

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

FORT GIBSON NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. OK-3-B

Location: 1423 Cemetery Road, Fort Gibson, Muskogee County, Oklahoma

The Fort Gibson National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 35.805259, longitude -95.230778 (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: 1939

Builder / Contractor: unknown

Description: The rostrum is an octagonal platform about 15' wide x 4' high. It is built of rock-faced local sandstone blocks of varying lengths with 1" margins laid in regular courses. A 6"-thick concrete pad sits atop and overhangs the platform. Eight five-sided cast-concrete posts stand at the corners of this pad. These posts support cast-concrete handrails, two rails running between each post. A flight of seven concrete steps leads onto the rostrum floor on the north side. It is flanked by sandstone cheek walls coped with cast-concrete blocks.

Site context: The cemetery was originally a 6.9-acre rectangle laid out around a central flagpole mound. Numerous additions have enlarged the grounds to over 48 acres and given it an irregular L shape. The rostrum, used as a speaker's stand on ceremonial occasions, is sited in the oldest part of the cemetery, in what is now Section 7, 170' southwest of the entrance gates. Its stairs face generally north, toward the main road that passes the cemetery.

History: The national cemetery at Fort Gibson, Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), was established in 1868 on land previously used as a post cemetery. There was no rostrum in the cemetery until the present one was completed in April 1939. The records of the Office the Quartermaster General, the U.S. Army department responsibility for the national cemeteries, state that the rostrum cost \$6,000 – an incredibly high figure at the time for such a simple structure. By comparison, the cemetery's new two-floor frame-and-brick superintendent's lodge was built in 1934 for between \$11,000 and \$13,000, and a comparable sandstone rostrum erected at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in Texas in 1934 cost the government \$827. The Fort Gibson rostrum's great expense may be explained by high stone cutting and transportation costs, or it may be a misprint in the available sources.

The 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 1999 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.

Sammartino, Therese T. National Register of Historic Places nomination for "Fort Gibson National Cemetery." Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1999.

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.