

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

ALEXANDRIA NATIONAL CEMETERY, LODGE

HALS No. VA-2-B

Location: 1450 Wilkes Street, Alexandria, Virginia.

The coordinates for the Alexandria National Cemetery, Lodge are 77.057885 W and 38.801704 N, and they were obtained in August 2012 with, it is assumed, NAD 1983. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

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

Prior to 1988, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs was known as the Veterans Administration.

The Veterans Administration took over management of Alexandria National Cemetery from the U.S. Army in 1973 (Public Law 93-43).

Date: 1871; 1878.

Builder/Contractor: Sinclair & Kimbrough; C.R. Grimes & J. Harrison.

Description: The Second Empire style lodge at Alexandria National Cemetery was built in 1878 reusing all but 20 feet of the south wall of the 1871 stone lodge. A fire in August 1878 destroyed portions of the original 1871 building. The 1871 lodge (and its rebuilding in 1878) followed the design for superintendent's lodges in a L-plan, one story initially and then completed as a one and one-half story building over a cellar and capped by a shallow hip roof over the slate tiled mansard of the upper floor. There were three principal rooms on each floor, plus the porch located in the space of the L-shaped floor plan. At Alexandria, the principal elevation of the stone L-plan lodge faces north, and the entry porch is located in the northeast corner of the building. The domestic space of the six-room lodge was expanded in 1887 with the construction of the elongated shed-like tool house. The tool house accommodated utilitarian storage, a privy, and a kitchen. It was linked to the lodge proper by a covered passage, later hyphen, from the rear (south) elevation. The office remained in place on the first floor, but the exodus of kitchen or dining room gave room for a hall in addition to a living room. In 1927 the covered passage became a formal addition to the lodge, filled in with brick masonry and fitted for a dining room. In the 1950s, this space was remodeled for a kitchen.

Examples of the augmentation of the standard plan include the extra dormer, seen on the west elevation of the Alexandria lodge, although care was taken not to diminish the architectural symmetry. Original windows have the large quoins and stone sills defining the openings; the sash was made of wood, double hung, and glazed with two-over-two lights. The lintels are square, not rounded, and this appears to have been a cost-saving measure as the design was implemented in the cemetery system in the 1870s. The rounded doorways and segmental arches

over the windows of the tool house reflect a return to an earlier option and an embrace of a classical revival style.

Inside the lodge, the walls and ceilings are plastered and painted. The floors are wood. The floorboards were tongue and groove and blind nailed originally, although as bathrooms were added to the second floor and kitchens appended, the flooring typically became iterations of vinyl or linoleum tiles. Doors are wood and paneled.

Site Context: The cemetery grounds are enclosed a low wall made of Seneca sandstone, and the main entrance is on the east side of the property. The gates open to Wilkes Street, along the roadway continues into the cemetery along the north (front) elevation of the lodge and terminates at the flagstaff. Internal drives extend north and south from the flagstaff to facilitate traffic to the rostrum. The lodge is located south of the entrance drive (Wilkes Street extension) and immediately southwest of the iron entrance gates.

History: Please see the contextual report for an analysis of the architectural development of the lodge as a building type for the national cemeteries and its place within this prescribed landscape (HALS No. DC-46).

In 1862 Congress authorized the appropriation of land for use as national cemeteries so that the Union soldiers who perished in service to their country could be buried with honor. These became the first cemeteries in the national cemetery system; by the end of the decade almost 300,000 men were buried in seventy-three national cemeteries. By that time the Office of the Quartermaster General, and the Quartermaster Montgomery C. Meigs in particular, had developed an architectural program for the cemetery. The program created for the national cemeteries included an enclosing wall demarcating the grounds and ornamental iron gates cast to instill reverence to those who entered and calm the wrought emotions of a nation in mourning for its lost sons. Specific plantings, such as the Osage-orange hedge and various trees, were selected to give a pleasing appearance and, likely, to screen outbuildings - the business of cemetery maintenance - from public view. Less a commemorative architectural statement, the superintendent's lodge combined practicality with a respectful presence.

Lodge plans first evolved from expedient wood-frame "cottages" to masonry buildings one-story in height and with a three-room floor plan. Construction of the temporary wood-frame lodges took place in the years 1867 to 1869, and overlapped with the construction of the first permanent masonry lodges built to a standard, single-story design from 1868 to 1871. Officers in charge of the cemeteries soon found the floor plans of the temporary wood lodges and the first permanent masonry lodges inconvenient and, increasingly, unattractive.

