

Jean Lafitte

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Jean Lafitte National Historical
Park and Preserve



Chalmette National Cemetery audio tour June 2015 transcript

Welcome to the Chalmette National Cemetery Audio Tour.

Greeting (plays the first time visitor calls in. When visitor calls in at another stop, voice says “Welcome back to the audio tour.”)

Chalmette National Cemetery and Chalmette Battlefield make up one of the six sites of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, part of the National Park Service. Chalmette National Cemetery was established in May 1864, and in honor of its 150th anniversary, this tour will share some of the stories of the troops who are buried here.

There are currently five stops on this audio tour. You may visit them in any order. When you reach a stop location and want to hear a story, call the audio tour phone number and press the number for that stop. For example, to hear Tour Stop 1, press 1. You can also leave comments about the tour, and we hope you do. Instructions on the audio tour will tell you how.

Tour Stop 1 – Charles A. Hamilton

Welcome to Tour Stop 1. It is the grave of Charles A. Hamilton, also known as Sandy Hamilton. He was a musician in the 92nd Regiment of the United States Colored Infantry. The 92nd served throughout Louisiana, including New Orleans, New Iberia, Port Hudson, and Brashear City, and in the Red River Campaign of spring 1864.

Hamilton enlisted in November 1863, so his regiment was originally called the 22nd Corps de Afrique Infantry. The Corps de Afrique was formed after the Union captured New Orleans from the Confederacy in April 1862. Some members of the corps were originally Louisiana Native Guards, militia units made up of free men of color from New Orleans. Other members of the Corps de Afrique were men who had been slaves until the Union army freed them. Many of these former slaves had been living in refugee camps, and the new recruits were eager for army service and for an opportunity to support their families.

Hamilton survived the Civil War and was honorably discharged in 1865. We know almost nothing else of his life, other than that he lived until 1933, that he was originally buried in Convent, Louisiana, and that

his daughter lived in New Orleans. Like so many Civil War soldiers, he served his country and then went on to a life that we can only guess at.

Tour Stop 2 – Benjamin G. Ames

Tour Stop 2 is the grave of Benjamin G. Ames. 1861 must have been a heartbreaking year for his wife. Her youngest son died at the age of 12, and her oldest son and husband both enlisted. Mrs. Ames was left with a married daughter and another son, who eventually enlisted three years later. The two sons survived the war, though one was captured and imprisoned at the notorious military prison at Andersonville, Georgia.

Benjamin Ames was a farmer and a cooper---a barrelmaker---in his mid forties when he enlisted as a private in Company G of the Connecticut 13th Regiment Volunteer Infantry. On March 23, 1862, Ames and his regiment set sail from New York harbor with the Union force bound for Confederate New Orleans. Ames was at Ship Island, Mississippi, when New Orleans was captured on April 25. He was transferred to Company H a few days later. By mid-May he was in New Orleans, keeping the peace in the city and participating in battles upriver.

Ames was confined to St. James Hospital in New Orleans in November 1862 and died there of typhoid fever on January 6, 1863. He was originally buried in Cypress Grove Cemetery No. 2. Ames was later reinterred here at Chalmette National Cemetery. The inventory of his possessions at his death shows only a cap and a greatcoat.

Tour Stop 3 – Henry Dunham

Welcome to Tour Stop 3. Henry Dunham grew up on a farm in Ohio, the fifth of eleven children. He enlisted in Company A of the 120th Ohio Volunteer Infantry when he was 19. Dunham was wounded in the Battle of Vicksburg in May 1863. In August, he was taken to a hospital in New Orleans, where he died in September. We can let Dunham speak for himself in a letter he wrote to his family on July 27, 1863.

