recording practices have allowed a potentially vast number of the graves to sink into obscurity.

"The only way that we're going to find them is to locate the stone that says they were Civil War veterans," says Richman. "Like any record-keeping system, it's not 100 percent accurate. Also, we can't tell from our books alone whether or not a person was a Civil War veteran."

For that, physically hunting down crumbling, old tombstones, among hundreds of thousands of other markers, is required.

"For instance, someone who died in 1863 from a battle wound, we can tell is a Civil War veteran," says Richman. "But someone who died in 1887—that gets very difficult to confirm." Richman has been poring over old obituaries from *The Brooklyn Eagle* and the *New York Times*, in preparation for the Indiana Jones-like expedition.

"That's been helpful, but I'm sure there are guys that are out there, that unless we find their stone, we'll never know if they're buried at Green-Wood.

Over 25 people have volunteered so far. Volunteers will meet at the main gates of the cemetery locat-

ed at 25th Street and 5th Avenue, on Armed Forces Day, at 10 a.m.

Keen eyes and a good pair of walking shoes are a must. Many markers have been worn down to little more than stone nubs sunken into ground.

"They're going to be looking inscriptions that specifically say this was a Civil War veteran," says Richman. "They're going to be looking for veteran stones issued by the U.S. government in the late 19th century."

The stones, made of marble, were issued free to the families of all Civil War veterans.

With a little practice, the telltale stones do stand out.

"When you get good at it, you can spot one at 100 paces, and we'll teach people to do that," says Richman.

The basic burial unit at Green-Wood Cemetery is the family plot. But many Civil War casualties were interred in much less expensive public lots located at the outer parts of the cemetery.

"Those essentially are single graves in rows," says Richman.

"Those are particularly rich areas for finding veterans."

Each volunteer will be given their own map and a specific, specially marked section of the cemetery to explore.

The work is important because it's the only way cemetery officials can be satisfied that an area has been properly investigated.

Tony Della Rocca, a historian of the 127th New York Infantry, has been exploring the cemetery for a few years and has been able to identify roughly 200 previously "unknown" Civil War soldiers on his own.

"We've found guys from Iowa, Pennsylvania, and from all over the place," says Richman.

Some of those discoveries were of men you might not expect to have made Brooklyn their final resting-place.

Confederate General Robert Selden Jarnett was the first general killed in the Civil War. The southern gentleman was actually married to Yankee woman from New York, who had her beloved husband's body secretly buried in Brooklyn just four months after Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.

"She feared retaliation if people knew he was there, so

there's no stone indicating that he's there, but our records clearly do indicate that he's there," says Richman.

In life, General Nathaniel Harris hailed from the deep south—Vicksburg, Mississippi—and fought for the Confederacy. But he too, is buried in Green-Wood Cemetery, in his sister's grave.

Just a few months ago, Richman made the startling discovery of two brothers—one from the north and one from the south—who, while bitter enemies on the battlefield, were laid to rest side-by-side in Green-Wood Cemetery.

Volunteers are also encouraged to bring digital cameras to help document their findings.

"We're shooting towards a book with the biographies of as many Civil War soldiers that we can find," Richman says. "We'd also like to be able to reproduce digital images of their stones."

With a little luck, volunteers might even be able to see what the Civil War veterans they happen to find looked like in life.

Richman has been collecting a large collection of Civil War photographs that could match an actual face to a faded inscription on a worn tombstone.

"There's no limit to the amount of people that we can send out to do this," says Richman. "It's not like people are going to be bumping in to each other."

While most archeological expeditions take things away, Richman is looking to give something back.

Officials plan to ask the Veteran's Administration to supply headstones for every unmarked grave belonging to a Civil War veteran.

"Everybody's going to be marked," says Richman. "And if we find any stones that need to be up-righted, we'll do that."

In the 19th century, the only choice families had for headstones, was marble. Any new markers placed today will be made of tougher granite.

Ultimately, Richman also wants to have every Civil War marker inscribed with a new insignia to make them easily recognizable to visitors.

For more information or to volunteer, call Jeff Richman at 631-549-4891. You can also email him at [grmwdours@aol.com](mailto:grmwdours@aol.com).