

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

LITTLE ROCK NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. AR-2-C

Location: 2523 Confederate Boulevard, Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas

The Little Rock National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 34.724968, longitude -92.259017 (North American Datum of 1983). The coordinate represents the structure's southern corner.

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

Construction date: 1907

Builder / Contractor: unknown

Description: The rostrum comprises a square podium from which rise four square corner piers supporting a pyramidal roof. The podium, 14'-6" square by about 4' high, sits on a concrete foundation and is built of brick stuccoed with concrete. The 18" square corner piers are made of brown brick and rest on square concrete bases. Steel beams clad in matching brown brick span the corner piers to create lintels supporting the roof. A simply molded overhanging cornice divides the lintels from the roof. The roof was originally covered in red tile, but this has been replaced with asphalt shingles. Two copper downspouts extend from the cornice to the ground along the piers at either side of the front of the rostrum.

The concrete floor of the podium is surrounded by a simple railing of cast-concrete blocks resting on short, square, brown-brick balusters. Concrete steps framed by low, wide cheek walls lead from the ground to the floor at the rear of the rostrum. Two marble dedication plaques are set into the front of the podium. The upper plaque displays the rostrum's dedication date and the final stanza of Southern poet Henry Timrod's "Ode sung on the occasion of decorating of the graves of the Confederate dead at Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, S.C., 1867 [1866]." It reads,

1907

STOOP ANGELS HITHER FROM THE SKIES
THERE IS NO HOLIER SPOT OF GROUND
THAN WHERE DEFEATED VALOR LIES
BY MOURNING BEAUTY CROWNED

The lower plaque reads:

ERECTED BY MEMORIAL CHAPTER
UNITED DAUGHTERS
OF THE
CONFEDERACY

Site context: The rostrum is located near the southern boundary wall that separates the Confederate section of the cemetery from East 28th Street. The rostrum is not parallel to the wall; it is turned forty-five degrees so that its front faces northwest, providing a view across the rows of Confederate graves.

History: The federal government purchased land for a military burial ground at Little Rock from the Little Rock City Cemetery in 1866, and the plot was established as a national cemetery in 1868. It was set up and maintained by the U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department. In 1886, the department awarded a contract to the Champion Iron Fence Company of Kenton, Ohio, to build a rostrum in the cemetery for use as a speaker's stand at annual Decoration Day ceremonies. The rostrum was constructed on the western edge of what is now Section 5 to a standard Quartermaster's design. It comprised an octagonal brick platform about 5' high with a concrete floor supporting a cast-iron superstructure of railings, eight columns, scrollwork frieze, and open ironwork roof. A set of iron stairs provided access onto the platform. The rostrum was nearly identical to five others erected by Champion in 1886 under the same contract at Loudon Park, Maryland; Cypress Hills, New York; Wilmington, North Carolina; and Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee.

The Little Rock rostrum suffered from faulty construction, and the earth fill under its concrete floor was found to be settling in summer 1887. By fall, cracks had developed in the brick base, and the floor had sunk six inches. These problems were repaired by Champion at the company's expense by May 1888. The rostrum was dismantled sometime after 1941.

The national cemetery was established adjacent to a Confederate burial ground used from 1861 to 1863 when the Confederate army occupied Little Rock. In early 1884, this eleven-acre plot received the remains of 640 Confederate soldiers originally interred in nearby Mount Holly Cemetery, and in June the city of Little Rock granted the Ladies' Memorial Association (LMA) responsibility for the land and the burials there. In the years that followed, the association was instrumental in having Confederate remains exhumed from scattered cemeteries around Little Rock and reinterred here. The LMA also allowed the burial of Confederate veterans and helped pay for the interment of indigent veterans who died at the Soldiers' Home in Little Rock. The LMA eventually became Memorial Chapter No. 48 of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and maintained the Confederate cemetery until 1913.

The rostrum that survives in Little Rock National Cemetery today was built by Memorial Chapter No. 48 in 1907 to serve Memorial Day ceremonies in the Confederate cemetery. No

information has been found to indicate the rostrum's designer, builder, or cost. The secretary of war took ownership of the Confederate cemetery in 1913 and designated it the Confederate section of the national cemetery. A restriction that only Confederate veterans could be buried in this section was lifted in 1938. Under army care, the rostrum received new concrete steps in March 1925 and a new roof and ceiling in September 1948. More recent roof replacement is evident.

Little Rock 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 1996 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 "Little Rock National Cemetery." Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996.

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.