Dear father I have been waiting on you to write but I see you are not very prompt in writing to me. I got one from George while I was in the rifle pits at Jackson that is the last one I got from home. Well in the first place we have had another battle. It was a sour old fight. We left Black River on the 11 and took up the line of march for Jackson. We were in the fight six days. We lost our Colonel. He was wounded in the leg. I was very badly hurt with the explosion of a shell. I was behind a tree and a shooting at the cannonier and they saw me. They shot four times at me. The first time they shot they shot a solid shot, it struck about a rod before me and glanced over my head. The last shot struck the tree and knocked me heels over head. It splat that tree all to pieces and a limb hit me on the side. I lost my gun and box. I have been very near used up that was the hardest trip ever we made. We had no water hardly. I am getting along very well now. I am very bad wore out. Poor Billy Watson has died. He took sick at Jackson. He died with the yellow fever. They (illegible). We buried him as well as we could the way we were fixed. I will write a letter to Marth and tell her all about his death. I got my likeness taken to day. I am a going to send it to you. This is a picture of a soljier. When you look at this you can imagine how we all looked

when we got back from Jackson. Sinse we left Grand Gulf the rebs lost 2 thousand killed and prisoners. So much for Grant. The boys are all shaking with the ague. Jim Johnson has the chills. He looks bad. Stouffer is all right. So am I in good heart at home every where no more good by,
write soon
your son H. Dunham

Tour Stop 4 – Lyons Wakeman

Tour Stop 4 is the grave of one of the hundreds of women who fought in the Civil War disguised as men. Lyons Wakeman was born Sarah Rosetta Wakeman. She grew up in a poor farming family in New York. In the 1860s, jobs for women were limited, which may be why Wakeman disguised herself as a man and took a job as a canal boatman. Wakeman enlisted as a private in the 153rd New York Volunteer Infantry on August 30, 1862. She regularly wrote home to her family, praising the army food and saying, “I am as independent as a hog on the ice.”

For the first 18 months, Wakeman and her regiment guarded Washington, D.C, from feared Confederate attack. She also served as a guard in a Washington prison where two female spies were being held. One of the other prisoners was a woman who had posed as a major in the Union army and who was imprisoned for violating the regulations of war.

In 1864, Wakeman’s regiment moved to northern Louisiana as part of the Red River campaign. She saw action at Pleasant Hill and wrote, “I was not in the first day’s fight...But the next day I had to face enemy bullets with my regiment. I was under fire about four hours and lay on the field of battle all night.”

After the battle, the Union army retreated to the Mississippi River. On the march, Wakeman became ill and was sent to a hospital in New Orleans. After suffering from dysentery for nearly a month, Wakeman died on June 19, 1864, at the age of 21.

How did Wakeman keep her secret? A doctor signed her enlistment papers, certifying that he had “carefully examined the above named Volunteer” and that “he is free from all bodily defects and mental infirmity which would, in any way, disqualify him from performing the duties of a soldier.” Wakeman’s letters home give us no direct clues to how she disguised her identity, but they are fascinating reading. A family member found the letters in an attic decades after Wakeman’s death, and they have been published and quoted many times, including in books available at the visitor center on the battlefield.

Tour Stop 5 – unknown veteran of the Battle of New Orleans

Tour Stop 5 is the last stop on the current Chalmette National Cemetery audio tour. Grave #12540 is the final resting place of a survivor of the Battle of New Orleans, fought here on January 8, 1815. This unknown man from Tennessee survived the battle and was returning home when he died in Mississippi. An early 1900s newspaper clipping in the archives of Chalmette National Cemetery tells the story.

While doing research for a book, a Confederate veteran named Luke Conerly of Gulfport, Mississippi, came across the story of a War of 1812 soldier who was buried on property near Magnolia, Mississippi.

Not long before Conerly's discovery, Congress had authorized using government funds to pay for the reburial of troops in national cemeteries.

Conerly made it his mission to bring the unknown soldier to Chalmette National Cemetery. He and the superintendent of Chalmette National Cemetery were guided to the grave by the only two men who remembered its location. Those two elderly men were Henry Brumfield, whose family owned the property, and an unnamed African American servant. According to Brumfield, family records showed that the soldier had fought at the Battle of New Orleans as part of Major Gen. William Carroll's Tennessee militia. The old records also said that the man's grave had been marked by a piece of wood with his name carved into it. The name and the grave marker were long lost, but tarnished brass buttons and uniform fragments identified the grave's occupant as a soldier. Conerly's mission ended when he attended the re-burial of the unknown Tennessean here at Chalmette National Cemetery.