Moreover, representatives from the Quartermaster General's Office noted these three-room models were often too small for a superintendent and his family, and so in 1869, plans for a six-room, one and one-half story type were acquired from Edward Clark, Architect of the Capitol Extension. The design was refined over the next two years and in 1871 drawn for the Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs's approval. This standard plan featured a mansard roof and so became associated with the French or Second Empire style. Contemporary buildings,

domestic and civic, exhibited this aesthetic and so the choice of the Quartermaster for a Second Empire style lodge is in keeping with national architectural trends as well as the personal taste of Meigs whose house also was erected in the Second Empire style. On the national stage, Alfred Mullet designed the Old Executive Office building in Washington, DC, a building whose construction in the 1870s coincided with the building of lodges in the Second Empire style in many of the national cemeteries.

The National Cemetery Administration identifies the Second Empire style lodge, referred to in the 1880s as the “usual” type, or even the “full Meigs plan” likely in reference to the Quartermaster’s endorsement of the design, as the first generation of permanent lodges. It reflects a concerted effort to standardize what a national cemetery, including the lodge, should look like. The last cemeteries for which the Quartermaster contracted for this style of lodge were for Mobile, Alabama, and Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1881.

The L-plan was revised in 1885 for the lodge in San Francisco, and then employed for the lodges in Mound City and Loudon Park. The revised plan was further improved for the construction of the lodge at Cypress Hills. The revision to the standard L-plan primarily included a change in roof form from the mansard to a cross-gable and the use of banded brick in the exterior walls. Cypress Hills was a simpler expression of the type, with segmental arches over the windows instead of stone lintels and having no banded exterior brick in the walls. In the 1890s, the plans called for an elongated office wing. This change to the L-plan accommodated an entrance hall in the middle of the building; the elongated L-plan was built in Santa Fe, Fort Smith, and Fort Leavenworth.

By the century’s end, standards of living called for conveniences the L-plan lodges lacked. Advances in plumbing and heating technologies, in particular, made the L-plan outdated as expectations about the appropriate level of domestic sanitation that the government should provide to its employees changed. Even so, the Quartermaster omitted indoor toilets from the lodge floor plans until 1905. Maintenance of the existing lodges, as well as ell additions, addressed some of the inconveniences of the older buildings, and made the lodges more comfortable as living spaces. Between the 1880s and 1940s, improvements to the existing lodges included the installation of indoor plumbing and bathrooms, central heating, closets and cupboards; adding a kitchen ell and converting the original kitchen into a dining room; and maintenance of windows, shutters, and porches.

By 1905, the Quartermaster determined some lodges warranted a complete overall, rather than renovation, and the department began to replace some of the buildings in the national cemeteries. For the new lodges, it created a succession of twenty-two different plans between 1905 and 1960. Nine of these plans were used to build multiple lodges, but thirteen were unique designs, used only once. Compared to the extended popularity of the L-plan, which lasted from 1870 to 1881 in its mansard-roof form and to 1904 in its later variations, the rapid succession of designs in the twentieth century suggests a new awareness among those directing the cemeteries of the need to construct lodges that were aesthetically and technologically up-to-date. Over five decades, the Quartermaster endorsed a progression of plans from four-squares to bungalows to Colonial Revival designs and then to suburban ramblers. This progression paralleled the changes

in form, style, building materials, and construction practices that occurred in the private housing market.

Most of the lodges built in the twentieth century are indistinguishable from typical American middle-class and upper-middle-class suburban dwellings, with the exception of a second entrance for the superintendent's office. In some instances, such as in Hampton, Virginia, and in Annapolis, Maryland, the army made a particular effort to match new lodges to their local surroundings, usually by building period-revival designs in places where those designs would have particular resonance. In a nod to the colonial heritage of the Chesapeake, the Quartermaster built one-and-one-half-story brick lodges in a Colonial Revival style at these cemeteries in 1940. In another example, the desire to match designs to localities prompted the alteration of the L-plan lodge at San Francisco into a Spanish Mission Revival building in 1929 and the similarly extensive reconstruction of the Santa Fe lodge into the Pueblo Revival style in 1942.

