

2014-03 Hopkins – Burial Ground

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*by Suzy Hopkins*

If a cemetery is a place where dead people are buried then a mass grave would be considered one. There are many examples of these in history: 700,000 corpses in 1938 in the Soviet Union, 1.38 million in 1975 in Cambodia, 8,000 in 1983 in Iraq, and many more including the most recent finding of over 1 million dead bodies found in South Sudan on February 24, 2014. These locations are the work of horrible humans.

However, there is a peaceful but dreary mass grave that you may not know about in the United States. In 1865, during the Civil War, it was used as a prisoner of war camp. Confederates who died there were buried. It is in New York City and considered part of the Bronx even though it is a half-mile long mostly flat island in Long Island Sound. This island is not on the ferry routes, public transportation maps or bicycling guides and is definitely not open to the public. Hart Island has been used as a paupers' grave site since 1868. There are coffins stacked three high in huge trenches dug by the inmates from Rikers Island Prison. There are a million unidentified graves marked only with crosses made of twigs. Every year over 650 adults with no families and more than 500 still-born babies and fetuses are buried there. There is a separate grave site for these additional 1 million tiny pine coffins. I always wondered what hospitals did with these tragic remains. Now I know.