

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### DANVILLE NATIONAL CEMETERY, LODGE

HALS No. VA-21-A

Location: 721 Lee Street, Danville, (Independent City), Virginia.

The coordinates for the Danville National Cemetery, Lodge are 79.391253 W and 36.576923 N, and they were obtained in August 2012 with, it is assumed, NAD 1983. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

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

Prior to 1988, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs was known as the Veterans Administration.

The Veterans Administration took over management of Danville National Cemetery from the U.S. Army in 1973 (Public Law 93-43).

Date: 1928.

Builder/Contractor: Unknown.

Description: The Dutch Colonial Revival style lodge is a one and one-half-story building made of hollow tile and frame construction and covered by a gambrel roof. The gambrel provides additional space for the second floor rooms. Dormers with paired windows are in the north and south slope of the roof, and sash windows punctuate the east and west elevations. Half-round, louvered openings ventilate the attic. The first floor also has paired sash windows in the north front and side elevations of the building; the front façade has a integral porch that was screened in 1939. This serves as the front entrance, and is reminiscent of how the porch was used in the L-shaped floor plan of the Second Empire style lodge design. The back entrance is enclosed to form a gable-roofed vestibule no wider than the steps approaching it. The foundations are concrete, and the interior walls are plaster on lath. The floors were all originally wood but linoleum was put into the kitchen in the 1940s and redone in 1968. "Armstrong" linoleum was laid in the office in 1953 and a fluorescent light placed in the office in 1960.

Maintenance ledgers kept by the Veterans Administration show that the floors were refinished several times, occasionally varnished and renewed, from 1928 through the 1960s, when the entries cease. Similarly, the lodge was painted inside and outside on a recurring basis, with increased frequency in the 1950s and into the 1960s. The roof was redone in 1941, Venetian blinds were hung in the windows around 1950 and storm windows and doors were installed in 1960. Basement shelving was added in 1934. The kitchen and bathroom were upgraded in 1950. Outside the cast iron Gettysburg Address plaque was removed from the building in 1952. It was placed closer to the driveway and pathway. The driveway was paved in 1963.

Site Context: Danville National Cemetery encompasses about three acres and is rectangular in shape. The main entrance is off of Lee Street, and a low stone wall marks the perimeter of the cemetery grounds. The principal elevation of the lodge is to the north, looking to Lee Street, and the lodge itself is located near the boundary wall and just west of the pedestrian entrance and walkway. The Dutch Colonial Revival lodge was erected in the same location as the previous lodge, the Second Empire style lodge of 1873-74.

History: Please see the contextual report for an analysis of the architectural development of the lodge as a building type for the national cemeteries and its place within this prescribed landscape (HALS No. DC-46).

In 1862 Congress authorized the appropriation of land for use as national cemeteries so that the Union soldiers who perished in service to their country could be buried with honor. These became the first cemeteries in the national cemetery system; by the end of the decade almost 300,000 men were buried in seventy-three national cemeteries. By that time the Office of the Quartermaster General, and the Quartermaster Montgomery C. Meigs in particular, had developed an architectural program for the cemetery. The program created for the national cemeteries included an enclosing wall demarcating the grounds and ornamental iron gates cast to instill reverence to those who entered and calm the wrought emotions of a nation in mourning for its lost sons. Specific plantings, such as the Osage-orange hedge and various trees, were selected to give a pleasing appearance and, likely, to screen outbuildings - the business of cemetery maintenance - from public view. Less a commemorative architectural statement, the superintendent's lodge combined practicality with a respectful presence.

Lodge plans first evolved from expedient wood-frame "cottages" to masonry buildings one-story in height and with a three-room floor plan. Construction of the temporary wood-frame lodges took place in the years 1867 to 1869, and overlapped with the construction of the first permanent masonry lodges built to a standard, single-story design from 1868 to 1871. Officers in charge of the cemeteries soon found the floor plans of the temporary wood lodges and the first permanent masonry lodges inconvenient and, increasingly, unattractive.

