

NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS -  
BATTLE MOUNTAIN SANITARIUM, GRAND STAIRCASE  
(Hot Springs Veterans Administration Medical Center, Building No.  
63)  
(VA Black Hills Health Care System - Hot Springs Campus, Building  
No. 63)  
500 North Fifth Street  
Hot Springs  
Fall River County  
South Dakota

HABS SD-24-Z  
*HABS SD-24-Z*

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS – BATTLE MOUNTAIN SANITARIUM, GRAND STAIRCASE

(Hot Springs Veterans Administration Medical Center, Building No. 63)  
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Location: 500 North 5th Street, Hot Springs, Fall River County, South Dakota

The coordinates at the top of the Grand Staircase are 43.435387 N, -103.479633 W, and they were obtained through Google Earth in December 2014 with, it is assumed, NAD 1983. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Significance: The Grand Staircase was built in 1915 to facilitate pedestrian access between Battle Mountain Sanitarium and downtown Hot Springs. The elaborate sandstone and concrete staircase with seating areas, light standards, and railings replaced a wood stair from 1903. Battle Mountain Sanitarium opened in 1907 on a bluff overlooking downtown. It was the tenth branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Veterans being treated at the Sanitarium and the staff could more easily navigate the steep grade between the Sanitarium and the local commercial district with this staircase.

Description: The Grand Staircase was built using sandstone and concrete for the steps, retaining walls, benches, and planters. It begins at the top of the hill as a straight run with one intervening landing flanked by benches. The stair then splits into two sections that curve to meet again in a single straight run at the bottom. The curved sections each have three landings, with the largest one at the center including a seating area. The curved sections also outlined a terraced planting area in the center and framed stone retaining walls at the top and bottom of the circle. Additional retaining walls have been added at the terraces. The bottom of the Grand Staircase is flanked by a pair of robust sandstone newel posts. "B.M.S." is carved into the front face of the left newel post cap and "1915" is carved into the same position on the right newel post. Another section of sandstone and concrete retaining wall is located here at street level.

The Grand Staircase also includes cast iron light standards, originally five pairs with multiple opaque glass globes. One of the pairs is a shorter version mounted on the top of the square newel posts at the bottom flight. The light standards are still original except the four arms have been removed leaving only the center lamp. The bases are stamped "George Cutter Co., South Bend, IND.". An original iron pipe railing is mounted on both sides of the stairs from top to bottom; a third metal railing at the center of each staircase is a later addition.

History: See overview historical context HABS No. SD-24 for additional information on the Battle Mountain Sanitarium and the NHDVS, as well as a list of individual building reports.

Battle Mountain Sanitarium, the tenth expansion of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, was built between 1903 and 1907 in Hot Springs, South Dakota. Omaha-based architect Thomas Rogers Kimball designed a striking Mission Revival hospital complex built with local red sandstone. A flight of wood steps was built into the hillside linking the Sanitarium site with the commercial district of Hot Springs by November 1903, at the beginning of construction.<sup>1</sup>

During a 1914 inspection of Battle Mountain Sanitarium it was noted that the existing wood stair was badly worn and in need of replacement in more permanent materials.<sup>2</sup> In 1915 an elaborate sandstone and concrete staircase with multiple landings and seating areas was built into the steep bluff easing pedestrian access between the Sanitarium and the business district in Hot Springs (Figure 1). Completed in November, the new Grand Staircase was built by the Rapid City Pressed Stone Co., under the direction of foreman John Merritt.<sup>3</sup> The gentle rise, plentiful landings, handrails and benches made climbing this steep grade easier for the veterans being treated at Battle Mountain Sanitarium.

In 1930, NHDVS was reorganized into a new Veterans Administration. The NHDVS was no longer an autonomous agency; now their primarily domiciliary services were just one of many offered by the Veterans Administration. The Grand Staircase continues to serve the Hot Springs Campus of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Sources: *Battle Mountain Sanitarium: Branch National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*. Omaha: Douglas Printing Company, c. 1919.

Historian: Lisa Pfueller Davidson, Ph.D., HABS Staff Historian

#### Project

Information: Documentation of the Grand Staircase at the Battle Mountain Sanitarium of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers was undertaken in 2013-14 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Documentation Programs division of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief. The project was sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), Office of Construction and Facilities Management, Kathleen Schamel, Federal Preservation Officer. Project planning was coordinated by

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<sup>1</sup> NHDVS Board of Managers, *Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 1903* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1904), 10.

<sup>2</sup> NHDVS Board of Managers, *Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 1915* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1916), 210.

<sup>3</sup> Battle Mountain Sanitarium transcribed newspaper articles, 26 November 1915, Hot Springs Public Library.

Catherine Lavoie, Chief, HABS; and by Douglas Pulak, Deputy Federal Preservation Officer, DVA. The field work was undertaken and the measured drawings were produced by Project Supervisor Mark Schara, AIA, HABS Architect, HABS Architects Paul Davidson, Daniel De Sousa, and Ryan Pierce, Jobie Hill (University of Oregon) and Emma Greenberg (Louisiana State University). The historical reports were written by HABS Historian Lisa P. Davidson. The large format photography was undertaken in 2008 by HABS Photographer James W. Rosenthal and in 2013 by HABS Contract Photography Renee Bieretz. Vital assistance was provided by Dena Sanford at the Midwest Regional Office, National Park Service, and by Patrick Lyke, Douglas Sprinkle, and other VA staff members at the Hot Springs Campus.



Figure 1: Staircase Between Hot Springs and Sanitarium, built 1915  
Source: *Battle Mountain Sanitarium: Branch National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers.*  
Omaha: Douglas Printing Company, c. 1919.