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THE ROSTRUM

Antietam National Cemetery

Historic Structures Report

Part I

Robert L. Lagemann

June 1964

Antietam National Battlefield Site

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

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ON

THE ROSTRUM

Antietam National Cemetery

Prepared by

Robert L. Lagemann

Park Historian

June 1964

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service,
Antietam National Battlefield Site

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART I

ON

THE ROSTRUM

Antietam National Cemetery

APPROVAL SHEET

RECOMMENDED

Harold J. Lessem
Superintendent

Date 6/24/64

Chief, EODC

Date _____

Regional Director, Northeast Region

Date _____

APPROVED

Director

Date _____

4. HISTORICAL DATA

- a. The Rostrum in Antietam National Cemetery has since 1879 been the site for nearly all the memorial services held in the National Cemetery. During the active period of the Grand Army of the Republic, or approximately until World War I, elaborate programs were held here each Decoration Day. In more recent years, this tradition has been maintained by the American Legion, who sponsor appropriate services in the Cemetery each May 30. The focal point for these programs is the Rostrum. Guest speakers, often prominent public officials and high ranking military personnel, address their audience from the Rostrum.

For a short period in the 1880's the area immediately around the large statue in the center of the Cemetery was preferred to the Rostrum.¹ By 1889, however, the location for the principle events was returned to the Rostrum where it has remained to date. (The annual Memorial Day ceremonies held in Antietam National Cemetery in 1964 again used the Rostrum as the speakers' platform.)

In addition to the traditional May 30th programs, other memorial type occasions were held here during the 1880's and 1890's. Although documentary evidence is lacking, local hearsay states that many regimental reunions were held during that period by survivors of

¹Letter, from Lt. Col. Dandy, Deputy Quartermaster General, U.S. Army, to the Superintendent, Antietam National Cemetery, dated May 29, 1889. (National Archives, Quartermaster, Cemeterial material.)

the Battle of Antietam. These programs, too, used the Rostrum as the site from which to address the veterans and guests assembled in the Cemetery.

- b. The structure was erected in the spring of 1879. A contract was made February 8, 1879, between the United States Government and a Hagerstown (Maryland) contractor, Jonathan Late, for construction of a rostrum in Antietam National Cemetery for the sum of \$915.00.²

According to the terms of the contract, work was to have commenced not later than February 15, 1879, and was to have been completed by May 25, 1879.³ Evidence that it was finished on time is provided by a newspaper account, describing the Decoration Day observance held in Antietam National Cemetery that year: "When the procession arrived at the Cemetery the artillery was drawn to the centre of the grounds, and the orator of the occasion and invited guests, took their place on the rostrum while the infantry stacked their arms in front."⁴

²Contract, between Capt. A. F. Rockwell, Asst. QMG, U.S. Army, and Jonathan Late, Hagerstown, Md., for Rostrum at Antietam National Cemetery, Sharpsburg, Md., Feb. 8, 1879. (National Archives, Office of QMG, Cemetery Files, National and Post Cemeteries, General Correspondence, Box 131, Antietam, Md., (1869-1879) to Arlington, Va.)

³op. cit., Article II.

⁴The Hagerstown (Md.) Herald and Torch, Wednesday, June 4, 1879 (page, unknown).

Construction of the rostrum was to proceed according to a standard Army Quartermaster plan.⁵ Apparently this plan, approved November 8, 1878, by the Quartermaster General, was the design to be used in construction of similar rostrums in other national cemeteries of the period. (The rostrum in Gettysburg National Cemetery is one example.) This style came to be known as the "Miegs' Plan," named for the Quartermaster General. A photostatic copy of this plan is attached to this report. The original is filed in the National Archives, Office of the Quartermaster General, Cemeterial materials.

No specifications other than those printed on the plan itself are listed in the contract. The plan specifies dimensions and materials. Measurements taken at the site with a ruled tape on June 15, 1964, correspond very nearly with those on the plan. There is no record of a final inspection, nor of subsequent changes in the structure. This seemingly indicates that the 1878 Quartermaster plan was not deviated from during construction. And with one exception, there appear to have been no alterations of the finished structure.

⁵"Plan for Rostrum for National Cemeteries, Quartermaster General's Office, November, 1878, Scale: 4' to 1'." (National Archives, Office of QMG, Cemetery Files, National and Post Cemeteries, General Correspondence, Box 131, Antietam, Md. (1869-1879) to Arlington, Va.)

