

NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS,
NORTHWESTERN BRANCH, MAIN BUILDING
(Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Building No. 2)
5000 West National Avenue
Milwaukee
Milwaukee County
Wisconsin

HABS WI-360-A
HABS WI-360-A

PHOTOGRAPHS

PAPER COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

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 –
NORTHWESTERN BRANCH, MAIN BUILDING
(Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Building No. 2)
HABS No. WI-360-A

Location: Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 5000 West National Avenue,
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

Present Owner: U. S. Federal Government

Present Occupant: Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Present Use: Vacant, except for small crash test laboratory

Significance: The Main Building was constructed in 1868-69 and designed by prominent Milwaukee architect Edward Townsend Mix. It was the primary purpose-built structure for the Northwestern Branch of the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (renamed National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in 1873). This new federal institution was authorized by Congress in 1865 and charged with caring for Civil War veterans disabled by their military service. That the Northwestern Branch was located in Milwaukee in 1866 was largely due to the fundraising and organization already completed by the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home Society. The Milwaukee women who spearheaded this effort donated \$95,000 to the cause and a picturesque campus was established west of the city.

Mix's design for the new Soldiers' Home building was a Victorian Gothic pile with a tall central tower and large flanking wings, prominently placed on a ridge looking east toward the city. Originally intended to be a multipurpose structure housing living quarters, mess hall, kitchen, chapel, offices, and recreation facilities, the Main Building was almost immediately too small for the demands of veteran care, in spite of its impressive size. The end towers, a modification of those omitted during the original building campaign, were added in 1875-76 to expand the living space. Shortly thereafter, expansion of the Northwestern Branch focused on decentralizing by adding new structures, including a hospital (1879), theater and home store (1881), chapel (1889), library (1891), and headquarters building with post office (1895). With many of these functions now removed from the Main Building, living quarters were expanded accordingly and the structure continued to function as a "domiciliary" with bedrooms, mess hall, and common areas until the 1980s.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1868-69
2. Architect: Edward Townsend Mix
3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses: This building was constructed as a multi-purpose administration, residence, mess hall, and recreation building for the Northwestern Branch of the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Gradually other single purpose structures removed these functions from the Main Building. It was used as a domiciliary and mess hall until the 1980s.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers¹:
 - S. A. Harrison, general contractor, masonry
 - George Burnham and Sons, brick
 - Judd & Hiles, sash and doors
 - M. Morris, building supervisor
5. Original plans and construction: The only surviving drawings of Mix's original design for the Main Building are two versions of a virtually identical rendering – one a color lithograph and the other a black and white engraving. In both a perspective view of the east façade of the building is shown from a slightly elevated vantage point just north of center. The central pavilion, with tall tower and lower flanking wings, is depicted essentially as built, including details such as the flag pole on the tower and small balconies that are no longer extant. Pointed arch windows and other Gothic Revival motifs are combined with the contemporary French fashion of a mansard roof, in keeping with the typical Victorian eclecticism. Dormers, an assortment of window shapes, and polychrome roof tiles all gave a variety of texture and line to the building in spite of its basically symmetrical and repetitive form. In Mix's original design the wings were to be elongated hyphens for substantial end pavilions. Each three and a half story pavilion was a simplified version of the center block, with a dormered mansard roof. These pavilions were roughly square in plan, five bays on each side with center entrances on the side facades. This entrance was accessed at the piano nobile level via an open landing with a straight run stair running parallel to the building on each side.²
6. Alterations and additions:

Corner Towers, 1875-76: The initial building campaign omitted the blocky end towers designed by Mix due to cost overruns. Four smaller and taller corner towers were then constructed during 1875-76. The northwest corner tower was constructed first during 1875 and contained toilet

¹ A list of contractors and supplies appeared in a newspaper article about the building dedication. See "The Dedication Yesterday," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 28 September 1869, 1.

² Engraving, c. 1867 [WHi-23678]; Color Lithograph, c. 1867, [WHi-54315], both in Place File, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

facilities for four floors. The other three towers contained living spaces and were identical in form but slightly simpler in external detailing.

Ells: Descriptions indicate that a rectangular ell was part of the original 1868-69 building campaign. Since then it was altered several times. A new L-shaped section was added to the west end in 1876. It was again expanded to the south with a one-story section added in 1889 (designed by H.C. Koch and Co.). The perpendicular extension on the north side of the ell is a mid-1930s kitchen addition that replaced a nineteenth-century structure in the same location and reused some of the original bricks.

B. Historical Context:

The National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (renamed National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in 1873) was established by an Act of Congress signed by President Lincoln in March 1865. Federal officials recognized the growing need to care for Union soldiers injured during their Civil War service and subsequently unable to support themselves. This unprecedented federal effort paralleled many state and local initiatives to care for disabled soldiers as the wounded filtered back North after years of fighting. The initial legislation did not specify where the Asylums would be located, but the general understanding was that several sites in different parts of the northern states would be needed. By 1930 when the National Homes were incorporated into the new Veterans Administration, the system had grown to include veterans of multiple conflicts cared for at eleven campuses located around the country.

Federal Veterans' Benefits

Many of the historic National Home sites are still part of the vast system of hospitals and other veterans' benefits managed by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (the Veterans' Administration was converted into a cabinet-level agency in 1989). There was a long history of Federal pensions and other financial support for disabled veterans, dating back to a 1776 law enacted by the Continental Congress. In 1833 the Bureau of Pensions was created by Congress, thus inaugurating the first federal veterans' benefit bureaucracy. The Civil War would greatly increase the number of veterans and the size of the federal veterans' pension system. Perhaps the most direct stepping stone to the establishment of the National Asylums was the 1862 General Pension Law. Congress established pensions for veterans disabled by injury or diseases during their service. By allowing for disease-related military disability for the first time, Congress greatly expanded the pension system. Historian Patrick Kelly has analyzed the unprecedented scope of the National Asylums and the veterans' benefits bureaucracy in the nineteenth century as representing a unique social welfare intervention of the federal government in an otherwise laissez-faire era.³

³ Patrick Kelly, *Creating a National Home: Building the Veterans' Welfare State, 1860-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2-4, 18. Kelly relates the unusual benefits of "martial citizenship" to the patronage traditions of the late nineteenth century.

There were a few, much smaller, federal institutions for disabled veterans that provided some precedent for the National Asylums – the U. S. Naval Asylum in Philadelphia, and the U.S. Soldiers' Home and the Government Hospital for the Insane, both in Washington, DC. The U.S. Naval Asylum for disabled and elderly regular Navy and Marine veterans was authorized first in 1811. Sufficient funds to complete a building in Philadelphia were finally authorized during the 1830s. The first purpose-built structure for the U.S. Naval Asylum was a Greek Revival central building designed by architect William Strickland. This multi-use building included living quarters, dining hall, reading and smoking areas, and a chapel.⁴

The U.S. Military Asylum, redesignated the U.S. Soldiers' Home in 1859, was created by Congress in 1851 after decades of debate. Many national leaders resisted the idea of a national military asylum as too similar to well-known monarchical military asylums such as France's Hotel des Invalides and England's Chelsea Hospital. It was the needs of Mexican-American War veterans that finally forced the issue. The Home was available to disabled and elderly regulars, or to volunteers with at least twenty years of service, who had contributed to its support through pay deductions. The Soldiers' Home administration structure of a board of commissions, branch governors, secretaries and treasurers parallels the one established for the NHDVS. Initially planned with three branches, the Home was centralized in Washington, D.C. by the late 1850s because of low demand. The Home included a pre-existing Gothic Revival cottage used by President Lincoln as a summer home during 1862 to 1864, and three Gothic Revival/Italianate-inspired structures built between 1851 and 1857. The bucolic grounds on a rise three miles north of the Capitol featured winding paths, attractive plantings, and scenic views.⁵

The Government Hospital for the Insane, soon known as St. Elizabeths, was established by Congress in 1852. Architect Thomas U. Walter designed the main hospital and central administrative building. This institution was founded to care for regular members of the Army and Navy, and residents of Washington, DC suffering from mental illness. St. Elizabeths also featured a naturalistic landscape with attractive views of the capital city from the south. Concurrent with establishing the NDHVS system in 1866, Congress passed an Act allowing for the treatment of Union veterans diagnosed as insane with three years of service at St. Elizabeths. In 1882, a law was passed allowing the National Homes to transfer mentally ill residents to St. Elizabeths.⁶

None of these institutions would prove to be adequate to handle the demand resulting from the Civil War conflict. Of the three million men who fought in the Civil War, over seventy percent were U.S. soldiers, many of them volunteers. By the end of the war, nearly 282,000

⁴A Second Empire hospital designed by John McCarther was added to the site in 1868. Suzanne Julin, "Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers," Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. National Historic Landmark Registration Form (draft), (2008), 30. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. (hereafter, Julin, "Northwestern Branch," NHL Registration Form).

