

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

PHILADELPHIA NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. PA-2-C

Location: Haines Street and Limekiln Pike, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania

The Philadelphia National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 40.059817, longitude -75.154193 (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: 1938-39

Builder / Contractor: built under the WPA

Description: The Philadelphia rostrum takes the form of a semicircular Tuscan-order temple. A full-height rear wall, built long the line of the cemetery's perimeter wall, provides the backdrop for a southeast-facing, raised, podium. Six columns screen the front of the rostrum and support an entablature. Six Tuscan pilasters, echoing the rhythm of the columns, articulate the rear wall, the bulk of which is reduced by three openings. The openings, covered with wire screening, are positioned high on the wall, extending from 7'-4" above the floor to the bottom of the entablature.

A 5'-1" wide x 1'-6" deep projection at the front of the semicircular podium supports a limestone lectern 5'-1" wide x 2'-7" deep x 3'-8-3/4" high. The top half of the projection and the lectern front are decorated by a blind memorial tablet, also carved from limestone. A flight of five steps leads onto the rostrum floor from the southwest corner of the podium. The podium and the steps are bounded by an iron railing 3' high.

The entire rostrum measures 40'-11" wide x 21' deep x about 17'-5" high overall. Its footings are concrete. The walls are built of roughly cut local schist laid in broken courses. The columns, pilasters, and entablature are limestone. The floor is bounded by flagstone coping and laid with square flagstone pavers. The wall-opening sills and stair steps are also flagstone. The roof and ceiling structural members are wood. The ceiling is made up of wood lath and gypsum cement plaster. The interior cornice is wood. The original roofing was tarred and graveled felt with copper flashing; the current roofing material is unknown. Downspouts run through the rear wall, draining water behind the rostrum.

Site context: Philadelphia National Cemetery occupies a nearly rectangular tract of land. The rostrum is built into the line of the north wall of the cemetery, close to the northeastern corner of the grounds. It lies about 170' from cemetery's paved drive. A lawn immediately in front of the rostrum provides an assembly area for ceremonies.

History: The Philadelphia National Cemetery was established at its current site in 1885 in order to consolidate Civil War burials located in seven regional private cemeteries. The government purchased a private estate of a little more than 13 acres in Philadelphia county to create a single national cemetery. The U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department created and maintained the cemetery.

The cemetery's first rostrum or speaker's stand for ceremonial use was built in 1888. It was an octagonal pavilion comprising a masonry podium and iron roof that was built by the Champion Iron Fence Company of Kenton, Ohio. It was built at the same time as four other nearly identical rostrums in the national cemeteries at Springfield, Missouri; Fredericksburg, Virginia; Hampton, Virginia; and Richmond, Virginia. It was dismantled at an unknown date.

The existing rostrum was built in 1938-39 as part of a Works Progress Administration project (O.P. No. 513-2-88) that funded a number of improvements to the cemetery's grounds and facilities. The WPA contribution to these improvements was \$9,700, supplemented by \$10,000 from the War Department. From this total, \$10,290.03 was used to build the rostrum, which was completed May 21, 1939. The cut stone used in the rostrum's construction was selected to match the existing stone cemetery wall.

The roof of the rostrum was replaced in September 1958.

Philadelphia 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. Rostrum at Philadelphia National Cemetery, April 1, 1938. Drawing no. 6843-110. 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 "Philadelphia 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.