



Photography at Antietam

A Battlefield Tour

"...Broken hearts cannot be photographed."



Back Cover: A solitary Confederate soldier killed and a battlefield grave at Antietam. Published by the Western Maryland Interpretive Association (WMIA), the nonprofit partner of Antietam National Battlefield, in cooperation with the National Park Service. Images courtesy of the Library of Congress. Written and designed by Park Ranger Snyder. To learn more visit www.nps.gov/anti and www.virtualantietam.com

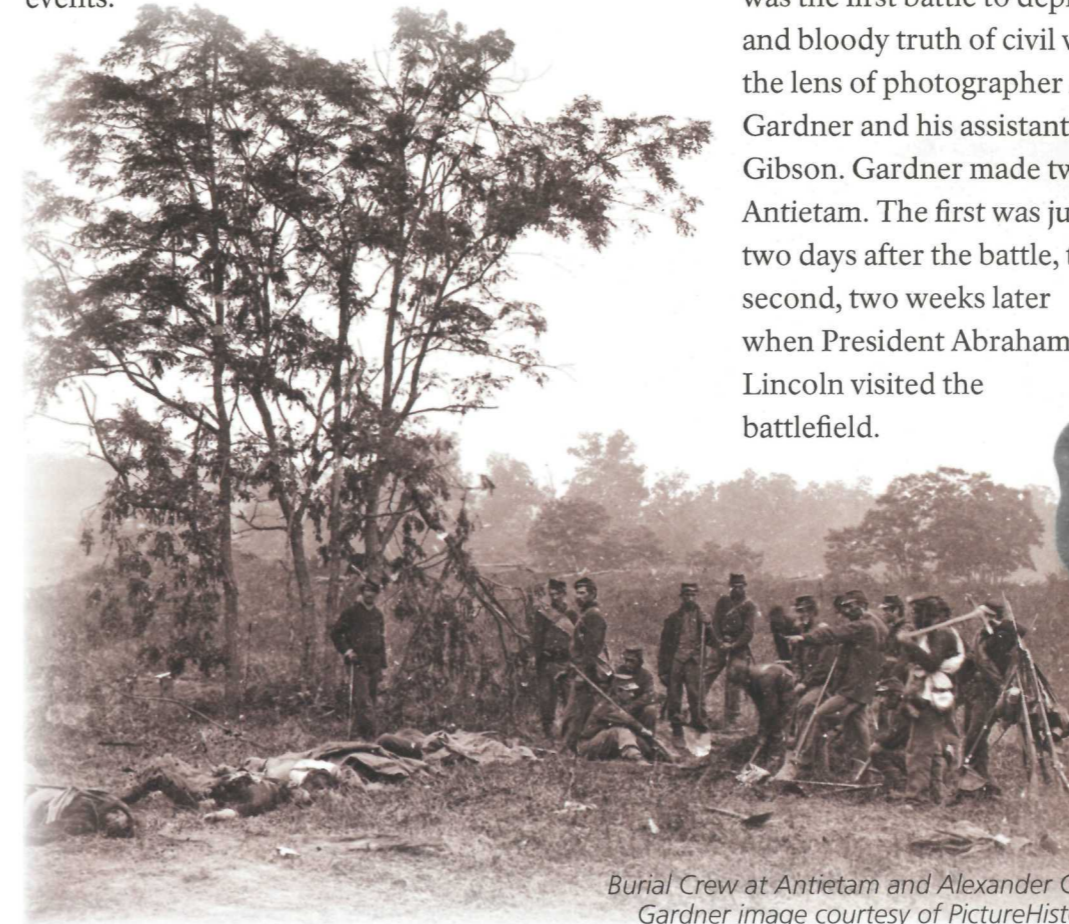


Burnside Bridge and Alexander Gardner's traveling darkroom

Introduction

The ability to capture a moment in time has fascinated us ever since an image was first produced in 1839. First a novelty, then a powerful medium of information and emotion, photography and photojournalism came of age during the American Civil War. No other conflict had ever been recorded in such detail. Nowhere else is this truer than at Antietam, the first battlefield photographed before the dead were buried.

It started with just a few, but by 1865 dozens of photographers were hauling glass plates and volatile chemicals across the war-torn countryside. Today, because of their work, we can still look into the faces of soldiers and visit the locations of tragic events.

