

History of the Rostrum at Cave Hill National Cemetery

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On a jaunt through the historic sections, it is inevitable that one will pass the Rostrum in the Cave Hill National Cemetery. Dating back to 1898, this is one of the last Rostrum construction projects in a U.S. National Cemetery.

Described as a “deep open-air podium surmounted by twelve Tuscan-order columns ranged in three rows of four,” it is nestled in the northwest corner of the Cemetery adjacent to a small lake. The history of these structures dates back to 1879 when the Army began to construct similar platforms at other cemeteries for use during Decoration Day.

The original design for the Rostrum was a garden pagoda. The adjacent lake was to be used to memorialize sailors lost at sea as mourners would float wreaths on the pond. Interestingly enough, the addition of this feature to the landscape nearly did not happen.



Decoration Day celebration at Cave Hill Cemetery, c. 1920



Flag-draped Rostrum, c. 1920

.05 acres specifically for its placement, which prompted the necessary funds to be made available.

Construction was first requested in 1882 when the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Association of Louisville contacted Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs. Sixteen years later, the feature was finally added to the grounds. Primary reasons for the length of delay included lack of federal funding and the perception of a lack of space. The process was solidified when Cave Hill Cemetery donated

The beams of the trellis that shaded the rostrum were repaired through funding by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1936. Floor resurfacing took place in 1947. The use of the rostrum largely ceased after WW II and the decrease in number of Civil War, Spanish-American War, and WW I veterans. Its magnificent architecture is a stalwart reminder of those who dedicated their lives to this country.