⁵ Kelly, 12; Judith Gladys Cetina, "A History of the Veterans' Homes in the United States, 1811-1930" (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1977), 50-53, 87; Julin, "Northwestern Branch," NHL Registration Form, 30-31.

⁶ Julin, "Northwestern Branch," NHL Registration Form, 31.

Federal troops had survived a gunshot wound and nearly 30,000 had survived amputation of a body part.⁷ The suffering of soldiers from wounds, disease, and psychological stress troubled many civilians who sought to help. Local efforts to provide meals, shelter, or medical care sprang up all around the country, many building on the philanthropy skills of upper class women. Many of the local groups came to be organized under the umbrella of the U. S. Sanitary Commission (USSC), established by order of President Lincoln in 1861. Creation of the USSC was spearheaded by New York City Unitarian minister Henry Bellows and other prominent men in the Northeast. Initially the Commission was charged with monitoring the medical care of Union troops and this mission gradually expanded to include coordinating volunteer efforts, inspecting army medical facilities, providing medical staff, and providing short-term housing and travel assistance for discharged men, among other initiatives.⁸

The USSC would be a major voice in the debate over how to help disabled veterans as the war drew to a close. At the heart of the issue was the question of whether a simple expansion of the pension system or a more complex federal institution was necessary. Many, including Bellows and the USSC, initially resisted the idea of a federal institution for veterans as demeaning, expensive, and un-American. Gradually even the USSC acknowledged that many disabled veterans would not have sufficient community or family help to live independently even with a pension. They conceived a model of three asylums in diverse geographic regions providing shelter, military discipline, and light work that would encourage independence and eventually return the soldiers to society. USSC did not have the funds to put this plan into action and their work was almost completed discontinued by early 1866. However, these ideas directly informed the creation of the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, in spite of the strong anti-institution stance of the USSC.⁹

As originally called for in the 1865 legislation, the National Asylum administrative structure numbered nearly 100 prominent citizens. The sentiment to help veterans and the recognition of their potential political power had resulted in swift passage of the bill without a workable administrative structure or clear direction on the best way to proceed. The Republican-controlled Congress, reacting to growing discontent with delays, amended the original act in April 1866 to create a more efficient and effective 12-member Board of Managers. The Board of Managers included the President of the United States, the Secretary of War, and the Chief Justice as ex officio members and nine men appointed by Congress. The political appointees were often veterans themselves. It was through their efforts that the Board of Managers fulfilled its charge of setting up branches of the NHDVS, conducting regular inspections, monitoring the organization's finances, and reporting to Congress.¹⁰

Benjamin F. Butler was elected president of the Board at its first meeting in May 1866 and held that position until 1880. Butler was a former Union Army general and controversial

⁷ Kelly, 15.

⁸ Julin, "Northwestern Branch," NHL Registration Form, 32; Kelly, 21.

⁹ Kelly, 23, 67; See Cetina, Chapter 3 for a discussion of the debate over institutional versus non-institutional care and the role of the USSC. Care of veterans by the NHDVS also included "outside relief" payments to veterans remaining in their own homes or residing a state-run soldiers home.

¹⁰ Kelly, 47-48, 54.

Republican politician from Massachusetts. He had the opportunity to exert a great influence on the development of the institution and its early branches in Maine, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Virginia.¹¹ The Eastern Branch was opened in Togus, Maine on November 10, 1866 to serve veterans in the Northeast. The first of the original branches, the Togus property was a former health resort that offered a number of buildings for immediate use. The Northwestern Branch in Milwaukee also was established in 1866, after negotiations with the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home Society transferred the money and property already acquired by that group to the federal effort. The Central Branch was located outside of Dayton, Ohio in 1867 to be accessible to a large number of veterans in the lower Midwest, western New York and Pennsylvania, and states to the south. The citizens of Dayton donated \$28,000 to the effort, again illustrating local desire to capture the benefits of having a federal facility.¹²

Establishing the Northwestern Branch

Milwaukee was a relatively young city at the time of the Civil War. Incorporated in 1846, it had grown rapidly due to its status as a transportation hub for the railroad and Great Lakes shipping, and a marketplace for a rich agricultural region. Relief work for Civil War soldiers began with the creation of the Milwaukee Ladies Association in October 1861, a group affiliated with the USSC through the Chicago Branch. The upper class women of the region in particular threw themselves into the work of raising money and creating institutions to support returning Union veterans. The group was large enough by December 1862 to split into the East Side and West Side Soldiers Aid Societies, with membership based on place of residence within Milwaukee. It was the West Side group that was reorganized into the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home Society and received a charter and building grant from the state in February 1865. Their efforts and assets would be key to the decision to choose Milwaukee for the location of the Northwestern Branch.

The Society sponsored a highly successful Soldiers' Home Fair during the summer of 1865, earning approximately \$100,000. The goal was to raise money for a permanent soldiers' home to replace the rented space where they provided meals, lodging, and medical care to Civil War veterans in need. Citizens around the state sent in goods and other donations to support the fair and its cause. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* urged its readers: "Let every one help with voice and means in the labor of love, and let us rear a monument to Wisconsin bravery, and liberality, and justice, which succeeding generations shall look upon with pride, as the payment in part of the great debt – which will always remain uncanceled – due to the brave sons of Wisconsin who fought in the army of the Union."¹³ The fair building was a temporary structure located at the corner of Main and Huron Streets near the Chamber of Commerce building. It was designed by Edward Townsend Mix, Milwaukee's leading architect, and featured a high gambrel roof at the center flanked by lower wings housing exhibit stalls, display rooms, and dining facilities.

¹¹ For more on Butler's colorful career and controversial reputation, see Kelly, 83-84.

¹² Julin, "Northwestern Branch," NHL Registration Form, 35.

¹³ "The Home Fair," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 18 May 1865, 1. This article includes an engraving of the "front elevation" and a floor plan for the fair building.

After their successful fair, the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home Society proceeded to provide food, shelter and care for veterans in rented buildings while architect Mix was charged with designing their permanent home. Little is known about this design. In January 1866 the *Milwaukee Sentinel* mentioned that plans were underway for a \$50,000 building to house 200 residents. The writer also stated that the plans were not yet complete enough to allow description.¹⁴ In April 1866, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported that the Society had purchased a site on Spring Street for \$12,000 and Mix was preparing to consider construction bids.¹⁵ Shortly thereafter it was reported that the bids were all too high, and the design would have to be revised into something less costly.¹⁶

These events nearly coincided with the first meeting of the NHDVS Board of Directors on May 12, 1866. Local Congressman, Halbert E. Paine, a war hero and powerful Republican, chose fellow Milwaukee resident Colonel George H. Walker to sit on the board.¹⁷ Walker was elected Vice-President of the Board, and at this initial meeting suggested his hometown as the location for a proposed Northwestern Branch. Walker assured the board that the funds and property already assembled for a Wisconsin soldiers' home would be turned over to the National Home. However there was hesitation among the leaders of the Society, particularly the "Lady Managers" responsible for much of the work on the fair.

In a letter to Walker, Mrs. C. K. Watkins, President of the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home, conveyed the decision to proceed with construction of their own building. Specifically, Watkins worried about the impact of any delay and the shift to federal control on needed services for Wisconsin's veterans. She also questioned whether it was appropriate to redirect funds donated for a specific purpose "to secure the location of an Asylum." She did allow that if Milwaukee was first designated the branch location at the next Board meeting, if construction began immediately, and if the new asylum would accept residents of the state house, her organization could seek permission from its various donors to reallocate the funds.¹⁸

Walker responded, again also in print, by praising their efforts but questioning their ability to handle the long term expense of running the Soldiers' Home.¹⁹ An editorial in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* praised the ladies of the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home and accused the NHDVS, with an \$8 million appropriation, of being small to insist on acquisition of a mere \$100,000 before making a decision:

At this time, when so many entertain loose views regarding the sacred nature of a public trust, the ladies of the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home well deserve the thanks and admiration of every citizen of Wisconsin, for the persistent, business-like fidelity with which they have kept the money committed to them for a specific purpose, and the constant refusal to listen to the inducements to betray their trust .

¹⁴ "Mr. Mix's Proposed Drawing for Soldiers Home, 200 Inmates," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 5 January 1866, 1.

¹⁵ "The Soldiers' Home," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 24 April 1866, 1.

¹⁶ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 5 May 1866, 1.

¹⁷ Kelly, 173.

¹⁸ "Wisconsin Soldiers' Home," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 9 June 1866, 1.

¹⁹ "The Soldiers' Home," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 11 June 1866, 1.

. . . The proposition made from the National Military Asylum made through Col. Geo. H. Walker, of this city, has certainly much plausibility, but, at the same time it is very vague and unsatisfactory.²⁰

In spite of the reluctance to immediately endorse the federal plan, it did seem to be generally acknowledged that hosting the Northwestern Branch would be a positive development for the city.