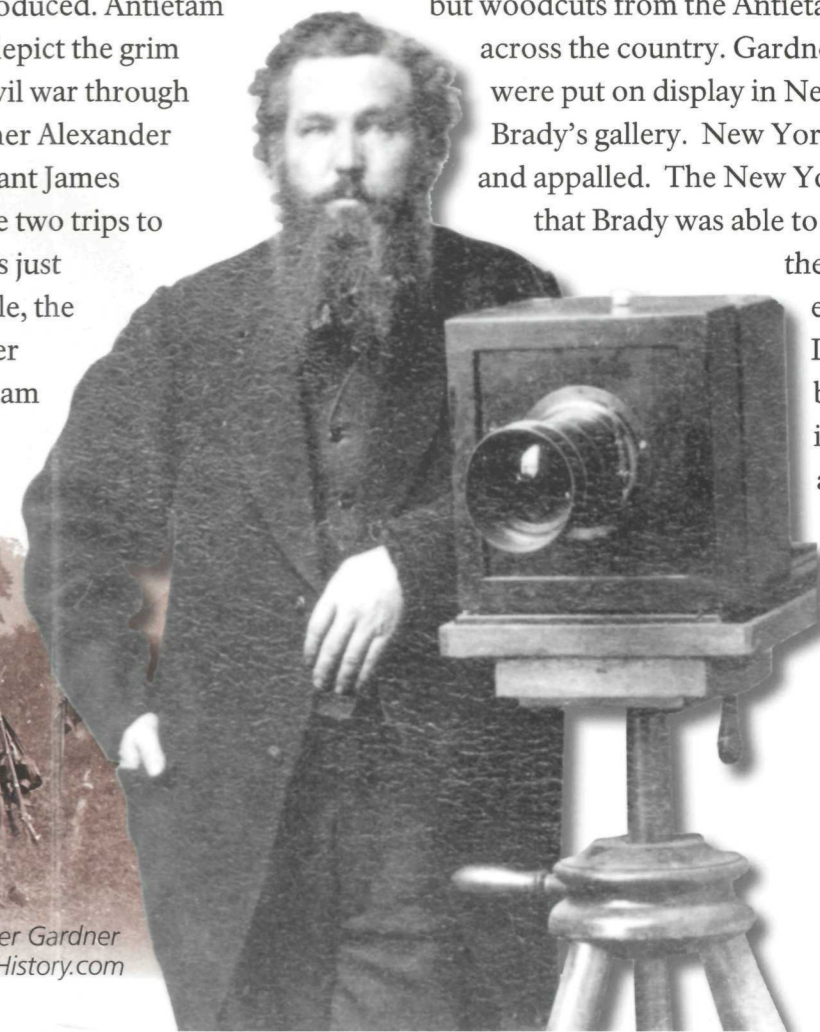


Burial Crew at Antietam and Alexander Gardner
Gardner image courtesy of PictureHistory.com

Alexander Gardner at Antietam

When war threatened the nation in the spring of 1861, thousands of soldiers flocked to Washington, D.C., to defend the capital. Photographers followed in their footsteps capturing camp scenes and portraits of untested, jubilant greenhorns in their new uniforms. It so happened that Alexander Gardner had just opened a new studio in the capital for the most notable photographer of his era - Mathew Brady. Gardner also took advantage of the coming storm to increase his business. All of the early war photographs were taken in studios or tents. No one had produced images in the field.

It wasn't until September of 1862 that the first true images of war were produced. Antietam was the first battle to depict the grim and bloody truth of civil war through the lens of photographer Alexander Gardner and his assistant James Gibson. Gardner made two trips to Antietam. The first was just two days after the battle, the second, two weeks later when President Abraham Lincoln visited the battlefield.



During both of his trips, Gardner moved across the battlefield taking advantage of another new photographic technique that increased the impact of war images - stereograph. Two lenses capture two simultaneous photographs, and when seen through a viewer, the mind creates a three-dimensional image. Parlors were filled with cards and viewers as stereo views became the rage in America. Of the approximately ninety images Gardner took at Antietam, about seventy were in stereo, adding a new, horrific view of the American landscape to home collections.

