

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

ZACHARY TAYLOR NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. KY-6-B

Location: 4701 Brownsboro Road, Louisville, Jefferson County, Kentucky

The Zachary Taylor National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 38.278148, longitude -85.642453 (North American Datum of 1983). The coordinate represents the structure's northwest corner.

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

Construction date: 1934

Builder / Contractor: unknown

Description: The rostrum at Zachary Taylor National Cemetery is an open-air rectangular platform 36' wide x 20' deep x 5' high surmounted by ten square columns supporting an open-gable roof. The foundations, walls, and floor of the platform are concrete, with the exposed vertical surfaces finished with a smooth concrete render. Two staircases, with pre-cast concrete steps set on concrete spandrel walls, lead onto the platform at each end of the rostrum.

The columns are concrete faced with uncoursed sandstone. They have exposed concrete bases and cast-stone ovolo-molded capstones. A 2"-diameter iron-pipe railing runs between the columns around the perimeter of the rostrum and down the sides of the stairs. The roof slates are laid on tongue-and-groove sheathing supported by rafters which are in turn bolted to the ridge beam and pole plates. Four tie beams span the rostrum from front to back supporting thin king posts. The rafters and longitudinal members have decoratively sawn tails. There are copper gutters and downspouts on both the front and rear of the rostrum.

A centered stairwell at the rear of the rostrum leads down to an 18' x 34' basement within the platform. Described in one early maintenance ledger as a receiving vault, the space in this basement employed for storage by 1942.

Two bronze memorial plaques, installed on two of the columns in 1997, memorialize soldiers of the 2nd Battalion of the 291st Infantry, 75th Infantry Division, who perished in the Ardennes in World War II.

Site context: Zachary Taylor National Cemetery is located on a nearly rectangular tract. A paved drive traces a straight path through the ground from the entrance gates to the monument to President Taylor, the President and Mrs. Taylor's mausoleum, and the Taylor family plot. This drive divides the grounds into two unequal parts, a larger portion containing the majority of the grave sites, and a narrow strip containing the administration and service buildings and the rostrum. The rostrum is sited about 30' west of the eastern enclosure wall, about midway between the entrance gates and the Taylor tomb.

History: Zachary Taylor, twelfth president of the United States, died in 1850 and was interred in an Egyptian Revival tomb in the family cemetery at his estate outside Louisville, Kentucky. Seventy-five years later, efforts to have the federal government take ownership of and maintain the family plot led Congress to authorize a national cemetery at the site. Although title to the family plot was never successfully transferred, the government built a new neoclassical mausoleum for the remains of Taylor and his wife in 1928 and established a national cemetery adjoining the family plot on land donated by the state of Kentucky.

The rostrum, a permanent speaker's platform for Memorial Day and other ceremonial observances, was built in the cemetery in 1934 at a cost of \$5,109.11. It was designed in the Construction Division of the Office of the Quartermaster General, but the contractor who constructed it has not been identified.

In 1939, Construction Division staff developed plans to remove the roof, face the walls of the platform with cut stone, and add a speaker's lectern to the rostrum, but these changes were not carried out.

Zachary Taylor 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 added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

Sources:

Holt, Dean W. *American Military Cemeteries*. 2nd ed. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2010.

Office of the Quartermaster General. Construction Division. Zachary Taylor National Cemetery, St. Matthews, Kentucky, Alterations to Rostrum, May 14, 1939. Drawing no. 6700-125. National Cemetery Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.

Kinsman, Mary Jean. National Register of Historic Places nomination for "Zachary Taylor National Cemetery." Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1983.

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.

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.