



General Thomas Swords 1806-1886

The highest-ranking veteran buried in the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground in Edison NJ, is Brvt. Major General Thomas Swords. He was a veteran of the Mexican War (1846) and the Civil War (1861-1865).

He was born in New York in 1806 and graduated from the US Military Academy in 1829. He served in Alabama, Florida, and Missouri. He was promoted to Lieutenant and transferred to a regiment of Dragoons at Ft. Gibson Okla. In 1834 he was an Assistant Quartermaster, and was at Ft. Leavenworth KS. He was promoted to Captain in 1837.

On May 2, 1838 he married Charlotte Cotheal in New York City. By 1842 he was directing the construction of Ft. Scott Kansas.

In 1846 during the Mexican War, Captain Swords, marched with Col. Stephen Kearney from Kansas to Santa Fe New Mexico, and captured the city. They then marched to San Diego California, and fought in a battle to take that city. After the battle Swords sailed to Hawaii for supplies. He returned to San Francisco, and then, in March 1847 he marched back to Ft. Leavenworth with Col. Kearny.

In 1852 he was appointed chief quartermaster of the Pacific.

According to the Federal Census of 1860, he was living in the 10th District in San Francisco, San Francisco County, California. He was age 48 [1812], a Lieut. Col. U.S.A. had personal property worth \$5,000 and was born in New York. With him was C.A. Sword, a female, age 37 [1823], born in New York. Living with them was a female servant, age 45, born in Ireland, named Eliza Swords! Relationships are not given in the 1860 Census.

During the Civil War from 1861 to 1865 he was chief quartermaster of the Department of the Cumberland, and the Ohio. He also served at the battle of Chickamauga.

He was made a Brevet Major General on March 13, 1865, the same day that George Custer and Abner Doubleday were made Major Generals.

The 1870 Federal Census in New York (It had to be done a second time some six months after the first.) In the 2nd enumeration, as it was called, Thomas Swords was living in a hotel located in the 21st Ward, 19th Election District, in New York City, County of New York, State of New York, on the South side of 39th St, between 5th and 6th Ave. He was age 55 [1815], an “Ex Army Officer,” born in New York. With him was Augusta Swords, a female, age 50 [1820], born in New York. This enumeration was taken on 1, 4 or 7 January 1871.

In the first enumeration of the 1870 Census taken on 25 July 1870 at the same location, we find A.M. Swords, a ret. Merchant with real estate worth \$40,000. And Caroline Swords, age 17, who keeps house; and Henry C. Swords, age 15 who is attending school. They are all living with Alex Cotheal, age 65, a ret. Ship Merchant with \$90,000 of real estate and \$50,000 in personal property; Chas. W. Cotheal, age 61, also a ret. Ship Merchant with no real estate but \$30,000 in personal property; and Elizabeth Cotheal, age 55, at home with \$40,000 in real estate. Altogether there are 10 people in the home, all born in New York, with 3 Irish born servants.

In 1880, Thomas and C. Augusta Swords, ages 69 and 50 [or 58], are living with 2 Irish born servants, at 115 East 38th Street in New York City, New York County, NY. He is a “Retired Army Officer,” and she is his wife. He and his father were born in New York and his mother was born in Penn. She and her mother were born in New York and her father was born in New Jersey.

General Swords retired in 1869, and died in New York City in 1886 at the age of 79. Charlotte Cotheal Swords died in 1888.

After years of being covered with brush and vines, his gravesite was cleared in 1998, and an American Flag is placed there for Memorial Day to recognize his service to the nation.

Submitted by Walter Stochel, with thanks to Jim Conlon for the Census research.