

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Magnolia Cemetery began in the 1820's. On August 5, 1862 it was the focal point of much of the fighting in the Battle of Baton Rouge. The cemetery retains its essential appearance and hence is in a good state of historical integrity.

At the time of the battle Magnolia Cemetery stood at the eastern edge of Baton Rouge. Today it is the only part of the battlefield which remains intact because the surrounding areas have long since been given over to commercial and institutional buildings. The cemetery consists of six city blocks (about twenty acres). There are no large pretentious tombs of the type found in New Orleans. Most of the monuments are relatively plain grave stones. Burials date from the 1820's to the 1970's. The land rolls gently and contains several large cedar trees. The property is presently encompassed by a 1909 cast-iron fence.

Assessment of Integrity:

In the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office, Magnolia Cemetery still conveys a sense of its time and place in history. There are more burials today than there were in 1862 and the cemetery has acquired the aforementioned cast-iron fence. Nonetheless, it is still a broad open field with modest size grave markers.

Specific dates                    August 5, 1862  
Builder/Architect                n/a

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)  
Criterion A

Magnolia Cemetery is significant on the state level in the area of military history as the site of the Battle of Baton Rouge, August 5, 1862. As explained below, this battle had an impact upon the course of the war in Louisiana and the Confederacy as a whole.

A Federal army of 2,500 men under Brigadier General Thomas Williams occupied Baton Rouge in August 1862. An army of Confederates under Major General John C. Breckinridge, former Vice-President of the United States, moved from Vicksburg, Mississippi to attack the Federals. By the time the Confederate force reached Baton Rouge, disease and heatstroke had reduced it to 2,600 men. The Confederates had two goals in their attack. Capture of Baton Rouge would give them control of a point on the Mississippi River below the Red River and open the latter to movement of supplies both east and west. Secondly, the capture of the town might be the first step in the recapture of New Orleans. The Battle of Baton Rouge would form an important part in the struggle for control of the valuable Mississippi River.

The Confederate army attacked the Federal encampments early on the morning of August 5. When the battle began, the men of the 21st Indiana Infantry advanced several hundred yards beyond the cemetery to the east-northeast. The Confederate attack drove the Federals back through the cemetery past their camps. A Federal counterattack led by General Williams pushed the Confederates back beyond the cemetery again. The cemetery itself became a battleground between soldiers of the 6th Kentucky Infantry Regiment and the 21st Indiana. For nearly an hour the two sides exchanged shots. One Kentuckian remembered that many of his comrades "sat on the graves, and fired from the tombstones which protected them." Finally the Confederates charged again and succeeded in driving the Federals away from the cemetery and toward the river. The 6th Kentucky suffered most of its casualties in the fighting around the cemetery. After the battle had ended, a Federal reported finding bodies of Confederate soldiers strewn all through the cemetery. He found twelve dead Confederates behind the Crenshaw family tomb with its beautiful effigies of three children who died in a yellow fever epidemic. The Federals buried most of the Confederates killed in the battle in a common grave in the cemetery.

The Confederate attack on Baton Rouge failed to drive out the Federal soldiers. Though pushed back to the levee, the Federals found safety there under the protection of the large cannons of warships on the river. Breckinridge had expected the ironclad gunboat Arkansas to arrive from Vicksburg and run off the Federal warships. The engines of the Arkansas broke down south of the town, and her crew had to abandon her and blow her up. When Breckinridge learned the fate of the

Arkansas, he ordered his men to retreat to the Comite River. The Confederate casualties numbered approximately 450 men. The Federal army lost 380 men, including General Williams.

The Battle of Baton Rouge was an extremely important event in the state's history. Though the Confederates did not win the battle, the ferocity of their attack convinced the Federal high command to evacuate the town and to fear an assault on New Orleans. The Confederates occupied Baton Rouge from late August until December 1862. They moved troops to the little town of Port Hudson north of Baton Rouge and established a garrison there on August 15. The bluffs of that town represented the first high ground north of Baton Rouge. By erecting powerful artillery batteries on top of the Port Hudson bluffs, the Confederates prevented the Federals from going any further northward on the Mississippi River. Confederate occupation of Port Hudson allowed them to use the Red River to ship supplies back and forth across the Mississippi. This flow of supplies continued unmolested until the fall of Port Hudson in July 1863. Thus, though a tactical defeat, the Battle of Baton Rouge proved to be an important strategic victory for the Confederacy. The battle resulted in the Confederates erecting a stronghold on the river which enabled them to supply their armies and prolong the Civil War. By driving the Federals out of Baton Rouge, the Confederates assured themselves ample time to make of the Port Hudson defenses one of the strongest fortified points in the South.

#### Sources on the Battle of Baton Rouge--

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