By July 1866, when the next Board of Directors meeting in Washington, DC was just a few days away, Walker announced his intention to request that the Northwestern Branch be located in Milwaukee. The situation in Milwaukee was a vivid example of the loss of status, responsibility, and power experienced by many female philanthropists as government institutions moved in, a shift they accepted reluctantly.²¹ In the end the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home assets were handed over the NHDVS and both groups cooperated in the efforts to erect the new federal institution.

Constructing the Northwestern Branch

The National Historic Landmark registration form for the NHDVS identifies the first phase of development as 1865-1870, when Congress and the NHDVS Board of Managers formulated policies that “guided not only the culture and governance of the institution, but also its aesthetic development through architecture and landscape design.”²² These two disparate concerns seem to have been intertwined almost from the beginning, which is extraordinary considering the pressing practical needs that brought the Homes into being. It would have been expedient to simply continue to house veterans in rented structures with the expectation that their services would eventually be phased out. Indeed, many prominent reformers had been resisting the idea of a major government institution for years, idealizing instead community-based care. Former USSC commissioner Samuel Gridley Howe argued that a “great institution, with its congregation of one sex – with its necessary discipline, and its monotonous life – never was and never can be such a home as our deserving veterans ought to have.”²³

The construction of the NHDVS embodied a complete rejection of this concern, while still trying to wrap a major bureaucratic institution in a veil of domesticity. The Board of Managers embarked on ambitious building campaigns that erected large scale institutional structures within carefully designed landscapes. Patrick Kelly draws convincing connections between this embrace of high profile institution building and the political motivations of veteran services. In his assessment the Board of Managers were “highly partisan politicians, advocates of a strong and active central state, and eager, for humanitarian as well as political reasons, to demonstrate the power of the federal government to create a centralized institution for the care of war-disabled veterans.”²⁴ Linking care for disabled veterans to domestic ideals of home was an

²⁰ “The Soldiers’ Home,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 12 June 1866, 1.

²¹ Kelly, 54.

²² Julin, “Northwestern Branch,” NHL Registration Form, 33.

²³ Quoted in Kelly, 75.

²⁴ Kelly, 85.

important rhetorical device to gain public support for this endeavor. These efforts culminated in successful lobbying to have the name changed to National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in 1873 (hereafter NHDVS). According to Kelly, the Board of Managers was especially careful to disassociate their institution from others with highly negative connotations, such as poorhouses or insane asylums.²⁵

In spite of the centralized bureaucracy and administrative structure of the NHDVS Board of Managers, there was not a standardized policy for construction of new branches. Most of these decisions were made at the local level by branch governors, as the chief administrator was called, and local managers chosen by the Board. The local managers were prominent local citizens who sometimes also served as Board members. Erastus B. Wolcott, former Surgeon General of Wisconsin, served as the local manager for the Northwestern Branch and a Board of Managers member after the death of George Walker in September 1866. He was instrumental in selecting the site and overseeing construction of the earliest structures. On March 1, 1867, Wolcott and a committee consisting of Frederick A. Smythe, Board of Managers member and New Hampshire resident and Lewis Gunckel, Board of Managers secretary and Ohio politician, selected a site west of the city from among a number of proposals. The combined 375-acre tract along the Menomonee River included parcels owned by John L. Mitchell, John H. Tweedy, and Henry Williams. The cost of the property was \$77,000. One-third of the property was owned by Mitchell, a former Union army lieutenant and son of Alexander Mitchell, one of Milwaukee's most powerful businessmen. Alexander Mitchell was also president of the Executive Committee of the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home Society.²⁶

The *Milwaukee Sentinel* published a detailed description of the site submitted by Wolcott a few days after the selection. The varied topography was seen as a particular advantage, with fertile bottom land for agriculture, rolling hills including the highest point in the vicinity, natural springs, and abundant timber. The Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad line crossing the property would provide easy transportation access.²⁷ Not coincidentally, many of the major players – Wolcott, Alexander Mitchell, John Tweedy – were also directors in the failing Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad. At the time, this railroad line was in the process of being absorbed by the Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad, of which the elder Mitchell was a majority stockholder. The site was also accessible via two major roads leading west from the city and flanking the Menomonee River valley – Grand Avenue to the north and Elizabeth Avenue (later National Avenue) on the south.²⁸ The existing buildings could be occupied within two months. The most substantial of these structures was John Mitchell's house. By early May 1867 the approximately sixty residents of the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home were transferred to the new federal property.²⁹

²⁵ Kelly, 91.

²⁶ Kelly 112; Kristin Gilpatrick Halverson, Nancy J. Hubbard, Todd Hunter, and Patricia Lynch. "Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers Historic District, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin," (National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2005), 42. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C..

²⁷"The National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers and Sailors," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 5 March 1867, 1.

²⁸ Halverson et al, "Northwestern Branch," NR Registration Form, 42.

²⁹ "The Soldiers' Home," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 3 May 1867, 1.

In addition to the natural beauty of the site, the Board of Managers employed a “landscape gardener” to design a site plan for both the Milwaukee and Dayton Branches. Thomas Budd Van Horne served a chaplain in the 13th Ohio Infantry in the Army of the Cumberland. During his military service he also laid out the military cemeteries in Chattanooga, Tennessee and Marietta, Georgia.³⁰ Details of his biography and training are rather sparse, as is information about his work for the Northwestern Branch. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported on May 18, 1867 that Van Horn [sic.], “recognized as perhaps the best landscape gardener in the country,” had chosen a prominent rise as the site for the main asylum building. The article went on to say that Van Horn “will return to this city shortly and will then commence laying out the avenues of the place and arrange for beautifying it.”³¹ The grounds of the Northwestern Branch would be laid out with a series of curvilinear roads and paths, manicured lawns, flower beds, and four artificial lakes for boating and fishing. Keeping with the landscape design ideals popularized by Frederick Law Olmsted and others in this period, the appearance was an “enhanced” natural landscape that utilized existing features such as the springs and rolling hills. [Other reports claim that Van Horn based his design for the military cemetery at the Northwestern Branch (1871) on the Gettysburg cemetery. [it is not clear whether there is good evidence for this or it is just an observation based on similarities]

Van Horne’s design philosophy was articulated at a community meeting to debate expanding Spring or Clybourn Streets west from the city to connect to the National Asylum. He acknowledged that pure commerce typically drove the early development of cities. He lamented the fact that sites of natural beauty were often ruined by the time citizens developed the wherewithal to consider aesthetic concerns. He pointed out that New York and Boston were the leaders in the creation of grand parks and cemeteries and other cities that wanted to be considered first class were hurrying to catch up. Milwaukee had natural advantages that would make the creation of beautiful avenues and attractive parks less costly than other cities. His assessment of the benefits of the National Asylum echoed the philosophy of social virtue through aesthetics most widely promoted by Olmsted, A. J. Downing and others:

Other cities are spending hundreds of thousands, even millions, for public grounds, which cannot surpass those of the National Asylum, which will cost the people nothing, either for original improvements or for the maintenance of their attractions as a Driving park, or for picnics and general recreation. And beyond the purposes of recreation, the gratification of a legitimate pride of city and the mere enjoyment of the beautiful, aesthetic appointments exert such powerful, though subtle, moral influences, that they become, whatever the cost, economical means for the cultivation of virtue in the people generally and for the enforcement of public order.³²

³⁰ Suzanne Julin, “National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers – Assessment of Significance and National Historic Landmark Recommendations,” (2008), 16-17. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. [hereafter Julin, “NHDVS – Assessment”]

³¹ “The National Military Asylum,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 18 May 1867, 1.

³² “The National Asylum,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 24 December 1868, 1.

Van Horne's system of winding carriage drives and scenic lakes were certainly key to the popularity of the Asylum as a destination for the people of Milwaukee.

Van Horne's selection of a site for the main building was publicized at the same time as the initial description of Mix's plans. Indeed the dramatic profile of the Main Building was the centerpiece of Van Horn's scenic landscape. In May 1867 the *Milwaukee Sentinel* offered this description: "The building will be nearly 300 feet square, three stories high, with a French roof and a tower 140 feet high, and will be of elegant architectural design."³³

There was an earlier purpose-built structure, perhaps also designed by Mix and based on his earlier plans for the state home. The *Sentinel* reported that work would begin on July 8, 1867 on a "substantial and well-finished structure, 110 feet in length by 52 feet in length, the walls veneered in Milwaukee brick." Construction was scheduled to take about six weeks. Another article in the *Sentinel* on August 28, 1867 describes the structure nearing completion:

The new building for the soldiers' occupancy. . . is rapidly approaching completion, the walls now being finished and most of the inside finishing and lathing completed. . . . Although only intended for temporary occupation as general quarters, the present building is by no means temporary in the character of its workmanship. It is being thoroughly finished, the best of material are used, and when the facings and verandah are on, will be a very sightly edifice capable of accommodating about 300 veterans. After the permanent structure is built and occupied, the present structure will be devoted to hospital or other kindred uses.³⁴

Historic photographs show a structure later known as Building 52 or the old hospital, that is probably the building referred to here. Almost a simplified sketch for the Main Building, the building features a tall center tower with a mansard roof and lower flanking wings. Building 52 was demolished during the 1960s.³⁵

After the first building for "temporary" occupation was complete, Wolcott and his committee turned their attention to construction of the main building. In late September 1867, the construction contract for the Main Building was awarded to S. A. Harrison of Milwaukee.³⁶ On October 11, 1867, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* announced that the building architect, Edward Townsend Mix, was appointed by the Board of Managers to oversee its construction.³⁷ The 1867 *Annual Report* of the Board of Managers summarized the progress on the new Milwaukee home building by the end of that year:

Immediately upon completion of the contract purchase of the site of the northwestern branch, about 3 miles from the city, . . . preparations were made for the construction of commodious and substantial buildings for the accommodation

³³ "The National Military Asylum," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 18 May 1867, 1.