Moreover, representatives from the Quartermaster General's Office noted these three-room models were often too small for a superintendent and his family, and so in 1869, plans for a six-room, one and one-half story type were acquired from Edward Clark, Architect of the Capitol Extension. The design was refined over the next two years and in 1871 drawn for the Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs's approval. This standard plan featured a mansard roof and so became associated with the French or Second Empire style. Contemporary buildings, domestic and civic, exhibited this aesthetic and so the choice of the Quartermaster for a Second Empire style lodge is in keeping with national architectural trends as well as the personal taste of Meigs whose house also was erected in the Second Empire style. On the national stage, Alfred Mullet designed the Old Executive Office building in Washington, DC, a building whose construction in the 1870s coincided with the building of lodges in the Second Empire style in many of the national cemeteries.

The National Cemetery Administration identifies the Second Empire style lodge, referred to in

the 1880s as the “usual” type, or even the “full Meigs plan” likely in reference to the Quartermaster’s endorsement of the design, as the first generation of permanent lodges. It reflects a concerted effort to standardize what a national cemetery, including the lodge, should look like. The last cemeteries for which the Quartermaster contracted for this style of lodge were for Mobile, Alabama, and Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1881.

The L-plan was revised in 1885 for the lodge in San Francisco, and then employed for the lodges in Mound City and Loudon Park. The revised plan was further improved for the construction of the lodge at Cypress Hills. The revision to the standard L-plan primarily included a change in roof form from the mansard to a cross-gable and the use of banded brick in the exterior walls. Cypress Hills was a simpler expression of the type, with segmental arches over the windows instead of stone lintels and having no banded exterior brick in the walls. In the 1890s, the plans called for an elongated office wing. This change to the L-plan accommodated an entrance hall in the middle of the building; the elongated L-plan was built in Santa Fe, Fort Smith, and Fort Leavenworth.

By the century’s end, standards of living called for conveniences the L-plan lodges lacked. Advances in plumbing and heating technologies, in particular, made the L-plan outdated as expectations about the appropriate level of domestic sanitation that the government should provide to its employees changed. Even so, the Quartermaster omitted indoor toilets from the lodge floor plans until 1905. Maintenance of the existing lodges, as well as ell additions, addressed some of the inconveniences of the older buildings, and made the lodges more comfortable as living spaces. Between the 1880s and 1940s, improvements to the existing lodges included the installation of indoor plumbing and bathrooms, central heating, closets and cupboards; adding a kitchen ell and converting the original kitchen into a dining room; and maintenance of windows, shutters, and porches.

By 1905, the Quartermaster determined some lodges warranted a complete overall, rather than renovation, and the department began to replace some of the buildings in the national cemeteries. For the new lodges, it created a succession of twenty-two different plans between 1905 and 1960. Nine of these plans were used to build multiple lodges, but thirteen were unique designs, used only once. Compared to the extended popularity of the L-plan, which lasted from 1870 to 1881 in its mansard-roof form and to 1904 in its later variations, the rapid succession of designs in the twentieth century suggests a new awareness among those directing the cemeteries of the need to construct lodges that were aesthetically and technologically up-to-date. Over five decades, the Quartermaster endorsed a progression of plans from four-squares to bungalows to Colonial Revival designs and then to suburban ramblers. This progression paralleled the changes in form, style, building materials, and construction practices that occurred in the private housing market.

Most of the lodges built in the twentieth century are indistinguishable from typical American middle-class and upper-middle-class suburban dwellings, with the exception of a second entrance for the superintendent’s office. In some instances, such as in Hampton, Virginia, and in Annapolis, Maryland, the army made a particular effort to match new lodges to their local surroundings, usually by building period-revival designs in places where those designs would

have particular resonance. In a nod to the colonial heritage of the Chesapeake, the Quartermaster built one-and-one-half-story brick lodges in a Colonial Revival style at these cemeteries in 1940. In another example, the desire to match designs to localities prompted the alteration of the L-plan lodge at San Francisco into a Spanish Mission Revival building in 1929 and the similarly extensive reconstruction of the Santa Fe lodge into the Pueblo Revival style in 1942.

