

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

NASHVILLE NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. TN-5-B

Location: 1420 Gallatin Road South, Madison, Davidson County, Tennessee

The Nashville National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 36.241688, longitude -86.729214 (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: unknown

Description: The rostrum at Nashville National Cemetery is a rectangular open-air pavilion. Designed in a monumental style with neoclassical details, it comprises a raised podium about 49' wide x 17' deep x 4' high made of reinforced concrete on concrete foundations and faced in rock-faced local buff-colored stone laid in broken courses. Substantial walls, also faced with broken courses of rock-faced stone, rise from the ends of the podium. Round-headed arches pierce these walls to provide portals for access onto the rostrum floor from graceful curved stairs at either end of the podium. A three-arch arcade spans the rear of the rostrum, while four smooth limestone Tuscan Doric columns set in antis screen the front of the rostrum between the end walls. Matching Tuscan pilasters adjoin the outermost columns in the screen. The end walls, rear arcade, and front columns support a plain limestone entablature and a hipped roof. The roof structure is wood covered in batten-seam copper roofing. The ceiling is wood covered in stucco. The podium has a flagstone floor. Iron railings border the stairs and run along the perimeter of the podium. A projection at the center front of the rostrum supports a limestone lectern, the front of which is decorated by a carved, blind memorial plaque.

Site context: Nashville National Cemetery covers 64.5 acres of undulating ground bisected by a railroad and divided by meandering drives into burial sections of various naturalistic shapes. The rostrum is located on the western boundary of the property and faces east, overlooking a gentle slope and rows of graves. A grassy area in front of the rostrum provides an assembly space on ceremonial occasions.

History: The national cemetery at Nashville was established in 1866 to provide a central burial ground for Union dead buried at other sites in and around Nashville and the

surrounding region after the Civil War. 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 for use as a speaker's stand at annual Decoration Day ceremonies. It was constructed to a standard design created by the department and comprised an octagonal stone platform about 5' high with a concrete floor surmounted by 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 other rostrums – at Loudon Park, Maryland; Cypress Hills, New York; Wilmington, North Carolina; Little Rock, Arkansas; and Memphis, Tennessee – built by Champion that year under the same contract. The rostrum, which stood in what is now Section MM in the southeastern portion of the cemetery, was dismantled before 1940.

A second rostrum was completed in June 1940. Designed by the Construction Division of the Office of the Quartermaster General, it cost \$11,862. The name of the contractor who built it has not been determined. The rostrum was built along the line of the wall that originally bounded the west side of the cemetery; this wall was removed in the late 20th century to allow construction of a maintenance road.

Nashville 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.

Office of the Quartermaster General. Construction Division. *Nashville National Cemetery, Nashville, Tennessee, Rostrum, Plan, Elevations & Sections, June 9, 1939.* Drawing number 6851-103. 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 "Nashville 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.