³⁴ "Soldiers Home," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 29 August 1867, 1.

³⁵ "The Soldiers' Home Buildings," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 8 July 1867, 1.

³⁶ "Bids for Construction, First Building Open," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 28 September 1867, 1.

³⁷ "A Good Appointment," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 11 October 1867, 1.

of the disabled soldiers seeking its care. . . . The foundations for a permanent building have been put in, and the work will be prosecuted vigorously in the spring, as there will be need to meet the increasing wants of the institution.³⁸

The Board report also mentioned that temporary accommodations had been arranged in existing buildings. They, oddly, did not specifically discuss the building completed in August.

Few records survive that describe the role of architect Edward Townsend Mix (1831-1890) in the creating the Northwestern Branch, but his career is generally well known in Milwaukee history.³⁹ Mix was born in New Haven, Connecticut. After working for a year in the Chicago firm of William W. Boyington, he relocated to Milwaukee in 1856. He served as Wisconsin state architect from 1864-67 and then continued to practice in Milwaukee from 1867 until 1889. During the last year of his life he lived and worked in Minneapolis. In her dissertation on Mix, historian Christy Szczyzny-Adams describes his “cosmopolitan” additions to the built environment of Milwaukee and region as “dominat[ing] the landscape and transform[ing] the town from a rough backwater into a sophisticated city during the second half of the nineteenth century.”⁴⁰ In addition to his earlier connections to the Soldiers Home Society, Mix was Milwaukee’s leading mid-nineteenth century architect and designer of choice for the business elite, including Alexander Mitchell. Milwaukee historian Richard Perrin noted that “in connection with Milwaukee’s earlier architecture, and particularly its finest church work, the name of Edward Townsend Mix appears very frequently. Socially prominent and active in many civic organizations, Mix appears to have been Milwaukee’s favorite architect for quite a time.”⁴¹ In his thesis on Mix, John Richard Burrows emphasizes his ties to the Mitchell family and the “Yankee” business elite in Milwaukee:

The Mitchells had dominated Milwaukee, both in social circles and in business, for a quarter of a century and the work of Mix was apparent in each facet of their lives. He designed their homes, which were focal points for prominent social events; he designed the Milwaukee Club, which they were instrumental in founding; and he designed the buildings to house their banking, real estate and railroad concerns which were cornerstones of the economic life of the city.⁴²

³⁸ Board of Managers – National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, *Annual Report* (1867), 3.

³⁹ “Edward T. Mix,” in Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*, (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970), 423-424; “Edward Townsend Mix,” *Dictionary of Wisconsin History*, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp>; Joseph Korom, *Milwaukee Architecture: A Guide to Notable Buildings* (Madison, WI: Prairie Oak Press, 1995), xi. There is some inconsistency in these sources regarding Mix’s early life and career.

⁴⁰ Christy M. Szczyzny-Adams, “Cosmopolitan Design in the Upper Midwest: The Nineteenth Century Architecture of Edward Townsend Mix” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2007), 1.

⁴¹ Richard W. E. Perrin, *Milwaukee Landmarks: An Architectural Heritage 1850-1950* (Milwaukee Public Museum, Publications in History no. 9, 1968), 15. Architect Walter A. Holbrook worked as Mix’s draftsman from 1869 and later his business partner.

⁴² John Richard Burrows, *The Work of E. Townsend Mix from 1856 to 1890* (MArch Thesis: University of Virginia, 1980), 48-49.

Mix's major commissions in Milwaukee included the Music Hall (1865), the Plankinton House hotel (1868), Chamber of Commerce (1880), a major expansion of Alexander Mitchell's residence (1873), the Mitchell Building (a commercial structure at the corner of Broad and Wisconsin Streets) (1878), and the 12-story Guaranty Loan Building, one of Milwaukee's first skyscrapers. According to Szczesny-Adams, approximately ten percent of Mix's buildings were institutional; a much larger portion of his work was residential or commercial.⁴³ The high profile Soldiers' Home commission was an important example of his institutional design.

Like other designers of his generation, Mix was well-versed in both the practical aspects of construction and a variety of the latest architectural styles. His work reflected the creative eclecticism prevalent during the second half of the nineteenth century. He exhibited a flexible use of fashionable historic motifs and forms in tandem with modern technology and building types. Perrin described Mix's career as including both restrained and exuberant designs. His Music Hall, an important early commission in 1865, introduced the stylish French Second Empire architectural mode to Milwaukee. His expansion of Alexander Mitchell's residence in 1873 transformed a staid Italianate house into a sprawling Second Empire confection. Mix also continued to use the earlier Italianate forms when necessary as well as a variety of Victorian Gothic-inspired motifs. Burrows described Mix as the consummate professional, unwilling to divulge information about his design decisions for wealthy clients. This reluctance also means that historians have little firsthand information regarding his opinions and ideas. Undoubtedly his varied approach was guided by the budgets and tastes of his powerful clients. His library contained many volumes on European architecture to support his eclectic and learned approach to design.⁴⁴

Mix's original design for the Main Building shows the central pavilion, with tall tower and lower flanking wings, essentially as built. Pointed arch windows and other Gothic Revival motifs are combined with the contemporary French fashion of a mansard roof, in keeping with the typical Victorian eclecticism. Dormers, an assortment of window shapes, and polychrome roof tiles all gave a variety of texture and line to the building in spite of its basically symmetrical and repetitive form. The wings were to be elongated hyphens for substantial end pavilions. Each three and a half story pavilion was a simplified version of the center block, with a dormered mansard roof. These original renderings also emphasize the landscape setting for the asylum. A variety of trees and bushes adorn the site as do several ceremonial cannons. Tiny figures of veterans are seen strolling on the landscaped grounds, including several amputees on crutches. Horse drawn carriages are shown using the road traveling past the front the building. Many future depictions of the Soldiers' Homes emphasized the use of picturesque grounds by both veterans and visitors.⁴⁵

⁴³ Szczesny-Adams, "Cosmopolitan Design in the Upper Midwest," 5.

⁴⁴ Perrin, 16; Burrows, 12. On Mix's extensive architectural library see Chris Szczesny-Adams. "Edward Townsend Mix: Books and the Professional Architect in Nineteenth-Century Milwaukee," in Kenneth Hafertepe and James F. O'Gorman, eds., *American Architects and Their Books, 1840-1915*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.

⁴⁵ Engraving, c. 1867 [WHi-23678]; Color Lithograph, c. 1867, [WHi-54315], both in Place File, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

A few newspaper accounts and scattered surviving records of the Board of Managers document the progress of the Main Building's construction. Much of the exterior work seems to have taken place during the more temperate months of 1868. The Board of Managers determined early in the process that the end pavilions designed by Mix would be omitted. On June 14, 1868 the low construction bid for the main building, "without the wings" was approved.⁴⁶ That winter the Board adopted a resolution that a number of amenities be included in the building, such as a "chapel, to be also used for lectures, concerts, etc., and a reading room and library, with an amusement hall and work shops in the basement."⁴⁷ Just a month earlier the *Sentinel* reported: "The work on the new building is progressing rapidly and the interior is already commenced. The steam heating apparatus and gas fixtures are being put in. The building will be ready for occupation by Spring."⁴⁸ Predictions of a spring occupation turned out to be a little optimistic. It was nearly fall when the building was finally ready to receive veterans and a dedication ceremony was planned. The first veterans moved in on September 10, 1869.⁴⁹ The building was described by the editor of the *Madison Journal* as "a splendid one, and fitted up with all the modern improvements for heating, ventilation, etc. rendering it very perfect in every respect."⁵⁰

The dedication ceremonies scheduled for September 28, 1869 were curtailed due to the death of General Rawlins, a member of the Board of Managers. However the activities were still rather extensive. The Board of Managers assembled to hold a meeting and inspect the premises. The "lady managers" of the Soldiers' Home Society were transported en masse via a carriage convoy from the downtown Plankinton House. Regular and special trains were available to bring interested citizens to the site. The newspaper coverage of the dedication offers insights into the creation and arrangement of this multi-purpose institutional building.⁵¹ Van Horne was praised as having "devot[ed] himself with great industry to laying out and embellishing the grounds and though the work is not completed, all that has been done has been well done, and the winding avenues and grassy plats give the premises a beautiful appearance."⁵²

The Northwestern Branch's Deputy Governor Col. Theodore Yates was also commended for his work overseeing the purchase of building materials and construction.⁵³ This account also offers a detailed description of the building and how it would be used:

The building presents a fine appearance from the exterior, and in its neatness, beauty of finish and completeness of appointments is a model. It is in the form of

⁴⁶ Minutes, 14 June 1868, *Proceedings of the Board of Managers, Vol. 1, May 16, 1866-April 17, 1883*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), 23-24.

