

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### Addendum to RICHMOND NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. VA-22-A

**Location:** 1701 Williamsburg Road, Richmond (independent city), Virginia

The Richmond National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 37.514356, longitude -77.392395 (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:** 1888

**Builder / Contractor:** Champion Iron Fence Company, Kenton, Ohio

**Description:** The rostrum is an octagonal, red-brick, open-air platform about 4' high x 16' across surmounted by a wrought-iron railing carried on eight cast-iron posts. The platform is articulated by shallow pilasters that wrap each corner, plus inset panels on the flat wall surfaces between the pilasters, and a simple cornice, all created in brick. The rostrum has a concrete floor surrounded by stone coping.

Eight cast-iron steps lead from the ground to the rostrum floor. The steps ornate feature lattice-pattern pierced risers and S-scroll pierced stringers. The cast-iron newel posts and wrought-iron hand rails are original, as are the matching railings and octagonal corner posts that line the perimeter of the platform. The corner posts are the surviving lower portions of tall cast-iron posts that once supported a tent-form roof, which was decorated by an iron open fretwork decorative frieze and scrollwork spandrels.

**Site context:** The original rectangle of Richmond National Cemetery was, by the end of the nineteenth century, divided into four equal quarters by two intersecting drives that met at a flagstaff mound in the center of the cemetery. Grass walks divided each quarter into six roughly equal sections, and a subsidiary gravel drive lined the entire cemetery inside the boundary wall. The rostrum was sited at the intersection of two grass walks in the southeastern quarter of the cemetery, about 150' from the flagstaff, in what is now Section 22A. Three summer houses stood in corresponding positions in the other quarters, forming with the rostrum the corners of a square around the flagstaff. The summer houses and most of the drives and walks no longer survive. Today, only the axial drive leading from the main entrance on the north side of the cemetery and the drives outlining the southeastern quarter containing the rostrum remain.

**History:** Richmond National Cemetery was established in September 1866, one of six cemeteries created during and just after the Civil War for the reinterment of Union dead from private cemeteries, battlefields, military hospitals, and prisons in the vicinity of Richmond, the Confederate capital. The cemetery was created and maintained by the U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department. The department contracted the Champion Iron Fence Company of Kenton, Ohio, in 1888 to build a rostrum in the cemetery. Intended to serve as a speaker's stand during Decoration Day ceremonies, the rostrum was nearly identical to four other rostrums Champion built for the department that year in the national cemeteries at Fredericksburg, Virginia; Hampton, Virginia; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Springfield, Missouri.

The rostrum's original roof was designed to be a framework only. It remained open to the sky until covered with galvanized-iron or tin sheet roofing at an unknown date. The roof ironwork was removed and the corner posts cut down to their current height in June 1952.

Richmond 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 1995 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.

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.* Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1888.

Sammartino, Therese T. National Register of Historic Places nomination for "Richmond National Cemetery." Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1995.

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.