

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### MOBILE NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. AL-1-B

**Location:** 1202 Virginia Street, Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama

The Mobile National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 30.673816, longitude -88.063951 (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:** 1892

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

**Description:** The Mobile rostrum is an octagonal open-air platform about 16' wide x about 3.5' high surmounted by a wrought-iron railing carried on eight cast-iron corner posts. The side walls, built of brick covered in concrete stucco, are articulated by eight shallow pilasters that wrap each corner plus inset panels on the flat wall surfaces between the pilasters. The floor is concrete and overhangs the perimeter walls slightly.

A flight of six cast-iron steps leads from the ground onto the rostrum floor. A seventh step is now buried under the topsoil below the cast-iron newel posts. The ornate steps feature lattice-pattern pierced risers and S-scroll pierced stringers. The wrought-iron railings on the stairs match the railings that connect the corner posts around the edge of the platform.

The corner posts are the remnants of tall cast-iron columns that once supported a cast-iron tent-form roof that was decorated by an iron open-fretwork decorative frieze and scrollwork spandrels. The roof was sheathed in tin or galvanized-iron roofing.

**Site context:** The rostrum is located in the very center of the rectangular original portion of the cemetery. The site was originally occupied by the flagstaff at the intersection of two axial drives that divided the cemetery into quarters. Today, only the drive leading to the rostrum from the cemetery entrance survives. The steps on the rostrum are oriented to the north.

**History:** Union soldiers and sailors killed during the Civil War in the 1864 Battle of Mobile in 1864 were buried in a lot in the city's Magnolia Cemetery. This tract, with additions, was established as Mobile National Cemetery in 1865, and the remains of Union servicemen buried elsewhere in Alabama were moved here to consolidate the care of their graves. In

November 1890, Maj. J. W. Scully inspected the cemetery and recommended to U.S. Army Quartermaster General R. N. Batchelder, whose department was responsible for the national cemeteries, that a rostrum be built in the grounds "as it is frequently visited by military and civil organizations on Decoration Day and other stated occasions." Batchelder replied that "the erection of a Rostrum in the Mobile National Cemetery will be considered when sufficient funds can be spared."

The Quartermaster's Department began erecting permanent speaker's stands in selected cemeteries in the 1870s. Beginning in 1886, the department built these rostrums to a standard octagonal open-air pavilion design comprising a masonry platform shaded by an iron roof. The department had contracted for the construction of eighteen rostrums to this design by the end of 1890, and it commissioned six more in 1892, including the one at Mobile and ones at the national cemeteries at Barrancas, Florida; Camp Nelson, Kentucky; Fort McPherson, Nebraska; Grafton, West Virginia; and Shiloh, Tennessee.

The rostrum at Mobile was completed in April 1892 at a cost of \$558.78. Although painted and maintained regularly, its ironwork deteriorated, and the roof was removed in 1957.

Mobile 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 1986 as part of Magnolia Cemetery, the private cemetery adjacent to it.

**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.

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.