⁴⁷ Minutes, 11 December 1868, *Proceedings of the Board of Managers, Vol. 1*, 30. Wolcott was the only no vote on this resolution.

⁴⁸ "Progress of New Building Outlined," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 14 November 1868, 1.

⁴⁹ "The National Military Asylum," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 11 September 1869, 1.

⁵⁰ "The National Military Asylum," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 16 September 1869, 1.

⁵¹ "The National Asylum," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 27 September 1869, 1.

⁵² "The Dedication Yesterday," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 28 September 1869, 1.

⁵³ A few years later a round of litigation would break out between Yates and the NHDVS over reimbursement for construction expenses, among other issues. See Meeting Minutes, 17 September 1875, *Proceedings of the Board of Managers*, 311.

a cross, and when the wings are completed, will have a frontage of 240 feet. . . . It is furnished with every conceivable convenience for the comfort and cleanliness of the inmates, and in this respect is equal to a first-class hotel of the most modern plan.⁵⁴

Rooms located on the first floor included reception rooms and offices flanking the center corridor, dispensary, hospital, matron's room, parlors, library, surgeon's rooms and a sitting room for the inmates. The second, third, and fourth floors contained forty dormitories, each with ten narrow beds, a washroom, and a sink. Estimates here indicate that the building could accommodate approximately 500 veterans. A dining room and then kitchen were located at the center rear of the structure. The laundry and a "bathing room" were located in the basement level of the dining/kitchen ell. Steam-driven machinery was used to do the washing and ironing. The engine room was a separate building containing a fourteen-horse-power steam engine to pump water, saw wood, and operate the laundry machinery, along with three steam heating boilers. Plans were in the works to build a small gas plant for lighting. The end pavilions were not constructed; instead the building stopped at the end of the side wings. Interestingly, Mix was only mentioned as drawing up plans for the building, suggesting that his role during construction was minimal. He could not have been pleased that his planned wings were severely truncated.

Apparently other aspects of the building were still unfinished at the time of its dedication and there was perhaps some strife between the Board and Wolcott. Just a few days later on October 1st, the Board passed two resolutions modifying the new building to accommodate recreational amenities first authorized nearly a year before.⁵⁵ One ordered that a partition in the second floor space over the dining room (in the ell at the rear of the building) be removed and the space furnished for use as a chapel and concert hall. The second allocated up to \$150 to convert a room in the attic into two bowling alleys, the purchase of two bagatelle tables, and fitting up "the room adjoining the tower" for use by the branch band. A third resolution was a stop work order, with the exception of the modifications just authorized, finishing the plumbing, steam and gas work, finishing the lodge at the north gate, and "with the further exception of such work as can be done by the inmates of the Asylum." Wolcott was the only no vote on all of these resolutions, perhaps an indication that he was being overruled in a disagreement with the Board.⁵⁶

Several early images clearly show the Main Building as it was built during the first 1868-69 campaign. The wings simply terminated where the side pavilions were supposed to be, a difference shown very clearly on photograph of the east façade from this period.⁵⁷ Also visible is a more realistic picture of the landscape conditions than an artistic rendering. The immediate grounds feature a few mature trees and a number of newly planted ones. The lawn looks rather

⁵⁴ "The Dedication Yesterday," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 28 September 1869, 1.

⁵⁵ According to an article by local historian Robert J. Neugent, the chapel, recreation, and other common spaces were to be housed in the end pavilions of Mix's original design. When these were eliminated over Dr. Wolcott's protestations, space had to be found elsewhere in the building for these functions. See Robert J. Neugent, "The National Soldiers' Home," *Historical Messenger* 31, no. 3 (1975): 91.

⁵⁶ Minutes, 1 October 1869, *Proceedings of the Board of Managers, Vol. 1*, 43-44.

⁵⁷ Photograph, c. 1870, [Humanities Room, Soldiers Home File], Milwaukee Historical Society.

rough and is ornamented by several cannon. One early stereopair image in the collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society shows a similar view of the grounds, including a gently curving gravel carriage drive.⁵⁸ In this photograph the south façade of the wing is visible. Much of this wall is blank brick, except for large openings in the center bay on each floor. The first floor entrance is accessed via a split parallel stair and center landing like the one indicated in Mix's original design for the end pavilion entrances. An engraving of the Main Building published in *Harper's Weekly Magazine* in 1870 rather accurately recreates the view, including the existing mature trees and drive (Figure 1). The *Harper's* engraving adds some picturesque detail such as a number of veterans reading or lounging with their pet eagle and dog near a cannon in the foreground.⁵⁹

The early records do not provide detailed information regarding how and why the aesthetic policies of the NHDVS were established. It does seem clear that attention to beautiful surroundings and attractive buildings was part of the reform ethos of the second half of the nineteenth century, as previously noted in relation to Van Horne. As architectural historian Carla Yanni has noted in her study of insane asylums, "In nineteenth century America, university builders, social reformers, park enthusiasts, and asylum doctors shared many values: that nature was curative, exercise therapeutic, and the city a source of vice."⁶⁰ In addition to the contemporary landscape design philosophy of Olmsted and others, the Board of Managers must have been influenced by work of Dr. Thomas Story Kirkbride on the design of insane asylums. He published his most prominent work on the subject in 1854, entitled *On the Construction, Organization, and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane*. Kirkbride's direct connection between design and medical treatment would have offered a more specific model to the NHDVS branch planners, even though there certainly would have been a reluctance to publicly draw parallels between the Soldiers' Home and an insane asylum. Further complicating matters was the fact that some of the veterans did indeed suffer from mental illness caused by their military service. St. Elizabeths in Washington, DC was officially designated for mentally-ill veterans and designed along the Kirkbride linear plan recommendations, but in practice each branch of the home had to make accommodations for men suffering from this type of injury.

Like Kirkbride advised, the NHDVS branches were carefully located outside of urban areas but with convenient transportation for staff, visitors, and supplies. Land was cheaper and the rural surroundings considered more therapeutic. The health benefits of nature, particularly for veterans scarred by the pain and noise of war, would have been viewed as common sense and supported by the latest scientific methods. The Board also followed the Kirkbride advice that asylums have an ample water supply and acreage for farming. A "suburban" location also was desirable to remove residents from the temptation of urban vice and aid with control of the group. Patrick Kelly observed that the selection of high elevations for both the Northwestern and Central branch structures reflected contemporary medical opinion that such vantage points would avoid the stagnant and potentially unhealthy air of low-lying areas. In addition to health

⁵⁸ Stereopair, before 1875, Place File (L. Black and Co. Photo), Perspective view from southeast, prior to construction of end towers [WHI-54264].

⁵⁹ Engraving published with brief article, "National Asylum for Soldiers," *Harper's Weekly* (29 January 1870): 77.

⁶⁰ Carla Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2007), 9.

benefits, there were comfort advantages to being up in a position to catch the prevailing breezes in a period before mechanical air cooling.⁶¹

The large centralized main building designed by Mix for the Northwestern Branch does seem to have some similarities to the sprawling asylums advocated by Kirkbride. He advocated construction of large linear plan buildings with many stepped back wings to take advantage of the light and fresh air from the bucolic surroundings. The Main Building featured ward rooms arranged along corridors with large windows and transoms for cross ventilation. Like Kirkbride's asylums, the Main Building combined residential, medical, and communal functions for a vulnerable population. However, visually and in form, the Main Building also seems indebted to other public building types of the era such as courthouses or colleges. The linear plan here was a conventional arrangement of pavilions and hyphens, not the distinctive stepped wings that were characteristic of Kirkbride plan asylums. The tall tower and multi-story wings were not particularly practical for disabled residents but conveyed a fashionable respectability shared by other major Mix commissions.

