

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

MOUND CITY NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. IL-9-B

Location: Junction of Highway 37 and Old U.S. Highway 51, Mount City,
Pulaski County, Illinois

The Mound City National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 37.087530, longitude -89.177522 (North American Datum of 1983). The coordinate represents the structure's western corner.

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

Construction date: 1882-83; rebuilt 1939

Contractor: John W. Adams and George Q. Adams, Chattanooga, Tennessee

Description: The symmetrical rostrum comprises a 37' long x 22' wide x 5' high rectangular podium from which rise eleven 8'-9" high x 18"-square columns supporting a hipped roof. The podium is made of brick covered by concrete stucco; its has a concrete floor over earth fill. The columns are red brick with concrete bases and caps; a one-course-high filet or annulet appears near the top of each column. The roof structure is wood sheathed with asphalt shingles. The main roof beams are paired, with tails that extend beyond the column caps; the tails are ornamented with simple segmental cut-outs at the ends. A ceiling allows the beams to be visible but hides the rafters from view. An aluminum gutter is installed along the eaves, and a single downspout extends from the east corner column to the ground.

A flight of concrete steps framed by stepped concrete cheek walls leads onto the rostrum at the center of the southeast side. The stairs feature pipe railings on either side; pipe railings also enclose the perimeter of the platform, one running about 1.5' above the floor and another running about 3.5' above the floor. An electric wheelchair lift is located at the east corner of the rostrum.

The rostrum is substantially altered from its original appearance. When completed in 1883, the rectangular podium was exposed brick articulated by shallow pilasters and dado panels. Twelve 12'-high square columns supported an openwork wood trellis from which climbing vines shaded the rostrum. The rostrum had a sod floor edged by stone coping and two cut-stone staircases, one off-center along each of the structure's shorter sides. A pipe railing supported by pipe balusters connected the perimeter columns at a height of 3'. The trellis was converted into a gable roof at an unknown date. In 1936, the roof was reinforced and

the two interior columns removed to allow a new 4"-thick concrete floor to be laid. The rostrum's current appearance – with rendered walls, shorter columns, a hip roof, and one centered staircase instead of two off-center ones – dates from a 1939 reconstruction.

Site context: Mound City National Cemetery was originally a 10.5-acre rectangular tract at the center of which stood the Illinois State Soldiers and Sailors Monument. The rostrum is sited about 160' from the monument, just off axis with it, inside the curve of an L-shaped drive that leads from the cemetery entrance to the monument. This drive was covered grass, then gravel, in the nineteenth century; today, it is paved. The rostrum is oriented with its sides parallel to the bounds of the cemetery.

History: The national cemetery outside Mound City, Illinois, was established in 1864. The rostrum was built in 1882 to provide a permanent speaker's stand for the Decoration Day (later Memorial Day) commemorations that were held in the cemetery each May. Army civil engineer James Gall Jr. noted in August 1882 that the cemetery was "visited by as many people on Decoration Day as attend the ceremonies at the Arlington Cemetery [outside Washington, D.C.], and the place should be made as attractive, pleasant, and convenient as possible."

The U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department, the agency responsible for maintaining and improving the national cemeteries, awarded the contract to build the rostrum to John W. and George Q. Adams, architects and builders of Chattanooga, Tennessee, based on their bid of \$1,820. The Mound City rostrum was one of five nearly identical rostrums built in 1882 by the Quartermaster's Department out of its annual funds appropriated for maintenance and improvement of the national cemeteries. The Adamases were also contracted to build the rostrum at Stone's River National Cemetery, Tennessee (contract price \$1,680), but failed to secure the contract for the rostrum at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Both were among the rostrums built for the army that year.

The Adamases built the rostrum to a standard design developed by the Quartermaster's Department in 1878 that had already been used at eight national cemeteries in 1879 and 1881. The workmen started construction in late August or September and had the entire structure completed by the middle of December 1882. James Gall Jr., who served as the department's construction supervisor for projects in the Midwest selected the site. "It will occupy a very fine portion of the grounds," he wrote, "surrounded by large shade trees and facing the flag staff and monument." In anticipation of future filling and grading in the cemetery because of flooding problems in the cemetery, Gall positioned the ground line of the rostrum about 2' above the then-existing general level of the ground. This necessitated additional foundation work and earth filling once construction began, adding \$128 to the rostrum's price, for a final construction cost of \$1,948. Because the brickwork was laid late in the building season, heavy frosts damaged the face joints before the mortar had fully set, and the contractors had to return in spring 1883 to repoint the joints.

Vines to be planted at the base of the rostrum arrived at the cemetery in spring 1883 but could not be placed because construction was not complete. "They were, however, carefully planted in a prepared trench, have made fine growth during the Summer, and will now be planted at their proper places against the Rostrum walls and columns," Gall reported in October 1883.

The rostrum's original trellis roof was renovated in 1899. By 1909, the roof was covered with corrugated-iron sheet roofing. At an unknown date, wood rafters and beam were added atop the trellis structure to create a gable roof with exposed king trusses on each of the rostrum's shorter ends. In 1936, the rostrum's two interior columns were removed, and the roof reinforced with steel gussets and straps. A 4"-thick concrete floor was poured, and concrete steps replaced the original cut-stone steps at each end of the rostrum. Three years later the rostrum was further altered during a substantial reconstruction necessitated by termite and flood damage. This work cost \$2,400, \$525 of which was provided by the Work Projects Administration; the remaining \$1,875 came from cemetery funds allocated to the purchase and hire of labor.

Mound City 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:

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Letter from the Secretary of War transmitting . . . statement of contracts made by the War Department for the year ending June 30, 1883. Sen. Ex. Doc. 83, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., Jan. 30, 1884.

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.

Report of the Secretary of War. Vol. 1. Washington: G.P.O, 1883.

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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.