



**HONORING FALLEN SOLDIERS:
AMERICA'S FIRST MEMORIAL DAY
MAY 1, 1865
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA**

A PROGRAM IN REMEMBRANCE

MAY 3-4, 2002

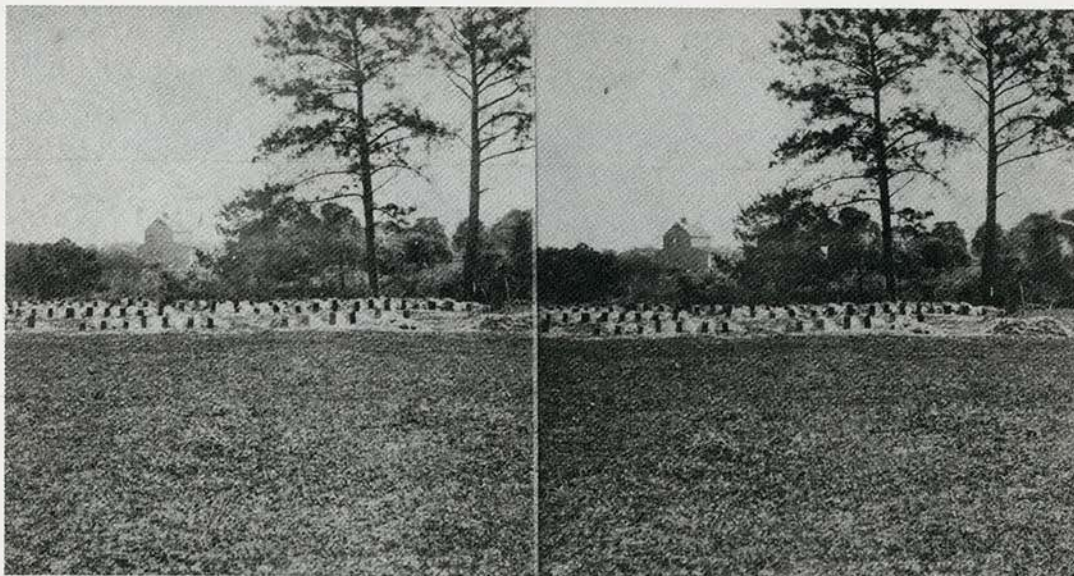


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May 1, 1865
Charleston, South Carolina



No. 355. Graves of Union Prisoners at the Race Course.

Edited by
Catherine Clinton

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Photo from nature By G.N. Barnard

RUINS OF THE PINCKNEY MANSION CHARLESTON, S.C.

“KEEP THEIR MEMORY GREEN”

On May 1st, 1865, when Esther Hill Hawks attended Decoration Day ceremonies at the former Washington Racecourse in Charleston, she asserted that “a fine monument is to be erected as soon as we have sufficient means.” Certainly her statement reminds us of the vital importance of monuments, as 130 years later in 2002, this spot—Hampton Park—is not graced by a monument, fine or otherwise.

Although historians over the years have noted the importance of this historic occasion [most recently Robert Rosen in his history of Charleston and David Blight in his work on Civil War memory], those who traverse this garden spot today have little awareness that Hampton Park was the place where Americans first gathered after the Civil War to decorate graves, and initiate the practice of “Memorial Day.” But through the generosity of the history-loving City of Charleston, a monument is to be erected. This monument will be a gift to the city, a gift to acknowledge Charleston’s significant role—significant in so many dimensions, and surely significant for years to come. This permanent memorial will remind visitors of the events which transpired in Charleston in 1865—and its legacy for South Carolina and the nation.