There was also a political aspect to the prominent siting of the main building amidst carefully planned carriage roads. Kelly notes the national significance of the manner in which both the Northwestern and Central branches were constructed: "The prominent location of the Central and Northwestern Branches on the nation's physical landscape announced to Americans the willingness and capacity of the central state to create a privileged system of institutional provision for the care of the Union's veterans."⁶² A site plan published in 1876 in the *Illustrated Atlas of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin* illustrates the first group of Northwestern Branch buildings. The roughly T-shape of the Main Building is flanked by the engine house and some small workshops. To the north a grouping of farmhouse and barns was adjacent to land used for agriculture. At the far northwest edge of the site and adjacent to the preexisting Catholic cemetery, was the new national military cemetery. South of the railroad tracks on lower ground was the Commander's and Surgeon's quarters, the hospital, and small music gazebo and another recreational pavilion. These recreational structures were near the largest lake – called Ice Lake (later Lake Wheeler). Three other small lakes and a few springs were indicated on the plan. Perhaps most striking is the overlay of curving carriage drives on the gridlike property lines and adjacent roads. These drives traveled near all of the lakes and the buildings and connected to the county roads at the north and south edges of the property.

On a local level, clearly this was an attempt to earn respectability for the institution at a time when many were worried about the presence of many potentially unruly or alcoholic veterans with time on their hands. The promotion and use of the grounds as a public park would have also been a shrewd move to curry public favor. A *Milwaukee Sentinel* article looked forward to having the Soldiers' Home grounds as a major public amenity for Milwaukee:

It is to be the place of resort for our citizens and those who visit us. The grounds possess natural advantages and beauty superior to those of the great central park

⁶¹ Kelly, 111.

⁶² Kelly, 111.

of New York and are to be improved and thrown open to us. Those who feared the presence in their vicinity of so many soldiers now laugh at their error, and have learned that there is no place of greater safety than near our “boys in blue.”⁶³

Promoting the Soldier's Home as a new public amenity and credit to the public spirit and patriotism of Milwaukee eased concerns about the presence of a large, unfamiliar, quasi-military institution. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* made it a point to publish the comments of a Minnesota newspaper editor who visited the home in 1871 and reported to his readers that “the building is of immense dimensions being 200 feet long, has a dining room 100 feet long and 44 wide, a beautiful chapel of the same dimensions, and in every department is every comfort and convenience human ingenuity could invent under the guidance of enlightened benevolence and humanity.”⁶⁴ Encouraging tourism would not have been unusual for institutions in nineteenth century America, where orphanages, schools for the deaf, and cemeteries were often destinations for visitors.⁶⁵ In 1877, the Northwestern Branch had approximately 40,000 visitors.⁶⁶

The national media also sought to explain the unfamiliar institution to the American public. Particularly important to the perception of the National Asylum system was the often repeated refrain that these were not charitable institutions, but a service and a right more than earned by the veterans. In January 1870 *Harper's Weekly* published a brief description of the Milwaukee home and an engraving of the main building.⁶⁷ It emphasized the independence of the soldiers, mentioned that the men were not required to surrender their pensions and those able could perform extra duties for pay. Discipline was described as minimal, only enough to preserve order and promote the well-being of the group. The main building and its setting were praised for being tasteful and attractively designed. A travelers account of a steamship trip on the Great Lakes published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1872 included the National Asylum in its description of Milwaukee. After seeing the sites in downtown Milwaukee, the group took a carriage ride out the Asylum, “an imposing structure where six hundred helpless men are provided with a home.”⁶⁸ The author commented on the amenities of Main Building, such as bathrooms, smoking room, billiard room, card room, ten-pin alley, concert hall, and library. A sign on the wall was quoted: “Soldiers are especially informed that this asylum is neither a hospital nor an almshouse; it is not considered a charity. It is a tribute to the brave and deserving, and is their right.”⁶⁹

Expansion and Changing Philosophy, 1870s

Initially some thought the National Asylums would be temporary and cease to exist as the disabled soldiers were able to return to family or died off. However given the level of investment and effort put into early design and construction for the National Asylums, it seems

⁶³ “National Military Asylum,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 13 March 1868, 1.

⁶⁴ “A Drive through Milwaukee by a Minnesota Editor,” *Milwaukee Sentinel* 17 May 1871, 4.

⁶⁵ Yanni, 71-72.

⁶⁶ Kelly, 186.

⁶⁷ “National Asylum for Soldiers,” *Harper's Weekly* (29 January 1870): 77.

⁶⁸ Constance F. Woolson, “Round by Propellor,” *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 45:268 (September 1872): 532.

⁶⁹ Woolson, 532.

unlikely that the Board of Managers ever really expected the need for their services to go away. A name change in 1873 from National Asylum to National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers officially acknowledged the long term resident status of most veterans as well as achieving the semantic change long sought by the Board. In 1874, Benjamin Butler wrote of his surprise that the demand of accommodations was continuing to grow, given the history of low enrollment at the regular Army Soldiers' Home in Washington, D.C.. By this time the NHDVS had branches outside Augusta, Maine; Milwaukee; Dayton, Ohio; and Hampton, Virginia.⁷⁰ The Southern Branch in Virginia was established in 1870 in order to have a branch in a warmer climate and one more convenient to African American veterans from the South.

A quasi-military system of drills and inspections sought to maintain discipline among the ranks and the fact that the administrators were also officers added to a hierarchy of authority and procedure.⁷¹ Residents of the home were required to wear a uniform, observe curfews, submit to inspections, and participate in work details if able. Infractions were punished by fines, loss of privileges, or expulsion. Governors, the lead administrator for each branch, stressed that strict military discipline was not expected but rules had to be enforced to ensure a healthful environment for all. Not surprisingly given the large number of men at a typical branch, the rules, particularly curfews and the prohibition on drunkenness, were frequently broken.

In 1875 branch governor General Hincks gave an interesting assessment of the character and discipline of the residents of the Northwestern Branch, as influenced by the park-like grounds:

The judicious betterment and tasteful adornment of the grounds, not only serve to attract large numbers of visitors to the Home, and thereby render the life of the inmate less monotonous, but tend to excite, and among the wounded and suffering veterans, a personal interest in the institution and an attachment to its familiar and pleasant scenes. These attractions, and the opportunity for light labor afforded by the employment of the partially disabled to make the improvements and cultivate the farm, with ample facilities for amusement and recreation, are powerful auxiliaries in maintaining discipline, repressing vice, and stimulating a feeling of contentment among the worthy and appreciative beneficiaries of the Home.⁷²

Hincks is remarking on a practical application of the restorative power of nature widely disseminated in nineteenth century reform circles. He also goes on to complain that this type of work causes conflict with an unworthy class of veteran who entered the army through conscription and who now “degrade the honest beneficiary as they did the honest soldiers in the army.”⁷³

⁷⁰ Kelly, 124.

⁷¹ Kelly, 141-48.

⁷² *Annual Report of the Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*. (National Soldiers' Home Printing Office, 1875), 8.

⁷³ *Annual Report of the Northwestern Branch*, (1875), 9.

Clearly the ideal of service to worthy veterans was occasionally marred by reality. Much of the Board of Managers' meetings were occupied with hearing appeals and complaints from individual veterans. Not every veteran was well-behaved and instances of disorderly conduct or fraud did occur. In addition, it was difficult for the National Asylum to guard against all theft or fraud by its administrators and staff within its large bureaucracy. Many considered discipline at the branches unnecessarily harsh. Enough people complained that in 1884 the Congressional Committee on Military Affairs held hearings and instituted new oversight.⁷⁴

As built the Main Building had several serious omissions that needed almost immediate remedy, such as the lack of ventilation shafts to carry odors away from the water closets and no heat above the first floor. Apparently the ventilation advantages of a linear plan and an elevated site were not sufficient to keep fresh air circulating properly. In December 1872 General Edward W. Hincks was brought in as governor of the Northwestern Branch to investigate and fix these problems. As reported in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in July 1874:

People, who have from time to time in years past, ridden through the beautiful avenues of the Soldiers Home and looked up at the grand and artistic structure devoted to the use of the disabled veterans, have been accustomed to look upon the placed as nigh-well finished. But such was not the case, so far at least, as the spacious grounds were concerned, and the building itself has undergone essential improvements.⁷⁵

The article went on to discuss both minor and major changes underway at the home. When General Hincks arrived he noticed men sitting or laying on stairways or in the halls. At the time men were forbidden from being in sleeping quarters during the day and could only use the chairs in the dining room at mealtimes. Hincks provided a chair to be placed next to each man's cot and allowed the sleeping quarters to be occupied during the day. He also oversaw the installation of over eight miles of steam pipe to heat the sleeping wards on the upper floors of the main building for the first time.

Hincks continued to work on improving and refining the Soldiers' Home. In September 1875 the Board of Managers approved his plans to move the water closets to a new attached tower at the northwest corner of the building. They approved spending \$3,920 on the addition.⁷⁶ The Northwestern Branch *Annual Report* for 1875 listed the twenty foot by twenty foot, five-story brick building for water closets as not yet completed. That year repairs were also made to the roof including increasing the pitch, general repairs, and new tin sheathing. A new water iron tank and alterations to the tank room (in the central tower) also were completed costing \$490.⁷⁷ In the 1876 *Annual Report*, it was noted that an additional \$1080.00 was spent to complete this addition.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Cetina, 190-191.

