

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

SPRINGFIELD NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. MO-4-C

Location: 1702 East Seminole Street, Springfield, Greene County, Missouri

The Springfield National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 37.172824, longitude -93.263923 (North American Datum of 1983). The coordinate represents the structure's southeast corner.

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

Construction date: 1940

Builder / Contractor: built with WPA funding

Description: The Springfield rostrum is a symmetrical, open-air pavilion in the style of a neoclassical temple. It comprises a raised podium 41' wide x 20' deep x 5'-8" high from which rise four corner piers and a perimeter colonnade of twelve Tuscan Doric columns supporting an entablature and end-gable roof. The podium is constructed of concrete on concrete foundations with its perimeter walls faced in blocks of rock-faced limestone laid in regular courses. The piers, columns, entablature, pediments, and tympana are also limestone. The roof structure is wood with wood sheathing and batten-seam copper cladding. The stuccoed interior ceiling is surrounded by a wood cornice.

Double staircases and perrons at the rostrum's gable ends lead from the ground to the concrete floor of the podium. The floor has a limestone border into which are set the stanchions of a 3'-high iron railing that runs between the perimeter columns and corner piers. Two limestone lecterns about 5' wide x 2'-9" deep x 4' high are located on centered projections on the north and south sides. The front of each is decorated with a carved, blind memorial tablet.

A bronze plaque mounted within the north lectern tablet reads,

IN MEMORY OF / THOSE WHO FOUGHT / AND THOSE WHO DIED /
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA / DURING THE / VIETNAM CONFLICT /
DONATION BY S.M.S.U. / VETERANS CLUB / 1979

The south lectern tablet contains a bronze plaque commemorating the AMVETS carillon placed in the cemetery in 1979. Two other plaques on the south side of the rostrum read,

CONFEDERATES / OF THE 501 ORIGINALLY BURIED HERE, 238 / WERE
KILLED IN THE BATTLE OF WILSON / CREEK AUGUST 10TH, 1861.
MOST OF THE / REMAINING 263 DIED FROM WOUNDS RECEIVED / IN
BATTLE OR FROM SICKNESS. SOME WERE / KILLED IN THE BATTLE
OF SPRINGFIELD, / JANUARY 8TH, 1863.

and

CONFEDERATE / CEMETERY / ESTABLISHED 1870 / BY PRIVATE
CONTRIBUTIONS / SUI RECENDI CAUSA DIMICA VERUNT

The iron fencing and limestone fence posts that flank the rostrum to east and west were installed to provide proper terminations where a section of boundary wall of the former Confederate cemetery was removed when the rostrum was built.

Site context: The oldest portion of Springfield National Cemetery forms a square with a flagstaff circle in the center. It is bisected north to south by a drive that leads to the former Confederate cemetery. The rostrum sits at the end of this drive, just inside the Confederate section, with one lectern facing north toward the flagstaff and entrance gates and the other facing south toward the monument memorializing Missouri Confederate soldiers and Maj. Gen. Sterling Price.

History: The U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department established Springfield National Cemetery on a 5-acre tract in 1867 to provide a suitable ground for the consolidation of Union burials from across Missouri after the Civil War. Additions over time have brought the cemetery to its current 18.1 acres, including 6.3 acres from an adjacent Confederate cemetery that was established in 1870 and conveyed to the federal government in 1911.

Over time, the cemetery attracted large crowds for the annual Decoration Day observances held there. The superintendent estimated that 25,000 people came to the cemetery to decorate the graves and hear the orations on May 30, 1885. Among those in attendance was Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, who wrote afterward to Quartermaster General S. B. Holabird,

My own conclusion is that the annual assemblage of our people at these National Cemeteries is having an excellent effect, and should be encouraged in every way possible. . . . Gradually you can also so order that each cemetery will have a stand for the public exercises, with a reasonable space, free of graves, for the audience. At Springfield this was impossible, and Supt. McKenna did the best possible in putting a small rough platform outside the wall and against it in the new purchase. The speakers had to stand on the

coping of the wall, and the vast audience had to stand for two and more hours round about as they best could.¹

A rostrum was completed in the cemetery in June 1888 to provide just such a permanent “stand for the public exercises.” The superintendent described it in January 1889 as “an octagonal structure, sixteen feet in diameter, with brick base, and iron superstructure, galvanized iron roof with cement floor.” It was one of five nearly identical rostrums built in various national cemeteries that year by the Champion Iron Fence Company of Kenton, Ohio, working under contract to the Quartermaster’s Department.² The rostrum stood on the east side of the original portion of the cemetery, between what are now Sections 27 and 2.

Another rostrum was built in the adjacent Confederate cemetery sometime after its establishment in 1870. This rostrum was hexagonal in plan, with a brick base, concrete steps and floor, wood superstructure, and tin roof. No information has been found about its origins, but it was likely funded by the Confederate Cemetery Association – the owners of the cemetery – or by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, an organization that frequently sponsored Confederate memorials and monuments throughout the South.

The dates when the two original rostrums were removed are not known, but the existing rostrum that now serves both burial grounds was designed in 1939 and built in 1940. The rostrum was funded through the Work Projects Administration (official project 65-3-55-403, FY 1939), although the final cost of the rostrum has not been determined.

Springfield 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.

¹ “Gen. Sherman to the Quartermaster General,” [Washington] *National Tribune*, July 16, 1885, 2.

² The five rostrums were built at Fredericksburg, Virginia; Hampton, Virginia; Richmond, Virginia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Springfield, Missouri. Only the example at Richmond still stands.

Office of the Quartermaster General. Construction Division. Springfield National Cemetery, Springfield, Missouri, Rostrum Details, May 5, 1939. Drawing no. 6855-105. National Cemetery Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.

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 "Springfield 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.