



20,000+ Souls. 20,000+ Stories. One question:

How did they die?

#1 Tuberculosis

A staggering 10% of all the souls buried here died of Tuberculosis (AKA “Consumption”)

A contagious bacterial infection of the lungs, **symptoms** include:

Coughing, coughing up blood, weight loss, weakness, fever

Treatments:

Plenty of fresh air

Surgical intervention: deliberately collapsing the infected lung. The intent was to give it a chance to “rest” and heal its lesions.

Spoiler alert—it didn’t work.

#4 Pneumonia

A respiratory infection that causes the lungs to fill with fluid or puss.

It can be caused by a lot of things—illness, parasites, poor living conditions, accidentally inhaling something like a piece of food ...

Symptoms:

Chest pain when breathing
Coughing, Fever

#2 Cholera

A bacterial infection of the intestines, contracted from infested water supplies.

Symptoms:

Vomiting
Diarrhea

#3 Dysentery

Caused most commonly by either a bacterial infection or an amoebic parasite spread through infected food and water

AKA: Flux, Summer Complaint,

Symptoms:

Diarrhea (usually bloody)
Cramps, Fever

#5 Meningitis or Encephalitis

4% of everyone, but 6% of infants

Both diseases have similar symptoms and result in

Inflammation of the Brain

AKA “Brain Fever”, this disease is caused by viral, bacterial, fungal, and parasitic infections

Symptoms:

Seizures, coma, muscle weakness, confusion, vomiting

Old Age

6% of people who survived infancy went on to die of “old age”!

Define old?

The average age of people who died this way was

80!

One of the oldest people in this cemetery is Mr. B. Harris—a freedman who died of a fever in 1848 at 116!

Child Birth

4% of women buried in this cemetery over 16 years old died either in child birth or of **child birth fever.**

What is that?

It is a serious post-birth infection that women often got, caused by unsanitary conditions during delivery—primarily from the unwashed hands of the midwives and doctors who helped them.

41% of the people buried in Nashville City Cemetery are under 2 years old.

Infants

Many of them (17%) didn’t even survive birth. The rest? Well , the same things that killed the adults killed them. But there are some causes of death that were specific to this age group ...

Cholera Infantum

Not to be confused with normal cholera, this disease is different.

It’s not contagious.

It’s seen almost exclusively in infants, mostly among those not breastfed.

It happened most often in the summer, when it was hot and humid.

Symptoms:

Vomiting, diarrhea

Croup

A respiratory infection most often found in young children.

Symptoms:

A loud, “barking” cough
(which gets worse with coughing and crying)
Fever, labored breathing
(taking a breath results in a high-pitched “whistling” sound)

Whooping Cough

A disease that can happen to anyone, but is especially deadly to infants.

Symptoms:

At first, looks like a cold:
Runny nose, cough, low fever
But then (1-2 weeks later):
Coughing fits with a characteristic “whooping” sound when inhaling
Vomiting
In babies—they often don’t cough. They just turn blue and die.

Teething

A shocking **7%** of infants buried in this cemetery have “teething” listed as a cause of death.

How? Why?

It’s less a result of the crankiness and pain of teething, and more a result of the way the **condition was treated:**

Lancing, cutting of the gums, or leeches
(to help the teeth “get out”)

Also, it was common to attribute any illness a child was having while they were teething to the teething itself.
Diarrhea? Fever? Seizures?

Must be teething ... *

*Note: Those are not normal symptoms of teething.

Bold Hives

Not an actual disease!
It was a common belief at the time, that babies were born with hives floating around inside them.

If your baby’s skin erupted into an angry red rash shortly after birth, it was thought to be **a good thing!**
It means the hives got out.

But, if not—your child is in danger. The hives went “in” instead of “out”, and are now attacking the inside of your baby (bold hives)

Preventative treatment:

Feeding the baby herbal teas—often brewed with ivy or catnip
Scarification (deliberately cutting the skin)



What a way to go!

The bizarre, tragic, and macabre deaths found in NCC

Drowning

A surprising **97** people buried here died of drowning. 10 of them died in 1866—the year after the Civil War

Rat bite

Thankfully not common, but there are 3 infants buried in this cemetery whose cause of death is listed as “rat bite”.

All 3 babies are girls, one of them a 2-year old named Sally King.

Poisoning

Sometimes by accident, but usually not, 43 people buried here died of poison.

16 of them died in 1865 and 1866—the years immediately after the end of the Civil War.

Explosion

9 people died dramatically in an explosion. Not all at once.

Except in 1847, when 3 ladies (ages 7, 25, and ?) died at the same time: “killed by the blowing up of magazine”

Worms

A horrifying 54 infants buried here have “worms” listed as a cause of death.

Intestinal parasitic infections, probably pin worms or hookworms.

No one over the age of 2 has this listed as a cause of death, but that doesn’t mean they didn’t have them!

Just that the cause of death was listed as something else.

It is estimated that up to 40% of all people living in the Southern US at the time (1800s) were infected with hookworms.

There are 3 infants buried here where the cause of death is listed as

“Killed by the mother”

Infanticide? Well, yes, but maybe more than just that.

There’s a 4th infant listed as

“Supposed to be killed”

All 4 infants are black; the children of slaves.

All 4 infants have fathers recorded, with both first and last names.

There are also another 20 infants with listed cause of death of

“Suffocation” or “Strangulation”

We can’t say for certain if these were deliberate or accidental—but it is notable that 19 of those 20 babies were also black children of slaves.

Walter Chipchase

Died May 2, 1861 at 6 years old

“Died from Vaccination”

W.H. Willson

Died September 16, 1865 at 35 years old

“Suposed to be murdrd”

Is that “supposed” or “supposedly”?

Gun violence

Whether deliberate or accidental, **129** people buried here died of gunshot not related to war.

Miss Susan Robinson, aged 62, died in 1863 of a “**Brokin Hart**”.

Unnamed infant

Died on December 18, 1857

“Chooked by a grain of coffee”

Horses

11 people buried here were killed by horses.

Either they fell off them, they were kicked by them, or in the case of Alfred, a 35 year old slave, sounds like he got trampled.

“Killed by horses running away”