

# GREEN HILL CEMETERY

– Established approximately 1863 –

The origin of the name “Green Hill” has been lost. The name has been used for many older cemeteries, chosen perhaps for the peaceful scene it suggests or for its serene sound. People have sought a restful “sleep” for their dead since the dawn of civilization. The Green Hill Cemetery of Danville, VA, however, most likely acquired its name in honor of the man from whom the site was purchased.



Dr. Nathaniel T. Green was born in Halifax County, Virginia. After studying medicine in Philadelphia, he came to Danville and started his practice in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. He purchased a parcel of land, commonly known at that time as “Thompson’s Grove.” It was this land that was purchased for a new cemetery when the old one on Grove Street was reaching its capacity.

A committee consisting of John M. Johnston and W. J. Crews, both town council members, was authorized to purchase the land needed for a “park and cemetery” from Dr. N. T. Green at a Town Council meeting on August 10, 1863. The committee performed its assigned task well, for at the next regular monthly meeting of council, it reported the acquisition of the property. Seven lots were purchased containing approximately ten acres, for the price of \$125 per acre. In addition, thirty-five acres adjoining these seven lots were purchased at \$500 per acre. If this cost seems high, one must remember that the purchase was made during The War Between the States and the medium of exchange was the inflated Confederate dollar.

A few weeks after the purchase, the town of Danville entered into contract with J.J. Hill to enclose the yet unnamed cemetery. Hill was to receive \$11 for each of the five-foot panels needed to enclose the grounds. The front enclosure was to be four feet high, the rear eight feet high. Mr. Hill agreed to construct the gates, with the town furnishing the necessary hinges and latches.

The new cemetery received its name on February 5, 1864. The minutes of council for that date simply state, "resolved that the new cemetery be called Green Hill Cemetery." No mention of discussion about the selection of names is recorded. One may assume that the council felt that Dr. Green's name should continue to be associated with the land.

Captain E. D. Myers, an engineering officer in the Confederate Army, was involved with the construction of the Piedmont Railroad south to Greensboro, NC, from Danville. The town sought his help and paid him \$1,000 for his services of surveying and laying off the plots in Green Hill. John M. Johnston was named the first treasurer and W.B. Watson the first sexton. The sale of lots began in March 1864.

Federal prisoners who died in Danville's prisons and hospitals were buried in the northeast corner of the new cemetery. In the short span of sixteen months, 1,413 would be laid to rest here. This portion of Green Hill became The Danville National Cemetery on August 14, 1867. A stone wall separates this area from the graves in Green Hill.

A Federal Calvary raid on June 25, 1864, led by General James H. Wilson, on the Richmond and Danville railroad bridge across the Staunton River fifty miles northeast caused a stir in Danville. The destruction of this important bridge would disrupt rail traffic and prevent the arrival of needed supplies to the town. In haste, regular military units and militia were dispatched from Danville to defend the



bridge. Their efforts succeeded, but not without the loss of lives. The town was aware of its obligations to these local defenders. On July 5, 1864, lot number 174 in Green Hill Cemetery was donated to the family of T. Wilkerson "in consideration of his death in defense of the interest of Danville at the Battle of Staunton Bridge." Wilkerson was possibly the first Confederate casualty buried in the cemetery. The location of his grave is unknown.

No record of burials exists prior to 1883. Therefore persons buried before this date, without headstones, cannot be identified. During this same period, 1864-1883, the system for numbering the plots was changed. Wilkerson's grave cannot be located for this reason.