Newspapers could not reproduce photographs, but woodcuts from the Antietam images spread across the country. Gardner's original images were put on display in New York City at Brady's gallery. New Yorkers were shocked and appalled. The New York Times stated that Brady was able to "bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our door-yards and along streets, he has done something very like it..."

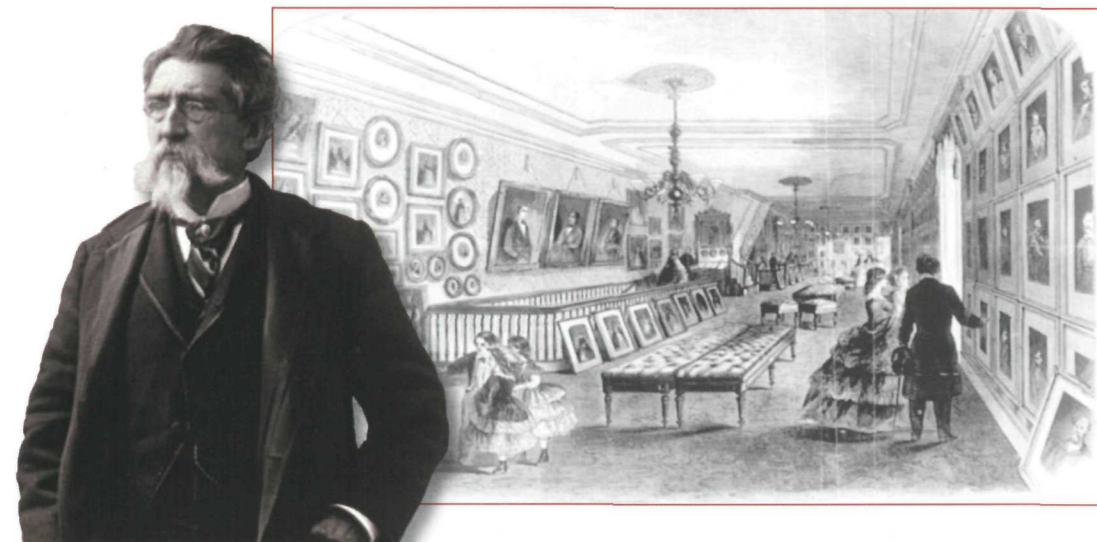
Photography comes to America

Louis Daguerre produced the first known image on polished silver plates in his studio in France. His invention quickly captivated the Europeans. Other inventors looked for new ways to produce their photographs. After a decade of silver plates and paper experiments, Englishman Frederick Archer started working with glass plates. This critical breakthrough, the glass negative, allowed positive copies to be transferred or created on light sensitized paper.

The initial problem with glass plates was keeping the light-sensitive chemicals on the glass. Archer overcame this problem by using a sticky transparent liquid called "collodion." For this new process a puddle of collodion was poured onto a glass or iron plate. Then the plate was tilted so that the collodion flowed over the entire plate leaving an even coating. When the coating began to set, the plate was then taken into the "darkroom" and then lowered into a bath of silver

nitrate where it received its light-sensitive coating. The plates had to be sensitized just minutes prior to making the exposure and then developed before the coating dried - thus the name "wet plate" photography. After exposing the plate - "taking the picture" - the photographer had to quickly fix and wash the plate thoroughly. Then the finished image was dried over an alcohol lamp and coated with a varnish for protection.

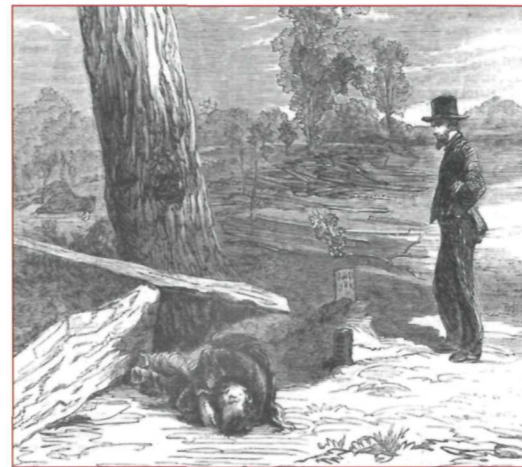
Samuel Morse, inventor of the telegraph, was in Europe and he helped bring the magic of photography to the United States. One of his students was Mathew Brady. Brady opened his photographic studio in New York City in 1844 where he became almost as famous as the notables who sat for their portraits. Brady's gallery was still using the Daguerre silver plate process. In 1856, glass plate photography made it to the States and no one perfected its process, or used it more effectively, than Brady's employee Alexander Gardner.