Comparison of the 1878 Quartermaster plan dimensions may be made with those recorded June, 1964, listed below:

Height from ground level to top of "floor," or platform
(at SW corner): 54 inches

Height of twelve brick columns rising from floor: 12 feet

Width of square brick columns: 17½ inches

Distance between rows of columns, north-south: 8½ feet

Distance between end and center columns, west end: 8 feet, 7 inches

Distance between end and center columns, east end: 8 feet, 8 inches

Distance between west center and east center columns: 13 feet, 7 inches

(The front of the Rostrum faces slightly east of south.)

Height of iron railing around platform, and at sides of steps
34 inches

Width of stone steps at each end of Rostrum: 70 inches

Number of steps, west end: 7; number of steps, east end: 9

Unpaved "floor" area around base of center columns: 58 inches square

Wooden rafters, east-west, supported by brick columns:

5 x 12 inch timbers, 6 in number

Wooden beams between heavy rafters and lattice boards:

3 x 6 inches, spaced 18 inches apart (average), 22 in number

Upper level of lattice roof: 1 x 4 inch boards, spaced 4 inches
apart

The platform, or floor, covers an area 22 feet by $37\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The timbers of the roof project beyond this area. Ends of roof support timbers are scalloped.

About five months after completion, the timber portions of the Rostrum were oiled. At least four gallons of boiled oil were purchased for this purpose in October, 1879.⁶ The following spring ten gallons of paint were bought to apply to this same woodwork.⁷ And by mid-summer, additional paint was ordered to complete the painting of the rafters and the "caps of pillars of Rostrum."⁸ In the foregoing sources the color of the paint was not specified. But it is assumed the paint was white lead; local memory does not recall any other color for the Rostrum woodwork. (The iron work around the platform and steps is painted black.)

⁶ Letter, to Capt. J. M. Marshall, Actng. Quartermaster, U.S. Army, Baltimore, from Supt. G. A. Haverfield, dated Oct. 11, 1879, Sharpsburg; Out Letter Book, Antietam National Cemetery (1879), pp. 10-11.

⁷ Letter to Capt. J. M. Marshall, Baltimore, from Supt. W. A. Donaldson, May 15, 1880; Out Letter Book, Antietam National Cemetery, page 43.

⁸ Letter, to Lt. J. McGilvray, AAQM, Baltimore, from Supt. Donaldson, July 12, 1880; Out Letter Book, Antietam National Cemetery, page 49.

The outer perimeter of the floor area is bound by smooth cut limestone blocks averaging 21½ inches in width. These are supported by the red brick walls of the rostrum base proper. The brick face of the walls was laid with a panel effect, with six different thicknesses in the depth of the brick courses.

The only obvious change in the structure, referred to above, is in the material covering the floor. Much of it is now covered by concrete, which appears to be of considerably later construction than the other portions of the Rostrum. No records have been discovered which disclose the type of cover, if any, originally used. I suggest that originally the floor surface, or flat platform area within the retaining walls of the brick foundation proper, consisted of tamped earth. The surface area surrounding the bases of the brick columns remains open; the packed earth is not quite flush with the paved floor around it.

Possibly the floor was left unpaved at the time of construction to facilitate growth of the vines that were expected to cover the lattice-roof, or "trellis," to provide shade and decoration. A local newspaper reported shortly after completion of the rostrum: "Grape vines, ivy vines and canadensia have been planted around the rostrum, and ere long this structure will be covered with these vines, not only adding beauty but an agreeable shade on decoration occasions."⁹

⁹The Hagerstown (Md.) Herald and Torch, Wednesday, July 16, 1879, (page, unknown).

Further reference to the rostrum vines may be found in the annual Quartermaster reports on national cemeteries. 1881: "Rostrum: It is not as well covered with vines as could be desired. If however the vines already planted should grow as well as may reasonably be expected the piers, columns, etc., will be well covered."¹⁰ And 1884: "The rostrum is in good condition and the vines cultivated for its adornment are tastefully arranged and present an attractive appearance, ..."¹¹

Since 1960, most of the vines have been removed from the Rostrum. This was done to allow repainting (white) of the lattice-work and roof timbers; and to prevent further deterioration of the brick joints. Access to the woodwork was prevented by the heavy growth of vines. And the vine roots were penetrating the lower brick joints.

Thickly leafed ivy remain on six of the twelve brick columns. Three of the columns have been almost entirely cleared of the vines, and three have vines in an unhealthy condition. Vines and other vegetation grow in the unpaved areas around the column bases. (June, 1964.)

During the 1950's a variety of small evergreen trees were planted around the base of the Rostrum, thus breaking the straight lines of its design and providing a less austere setting for the structure.

¹⁰ Report of Major C. W. Foster, Quartermaster Inspecting Officer, to the Quartermaster General, U.S. Army, Washington, D.C., dated Sept. 22, 1881, page 2 (National Archives).

