

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

NATCHEZ NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. MS-2-B

- Location:** 41 Cemetery Road, Natchez, Adams County, Mississippi
The Natchez National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 31.580996, longitude -91.395708 (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:** 1931
- Builder / Contractor:** unknown

Description: The rostrum is an octagonal, 15'-wide x 12"-thick concrete platform raised about 30" above the ground on eight concrete corner piers. It was cast in place atop concrete foundations and has a concrete staircase leading onto it from the ground along one side. The top of the platform is surrounded by a iron-picket railing supported by eight iron-pipe posts.

The railing posts are the remnants of full-height pipe columns that once supported the lightweight steel framework of an eight-sided pyramidal roof. The roof was covered in galvanized-iron standing-seam roofing, and a spike finial or lightning rod was located at the apex of the roof. A metal grille of similar construction to the railing surrounding the platform once formed a decorative screen below the eaves of the roof.

Site context: The original cemetery property encompassed just over 11 acres on a steep bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. It was laid out in irregular sections of various shapes divided by curving drives. The rostrum is located near the edge of one of the flatter sections (Section D), at the end of a concrete walkway, the land here gently sloping downward from the rostrum toward the cemetery lodge, flagstaff, and entrance.

History: Many Union soldiers and sailors died in the camps and hospitals of Natchez during the Civil War. The U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department established the national cemetery at Natchez in 1866 to consolidate remains disinterred from Louisiana and Mississippi into a single burial ground.

The cemetery's original superintendent's lodge, built ca. 1868, was replaced with a new lodge in 1931. A new service building was built at the same time, as was the rostrum—a simple, open-air, covered platform for use as a speaker's stand on Memorial Day and other occasions. The rostrum also doubled as a rest pavilion for cemetery visitors. It was completed July 8, 1931, at a cost of \$943, and was one of six nearly identical concrete

rostrums built at six national cemeteries that year. (The other rostrums were built at Chalmette, Alexandria, and Port Hudson, Louisiana; Greeneville, Tennessee [Andrew Johnson National Cemetery]; and Raleigh, North Carolina.)

The roof of the rostrum was removed and the columns cut down in late 1957, leaving the structure as it is today.

Natchez 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 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 "Natchez 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.

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