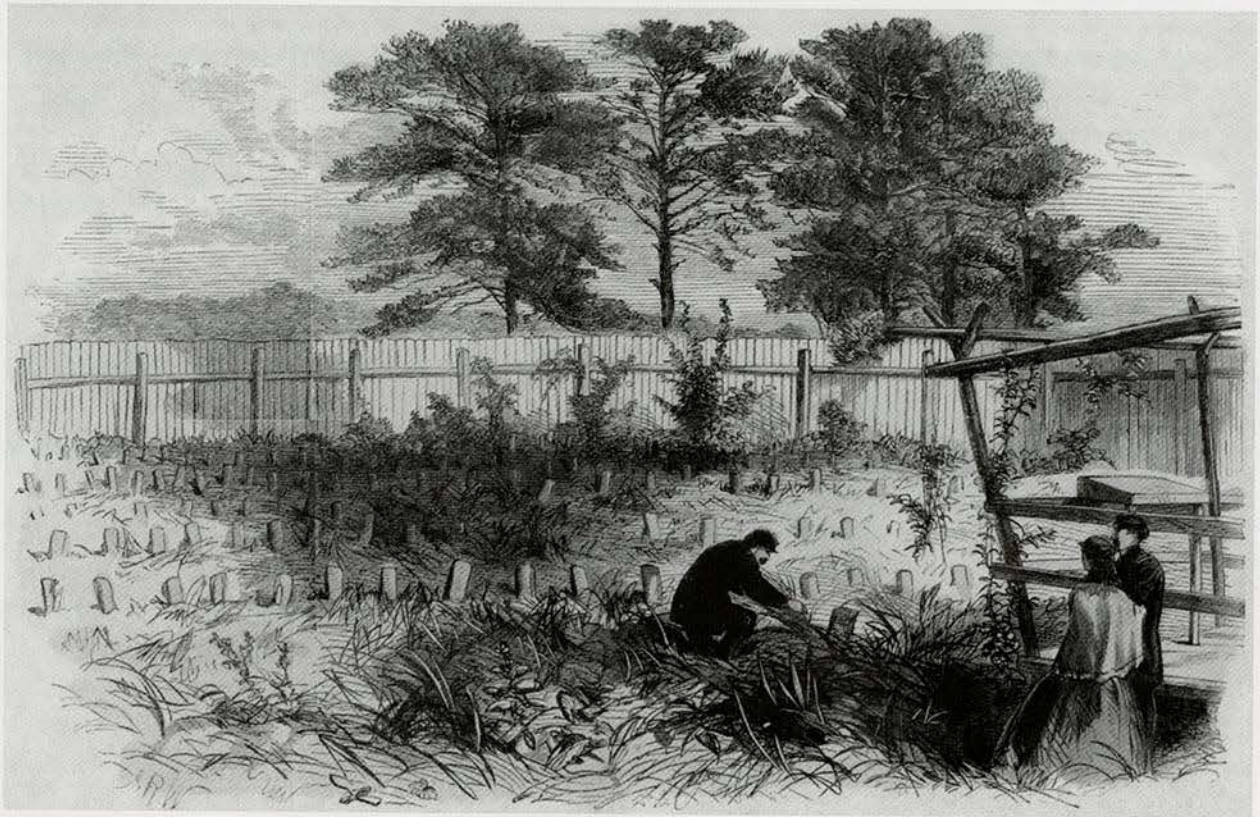
It remains for the scholars and students of Civil War history to continue their debates over whether this was a “true” memorial day. But eyewitness accounts and newspaper notices (even illustrations) remind us that it was a truly moving day of memorialization—with graves festooned with flowers, with prayers and patriotic hymns, with soldiers and citizens gathered to honor the fallen soldiers and, as one survivor enjoined, to “keep their memory green.”

We planned for 2002 to be the beginning of a revitalized celebration of this historical moment. We begin with a two day event—May 3rd and 4th— with scholarly forums and poetry contests, with a chorus of local schoolchildren, with Massachusetts 54th soldier re-enactors, with local ministers and musicians, to bring together and create a community to preserve historical memory. We wanted to “bring back” Robert Smalls and Francis Rollin and Martin Delany, and other important characters from Charleston’s Civil War past—to honor their memory as well.

In the twenty-first century there will be many who visit and revisit the historic sites of Charleston, who marvel at the city’s rich and deep history—and its embrace of the past. We look forward to future celebrations of “America’s First Memorial Day” and the people who made it possible—to “keeping the memory green.”

Catherine Clinton

Charleston, S.C.



Harper's Weekly, May 18, 1867