

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
FORT SAM HOUSTON NATIONAL CEMETERY, LODGE

HALS No. TX-3-A

Location: 1520 Harry Wurzbach Road, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

The coordinates for the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, Lodge are 98.433442 W and 29.476614 N, and they were obtained in August 2012 with, it is assumed, NAD 1983. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Present Owner: National Cemetery Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Prior to 1988, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs was known as the Veterans Administration.

The Veterans Administration took over management of Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery from the U.S. Army in 1973 (Public Law 93-43).

Date: 1934.

Builder/Contractor: Unknown.

Description: The Mission Revival Ranch style lodge is a one-story structure (about 56' x 47') with a cross-gabled roof covered in Spanish tile. The principal elevation faces north. The exterior walls are hollow tile and stuccoed; the foundations are concrete. The windows are casements, and the floors are wood.

Maintenance records for the years 1949 to 1967 indicate that the lodge was painted at regular intervals, and the rear porch was screened in 1961. At that time windows were installed in the porch and some (unspecified) repairs were made to the dining and living rooms. The walls were underpinned on the north wing, where the office was originally located, in 1953, and other changes were made that were more aesthetic in nature including the installation of wood cabinets in the kitchen (1960), installation of aluminum awnings, a ventilation fan, and wood paneling (1963), and a new floor in the kitchen (1965). The downspouts were repaired in 1957 and the electrical system upgraded in 1967.

Site Context: Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery has a rectilinear footprint on an east-to-west axis. The main entrance opens off of Military Highway on the west side of the cemetery and the lodge is located in proximity to the gate. The principal elevation of the lodge faces north to the entrance drive. The flagstaff is located just east of the lodge, along the east-to-west entrance drive that bisects the grounds.

History: Please see the contextual report for an analysis of the architectural development of the lodge as a building type for the national cemeteries and its place within this prescribed landscape

(HALS No. DC-46).

In 1862 Congress authorized the appropriation of land for use as national cemeteries so that the Union soldiers who perished in service to their country could be buried with honor. These became the first cemeteries in the national cemetery system; by the end of the decade almost 300,000 men were buried in seventy-three national cemeteries. By that time the Office of the Quartermaster General, and the Quartermaster Montgomery C. Meigs in particular, had developed an architectural program for the cemetery. The program created for the national cemeteries included an enclosing wall demarcating the grounds and ornamental iron gates cast to instill reverence to those who entered and calm the wrought emotions of a nation in mourning for its lost sons. Specific plantings, such as the Osage-orange hedge and various trees, were selected to give a pleasing appearance and, likely, to screen outbuildings - the business of cemetery maintenance - from public view. Less a commemorative architectural statement, the superintendent's lodge combined practicality with a respectful presence.

Lodge plans first evolved from expedient wood-frame "cottages" to masonry buildings one-story in height and with a three-room floor plan. Construction of the temporary wood-frame lodges took place in the years 1867 to 1869, and overlapped with the construction of the first permanent masonry lodges built to a standard, single-story design from 1868 to 1871. Officers in charge of the cemeteries soon found the floor plans of the temporary wood lodges and the first permanent masonry lodges inconvenient and, increasingly, unattractive.

Moreover, representatives from the Quartermaster General's Office noted these three-room models were often too small for a superintendent and his family, and so in 1869, plans for a six-room, one and one-half story type were acquired from Edward Clark, Architect of the Capitol Extension. The design was refined over the next two years and in 1871 drawn for the Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs's approval. This standard plan featured a mansard roof and so became associated with the French or Second Empire style. Contemporary buildings, domestic and civic, exhibited this aesthetic and so the choice of the Quartermaster for a Second Empire style lodge is in keeping with national architectural trends as well as the personal taste of Meigs whose house also was erected in the Second Empire style. On the national stage, Alfred Mullet designed the Old Executive Office building in Washington, DC, a building whose construction in the 1870s coincided with the building of lodges in the Second Empire style in many of the national cemeteries.

The National Cemetery Administration identifies the Second Empire style lodge, referred to in the 1880s as the "usual" type, or even the "full Meigs plan" likely in reference to the Quartermaster's endorsement of the design, as the first generation of permanent lodges. It reflects a concerted effort to standardize what a national cemetery, including the lodge, should look like. The last cemeteries for which the Quartermaster contracted for this style of lodge were for Mobile, Alabama, and Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1881.