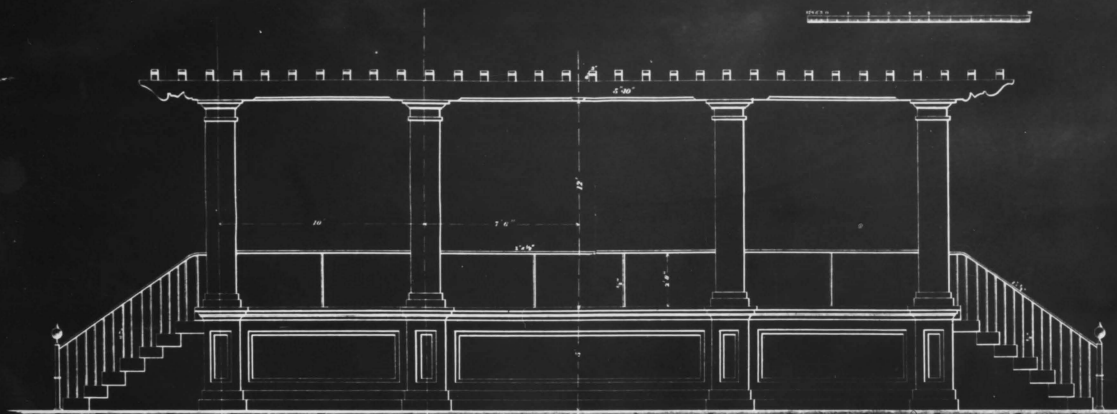
¹¹ Report of Major C. W. Foster, Quartermaster Inspecting Officer, to Lt. Col. Wm. D. Whipple, Asst. A.G., Governor's Island, New York Harbor, dated May 19, 1884; inspection of Antietam National Cemetery, May 16 (National Archives).

Plan for Rostrum

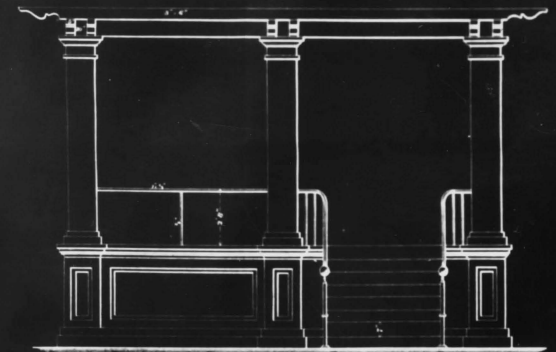
For

NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERIES.

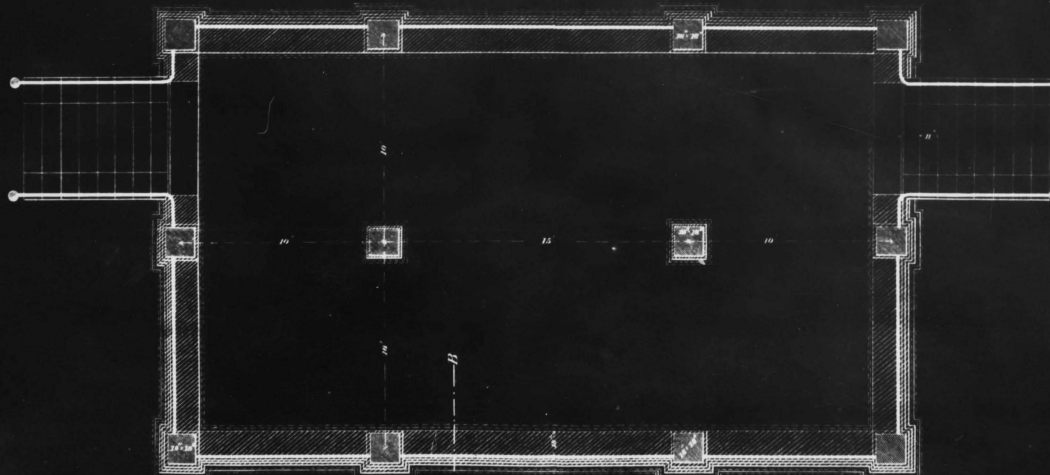
Scale 4 feet to 1 inch.



Front Elevation.

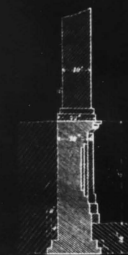


Side Elevation.



Plan.

Note
Row Elevation same as front.
The entire structure excepting the steps, stringers
and girders to be of good hard red brick laid in
lime and sand mortar; steps to be of cut stone.
Roofings of iron.



Cross Section on Line A-B

Morris

Quartermaster-General

Q.M.G. No. 1074

Direct Major-General U.S.A.