

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### CAMP BUTLER NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. IL-7-C

**Location:** 5063 Camp Butler Road, Springfield, Sangamon County, Illinois

The Camp Butler National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 39.832468, longitude -89.558316 (North American Datum of 1983). The coordinate represents the structure's southwest corner.

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

**Construction date:** 1939

**Builder / Contractor:** unknown

**Description:** The rostrum is an open-air neoclassical pavilion comprising a raised speaker's podium (platform) shaded by a pedimented temple roof. The podium sits atop concrete foundations and is made of reinforced concrete faced with light-gray Bedford limestone. Symmetrical staircases, made of limestone blocks set on concrete supports with limestone facing, lead onto the podium on both sides of the rostrum. The floor is concrete bordered by limestone coping blocks. A 3'-high wrought-iron railing encircles the podium, and a limestone lectern about 4' high x 4' wide x 2' deep is centered along the front of the rostrum, which faces south.

Twelve square Tuscan-order limestone columns with limestone bases and capstones, 10'-0" high x 1'-4" square and spaced 2'-8" apart on center, are set in groups of three at each corner of the podium. They support a limestone entablature and gable roof with pediments facing the sides of the rostrum. The batten-seam copper roof is supported on wood framing, while the interior ceiling and moldings are also wood.

The podium measures 20'-2" wide x 14'-6" deep x 3' high. Including the projecting stairs, the rostrum overall measures 34'-2" wide x 14'-6" deep.

**Site context:** The oldest portion of Camp Butler National Cemetery occupies what is now the southwestern corner of the expanded grounds; a gate remains where the original cemetery entrance was located. A drive leads straight from this gate to a large circle, once the site of the flagstaff. The rostrum sits about 50' beyond this circle, facing the circle and the historic entrance drive. An area about 80' wide in front of the rostrum has been kept free of graves to provide an assembly area for memorial observances.

**History:** The cemetery was created in 1862 to provide for the burial of Union soldiers who died while training at Camp Butler and Confederate soldiers who died while imprisoned at the camp. Covering 6 acres initially, the cemetery now encompasses 53 acres after land acquisitions made in the twentieth century.

The U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department, which was responsible for the national cemeteries, contracted for the construction of rostrums in fifty national cemeteries between 1873 and 1905 to serve as speaker's platforms for Decoration or Memorial Day observances. The first rostrum at the Camp Butler cemetery was built in 1896 or 1897 and was one of four nearly identical ones constructed that fiscal year. (The others were located in the national cemeteries at Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Poplar Grove, Virginia; and Salisbury, North Carolina.) The rostrum was an octagonal, open-air brick pavilion about 5' high x 16'-2" across surmounted by a cast- and wrought-iron tent-form roof. It had concrete foundations and a concrete floor. It was located about 70' to 80' west of the current rostrum. It is not known when this rostrum was taken down, but June 1939 photos of the grounds in the Veterans Administration records at the National Archives show it still in place immediately prior to the construction of the new rostrum.

The continued expansion of the cemetery justified the erection of a new rostrum in 1939. Sparsely neoclassical in style, the design was adapted from one used in 1937 for the rostrum at Beverly, New Jersey, with only minor adjustments in dimensions and the substitution of limestone facing for Beverly's buff brick. The Camp Butler rostrum was begun in summer 1939 and was completed September 2, 1939. It cost \$5,232.

Camp Butler National Cemetery was transferred from the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Memorial Affairs Agency to the Veterans Administration (now the Department of Veterans Affairs) in 1973. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1997 as part of the Civil War Era National Cemeteries Multiple Property Submission.

**Sources:**

Call, Lewis W. *United States Military Reservations, National Cemeteries, and Military Parks. Title, Jurisdiction, etc.* Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1907.

Holt, Dean W. *American Military Cemeteries.* 2nd ed. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2010.

Office of the Quartermaster General. Construction Division. Camp Butler National Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois, Rostrum, Mar. 4, 1939. Drawing no. 6857-103. National Cemetery Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.

Records of the Veterans Administration, Department of Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Historical File (Record Group 15/A-1, Entry 25), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, General Correspondence and Reports Relating to National and Post Cemeteries (Record Group 92, Entry 576), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Sammartino, Therese T. National Register of Historic Places nomination for "Camp Butler National Cemetery." Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1997.

U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps. *Outline Description of Military Posts and Reservations in the United States and Alaska and of National Cemeteries*. Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1904.

**Historian:** Michael R. Harrison, 2012

**Project Information:** The documentation of 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 Lavoie, Chief of HABS. Historical research was undertaken by HABS Historians Michael R. Harrison and Virginia B. Price. NCA Historian Jennifer M. Perunko provided research and editorial support. Field work for selected sites was carried out and measured drawings produced by HABS Architects Paul Davidson, Ryan Pierce, and Mark Schara.