

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

CYPRESS HILLS NATIONAL CEMETERY, JAMAICA AVENUE UNIT, ROSTRUM

HALS No. NY-2-E

Location: 625 Jamaica Avenue, Brooklyn, Kings County, New York

The Cypress Hills National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 40.688258, longitude -73.882826 (North American Datum of 1983). The coordinate represents the structure's southeast corner.

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

Construction date: 1939

Builder: built with WPA funds

Description: The Cypress Hills rostrum takes the form of an open-air neoclassical temple with a pedimented end-gable roof set atop a one-story-high base. The rostrum is built against a hill located at the visual terminus of the axial cemetery drive. Curved retaining walls create a small assembly area in front of the rostrum. The base of the rostrum, measuring about 26' wide x 14' deep x 12' high and containing a single interior chamber, is built of reinforced concrete on concrete foundations and is faced with blocks of smooth-faced limestone. Its front is pierced by a central door and two small windows, both now covered over. Two additional small windows pierce the sides of the base. The door opens through a deeply projecting architrave with triangular pediment. An industrial roller door has been installed to cover the door opening.

Twelve limestone Tuscan Doric columns rise from the perimeter of the top of the base. Four columns are set along the front of the rostrum and another four along the rear. The remaining columns are accoupled to the corner columns at each end of the rostrum. The columns support a full entablature and end-gable roof. The roof structure and sheathing are wood; the roofing is mottled red and brown terra-cotta tile.

The rostrum floor is concrete, and an iron railing links the columns along the perimeter. The ceiling is stucco and has wood moldings. A limestone lectern is located directly above the projecting door pediment at the center front of the rostrum. Stone steps and a landing lead onto the floor from the ground behind the rostrum.

The flanking walls to either side of the rostrum are also built from smooth-faced limestone blocks around brick cores, with limestone coping. They terminate in square-plan end posts with ball finials.

Site context: The rostrum sits in the 1884 addition to Cypress Hills National Cemetery. An axial drive nearly bisects the grounds of the addition, running straight from the entrance gates to a circle that is close to the northwestern boundary of the cemetery. The rostrum is located along the edge of this circle, facing southeast along the length of the drive toward the gates.

History: Cypress Hills National Cemetery was established by the U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department in 1862 to provide for the burial of Civil War dead in the vicinity of New York City and Brooklyn, New York. It originally comprised a 2.75-acre tract located within the boundaries of the private Cypress Hills Cemetery. When these grounds were filled, a second, non-contiguous tract of just over 15 acres was purchased along nearby Jamaica Avenue to expand the cemetery.

The original rostrum at Cypress Hills was a brick and cast-iron open-air octagonal pavilion built in 1886–87 by the Champion Iron Fence Company of Kenton, Ohio, to a design by the U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department. It was built at the same time as the nearly identical rostrums at Loudon Park, Maryland; Wilmington, North Carolina; Little Rock, Arkansas; and Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee. From this group, only the base of the Wilmington rostrum survives. The Cypress Hills rostrum, located in the 15-acre cemetery addition and sited in the middle of what is now Section 2, was begun in fall 1886 and completed in May 1887. Problems with the construction led to some rebuilding work by a New York contractor named Mr. Walthers in 1887. The rostrum was torn down at an unknown date.

The Construction Division of the Office of the Quartermaster General designed a replacement rostrum for the cemetery in 1938. It was built with \$24,785.31 in Works Progress Administration funding in 1939.

The 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. Cypress Hills Nat'l. Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York, Rostrum, May 24, 1938. Drawing no. 6841-104. 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 "Cypress Hills 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.