⁷⁵ "Soldiers Home – Improvements In and Around the Veteran's Home," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 24 July 1874, 8.

⁷⁶ Minutes, 17 September 1875, *Proceedings of the Board of Managers*, 311.

⁷⁷ *Annual Report of the Northwestern Branch*, (1875), 7.

⁷⁸ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1876), 65-66.

Installation of the new water tank turned out to be fortuitous. In the early evening of January 26, 1876 a fire was discovered in upper floor of the central pavilion. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported that the water tank installed the previous summer was instrumental in allowing the residents to contain the fire until the steam fire engine arrived.⁷⁹ The fire had traveled through a partition on the fourth floor and was traveling across the mansard roof above the ceiling. Most of the damage was due to the water used to put out the fire and the holes cut in the ceiling to better douse the flames.

Extensive repairs were needed to the upper floor after the fire, at a cost of \$4,496. Additional expenses included a new iron water tank in the tower (\$168.80) and two iron fire escapes (\$533.09). In the course of making these repairs, the fifth floor spaces affected by the fire were converted from a recreation room to dormitories - the bowling alleys and bagatelle tables here had been difficult for some residents to access.⁸⁰ At this time the Board of Managers also decided to undertake a number of changes and additions to the building. Construction on the water closet tower at the northwestern corner was already underway. In March 1876, Wolcott again raised the issue of building end towers for the building. Apparently these additions had been the discussed at the previous meeting, but a decision was postponed. At this meeting the resolution was passed to appropriate \$15,000 for additional towers to be used as sleeping quarters. Apparently Wolcott's intention was to "complete" the building, but these tall corners towers were very different from the substantial end pavilions designed by Mix. The motion to build these towers passed on a four to three vote, perhaps indicating disagreement about the best way to provide additional quarters at the Northwestern Branch.⁸¹

At the same March 1876 meeting, the Board approved a \$4000 request from Hincks to move the laundry from the basement to the engine and boiler house at the northwest side of the building. The funds would be used to build a second story on the boiler house for that purpose and to build new bowling alleys in the old laundry. Apparently moisture from the laundry was causing damage in its basement location.⁸²

On April 21, 1876, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* described the planned improvements to the Home and indicated that Mix may have been involved with working out a compromise solution to finishing his design:

General Hincks will materially improve the appearance of the National Home by finishing the north and south fronts of the wings of the building, which were left in an incomplete state, as it was originally designed to add to them. The plans adopted involve no extension of these wings. A tower on each corner of the present termini, brick facing and stone trimmings, with handsome porch for each front, are embraced by the design of Mr. Mix, the architect, the whole planned to

⁷⁹ "Fires," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 27 January 1876, 5.

⁸⁰ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1876), 66.

⁸¹ Minutes, 24 March 1876, *Proceedings of the Board of Managers*, Vol. 1, 342.

⁸² Minutes, 24 March 1876, *Proceedings of the Board of Managers*, Vol. 1, 342.

correspond in appearance with the main building. As one of the towers has already been put up, but three remain to be erected in connection with the plan.⁸³

The separate construction campaign, as well as the different planned use, explains the subtle differences still visible in the exterior detailing of the northwest tower versus the other three.

Along the construction of the towers, two alternative plans were proposed for expanding the associated service structures. “Plan no. 1” involved extending the dining room ell out “to a line” with the engine house and also adding the second story to the engine house for a laundry. “Plan no. 2” was to just build the engine house second story without extending the dining room. Potential contractors were asked to bid separately on the two potential plans. The construction bids were opened in Mix’s office on April 20, 1876. The contract was awarded to Mr. S. Bryant based on a \$19,000 bid on plan no. 1.⁸⁴ As described in the *Annual Report*, during 1876 the new towers provided dormitories for 136 inmates, the dining room was enlarged with room to seat 151 additional men, and a new laundry and a “capacious meat room and refrigerator” were added to the facilities. The total cost of all these improvements was \$26,150. In addition a new store was set up in the basement. The engine house is no longer extant; but the towers and dining room ell are all still intact. Presumably the dining room addition was an extension to the west that later received a second story.⁸⁵

No new construction was undertaken the next year at the Northwestern Branch, but several projects helped complete the improvements to the main building. The wood on earth floors, which had become wet and smelly, were replaced with brick and concrete pavement over a new layer of gravel. With this improvement and the relocation of the laundry, newly finished basement spaces were available for dormitories. Space for fifty more beds was achieved in the basement and by rearranging some of the administrative functions on the upper floors.⁸⁶ In 1878 the only improvement to the Main Building was new stone steps, as the focus shifted to decentralizing the arrangement of this NHDVS branch.⁸⁷

Decentralizing and Expanding, 1880s-1890s

The Main Building had been planned as a multi-purpose structure that would define life at the Northwestern Branch both visually and on a practical level. As the size and the responsibilities of the National Asylum continued to grow, it became apparent that the centralized model was not working well. Like Kirkbride’s insane asylums, the National Homes experienced problems with crowding and the impossibility of creating a “homelike” atmosphere at such a large institutional scale.⁸⁸ Carving out space for more beds in the basement, attic, and former administrative offices, even if carefully done, was indicative of the growing

⁸³ “National Home Improvements,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 21 April 1876, 8.

⁸⁴ “National Home Improvements,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 21 April 1876, 8.

⁸⁵ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1876), 66, 71.

⁸⁶ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1877), 95.

⁸⁷ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1877), 80.

⁸⁸ Kelly, 113-114; Yanni, 55, 90-95. According to Yanni, there also was a move in the late 1870s to decentralized over centralized insane asylum construction.

overcrowding. In December 1875, Hincks reported that the Northwestern Branch housed 547 men. He expected that number to increase to at least 607 during the winter months, typically the time of highest demand. The maximum number that could be accommodated was 614 men, including 75 in the hospital.⁸⁹

By the late 1870s, the Northwestern Branch began to shift to a decentralized arrangement like the Central Branch in Ohio. When testifying before a Congressional committee in 1884, General Sharpe, the current governor of the Northwestern Branch, expressed dissatisfaction with the large main building. He attributed most of the discipline problems to “herding” the men together in one large structure. The governor speculated that if he had enough money, he would prefer to tear the building down and start over on a decentralized barracks plan like the Central Branch.⁹⁰ In 1879 a new hospital was built west of Main Building. This structure was the first major step toward creating the cluster of buildings that define the historic core of the campus and was indicative of the shift in focus to medical care of aging veterans. However the new hospital did not remove functions from Main Building, but instead upgraded the facilities available at the original “temporary” hospital. This improved hospital did have its own kitchen, dining room, and reading room, replacing use of those facilities in the Main Building for some residents.⁹¹

An 1882 account of an Army of the Cumberland reunion illustrated the important role of the National Homes in the lives of veterans. Meeting in Milwaukee that year, the veterans’ group activities included a banquet at the Northwestern Branch and a large contingent of Soldiers’ Home residents marching in a parade. An artist’s rendition of the reunion showed clusters of veterans talking on the grounds of the Home, the south façade of the Main Building visible in the background. The glowing article about the events commented that “the men all seemed to be well satisfied with the management of the institution, and grateful for the shelter it affords them in their declining years.”⁹² A *Harper’s* article on the city of Milwaukee from the same period also praised the local branch of the Soldiers’ Home. The author expressed his confidence that the grounds would become a lovely park as the city expanded to the west, “for the Soldiers’ Home will find itself utterly without tenants before many more years.”⁹³

Rather than slowing as originally expected, the demand for the National Homes continued to grow as the Civil War veterans aged and Congress broadened admission requirements. In 1884 there was a major expansion of the eligibility requirements for the NHDVS branches. Previously proof had to be provided that one’s disability was a direct result of military service. Now any honorably discharged Union veteran was eligible for admission, as well as veterans of the War of 1812 and the Mexican War. As previously self-sufficient veterans

⁸⁹ *Annual Report of the Northwestern Branch*, (1875), 8.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Kelly, 114.

⁹¹ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1880), 111; See Cetina, Chapter 8 for a detailed discussion of medical care for aging veterans.

⁹² “The Army of the Cumberland,” *Harper’s Weekly* 26:1346 (7 October 1882): 637.

