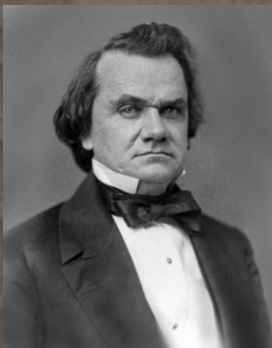


# Camp Douglas

## The History of a POW Camp

In 1860, the area that became the Bronzeville Neighborhood was a rural landscape of open prairie and small groves of trees. Senator Stephen A. Douglas, a long-time political rival of Abraham Lincoln, was a prominent early resident and was important in the development of Chicago. Douglas donated ten acres of his land in the area to an early manifestation of the University of Chicago. Soon after, Camp Douglas sprung up nearby.



Stephen A. Douglas, 1859.  
Library of Congress Collection



The old University of Chicago.  
Public Domain

In the summer of 1860, Chicago hosted the Seventh Annual United States Agricultural Fair in a rural area and the future Bronzeville Neighborhood. As many as 40,000 people flocked to a tented pavilion to see the latest in agricultural practices and machines. There was a contest at the fair for the best drilled militia company. The Chicago Zouave Cadets won the competition. The skill of this company, their handsome commander Elmer Ellsworth, and their gaudy uniforms, modeled on native Algerian troops, soon won national renown.

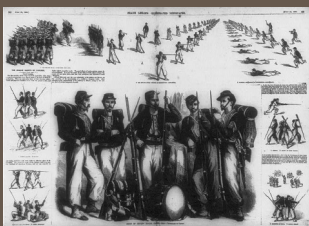


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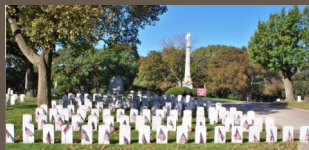
Teacher Resources

Sam DeVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music.  
Archive Center, National Museum of American History  
Smithsonian Institution Collection



Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, July 28, 1860.

The fields along what is today Martin Luther King Drive were a popular place for picnics, and informal beer gardens operated during the summer months. When the Civil War broke out in the spring of 1861, makeshift military encampments sprung up near the former fair grounds just beyond the southern boundary of Chicago. These encampments, in part, were the basis for placing Camp Douglas at this location. The camp opened in early October 1861. Initially, a carnival atmosphere pervaded the area on Sunday afternoons as family and friends visited the new soldiers with hampers of cold chicken and sweets. Newly elected officers were presented with their swords and regimental colors. One recruit wrote home after one such afternoon that he was "having a first-rate time." The reality of war seemed as far away as Dixie.

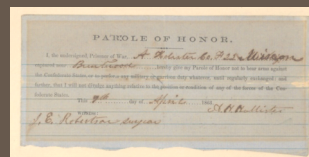


Soldiers' graves, Rosehill Cemetery, Chicago, IL.

Gradually, the Union Army became more organized, and barracks were built for newly enlisted soldiers. Railroads brought thousands of recruits from Wisconsin, Iowa, and Michigan to Chicago. Even after part of the camp was dedicated to holding Confederate prisoners beginning in February 1862, Union soldiers entered the ranks and received preliminary training at the camp. By war's end, some 40,000 Union soldiers were processed there. The infectious diseases at the camp that later plagued captured Confederates also affected Union recruits. One of those was remembered by a comrade in his wartime journal:

*"Charley Miller, who was sent to the Post Hospital a few days ago, having caught a severe cold, which developed into a raging fever died last night unexpectedly, which cause me much sorrow, as we had become very much attached to each other....He was the first member of our company to cross the line over into the great beyond."*

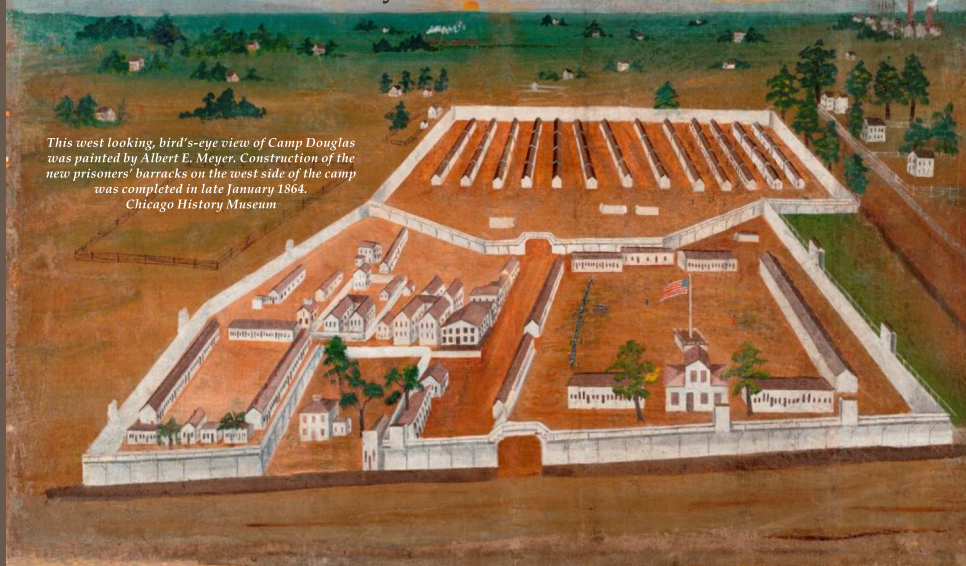
Private Miller was buried at Rosehill Cemetery, where he still lies today.



Example of Parole Papers issued by Confederate officers to Union soldiers as part of a prisoner exchange.

By far the most troublesome Union troops housed at Camp Douglas were a series of Union regiments captured by Confederate General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson during the 1862 Antietam Campaign. Unable to care for a large haul of prisoners, Jackson paroled the captured regiments. According to the rules of parole, they were returned to Union lines but were unable to serve in combat until they were officially exchanged for Confederate prisoners. The army sent the men to Chicago's Camp Douglas to await that exchange. They resented being confined to the camp and showed their displeasure by burning down barracks, tearing down the camp stockade, and pelting camp guards with stones. Discipline was only restored in November 1862, when prisoners were officially exchanged.

Best known as a Confederate prisoner of war camp, Camp Douglas held as many as 12,082 Confederate POWs by December 1864. Thereafter, the prisoner population declined to 32 by late July 1865, before officials began closing the camp in August. Several months later, camp buildings were auctioned off or destroyed. The camp was officially closed in March 1866.



This west looking, bird's-eye view of Camp Douglas was painted by Albert E. Meyer. Construction of the new prisoners' barracks on the west side of the camp was completed in late January 1864.  
Chicago History Museum

## Camp Douglas Restoration Foundation