In Alexandria National Cemetery, the lodge remains as an important example of the development of the definitive L-plan design for the lodges in the years 1870 to 1872. The stone lodge was planned as a one-story building with a L-plan, but during the course of construction, the Quartermaster's department modified the contract so that the lodge would be completed in the Second Empire style with a mansard roof. The addition of a dormer window on the west elevation illustrates the evolutionary nature of the design at the time of construction. By 1878, when the lodge is rebuilt after the fire, the definitive version of the L-plan had emerged.

Alexandria National Cemetery was established in 1862, and soon thereafter, pressing need for burial ground prompted the Quartermaster General, Montgomery C. Meigs, to look elsewhere in the area for land to use as a cemetery. He settled on Arlington, the former estate of George Washington Parke Custis and childhood home of General Robert E. Lee's wife, Mary. The new property became Arlington National Cemetery. Similar to the conversion of Arlington, the farmland known as Spring Grove that surrounded Alexandria National Cemetery became a burying ground. By 1870 Alexandria National Cemetery consisted of about five acres.

A temporary, one story frame lodge was built in the cemetery in 1867 or 1868. This frame building had two rooms and, after a permanent lodge was built in 1871, it was reused as a summer kitchen in conjunction with that structure.

In September 1870, contractors Sinclair & Kimbrough won the contract to construct a new single-floor stone lodge on a bid of \$1690. In May 1871, they agreed to modify the building, while it was under construction. For an additional \$1050, the contractors added a second story under a mansard roof. When this building was completed, later in 1871, the original frame lodge was moved and attached to it for use as a summer kitchen. In 1873 the inspector commented on the good condition of the lodge. He observed that the ceilings were low and the ventilation in the upper floor was poor. The inspector recommended a scuttle or hatch be cut into the ceiling to alleviate the problem but this request was disapproved. He also noted that the chimney needed capping to prevent rain from washing down into the building; the openings were too large. A small sketch in the margin of the report showed a rounded or arched cap over two flues. It was also recommended that the graves near the lodge be removed. By 1876 the hazards of living in a

cemetery manifested themselves; exhalations from the graves caused dangerous fumes and the superintendent requested permission to move his family to rented quarters in town. He also complained of the dampness of the lodge, suggesting that the chimney may not have been capped. Likely these design flaws were not amended at the time of complaint, but modified when the lodge was rebuilt in 1878.

In August 1878 a fire consumed the frame kitchen attached to the lodge and damaged the interior of the main living quarters. The fire destroyed the woodwork and most of the superintendent's belongings. There had been no sign of a cinerary, such as ash, or even a fire in the fireplace the evening of the blaze. Due to uncertainty as to the cause of the nighttime blaze, the closest neighbor, Mr. Carter, was interviewed and he had no recollection of seeing fire or smoke before going to bed. The superintendent's wife, who was alerted by the smoke, ran toward the Carters' house for help and when interviewed she said saw a Negro man in the road. Authorities questioned the man, who was reportedly from Caroline County, but released him. No cause or responsible party was identified. The inspection of the ruined lodge revealed that the combustible material was primarily above the walls and burned up before falling in. This damaged the woodwork but left the masonry walls intact. Rebuilding 20 feet of the south wall, which was adjacent to the wood kitchen where the blaze began, plus six window sills, two door sills, and three lintels represented the bulk of the repairs detailed in the report. Although not specified, due to the claims of damage to the superintendent's personal items, the interior was likely reconstructed.

After the winning bid for the rebuilding of the lodge was withdrawn, new contractors Charles Grimes and Joshua Harrison completed the building. After a short delay due to weather, they turned it over to the Quartermaster for inspection in December 1878. The brick tool house was built a decade later. A smaller tool house made of wood was also on grounds.

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Historian: Virginia B. Price, 2012.

Project Information: The documentation of the 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 C. Lavoie, Chief of HABS. Historical research was undertaken by HABS Historians Virginia B. Price and Michael R. Harrison. NCA Historians Jennifer Perunko, Alec Bennett, and Hillori Schenker provided research material, edited and reviewed written reports. Field work for selected sites was carried out and measured drawings produced by HABS Architects Paul Davidson, Ryan Pierce, and Mark Schara.