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The Four Burials of William Clarke Quantrill

There were four separate burials for the famed Civil War Missouri guerrilla chieftain, Colonel William Clarke Quantrill, who gained fame for his daring exploits in Missouri, Kansas, Texas, Arkansas, Indian Territory and Kentucky. At the close of the war, he was taking 52 of his handpicked men east to join the Southern forces of General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia in order to receive honorable terms of surrender which he could not receive in Missouri. It was evident that the end of the war and the South's defeat was soon inevitable. When the critical city of Petersburg, Virginia, fell to Northern forces on April 2, 1865, the Confederate government in Richmond was forced to flee and the surrender of Lee's army took place soon afterwards on April 9. Quantrill's progress towards Lee's army was abruptly halted and he was forced to find shelter in safe houses of Southern sympathizers in Nelson and Spencer Counties in northern Kentucky. Resting in a friendly farmer's barn during a heavy rainstorm Quantrill was fatally struck down while attempting to heroically cover the retreat of his men as they were surprisingly attacked by an overwhelming force of Federal guerrillas. Mortally wounded on May 10, Quantrill was conveyed by wagon to Louisville to a Federal prison hospital on May 14, where the 27-year-old guerrilla died a month later on June 6, 1865.

The day following, Quantrill's body was transported to Louisville's Portland Cemetery also known as St. John's Cemetery where he was buried in an unmarked grave according to his last request next to the sexton's house. Here his body lay at peace for twenty-two years until 1887, when his mother and his childhood friend, William W. Scott, traveled to Louisville to have his remains exhumed and placed in a zinc lined coffin and returned to the Quantrill family plot in the Canal Dover 4th Street Cemetery in Ohio. The reburial in Dover was not initially allowed because city officials were

local cemetery as well as objections of Union veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic who did not want Quantrill buried in the same cemetery with Union soldiers. Quantrill was eventually allowed to be buried in an unmarked grave next to his brother Franklin and his mother Caroline. William W. Scott rather than place Quantrill's remains in the prepared coffin surreptitiously stole the skull and remaining large bones hoping to sell them later to the highest bidder after Quantrill's mother died. After exhuming Quantrill's remains in Louisville, Scott, after only nine days, attempted to sell Quantrill's skull. Not finding a buyer Quantrill's skull found its way to the Dover Historical Society where it was kept and used in initiation rites for the local college's Zeta Chapter of the Alpha Pi fraternity until 1942. After Scott's death on November 6, 1902, the rest of Quantrill's remains were eventually sold by Scott's widow to the Secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society, William Eley Connelley, who eventually wrote a scathing book based on his own opinions towards his wartime nemesis in 1909. Caroline Quantrill died on November 23, 1903. Three days later Connelley had Quantrill's remains exhibited at the historical society's museum until public outcry against such a morbid display caused them to be taken down and stored away for the next 76 years.

In 1989 the Kansas State Legislature passed the Unmarked Burial Sites Preservation Act, intended to protect Native Indian burial sites as well as making it illegal to own the remains or artifacts of Native American Indians. Also included in the law was the illegal possession of any remains of American soldiers which also included the remains of Confederate soldiers. As a consequence, the Kansas State Historical Society had to relinquish their possession of Quantrill's earthly remains. Acting quickly the Missouri Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans led by attorney and Commander-in-Chief of the Missouri Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans,

Continued on Page 6...

Paul Petersen continued from page 5...

Robert L. Hawkins III, requested and eventually were given Quantrill's remains. The Missouri Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans also sought Quantrill's skull from the Dover Historical Society but knowing that their old enemy would be given an honorable burial they refused and quickly held a burial in the Quantrill family plot in Dover, placing Quantrill's skull in a child's coffin and hastily burying it late at night without making any notification so kinfolk or others could attend and pay their respects. Their stated purpose was that the burial "be conducted with no publicity and a minimum of fanfare." The coffin was hastily buried and capped with several layers of concrete to prevent anyone from taking it.

The rest of Quantrill's remains obtained by the Sons of Confederate Veterans were placed in a homemade roughhewn coffin covered with a Confederate battle flag and a respectful and dignified reinterment was held on October 24, 1992, with the eulogy given in the chapel of the cemetery at the Confederate Veterans Home in Higginsville, Missouri. Hundreds of mourners came to pay their last respects including many descendants of those who had ridden with Quantrill during the war. All the pallbearers were made up of descendants of the partisan ranger's ancestors. A detail of reenactors from the Fifth Missouri Infantry, CSA, comprised the honor guard. The eulogy was given by Father Hugh Beahan, Chaplain of the Missouri House of Representatives. Commander Hawkins' eulogy concerning Quantrill summed up the pent-up feelings of those who loved him as well as those who hated him. "We do not wish him buried where people are ashamed of him, where no one remembers or cares to recall the brutality of a partisan warfare that created men like (Quantrill) and those who rode with him, where he would be laid to rest with a sense of relief that a difficult task had finally been done, with no military honors and no remembrance of the suffering and sacrifice of days gone by. He belongs here, here, with those who were truly his people."

And so, the first burial of William Clarke Quantrill was held in Louisville's Portland Cemetery on July 7, 1865, while his second burial was held in the Quantrill family plot in Canal Dover, Ohio, in 1888, when his skull was added comprising his third burial on October 30, 1992. On October 24, 1992, Quantrill's fourth and final burial took place in the Confederate Veteran's Cemetery in Higginsville, Missouri, finally resting alongside many of the men who had fought with him so courageously during the War for Southern Independence.

Article by *Paul R. Petersen* – author of *Quantrill of Missouri, Quantrill in Texas and Quantrill at Lawrence.*

References: *Gone But Not Forgiven, Those Vile Rebel Bones Lie in Three States* by Patrick Marquis of quantrillsguerrillas.com

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