

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

NATCHEZ NATIONAL CEMETERY, LODGE

HALS No. MS-2-A

Location: 41 Cemetery Road, Natchez, Adams County, Mississippi.

The coordinates for the Natchez National Cemetery, Lodge are 91.397217 W and 31.580779 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 Natchez National Cemetery from the U.S. Army in 1973 (Public Law 93-43).

Date: 1931.

Builder/Contractor: Unknown.

Description: The lodge completed in 1931 is in the Cape Cod style and the main elevation of the building faces southwest. The main block is five bays across, with a center doorway and wings to each side. The southeast wing likely served as the office, while the northwest wing consisted of a porch. The Natchez lodge has a cross-gable roof that was covered in slate shingles initially, had an interior chimney, three dormer windows in the southwest (front) slope of the main roof, and sash windows glazed with multiple lights. There are shutters on the windows of the southwest façade. The walls are stucco, the foundations are concrete, and the floors are wood.

Ledgers with entries about repairs or changes to the lodges tracked for the Veterans Administration what was done when, and how much it cost from the 1920s through the 1960s. The ledgers reveal that shortly after the lodge was completed, the roof still needed some work. It leaked. In 1932 to 1934 repairs to the slate were made and a copper ridge roll was installed. These repairs held. In 1948, several of the slate tiles were replaced, the next year a fan was installed in the attic, and in 1952 work was needed on the dormer windows and roof. The roof was replaced in 1964.

In 1937, the porch was enclosed by switching the screens for double-hung glazed sash, and by using “drop side wainscoting” for the interior walls. Several years later, the roof (which appears in historic photographs to be a shed roof covered in tin) was repaired. Aluminum screens for the windows and doors arrived in 1959, and in 1966 so did aluminum awnings. The kitchen was painted in 1947 and again in 1955. It was remodeled in 1968. Venetian blinds were hung in the windows of the office in 1956.

Site Context: Natchez National Cemetery is adjacent to the city cemetery and is irregular in overall shape and in burial sections. A stone wall encloses the cemetery, and pathways lead through the grounds, radiating outward from the flagstaff circle near the main entrance. The entrance is in the south corner of the cemetery and the lodge is located nearby, just northeast of the gates.

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.

In 1931, concurrent to the construction of Dutch Colonial Revival style lodges in several of the national cemeteries, the Quartermaster's office also experimented with a Cape Cod form. Similar building materials and technologies were used in the two models, such as the hollow-core tile and frame structure and the use of dormers to illuminate upper floors. Rather than a gambrel roof, as the Dutch Colonial Revival style lodges had, the Cape Cod design called for cross-gable roofs with a trio of dormers in the front. The floor plan for the Cape Cod lodge was for a one-story building with symmetrical porch and office wings. The rooms along the front of the lodge were the porch, dining room, living room, and office, while the rear housed the kitchen, bathroom and three bedrooms. The lodge at Natchez National Cemetery is significant as an example of this suburban house form adapted for use in the national cemetery system. It cost \$9985 to build.

Natchez National Cemetery was established in 1866. It is adjacent to the Natchez City Cemetery, and its topography on the high bluff overlooking the Mississippi River prompted a more picturesque meander than the straight lines of the cemetery vistas in other locations. During the war, Natchez surrendered to the Union forces in 1862; it had been a thriving port and an economic center and so was sought after by both sides. The military hospitals set up in the city received many of the wounded, and the need for the cemetery was felt immediately. At the war's end, those buried in the levees on the west bank of the Mississippi as well as in cemeteries on both sides of the water were reinterred in Natchez. By 1870 over 3000 were buried, the names of only 253 were known.

By the 1870s, the one-story, three-room brick lodge (17'8" x 44'8") erected for the superintendent fared poorly. Hints of its condition came in May 1874 when it was recommended to the Quartermaster General that a detached kitchen and dining room be constructed. In October 1875 remedies shifted; plans now included finding a site for the office and removing that function from the lodge altogether as had been done in Vicksburg. In November 1875 progress was made, and in December the new one-room, one-story office was accepted as complete by the Quartermaster. The office was well-built, with the only flaw discovered after several years of use. The chimney, built in the wall rather than as an exterior stack, permitted rain water to wash down into the building and the lack of a hood on the stove blackened the walls. Presumably this was corrected for the following year no mention of it is made in the inspection.

The office may have fared well in the mid-1880s, but the inspection reports paint the lodge in ever darkening strokes. The end wall had separated from the north and south sides; the north side was cracked. Cracks appeared on the interior as well, and as a result, some of the plaster had fallen off. The north stoop was too close to the ground and rotted away. The ceilings were about 11' high, but the floors were less than 1' off the ground that there was no ventilation and an open invitation to vermin to enter. By 1884 the superintendent moved his family to a farmhouse

nearby, living at his own expense. The lodge, it was thought, was too small for a family and too damp and unhealthy. The solution proposed to the Quartermaster was to either add a story to the lodge, as was done in Marietta and Annapolis, or to add two rooms to the office. The walls of the lodge were 9" thick, so there was some concern about reinforcing them to hold the weight of another floor even if successful precedents at Marietta and Annapolis existed. In 1888 the matter was not resolved, but by 1909 the survey described the lodge as having two rooms added onto it, and the office remained a detached building. Two room annex was built in 1898. The specific circumstances at Natchez National Cemetery facilitated this arrangement, and effectively preserved one of the oldest lodges in the cemetery system for far longer than its nineteenth-century advocates imagined possible. However, in 1931, a Cape Cod style building replaced the old lodge as improvements swept through the cemetery bringing the new lodge as well as a maintenance building, a rostrum, and iron gates.

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Cemetery System.” In *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*, edited by Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003.

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.