



June 2021

***License Plate to Old Isham's Gravesite
Confederate General's Favorite Horse Buried
Near Beech Grove***



This battlefield preservation supporter visited the grave of "Old Isham," Confederate General Benjamin F. Cheatham's favorite wartime horse. While perhaps not as well-known as General Grant's "Cincinnati" or General Lee's "Traveller," Cheatham's horse was named after Isham Harris, Governor of Tennessee (1857-1863). After the war Cheatham took Old Isham to his farm in Beech Grove. In Old Isham's old age he became a pet to Cheatham. Some of his veterans, as they passed along Manchester Pike, would stop and give a treat to Old Isham. Cheatham buried Old Isham with full military honors and selected a burial site along the pike so veterans could visit his grave. In 2002 the Cheatham Camp 72, SCV located and marked the grave. The gravesite is along what is today named "French Brantley Road" – a stretch of the historic, Civil War era Murfreesboro-Manchester turnpike.

One clause in the surrender terms for both the Army of Northern Virginia and Army of Tennessee said that every Confederate officer and cavalryman could take his horse home with him. This provision, insisted on by General Lee, was accepted by Grant when he was told that former soldiers would not be able to plant spring crops without their war horses. In the postwar years, several generals' horses were popular attractions at reunions of the Grand Army of the Republic and the United Confederate Veterans. Veterans would often clip hairs from the mane or tail of their favorite general's horse as a souvenir reminder of their days on the battlefield.

Union and Confederate armies depended on horses and mules to move supplies and equipment and men. Three million horses and mules served during the Civil War, and nearly half lost their lives. While some died in combat, most horses and mules succumbed to the constant wear and tear of their duties coupled with poor nutrition; in essence they worked themselves to death.

Old Isham's burial site includes a small fence, two horseshoes, a US flag and the 1st Corps Army of Tennessee flag. The symbol near the top of the headstone is the Southern Cross of Honor – a postwar award the United Daughters of the Confederacy gave to honorably serving Confederate veterans. It appears on most if not all government supplied Confederate tombstones. Another distinct feature of the headstone is the pointed or peaked top. Union and later US tombstones have rounded tips.



Soldiers who rode often developed a personal bond with their horses as they faced the daily hazards of the Civil War together, and the loss of a horse was sometimes felt as keenly as that of a human friend. It is little wonder that Old Isham and hundreds of other equine warriors have their deeds commemorated in stone across the nation.

SEND US YOUR PHOTOS!

If you have a "Save our Battlefields" license plate, please consider stopping by and taking a photo of your plate at a battlefield or other battle-related Civil War site in your area... we're especially interested in sites that don't always get the historians' spotlight! If you're looking for a site in your area, we can help find one nearby – just email us - or if you've already got that special photo please send to info@tcwpa.org.



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