



PATRICK McCARTHY, WHO DIED IN THE ALMSHOUSE, BURIED WITH MILITARY HONORS.

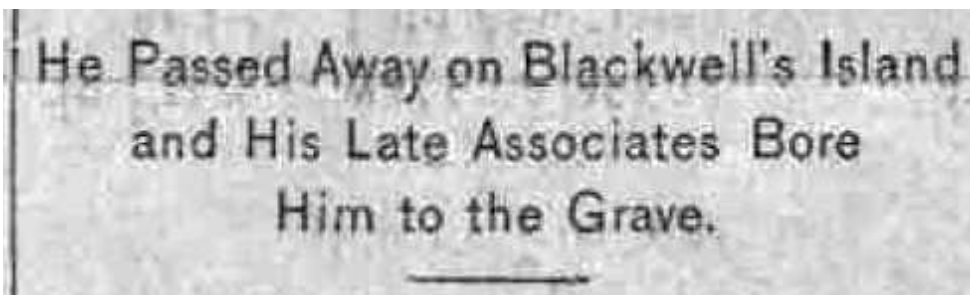
# DIED IN ALMSHOUSE, BURIED WITH HONORS.

Patrick McCarthy, Veteran of  
the Civil War, Given a  
Soldier's Funeral.

THE JOURNAL, N.Y. March 14, 1896 [*caption accompanying above illustration:*] There was an unusual scene on Blackwell's Island yesterday. Patrick McCarthy, a veteran of the Civil War, who

was an inmate of the almshouse, died this week, and would have received a pauper's burial had it not been for General [*James Rowan*] O'Beirne, who gave the body a soldier's funeral. Comrades of McCarthy, who are also in the almshouse and who fought for the Union, attended the funeral and were moved to tears during the services. They bore the flag-draped coffin which contained McCarthy's remains to the wharf, where it was placed on a steamer and taken to the cemetery on Hart's Island.

*[The story itself appeared below the illustration, caption and one-column headline decks:]*



The body of Patrick McCarthy, late of (he almshouse, was put under the sod on Hart's Island yesterday, but it does not fill a pauper's

grave. It rests in a soldier's grave and it received a soldier's burial. He was a veteran of the late war. Other ex-soldiers have died in the almshouse, but never before was there such a funeral on Blackwell's Island.

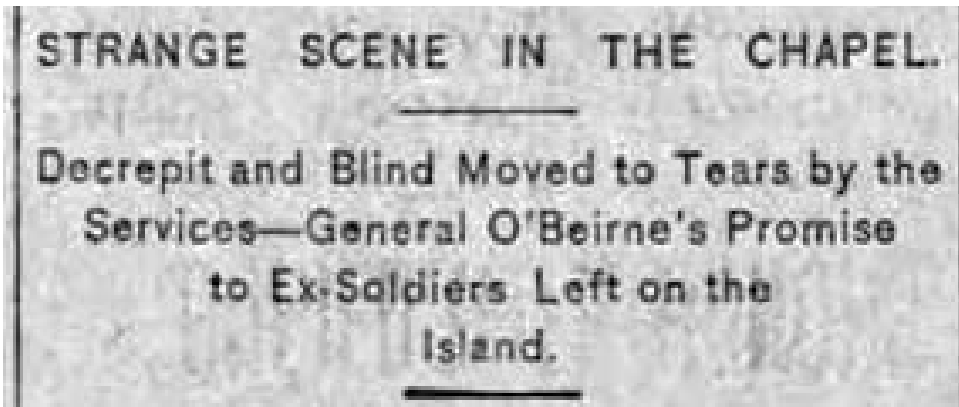
Those who died before McCarthy were placed in rough pine boxes, carted down to the landing, carried on board the steamer by men in striped clothing from the penitentiary, and dropped into the trenches on Hart's Island that accommodate fifty bodies each, with no more pomp or ceremony than would be exercised over the remains of an animal.

An undertaker, with his breast adorned by a Grand Army badge, went over from New York with a rosewood coffin for McCarthy. The body was clad in a soldier's uniform. The coffin was covered with the national flag. Around it there were lighted candles and the altar was ablaze. A priest of McCarthy's religion conducted services for the dead in the almshouse chapel, and a choir of six voices furnished solemn music.

The front pews of the chapel were occupied by the twenty-eight ex-soldiers who remain in the Almshouse. Grizzled old veterans all of them, one with a single eye, another with only one leg, still another who lost both arms at Antietam. then a man with, only half a nose, here one with eyes half blinded by

the smoke at Ball's Bluff. Behind and around them were seated the other inmates of the Almshouse, the women on one side and the men on the other.

In the gallery there was a crowd gathered around the choir and organ. "Blind Sal," the soprano, was never in better voice. That was remarked by the oldest inmate, as she sent forth the grand notes of "Peace to His Ashes."



The Almshouse folks do not weep often; they are too hardened to misery for that. But their tears flowed yesterday, under the influence of the music and the unwonted

surroundings. The priest, Rev. Father Blumensatt, came from behind a screen, clad in the robes of the Church. He sprinkled holy water on the flag over the coffin and his assistant swung' the censer. He chanted the services for the dead in Latin and the congregation made the responses. Then the priest extolled the man whose corpse was before him.

"He was a soldier of the Union," said the priest, "but he would have gone to an unhonored and an unmarked grave had not God put it in the heart of one man to prevent it. As it is, future generations will be able to point out the spot where the hero McCarthy lies. So will it be with all of you ex-soldiers hereafter, for General O'Beirne has promised to see that all of you receive proper burial."

The lame, the halt and the decrepit filed past the coffin and looked for the last time on their dead companion's features. Then six stalwart ex-soldiers, in blue uniforms, shouldered the coffin and carried it downstairs, where General O'Beirne delivered a brief speech. He spoke of the honors the veterans had won in war, and cautioned them to uphold the dignity of their uniforms and the respect they had commanded for the flag.

The General deplored the fact that there were any old soldiers in the almshouse, when there were soldiers' homes, provided by the people, in which they might



spend their last days. The General knew that some of them had been expelled from the homes, but he promised to investigate those cases and furnish a remedy if such action was proper.

The faces of the listening veterans brightened at the General's words, and they applauded the conclusion of his speech. McCarthy's coffin was then carried on the shoulders of his comrades to the steamer that took it to Hart's Island. There a volley was fired over his grave and the services were at an end.

*Click photo left of General James Rowan Beirne to access his Find-the-Grave website bio. He served in the 37<sup>th</sup> NY Volunteer*

*Infantry aka Irish Rifles, received a Medal of Honor, participated in the successful hunt for Lincoln assassination conspirators, worked as a NY and Washington journalist and served as Ellis Island immigration administrator.*

## Correction History Webmaster Notes

The above story about the old soldier's funeral on Blackwell's Island and burial on Hart Island was published in *The Journal* during **1896**, the first year NYCD operated as a separate agency, no longer part of the dual Department of Public Charities and Correction. However, NYCD inmates were still the labor force for City Cemetery operations on Hart Island.

A fictional short story "A Burial by Friendless Post," written by Robert Shackleton and published by Scribner's Magazine in **1899**, bears a striking resemblance to the above byline-less news account which is accessible via the [Library of Congress](#). A synopsis of the Friendless Post short story and a link to the unabridged version are accessible on a Correction History website page about [Hart Island Potter's Field's Former Graveyard for Civil War Vets](#).

To [Correction History website](#) home page.