

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

RALEIGH NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. NC-4-B

Location: 501 Rock Quarry Road, Raleigh, Wake County, North Carolina

The Raleigh National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 35.773767, longitude -78.620508 (North American Datum of 1983). The coordinate represents the structure's approximate center.

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

Construction date: 1931

Builder / Contractor: unknown

Description: The rostrum is an octagonal, 15'-wide x 12"-thick concrete platform raised about 20" above the ground on eight concrete corner piers. It was cast in place atop concrete foundations and has a concrete staircase leading onto it from the ground along the north side. The top of the platform is surrounded by a iron fence-like railing supported by eight iron-pipe posts which terminate in iron cannon balls.

The railing posts are the remnants of tall pipe columns that once supported the lightweight steel framework of an eight-sided pyramidal roof. The roof was covered in sheet-metal standing-seam roofing, and there was a spike finial or lightning rod at the apex. A metal grille of similar construction to the platform railing formed a decorative screen below the eaves. The roof and grillwork were removed in 1957.

Site context: The rostrum sits toward the south end of the 7-acre rectangular cemetery along the line of the grounds' north-south axis. It sits within a rectangle of land defined by the looping path of the cemetery's paved drive. Today, there is no open lawn around the rostrum for audiences at ceremonial occasions, the former lawn having been used for graves. The rostrum stairs face north, and the cemetery's committal service shelter sits 30' to the east.

History: The national cemetery at Raleigh was established in 1865 to provide burial sites for Union soldiers killed during Gen. William T. Sherman's Atlanta campaign during the Civil War and to allow Union burials to be consolidated from other places in the region. The cemetery was created and maintained by the U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department.

The Quartermaster's Department began erecting rostrums in selected national cemeteries in 1879 in order to provide permanent speaker's stands for use during annual Decoration Day observances. About 1881, two Union veterans living in Raleigh, A. W. Shaffer and one Mr. Brewster, used their own money to provide Raleigh National Cemetery with a wood rostrum. It was located about 400' southeast of the cemetery superintendent's lodge, and an inspector for the army described it as "an octagonal wooden structure, 12 ft. dia., with eight posts, rail (but not lattice) & seats around. Curved & pointed boxed roof tinned, surmounted by a finial, weather cock & the badge of the 6th Corps in tin, gilded. Ceiling is covered with slats, nailed in octagonal form. The whole is neatly painted & in good order."¹

"It is such as we could afford," Shaffer wrote to Lt. Col. R. N. Batchelder, the officer in charge of national cemeteries, "none of us having any personal friends buried there, but it is nothing compared with those which you are erecting in other Cemeteries. I write to express the hope that you will not deprive us of a good [rostrum] because of our voluntary action in erecting a cheap one."² Batchelder replied that "the department contemplates the erection of new structures of this character at all the national cemeteries not already supplied, and it is hoped we may be able to provide one for this cemetery next year."³ A new rostrum was not, however, provided by the government the next year, and Shaffer and Brewster's wood rostrum was still standing in 1892, when the army included it on a plat of the cemetery. It was torn down at an unknown date after that.

The existing rostrum at Raleigh is one of a group of nearly identical concrete rostrums built at six national cemeteries in 1931. It was completed in August of that year on the site of the old wood rostrum, at a cost of \$987.⁴

The roof of the rostrum was removed and the columns supporting it cut down in December 1957. This is also likely when the cannonball caps were placed on the railing posts.

Raleigh 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:

¹ W. H. Owen, inspection report for Raleigh N/C, Nov. 26, 1886, dockets for Raleigh, RG 92, National Archives.

² A. W. Shaffer to R. N. Batchelder, Dec. 11, 1886, dockets for Raleigh, RG 92, National Archives.

³ Batchelder to Shaffer, Dec. 14, 1886, dockets for Raleigh, RG 92, National Archives.

⁴ The other 1931 rostrums were built at Alexandria, La.; Chalmette, La.; Greeneville, Tenn. (Andrew Johnson N/C); Natchez, Miss.; and Port Hudson, La. One was planned for Salisbury, N.C., but not built.

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.

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 "Raleigh 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.