The L-plan was revised in 1885 for the lodge in San Francisco, and then employed for the lodges in Mound City and Loudon Park. The revised plan was further improved for the construction of the lodge at Cypress Hills. The revision to the standard L-plan primarily included a change in

roof form from the mansard to a cross-gable and the use of banded brick in the exterior walls. Cypress Hills was a simpler expression of the type, with segmental arches over the windows instead of stone lintels and having no banded exterior brick in the walls. In the 1890s, the plans called for an elongated office wing. This change to the L-plan accommodated an entrance hall in the middle of the building; the elongated L-plan was built in Santa Fe, Fort Smith, and Fort Leavenworth.

By the century's end, standards of living called for conveniences the L-plan lodges lacked. Advances in plumbing and heating technologies, in particular, made the L-plan outdated as expectations about the appropriate level of domestic sanitation that the government should provide to its employees changed. Even so, the Quartermaster omitted indoor toilets from the lodge floor plans until 1905. Maintenance of the existing lodges, as well as ell additions, addressed some of the inconveniences of the older buildings, and made the lodges more comfortable as living spaces. Between the 1880s and 1940s, improvements to the existing lodges included the installation of indoor plumbing and bathrooms, central heating, closets and cupboards; adding a kitchen ell and converting the original kitchen into a dining room; and maintenance of windows, shutters, and porches.

By 1905, the Quartermaster determined some lodges warranted a complete overall, rather than renovation, and the department began to replace some of the buildings in the national cemeteries. For the new lodges, it created a succession of twenty-two different plans between 1905 and 1960. Nine of these plans were used to build multiple lodges, but thirteen were unique designs, used only once. Compared to the extended popularity of the L-plan, which lasted from 1870 to 1881 in its mansard-roof form and to 1904 in its later variations, the rapid succession of designs in the twentieth century suggests a new awareness among those directing the cemeteries of the need to construct lodges that were aesthetically and technologically up-to-date. Over five decades, the Quartermaster endorsed a progression of plans from four-squares to bungalows to Colonial Revival designs and then to suburban ramblers. This progression paralleled the changes in form, style, building materials, and construction practices that occurred in the private housing market.

Most of the lodges built in the twentieth century are indistinguishable from typical American middle-class and upper-middle-class suburban dwellings, with the exception of a second entrance for the superintendent's office. In some instances, such as in Hampton, Virginia, and in Annapolis, Maryland, the army made a particular effort to match new lodges to their local surroundings, usually by building period-revival designs in places where those designs would have particular resonance. In a nod to the colonial heritage of the Chesapeake, the Quartermaster built one-and-one-half-story brick lodges in a Colonial Revival style at these cemeteries in 1940. In another example, the desire to match designs to localities prompted the alteration of the L-plan lodge at San Francisco into a Spanish Mission Revival building in 1929 and the similarly extensive reconstruction of the Santa Fe lodge into the Pueblo Revival style in 1942.

Regional revival building forms influenced the Quartermaster's designs in the 1930s, and in 1934, money through the PWA allowed for a comprehensive building program in Fort Sam Houston. Elements of the cemetery landscape built at this time included the lodge, entrance

gates, comfort station, rostrum, and boundary wall. All of the buildings were designed with Mission Revival style features, such as stuccoed walls and Spanish tile roofs, which lent the cemetery uniformity in appearance.

The lodge in Fort Sam Houston is significant as an example of a PWA-funded construction program that financed the building of lodges throughout the national cemetery system in 1934, including those in Fort Sam Houston, Fort Gibson, and Philadelphia. Although similar to the Southwestern Ranch style lodges built afterward in Fort Rosecrans (1936) and Fort Bliss (1939), the Fort Sam Houston building was described as a Mission Revival Ranch house. The lodge was one story, and was built of stuccoed hollow tile at a cost of \$18,883.

Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery has long been associated with the army post in San Antonio, although the land on which the cemetery would be established did not become a burying ground until the mid 1920s. In 1924 land from the military reservation was set aside for the cemetery and the first interment was in 1926. In 1931 the War Department transferred sixty acres and designated the parcel an addition to San Antonio National Cemetery; the name was changed to Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in 1937.

Sources:

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Historian: Virginia B. Price, 2012.

Project Information: The documentation of the lodges and rostrums in the national cemeteries was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), one of the Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief. The project was sponsored by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) of the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Sara Amy Leach, Senior Historian. Project planning was coordinated by Catherine C. Lavoie, Chief of HABS. Historical research was undertaken by HABS Historians Virginia B. Price and Michael R. Harrison. NCA Historians Jennifer Perunko, Alec Bennett, and Hillori Schenker provided research material, edited and reviewed written reports. Field work for selected sites was carried out and measured drawings produced by HABS Architects Paul Davidson, Ryan Pierce, and Mark Schara.