

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

MOBILE NATIONAL CEMETERY, LODGE

HALS No. AL-1-A

Location: 1202 Virginia Street, Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama.

The coordinates for Mobile National Cemetery, Lodge are 88.063345 W and 30.673325 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 Mobile National Cemetery from the U.S. Army in 1973 (Public Law 93-43).

Date: 1881.

Builder/Contractor: Farley, Cahall and Baird.

Description: The Second Empire style lodge was erected in 1880 to 1881 and made of brick masonry. It is one and one-half stories in height with a slate-covered mansard roof surmounted by a shallow hip roof covered in tin. The principal elevation faces southwest. The windows are double-hung, wood sash glazed with six-over-one lights, but maintenance ledgers from the Veterans Administration indicate screens were installed, repaired (1949), changed for aluminum (1959) and replaced (1972). It is unclear from the ledger if the sash was replaced or the storm and screen combination was merely upgraded. The doors are wood and paneled; the floors are hardwood except for the office and bathroom, which were tiled in 1955. The lodge was electrified in 1920 and rewired at least twice since. Major additions include the sun parlor off the dining room in 1931 as well as the remodeling of the stairways to accommodate the new bathrooms that same year. A half-bathroom was inserted onto the back porch in 1966. Waterproofing the basement and maintenance on the roof and gutters occurred at intervals, to keep the rain out, and one redecorating effort was noted in the ledger for 1949.

Site Context: The lodge is located in the northwest corner of the southeast section (section four) of the initial Mobile Cemetery plot, and the porch-entry to the L-shaped lodge faces southwest toward the cemetery drive. The office is in the south room and is closest to the formal entrance to the grounds from Virginia Street; originally there were internal drives dividing the cemetery grounds into quadrants. The rostrum was placed at the intersection of the axial drives and the lodge was erected about 40' to the southeast of that central point. Of the internal drives, only the loop past the lodge survives today.

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.

The lodge built in Mobile, Alabama, is significant as one of the last examples of the definitive L-

plan type to be constructed in the national cemetery system and, as such, it is a particularly important extant example in the evolution of lodge design that occurred through the aegis of the Quartermaster's office in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In Mobile, the national cemetery was established in 1865 and the city gave three acres of land for the burying ground. Soldiers had been buried in a section of the municipal cemetery, Magnolia, and this acreage extended that plot. By 1867 reports to the Quartermaster indicate the cemetery was plotted and a temporary wood lodge was built "in conformity" to the plans issued by the Office of the Quartermaster General. A map of the cemetery included the wood-frame, temporary lodge building's footprint, which measured 19'4" x 33'10". The floor plan consisted of two rooms. In 1868, a surrounding verandah was added. However, letters suggest living in the cemetery was unhealthy, and no superintendent lived on-site for any length of time. The death of the superintendent, Charles Jackson, in 1871 reinforced the opinion that residence in the lodge in that cemetery was fatal. The recommendation following Jackson's decease was for the superintendent to live elsewhere. Likely successive superintendents lived in town, rather than in the cemetery, until healthier quarters could be built.

By the decade's end, the Quartermaster's office resolved to provide a permanent lodge for the superintendent of the cemetery, and in June 1880 the Quartermaster entered into a contract with Farley, Cahall, and Baird. Costs of construction for a brick lodge in the Second Empire style were estimated at \$2984. The contractors were ready to start in July 1880 with an anticipated completion date in March 1881. As the work neared completion, civil engineer C. M. Clarke reviewed the construction and wrote, damningly, that the work was of such inferior quality he thought it must have been done on purpose. The contractors used unseasoned sapwood, for example, and they also installed the slating improperly causing the roof to leak. The mortar joints did not set before winter came, and so the cold temperatures caused the mortar to freeze. The brickwork subsequently needed repointing. Many of the repairs were done by March 1881 and, at the time, the contractor requested permission to use cement based mortar rather than lime on the lower floor walls. This would cost more, but was endorsed. The inspection in 1890 revealed that the damp climate caused the paper to pull away from the walls and likely prevented the kalsomine from adhering. The only recourse was the clean the walls and repaint them. The 1909 survey indicated the lodge remained true to the L-shaped plan, with three rooms per floor, without any additions.

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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.