



FORT GEORGE G. MEADE NEWS RELEASE

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Final resting place for couple who died in 1800s

CENTURY-OLD REMAINS MOVED FROM FAMILY TOBACCO FARM CEMETERY
ON FORT MEADE

FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, Md: For more than 130 years, the landscape around the 480 square-foot cemetery plot containing two graves changed radically.

The site went from a family-owned tobacco farm to a bustling military camp preparing Soldiers for war, then part of the beauty and serenity of a 36-hole golf course and finally, surrounded by the nation's ultra-modern and high-tech platform for information and cyber operations.

Throughout these significant changes, the family plot remained an historic marker of the post.

Today, the Downs family plot is part of Fort Meade's East Campus, an area of the installation that is in the process of a multiyear, multiphase construction project.

"It took many people, with lots of different expertise, to be able to pull off this big project," said Jessi Spencer, a bioarcheologist with Environmental Research Group LLC, the contractor used to properly exhume the remains.

"The project went smoothly and wonderfully. It was really neat to see everyone shine in their own element. It has been a great and rewarding project and we're very proud to be part of it."

Coordinated Efforts

The East Campus is home to the National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command, two of 119 tenant partners on post where the Downs were buried.

The NSA construction project began in 2013. Construction efforts are designed to improve national security capabilities to protect information systems and address adversarial cyber activity.

The area on which the Downs family plot sits will be subsumed by the construction effort.

On June 3, the remains of William T. Downs (1790-1883) and his wife, Mary A. Downs (1803-1875), were moved to their new permanent home. They were reinterred in the Bethel United Methodist Church Cemetery on Rock Avenue.

Fort Meade, the NSA and the Army Corps of Engineers have been coordinating efforts over several years to ensure the most respectful and expedient way to relocate the remains.

“When we said a prayer [before the exhumation], I got real emotional inside,” said Jerry Glodeck, a Fort Meade environmental protection specialist, who has helped maintain the gravesite for many years.

“This is where they chose as their final resting place. It was a place of honor and a place where a couple decided they wanted to spend their time together forever.”

Unselfish Act

The Downs family tobacco farm was one of 11 farms acquired by the War Department in 1917 to form what was then Camp Meade. Located near three railheads, good roads, easy distance from the Baltimore Harbor and close to

Washington, D.C., the rich farm land was thought to be the best location for the new camp.

The farmers were paid \$35 per acre.

“It’s like they gave a part of themselves when they gave their farm up for our national defense,” Glodek said. “They were true patriots. ... At the time they gave their farm up, the world was in chaos.

“So they gave a big piece of themselves, and their family should be proud of that unselfish act. It’s a hard act when you’re a farmer.”

As was the custom of the times, a number of the farms had maintained family cemetery plots. These plots became part of the land acquisition and have been carefully and respectfully maintained according to Army regulations for the last 100 years.

“It was part of my job, long before this new construction projection, to make sure the grass was mowed there, to ensure the headstone was well taken care of and the fencing,” Glodek said. “It was a beautiful spot. I could imagine Mary and her husband picking the spot.”

Both William Downs, who was predeceased by his wife, and Mary were buried several decades before the military acquisition of the land. The family had owned and operated the farm since the early 1800s.

For decades, the headstones and a small fence that surrounded the 480-square-foot area, was located at the 11th tee, facing the clubhouse on the Applewood Golf Course.

Respectful Ceremony

Throughout the years of planning and procedures needed to gain permission to move the remains, everyone involved understood and respected the importance of getting it right.

“Knowing their contribution, it made everyone a little bit more focused,” said Matthew Boren, chief of military construction for NSA. “We offered a little bit more care, a little bit more respect as we went through this process.

“Now, seeing this in the end, makes it all the more rewarding.”

The remains were transferred from their former plot in two large cement vaults.

The vaults were then moved to their new location in the Bethel Cemetery.

James Downs, the son of William and Mary Downs, was already buried in the Bethel Cemetery. In a ceremony that included prayers, flowers and a small group of witnesses, William and Mary were reinterred near their son and daughter-in-law.

Those in attendance were moved by the event.

“We thank them for their contribution,” said Chaplain (Col.) Raymond Robinson, the Fort Meade senior garrison chaplain who presided over the reinterment ceremony.

“Little did they know that they would be contributing to something that would impact our national defense long term. And so it’s really cool to be a part of something like this. And [it’s] such an honor to be able to participate in the reinterment of these folks, who were part of the shape and part of that generation of Americans who gave in support of the defense of our nation.”

In the stillness, witnesses also offered their appreciation to the couple.

“We all had a moment, near the end, where we stopped and sat in silence and thanked them for this opportunity,” said Gina Foringer, CEO of Environmental Research Group LLC. “We reassured them that we cared and that we were transferring them ... to their new resting place.”

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BACKGROUND

Fort Meade is the Nation’s Platform for Intelligence, Information and Cyber Operations. With more than 57,000 employees representing each branch of military service, Fort Meade is the largest employer in the state of Maryland and the Army’s second largest installation based on

population. Some of the Fort's 119 tenant organizations include US Cyber Command, The National Security Agency, Defense Information Systems Agency, Defense Media Activity and federal agencies including the Architect of the Capitol and the Environmental Protection Agency.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Media will be expected to follow the current mask policy. Mary Doyle in the Fort Meade Public Affairs Office at (301) 677-5592 or mary.l.doyle14.civ@mail.mil.

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