

## **Lorton History - Lonesome Cemetery**

### **Potter's Field for DC Prisoners**

**By Irma Clifton**

Even though it appears no ghosts have ever been associated with it, just the name, Stoney Lonesome Cemetery, conjures up visions of spirits hovering over the land. Add to that the fact that there are no headstones and only a black wrought-iron fence and sign to mark the site and you have all the ingredients for a real mystery-thriller. Unfortunately, the facts surrounding the cemetery are much more mundane.

Stoney Lonesome Cemetery is a sort of "Potter's Field" on the grounds of the former DC prison at Lorton that dates back to just after the Workhouse was established in 1910 when a small plot of land was set aside as a site for interment of those men and women who died while incarcerated with no relatives or friends to take care of the burial. Early burials were of men who died of injury or disease, or were drowned while working on a dock in the area of the brick kilns. Several men who died at the Workhouse during the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918 are also buried there.

Coffins were no more than a pine box fashioned in the carpenter shop at the Workhouse. Graves were hand-dug by a lone inmate, usually a trustee who would take a whole day to accomplish the task. A local clergyman, and in later times the prison chaplain, would officiate while other imprisoned friends of the deceased stood at graveside for the ceremony and interment. It is estimated that between fifty and one hundred prisoners may be buried at the site.

Located in a grove of cedar trees, some of which appear to be more than 75 years old, the old cemetery is located along an access road to the Fairfax Water facility. The graves are laid out in north-south rows and are now just depressions in the ground.

The last burial is said to have occurred sometime during the 1960s, but records have long been lost that would indicate who or when a prisoner was buried. There is one notable exception although verification appears mostly to be through newspaper articles of the day and by word of mouth. During the 1940s a Marine by the name of McFarland was recuperating from wounds received in the Pacific Campaign at the barracks in Southeast Washington. He was accused of strangling a young woman with her snod, arrested and sent to DC Jail. Said to be a likeable, charismatic and handsome man he was somehow able to escape and remained at large for weeks. He was eventually located in Tennessee and returned to DC Jail. Months later he was tried, convicted of murder and sentenced to be executed. In those days execution was carried out in the electric chair at the DC Jail. Following several appeals of his sentence McFarland was finally executed.

No family member claimed his body and for some reason not clearly documented Hall's Funeral Home in Occoquan, Virginia was assigned the responsibility for arranging his interment in Stoney Lonesome Cemetery at the DC Workhouse. This is the only part of the story for which documentation is known to exist. For over forty-five years McFarland's body rested at that bucolic site on the prison grounds.

Then, in the early 1990s family members from North Carolina began research to find the grave and have the body moved to the family cemetery there. Alas, records could not be found in the DC Corrections system and records from Hall's Funeral Home had been washed away during Hurricane Agnes in 1972. The family's attempt to bring home their loved one came to naught.

Stoney Lonesome Cemetery's history could easily lead to flights of fancy as this Halloween approaches and it may even seem possible, if you listen very closely, to hear the shrieks and moans of those who in coming to prison not only lost their freedom but never expected to lose their very lives as well.



A burial at Stoney Lonesome Cemetery in 1948 on the Workhouse grounds at Lorton. Note the pine coffin. Credit Orsinger Collection at the Workhouse Museum