Antietam Stereo Image and the Published Woodcut



Gardner stereo image entitled "A Contrast: Federal buried, Confederate unburied, where they fell on the Battlefield of Antietam."



Woodcut created from the Gardner photograph that was reproduced in the newspapers.

Mathew Brady and his New York Gallery. This is where Alexander Gardner's Antietam images were first displayed.

Types of Photographic Images

The following five forms of photographic technology were used during the Civil War to make the miracle of photographic images possible:

1. Daguerreotype - This was the earliest form of photography, invented in 1839 by Frenchman Louis Daguerre. It used polished silver plates as the base for the image. Few Daguerreotypes were taken during the Civil War.

2. Ambrotype - Invented in the early 1850s, the ambrotype resembled a daguerreotype except glass, instead of a silver plate, was used for the base of the image. The ambrotype was a thin or light collodion negative on a glass plate. When backed with black varnish, paper or cloth the negative turned into a positive photograph. This technique was popular until the 1860s.

3. Ferrotypes or "Tin-Types" - This process was invented soon after the ambrotype. These photographs became the most common form for inexpensive images made during the Civil War. The tintype was very similar to the Ambrotype, except a blackened piece of sheet iron was used, instead of glass, as the base of the photograph.

4. Carte de Visite - The carte de visite (French for "visiting card") was a small paper print made from a glass negative.

This new ability to mass-produce prints from a collodion negative fascinated the nation, both North and South.

5. Stereograph, Stereoview or Stereocard - Many of the greatest Civil War photographs, including the majority taken at Antietam, were actually produced as a stereo negatives. The camera had two lenses about the same distance apart as human eyes. Two images were taken at the same time, reproduced on a rectangular card, and when seen through a special viewer a three dimensional effect was produced.



Stereo Card Viewer

Conclusion

Many photographers would provide us with an unbelievably rich photographic history of America's most costly war. Interest in the War has endured because of men like Timothy O'Sullivan, Matthew Brady, Alexander Gardner and James Gibson. More recently Ken Burns in his profound PBS documentary relied heavily on the work of America's first great photojournalists to inspire and educate us.



Burnside Bridge looking north on the east bank where Union soldiers from the Ninth Corps made many of their attacks.



The Mumma family farm was burned to the ground by Confederates so that Union soldiers would not use the house for cover.

Take the Battlefield Photography Tour

In the center of the brochure are eight of Alexander Gardner's greatest Antietam photographs. The location of each pair of images can be walked to from battlefield auto tour stops, starting at the visitor center. At most you will have to walk a couple of a hundred yards. Accompanying each image is a map showing the approximate

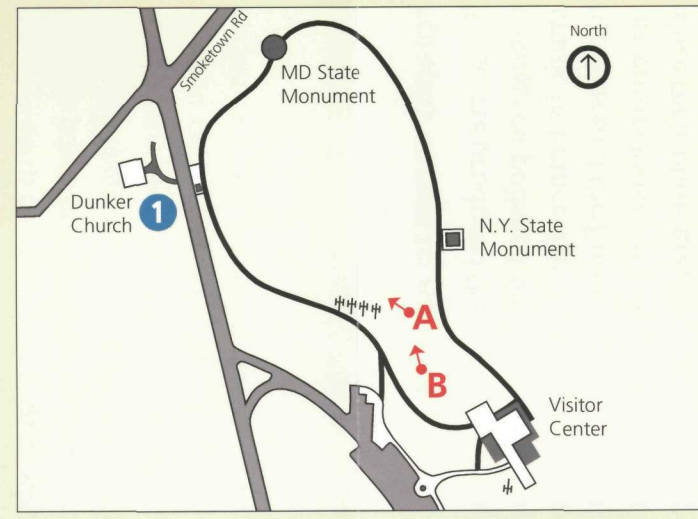
location of Gardner's camera when the photograph was taken, and a small photograph showing what the view looks like today. Stand where Alexander Gardner and his assistant James Gibson set up their camera with the traveling darkroom close by. Take a photo today and create your own "then and now" history at Antietam.

