

**HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY**  
**FORT MCPHERSON NATIONAL CEMETERY, LODGE**

**HALS No. NE-1-A**

Location: 12004 South Spur 56A, Maxwell, Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The coordinates for the Fort McPherson National Cemetery, Lodge are 100.527115 W and 41.025605 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 McPherson National Cemetery from the U.S. Army in 1973 (Public Law 93-43).

Date: 1879.

Builder/Contractor: John B. Hindry.

Description: The Second Empire style lodge is a one and one-half story, brick building with a mansard roof. The principal elevations are south, to the entrance drive, and east, to the public information building and roadway. Historically the front façade faced south to the drive and cemetery beyond; photographs show the open porch at the southeast corner and the cast-iron Gettysburg Address plaque affixed to the south elevation. The corners of the building are visually reinforced with brick quoining, while the window openings have stone lintels and sills. The windows are hung sash and originally made of wood. In photographs taken for the Veterans Administration, the glazing in the dormer windows consists of four lights likely in paired casements with one-over-one lights, however, in contemporary images the dormers appear to be glazed with eight lights. It is unclear if they are casements or sash or fixed. Historic photographs also record the presence of shutters on the windows, shutters that have since been removed. The floors are wood. The maintenance ledgers for the cemetery buildings indicate that linoleum flooring was installed in the kitchen and bathroom of the lodge in 1944 and then subsequently replaced with rubber tile in 1957. New wood floors were laid in the living and dining rooms in 1934 and the floors were refinished in 1957. In the basement, concrete floors were added to two of the rooms, plus a laundry sink and shower bath, in 1938.

The original floor plan was an L-shape, with three rooms on both floors over a basement. A porch filled the L at southeast corner and served as a vestibule for the two rooms, the office and living room, opening onto it. A small porch sheltered the rear (north) entrance into the kitchen. Both porches were enclosed. A new vestibule was created in 1951. A modern kitchen was added to the north (rear) in 1926; the ell was 10' x 12'. This extension coincided with upgrades to the

general plumbing and electrical fixtures, the installation of a bathtub and water closet, and a change to the septic system. The other main change to the interior floor plan occurred in 1934 with an alteration to the stairway and upstairs hall for the second-floor bathroom and the construction of closets. Screens, shades and storm windows were periodically switched out – either cleaned and painted or replaced – and all of the building was routinely painted inside and outside from the 1920s through the 1960s. Hail damage in 1964 prompted the replacement of several of the storm windows and repairs to the roof.

Site Context: The national cemetery has a square-shaped lot and in the 1940s it was enclosed by a wrought-iron fence. The grounds were laid out in quadrants for the burial sections, with the flagstaff at the center of the cemetery lot, initially. The main entrance to the cemetery is from the east boundary on Fort McPherson Road (State Route 56A). The lodge is located north of the entrance drive in the northeast quadrant and in proximity to the entrance gates. The south elevation looks to the entrance drive while the east elevation faces the roadway. Historically, there was a cistern located west of the lodge and the multipurpose tool house was to the north of the building. Today maintenance facilities have replaced the tool house north of the lodge, gravesites are along the building's west side, and the walkways connect the east elevation of the lodge to the public information building. The flagpole was moved west and placed near the committal shelter.

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.

The L-plan lodge in the Second Empire style built for Fort McPherson National Cemetery is a significant survivor of a distinctive building type, and within the architectural history of the superintendent's lodges, an especially well appointed, built example of the definitive plan for masonry lodges issued by the Quartermaster's office in 1871. Although the porch was altered, the integrity of the building form and floor plan remains. There were five lodges completed in 1879 using this version of the L-plan design, four of them in brick and one in stone. Of the 1879 class, Fort Gibson's lodge was constructed in stone, while the lodges in Andersonville, Baton Rouge, Port Hudson, and Fort McPherson were brick. Only two other brick lodges would be constructed with this plan, those in Beaufort and Mobile. The lodge at Fort McPherson, therefore, represents the heyday of this seminal phase in the evolution of the national cemetery landscape.

The U.S. government reserved just over one hundred acres within Fort McPherson Military Reservation for use as a cemetery in 1873. The military installation came as settlers from the east and traders with commercial interests began to travel through the Platte River Valley along the Oregon Trail attracting and alarming the Pawnee and Sioux tribes as they did so. The site for the fort was selected in 1863 and the post remained active until 1880. It was named for General James McPherson in 1866; McPherson was killed during the battle for Atlanta in 1864 and had commanded the Army of the Tennessee.

The military post also offered protection to those helping to build the Union Pacific rail line to the west coast. As railroad travel replaced that by wagon train, the need for many of the frontier military posts decreased and several locations were abandoned. Some of the earliest interments in Fort McPherson National Cemetery were those transferred from former military positions in Nebraska and Colorado, and later included those from several frontier posts in Wyoming, South Dakota, and Idaho. The lodge constructed for the national cemetery in 1879 followed the plan

and standard design for one and one-half story, masonry lodges in the Second Empire style; John B. Hindry won the contract for construction. The cost to build the lodge was \$3770.

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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.