

Sons of Confederate Veterans in East Valley pay tribute

By [Mike Sakal](#), Tribune | Posted: Friday, November 2, 2012 8:09 am

This coming Tuesday, when the Sons of Confederate Veterans gather at Globe Cemetery, the historical veterans organization will honor Pvt. Wesley Lancaster, who has been buried in an unmarked grave for nearly a century.

Lancaster, who served with the Confederate Army's 36th Texas Cavalry in Company D, is a military veteran many would say "was on the other side" during the Civil War.

Amid full military honors and some of the group's members dressed in the Army's military uniform of that time, the Sons of Confederate Veterans will dedicate a long overdue military gravestone for him as another Veterans Day holiday nears.

The Sons of Confederate Veterans — Camp 1708 commanded by Kevin Brown of Apache Junction is a local chapter among about a half dozen others that goes throughout the state locating burial sites and remembering soldiers who fought in the Confederate Army under General Robert E. Lee against the Union Army before it surrendered at Appomattox on April 9, 1865.

Brown, whom I met while standing in line at McDonald's on Broadway in Tempe as I was waiting to order my cup of coffee last Friday, had noticed me wearing my black T-shirt bearing the East Valley Tribune logo and started talking to me. He told me of a story idea he had — about the group's cause and how important it is for them to remember those who fought in the war. He talked about the lengthy process that member Chris Mathis — (who lives in Kansas, but is active with the group's Prescott chapter) — goes through to get a gravestone after discovering where a Confederate soldier is buried.

"They were soldiers, too," Brown said. "They fought for a cause they believed in, and they laid down their lives for it and we believe it's important to remember our own," said Brown, whose relative, Larkin Bishop, was a sergeant for the Confederate Army in North Carolina. It is a requirement to have a relative who fought for the Confederate Army to be a Sons of Confederate Veterans member.

Sons of Confederate Veterans have helped to recognize that there are at least 31 known gravesites of Confederate soldiers throughout Arizona, including seven in the Mesa City Cemetery and 13 in the Double Butte Cemetery in Tempe. Martin Worthington, who was a soldier in the Confederate Army's Arkansas First Mounted Rifle Division and is buried in the Mesa City Cemetery, was the last soldier from the East Valley to receive a gravestone last year after being buried in an unmarked grave for 97 years. Many of the soldiers' stories are posted on the website, www.ourconfederateheros.org.

The Sons of Confederate Veterans, who are more than 200 members strong in Arizona, also let people know they are not a hate group, as in part, the Civil War under President Abraham Lincoln's tenure in the White House was over slavery. But the war also was over what Southerners believed were unfair taxes imposed on them by the Union states, having to pay more for goods and pay high tariffs on shipping cotton, causing them to secede or withdraw from the Union.

At the time of the Civil War, Arizona was a territory divided — the northern portion was Union, but from north of Phoenix around the area that became Anthem to the south of that, the territory was Confederate.

The Sons of Confederate Veterans, which has been in Arizona since the early 1990s, also provide education to schools and donate to charities such as the Susan G. Koman Breast Cancer Fund and Mary Ellen's Place for Homeless Women Veterans, a shelter in Phoenix as well as a number of battlefields and military monuments throughout the nation.

Standing in Double Butte Cemetery in Tempe, Barney Mullins, a member of the group, said, “We seek to restore the honor for the soldiers who fought in this army. They put everything on the line for a cause they believed in and they died for it, just not from being shot, but from disease and fighting without shoes or supplies. A lot of people didn’t realize it, but if you lost a couple of companies in casualties, you could lose an entire town, and that’s a devastating loss.”

“We remember them for their duty and honor,” Mullins added.

Brown said, “We couldn’t do this without Chris Mathis. Not only does he start by locating where soldiers are buried by starting at www.ancestry.com. and figuring out what cemetery they’d be buried in, he has to locate a family member willing to have a gravestone placed at the site, get the cemetery to agree to put it there as well as the Veterans Administration to provide the gravestone. It takes a lot of time and dedication. Once it is established that a person in an unmarked grave served in the Confederate Army, all three parties have to agree to have a gravestone placed on their behalf — the VA, the family and the cemetery. Sometimes, a family doesn’t want anything to do with it; other times when a family is contacted, they are overwhelmed and grateful.”