Stop 1 - The Visitor Center



The first two images on your tour were taken on the high ground where the park visitor center sits today. Just across the Hagerstown Turnpike sits the Dunker Church. Image A looks northwest and is considered one of Gardner's greatest photographs, capturing the incredible irony of the devastation

A



of war with a backdrop of a house of worship for the pacifist German Baptist Brethren. In image B, Gardner moved his camera to face north along the Hagerstown Turnpike towards the Cornfield. During the battle, Colonel S. D. Lee placed his Confederate

B



artillery battalion on this ridge where it suffered intense infantry and artillery fire from numerous Union attacks. The destroyed artillery limbers and unburied dead are possibly from his command.

Stop 2 - The Cornfield



Drive to Stop 4, The Cornfield, on the auto tour route. From the parking area you will have to walk in opposite directions to reach the site of these two images. Image D is farther east down Cornfield Ave. towards auto Tour Stop 3, and the other is back on the Hagerstown Turnpike, just south of the

C



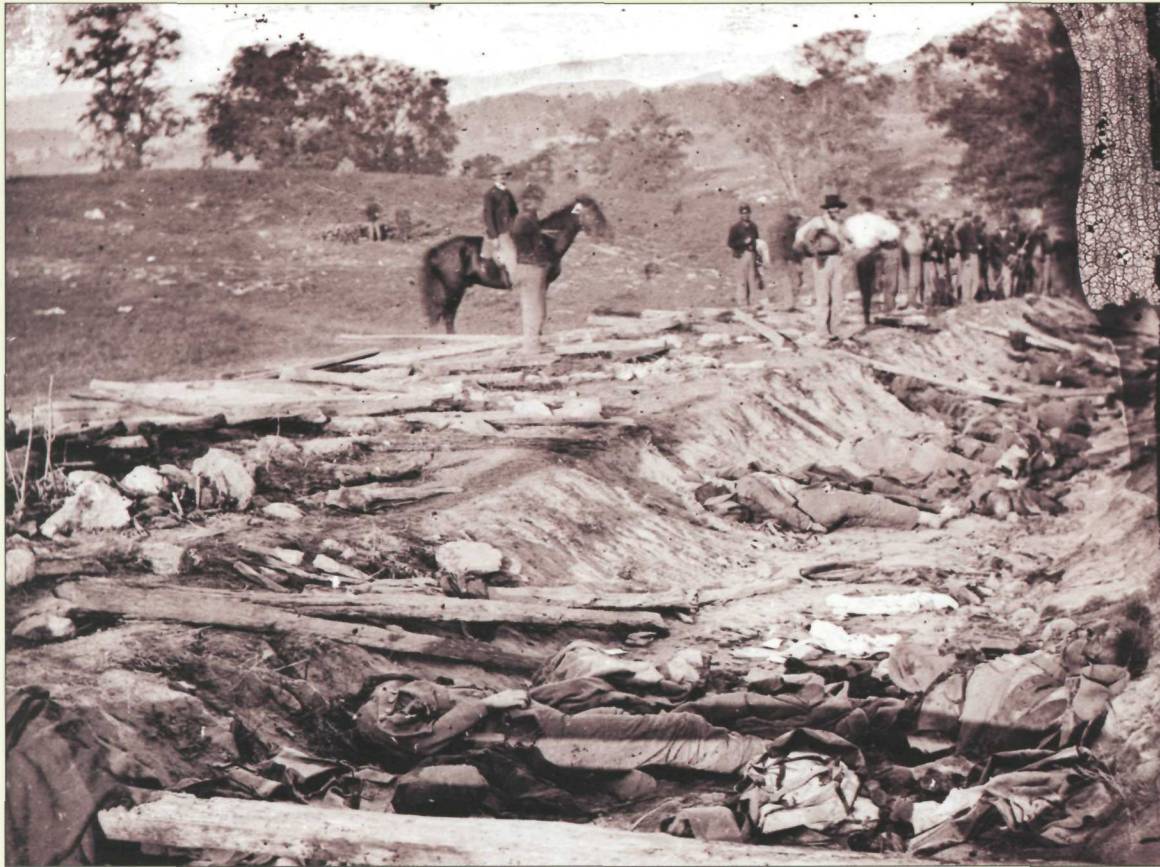
intersection with Cornfield Ave. Gardner's caption for image C is "View of the field, on the west side of Hagerstown road, after the Battle of Antietam." The Hagerstown Turnpike is on the right side of the image inside the high post and rail fences.

