HISTORY

PRISONERS OF MEMORY: CAMP MORTON, INDIANA, 1862 - 1865

A CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS
BY
SADIE JEAN RITCHIE

DR. DOUGLAS SEEFELDT - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
MAY 2015
This project is current available at: http://sjritchie.iweb.bsu.edu/pom/prisonersofmemory/

This project started initially in the Fall of 2013 with Dr. Douglas Seefeldt’s Digital History graduate seminar. My original project, “Confederate Prisoners in Enemy Memory,” started very small, and I did very little research, mostly relying on what was easily available as I focused on mastering new digital research tools. That project focused on the movement of 1,616 POW bodies in Indianapolis, Indiana who had died while prisoners of war at Camp Morton during the American Civil War. After that project my interest in my topic grew, and the majority of my research came to focus around memory theory, monuments, public memory, as well as the primary sources that come from events and places such as the American Civil War and Camp Morton. The more research I did the more I felt that my work was not only viable, but also very important. Camp Morton has been mostly forgotten, not only in the state of Indiana and the city of Indianapolis, but also in the wider world of Civil War history. However, it is hard to believe that a place where such accused atrocities occurred could be so easily forgotten. Because of this I decided to focus my research and work on Camp Morton, and attempting to understand why Camp Morton and the 1,616 POWs that now lay at rest in Indianapolis have been largely forgotten.

Up to this point my research had taken many different routes. The first was the actual movement of bodies, the second attempt was to understand the role that monuments play in remembering the past, present, and future, and also the role of public memory in commemorating past events. All of these areas of study are deeply connected, especially when they are all focused on one event and place in time. With this in mind I set out looking for relevant primary source material. I have stacks of secondary source material that my research has uncovered; however, there was a very serious lack of primary source material, and to some extent there still
is. I felt that primary sources would allow me to better understand why Camp Morton and the deceased POWs were forgotten. I looked for diaries, memoirs, newspapers, and correspondence. All four of these primary source types fell into one of four categories that related to my work. This was not easy. As my project states, there is a serious lack of primary sources, especially diaries and correspondence coming from Camp Morton. To compound this problem, the majority of the sources that do exist are held out of state since most Confederate POWs returned to their southern home states after their release. Once many of these sources were obtained, the information that was held within them was not always satisfactory. In order for a primary source to be useful in understanding Camp Morton the source must have information about the prison. Many prisoners did not write about their daily life beyond the weather being “pleasant” or “bad,” and often commenting quickly on rations. At first, this lack of information within the sources is maddening; however, it quickly became apparent that this contributed to the lack of memory of Camp Morton.

Once I had a significant amount of sources in hand I began to work with them. Reading, transcribing, and also using text analysis to allow a better understanding of the sources was the second major step. As I read, transcribed, and worked with my sources the answers to my questions became clear. Camp Morton had been a significant prison during the Civil War. It started initially as a temporary prison for the overflow of Camp Douglas; it soon became a permanent prison that was over capacity for most of its use. The primary sources also made it clear why Camp Morton had been so easily forgotten. There were few diaries that survived Camp Morton and the time since, those that are left give little insight into the world of a POW — be it from lack of education or lack of want to write, these diaries give little information to help better understand what the conditions were like. Correspondence are also difficult to find — they
too give little insight into prison life. However, the primary sources that fall into the category of memoirs play an entirely different role. Memoirs have their own special category because they are the memories of an individual who experienced the event first hand, but often the memories are put to paper much later in time, so they must be scrutinized carefully before being deemed true or trustworthy. Memoirs are not that hard to find. Some come in the long form of books and autobiographies, others are much shorter, appearing as magazine articles or a single chapter of a book. All of these works were not only read and studied, but almost all of them were run through the text analysis tool Voyant. Voyant allowed me to easily search and compare different texts. Also, I was able to isolate specific words to see how they were used, and how individuals with different intents could use them differently.

With my research complete and my questions answered I needed a way to display my work. I knew that my initial digital project format would work, but that it would need serious updating so that it could allow my work to be displayed properly. While my first project was created fairly easily with software that did most of the work for me, this time I decided to find a CSS template that would be better suited to my needs and then made further changes to it myself. After adding my text, visualization, and other tools that I know make my work easier to understand and more hands on, I had a completed project. I have included the files of my project along with this essay as part of my CRPRJ 698 submission.
Sources and Data

Sources

**Camp Morton Primary Sources**

Burke, Curtis R. Diary: 219–228. Indiana Historical Society Archives, M0903, Box 1, Folder 3.

Cunningham, S. A. *Confederate Veteran* XIV, no. 9 (September 1906): 394.


**Camp Morton Secondary Sources**


Civil War Memory Studies


**History and Memory**


**Data**

Visualization and Text Analysis: While my project only exhibits a hand full of visualizations, many sources (both shown and not) had text analysis performed on them for research purposes.

Voyant Text Analysis of Curtis R. Burke Diary and the word “pleasant”

Voyant Text Analysis of Confederate Veteran Magazine articles and the word “rations”

Voyant Text Analysis of “Cold Cheer at Camp Morton” and “Reply to Cold Cheer at Camp Morton” and the word “rations”

Google Ngram Viewer Visualizations of words related to Confederate POWs used from 1925-2000

Timeglider – timeline located on “Camp Morton” page

Google Map Engline Lite – map located on “Public Memory” page