Of the twentieth-century lodge forms, the design in the Dutch Colonial Revival oeuvre was selected most often. Fourteen lodges were built using this plan between 1921 and 1934. The design called for a one and one-half story building with masonry construction at the first floor and wood-frame gambrel roofs enclosing the upper floor. The building footprint was rectangular and included an enclosed porch and office in the front, a living room and stair in the middle, and a dining room and kitchen at the rear. The second floor contained three bedrooms and a bathroom opening off of a central hall. Three versions of the design were used. The first in four lodges erected between 1921 and 1928, with hollow core tile walls covered in stucco, shingled roofs and gable ends, and dormers two windows in width on the front and rear. The second version expanded the dormer from two windows to four, adding more light the upper floor. This plan was used twice, for lodges in Nashville and Chattanooga, in 1931. WPA funds paid for the construction of lodges in 1934, including eight built to a third rendition of the Dutch Colonial Revival design. In 1934, the building materials included a brick construction on the first floor and faux half-timbered or brick gables.

The lodge in Danville National Cemetery is significant as an example of the first expression of the Dutch Colonial Revival style plan tried by the Office of the Quartermaster General. The building was constructed in 1928 and it cost \$9503 to do so. Other lodges built according to this plan in 1928 include those at City Point and Vicksburg.

Danville National Cemetery was established in 1866 signaling the city's significance as a railroad hub and as a holding place for prisoners of war. Seven tobacco warehouses in Danville became the prisoner-of-war camp. Conditions were awful in all of the prison camps, and in Danville, many died from pneumonia, diarrhea, and scurvy in 1864 to 1865. All but four burials are of those who died in the prison. The first superintendent of the cemetery was appointed in 1867, and a small, wood lodge was built for his use. This temporary wood lodge was one story and contained three rooms. By May 1873 this wood-frame building was uninhabitable. Reports to the Quartermaster General strongly urged that measures be taken for a new lodge as the wood one would not be fit to live in through another winter. The Quartermaster's office concurred.

Plans for formalizing the cemetery landscape 1873 included a new L-plan lodge and a cistern, as well as the enclosing wall. The new lodge was to be placed near the main entrance, on vacant land, rather than on the site of the old, wood lodge. The old, wood lodge was built too close to the graves so its location had become inappropriate. John Comfort won the contract for the Danville lodge with a bid of \$2800, and the contract for the 10' in diameter and 10' deep cistern he proposed to build for \$250. The new lodge was brick and built in the Second Empire style. By June 1874 the lodge was nearing completion and the roof was under construction. However, Comfort only laid the foundation for the building when the Quartermaster assumed the

responsibility for erecting the remainder of the lodge. It is unclear from the record what caused the dispute and Comfort's dismissal or default.

In August 1876 the lodge was described as a brick building, one and one-half stories over a basement. It had mansard roof and three rooms per floor. The cellar was damp. By 1909, when the cemetery was surveyed, the brick and stone lodge needed painting. The old, wood lodge had been moved and converted into a tool house. The Second Empire style lodge was demolished in 1928 when the present, Dutch Colonial Revival lodge was built in its stead.

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Historian: Virginia B. Price, 2012.

Project Information: The documentation of the 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 C. Lavoie, Chief of HABS. Historical research was undertaken by HABS Historians Virginia B. Price and Michael R. Harrison. NCA Historians Jennifer Perunko, Alec Bennett, and Hillori Schenker provided research material, edited and reviewed written reports. Field work for selected sites was carried out and measured drawings produced by HABS Architects Paul Davidson, Ryan Pierce, and Mark Schara.