D



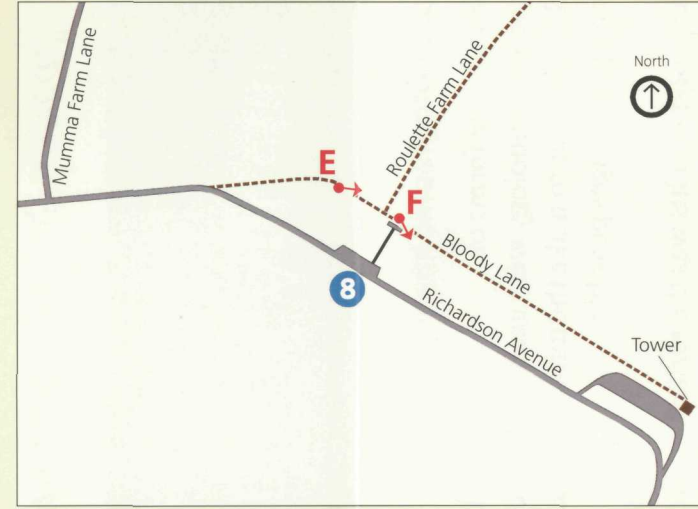
In photograph D Union soldiers gather near scattered bodies and the litter of battle. The prominent rocks in the center of the image are on the south side of Cornfield Ave. where today a monument is mounted with three bronze rifles dedicated to the 90th Pennsylvania Infantry.

Stop 3 - The Sunken Road or Bloody Lane



These two images were captured in close proximity to each other in the Sunken Road (auto Tour Stop 8). Gardner's title for image E is "Confederate dead in a ditch on the right wing used as a rifle pit." It was here that Gen. Robert Rodes' brigade of Alabama soldiers made their defense of the lane.

E



The second photo F was taken a little farther to the east (closer to the tower) and is where Gen. George B. Anderson's North Carolinians made their stand.

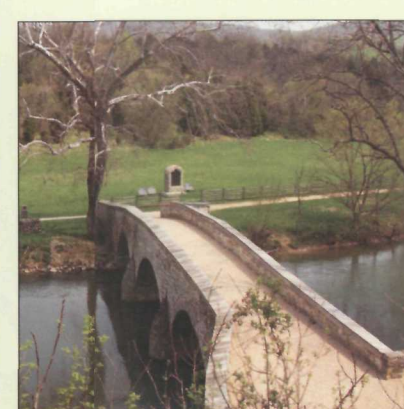
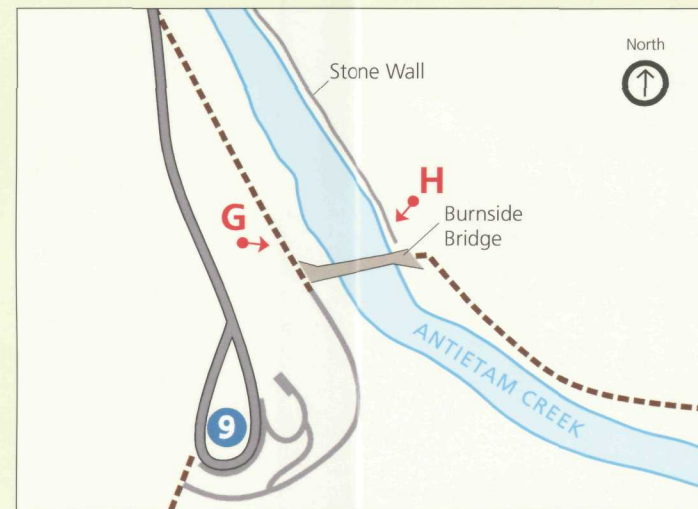
F



Stop 4 - Burnside Bridge



G



The Confederate defenders at the Burnside Bridge (auto Tour Stop 9) looked down on this crucial Antietam crossing just as Gardner captured the view in image G. After the

H



battle over 4,000 bodies were buried on the field where they fell. Some of those graves were along the stone wall in Image H. The Bridge can be seen through the trees in the background. Later, the Union bodies were reinterred to the National Cemetery, Confederates to three local cemeteries.