

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
FORT HARRISON NATIONAL CEMETERY, LODGE

HALS No. VA-24-A

Location: 8620 Varina Road, Richmond, (Independent City), Virginia.

The coordinates for the Fort Harrison National Cemetery, Lodge are 77.366667 W and 37.428333 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 Fort Harrison National Cemetery from the U.S. Army in 1973 (Public Law 93-43).

Date: 1871; second floor addition, 1873-74.

Builder/Contractor: Kyran A. Murphy; John C. Comfort.

Description: As completed in 1874, the Second Empire style lodge at Fort Harrison National Cemetery is a one and one-half story, stone building. The principal elevation faces east to the low, brick boundary wall and road beyond. The cast iron, Gettysburg Address plaque is affixed to the east (front) elevation and gives further emphasis to the primacy of this façade. The lodge has a mansard roof that is covered in slate and punctuated by eight dormer windows. The dormer windows were remodeled into casements in 1934. The mansard is surmounted by a shallow hip roof covered in tin. There were two brick chimneys originally. The floor plan features three rooms on each floor, over a partial or full basement. A porch at the southeast corner filled the space of the L in plan, and a small rear porch sheltered that entrance to the west elevation. Early windows were hung sash with wood frames and glazing arranged with lights placed six-over-six.

Photographs in the Veterans Administration files show shutters on the sash windows as well as screening on the front porch. There was also a kitchen lean-to added by 1925. Electric lights came in 1927 and a well pump in 1934. A concrete floor was poured in the basement in 1929, and oak flooring installed in the office in 1933. The oak floor was exchanged for linoleum flooring in 1936. The mid-1930s brought a number of changes to the lodge. Structural work included the rebuilding of the two chimneys, inserting a joist in the bedroom over the office, and replacing the rafters of the main deck of roof. Shifts to the floor plan included door of the kitchen, making three closets upstairs, and constructing a coal bin. Aesthetic changes included adding linoleum flooring in the kitchen, refinishing the wood floors, plastering the walls and ceilings, and renewing the ceiling of the porch.

In 1948 repairs to the kitchen were made and the chimney was cut out; the kitchen chimney was no longer needed because of the installation of modern ventilating fans and appliances. A steel beam was inserted in the dining room, suggesting some stabilization work was needed. The following year seventeen aluminum windows were installed; likely these were storm windows. Gutter work was done, otherwise the late 1950s were characterized by routine maintenance and upgrades and a steady flow of painting projects. The kitchen and bathroom were re-tiled in the early 1960s and minor repairs to locks, doors, and windows were done during those years as well.

Photographs in the maintenance files of the Veterans Administration reveal two additions to the rear of the lodge. Both appear to be constructed of wood frame on concrete.

Site Context: The superintendent's lodge is placed in proximity to the entrance gates on the east side of the cemetery. The building faces Varina Road and a sidewalk connects the front (east) façade of the lodge to the entrance drive. West of the lodge, in the center of the rectangular lot, is the flagstaff. The cemetery is enclosed by a low brick wall.

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.

Within the architectural history of the national cemeteries, the lodge at Fort Harrison National Cemetery is a significant as an extant example of the L-plan design readily associated with the Office of the Quartermaster. This lodge is particularly important because it was first built to plans for a one story, stone building covered by a hipped roof. This early iteration of the L-plan was used in national cemeteries in Virginia in 1871 and 1872, as well as in the Soldiers Home and Battleground cemeteries in Washington, DC. All of the lodges constructed with these plans were altered, changing the hip roof for a mansard roof and so providing a second floor of living space in the building for the superintendent. The change in roof type gave the buildings, like the lodge at Fort Harrison, the same silhouette and floor-plan as the lodges subsequently built according to the definitive L-plan design for one and one-half story masonry buildings that became the standard issue.

Fort Harrison National Cemetery is one of several national cemeteries located near Richmond, Virginia, and it was established in 1866 to protect the burying ground for those who died in the fight for the Confederate Capital city just two years earlier. Fort Harrison and Fort Gilmer belonged to the outer ring of defenses for Richmond, sited on the city's north side, and in September 1864 Union forces attacked. Fort Harrison fell early in the battle and remained in Union control for the remainder of the war. The post became a national cemetery at the war's end, and the remains of those who died in Fort Harrison, Fort Gilmer, and elsewhere in the vicinity were reinterred here. The burials included four Confederates, all prisoners of war.

Soon after the national cemetery was established at Fort Harrison, the Quartermaster's department built a temporary lodge to house the superintendent. It was wood-frame and only one floor. Likely it contained two rooms, plus the exterior kitchen, as the floor plans of other temporary lodges are known to have had. While this lodge sufficed for a number of years, plans for a permanent lodge to replace it emerged in 1871.

In 1871, the Quartermaster's department oversaw the construction of a single-floor, stone lodge containing three rooms on an L-shaped plan at Fort Harrison National Cemetery. This lodge,

with additions, remains on site today. Kryan A. Murphy won the contract for the construction of the lodge at Fort Harrison in a joint proposal that included the lodge at Staunton National Cemetery as well. The site selected was “new ground” meaning it had been built up for burials, so the contractor requested that the foundations of the building go down four feet, rather than the two feet specified, for stability. Forty bodies were moved to accommodate the building site as well. The temporary wood-frame lodge was moved. The former lodge was converted into a tool house and privy.

In late 1873, John C. Comfort received a contract to add a second floor under a mansard roof to the recently completed, one-story lodge. The contracted work also included the installation of shelving in the closets and repairs to the flooring of the stair head. Comfort finished the addition in 1874, after a number of disagreements with the Quartermaster’s department over the quality of work done.

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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.