⁹³ E. Ingersoll, “Milwaukee,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 62:371 (April 1881): 716. The article includes two engravings of the Soldiers’ Home – one is a perspective view of the Main Building from the Southeast, the other a scene of members gathered around a table playing a game of “Pacific” (similar to chess).

became disabled due to various causes, including the long term effects of their military service or simply old age, the demand for Soldiers' Home admission grew rapidly.⁹⁴

Previously reluctant to expand, the Board of Managers now moved rapidly to establish the Western Branch in Leavenworth, Kansas in 1884, the Pacific Branch in Santa Monica, California in 1887, and the Marion, Indiana Branch in 1889. They also authorized a variety of new construction at the existing branches. During this period a number of new structures were added to the Northwestern Branch to meet increased demand. The construction of Ward Memorial Hall in 1881 expanded the recreational facilities for the branch by adding an auditorium and restaurant space and removing the home store from the Main Building. Prior to 1884, all residential facilities at the Northwestern Branch were located in the Main Building. Then additional barracks were built in 1884 (Building 5), 1888 (Building 7), and 1893 ("old men's" barrack with its own mess, now demolished). Starting with the new hospital, the firm of Milwaukee architect Henry C. Koch was responsible for nearly all new building design at the National Home. Koch and Co. also designed a new chapel for the branch that was completed in 1889 and possibly also the new library built in 1891-92. With the new purpose-built structure available, the chapel on the second floor of the Main Building's dining room ell was converted into sleeping quarters for sixty additional men.⁹⁵

During the rest of the nineteenth century, a number of small improvements and maintenance projects were undertaken at the Main Building. The monumental structure continued to serve as the main barracks and dining structure for the branch as well as its visual focus. In late 1880/early 1881 an artesian well was bored near the Main Building. The pressure of water rising from the well was strong enough to fill the tanks in the upper floor of the tower without assistance from a steam engine pump.⁹⁶ Another important improvement for the comfort of the disabled residents was the installation of an elevator during fiscal year 1883 (July 1, 1882-June 30, 1883). As described in the Board of Managers *Annual Report*: "During the year an elevator has been placed in the main building, and is found to be a great satisfaction to the members, who heretofore have been obliged to walk up the stairs, which, in the disabled condition of many of them, was slow and painful."⁹⁷ Elevators were still rather unusual at the time this first one was installed at Main Building near the northwest end of the central corridor. The elevator rose five floors to the attic level of the central block. A replacement, or perhaps an additional, elevator costing \$3,800 was installed during fiscal year 1895.⁹⁸

In fiscal year 1889, the dining room and kitchen at the rear ell of Main Building were again expanded. It was anticipated that the new ability to seat 1,050 men in the dining room and

⁹⁴ Kelly 128; Cetina 171, 167. Disabled veterans of the Mexican War and War of 1812 were first eligible in 1871, but there was some confusion regarding how to interpret the law requiring proof of service-related disability.

⁹⁵ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1889), 90. Illustrations and good descriptions of the various NHDVS branches in this period appears in Maria Barrett Butler, "The National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 73:437 (October 1886): 683-695.

⁹⁶ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1881), 98. The 1892 Moller plans show two tank rooms on the fifth floor located in the northwest and southwest corners. Perhaps these tanks were added when additional water was available via the new artesian well. The extant tank is located at a higher level in the central tower.

⁹⁷ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1883), 111.

⁹⁸ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1895), 76.

cook for 1,800 would meet the needs of the Home for many years.⁹⁹ The addition cost \$10,000 and was designed by H.C. Koch and Co..¹⁰⁰ This expansion was probably the one-story section on the south side of the ell. Comparing a c. 1887 interior view of the dining room with one taken c. 1889 shows that the original space contained two rows of metal columns with square decorative capitals (these capitals are still extant above the drop ceiling). When expanded the new section was uninterrupted by columns and featured thick ceiling beams and a row of metal columns with ornate acanthus leaf capitals along the former location of the exterior wall.¹⁰¹

In fiscal year 1893, the entire steam piping and radiator system in Main Building was replaced at a cost of \$7,250.¹⁰² The new system was low pressure, considered much safer than the previous high pressure one. Specifications for the new system indicated that all of the pipe, fittings, valves, radiators, and wall coils needed to be replaced.¹⁰³ Many radiators still in the building appear to date from this period. Copies of drawings by Milwaukee architect John A. Moller in the Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center Library appear to be locating the radiators for this heating system upgrade.¹⁰⁴ The drawings are dated 1892 and only available for the second through fifth floors (Figure 2). They show an open landing Imperial stairwell (a single flight splits into two parallel flights after making a 180-degree turn at a landing) at the rear of the center hall where the main block meets the ell that is no longer extant. A large space and two smaller sections of the original ell second floor are labeled “old chapel,” indicating that perhaps at this point these spaces were being used as public areas. Beyond the washrooms and water closets in the northwest tower, all of the remaining spaces are labeled as bedrooms except for a “printing room” on the west side of the north corridor on the third floor. The small bathrooms added to tower bedrooms are not yet in place. The only elevator is near the center of the main block at the northwest corner of the central hall.

These drawings also provide some clues as to the dining room ell additions. In plan a L-shaped section at the west end of the ell is distinct from the original rectangular section. Perhaps this corresponds to the 1876 expansion. The second floor in this area is being used for bedrooms in 1892 and there is a small straight run stair on the north side. The first floor plan is not available, but a roof line drawn on Moller’s second floor plan indicates how a one-story expansion to the south filled in the L-shaped addition to create a larger rectangular ell. The north extension section is schematically indicated on Moller’s plans above the second floor, and the

⁹⁹ Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1889), 90.

¹⁰⁰ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 28 April 1889.

¹⁰¹ Stereopair photograph of interior of dining room, c. 1887 [WHi-34876], H. H. Bennett Studio Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society; Photograph of dining room in *National Soldiers' Home Near Milwaukee* [Souvenir Booklet], 1889, Zablocki VA Medical Center Library.

¹⁰² Board of Managers, NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1893), 65.

¹⁰³ Typescript – “Specifications for changing the High Pressure into a Low Pressure Steam Heating Apparatus, in the main Building of the National Home, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin,” (22 August 1892), Zablocki VA Medical Center Library.

¹⁰⁴ A booster publication from 1897 lists John A. Moller as one of the principles in the firm of Moller & Ehlers which was formed in 1895. These plans of the Main Building were made the first year Moller was in business for himself. See *Milwaukee: A Half Century's Progress, 1846-96*. (Milwaukee: Consolidated Illustrating Co., 1897), 197, 205-206. Moller also designed the Catholic Chaplain's Quarters at the Home in 1909.

specifications for the new heating system in 1892 mention a “dining room annex to the north.” The current appearance of this section seems to indicate a major overhaul during the 1930s.

A number of reports and brochures from the mid/late 1890s give useful descriptions of Main Building. The Inspector General’s report for 1894 described the Main Building as so:

The main building has a capacity of nearly 800, and quarters five companies. It is four stories in height and contains, in addition to the wards, also the principal mess hall and administration offices. Though commodious and large, it seems overcrowded, like all the barracks.¹⁰⁵

An illustrated souvenir booklet from around the same time gives a similar description with more details:

In the main building . . . are the offices of the Governor, Treasurer, Quartermaster and Adjutant, principal dining room, some sleeping wards, reception room, etc. The main dining room is 77x120 feet, and will accommodate 1,100 persons at one time. It is a light, airy, cheerful room. Adjoining this is a smaller dining room for the use of the non-commissioned staff, clerks, etc.¹⁰⁶

In 1897 the Inspector General noted that Building No. 2 was by far the most expensive building at the Branch, costing nearly \$319,000 (including original construction and later expansion). Even with a purported 1.4 million square feet of floor space, it was noted that the Main Building was always overcrowded.¹⁰⁷ Demand would continue to grow after 1900 when Spanish-American War veterans became eligible for membership. Overall the medical services began to take on greater importance, particularly because of Spanish-American veterans suffering from tuberculosis, yellow fever, or malaria. To help meet these needs, the Board of Managers established the Danville, Illinois Branch in 1897, the Mountain Branch near Johnson City, Tennessee in 1901; and the Battle Mountain Sanitarium near Hot Springs, South Dakota in 1902.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ J.C. Breckinridge, *Report of the Inspector General on the Several Branches of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers from October 3 to December 23, 1894* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1894), 22-23. The report also noted that the dining room could seat 956 men.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Corbett, *The Soldiers' Home: Detailed Description of the North-Western Branch National Military Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 7th edition* (Milwaukee: Burdick, Armitage, and Allen, Print, c. 1895), 2. Souvenir booklet in the Zablocki VA Medical Center Library; Appraisal lists published by the Board of Managers listed the “main building, including barracks A, B, C, E, and K” as costing \$320,000 from the general fund. For example see Board of Managers - NHDVS, *Annual Report* (1910), 137.

¹⁰⁷ J.C. Breckinridge, *Report of the Annual Inspection of the Several Branches of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers made by the Inspector-General of the Army July 31, 1897-November 1897* (55th Congress, 2d sess., House Document No. 278, 1898), 42

¹⁰⁸ Cetina, 354-55. Although still residential, the Mountain Branch featured a large hospital and the location was thought be particular beneficial to tuberculosis patients. The Battle Mountain Branch was the first in the NHDVS to be primarily a medical facility.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, Building No. 2 was again due for repairs because of heavy use. Worn floors were replaced, plumbing fixtures repaired or upgraded, and extensive white washing and painting done. A new elevator was also installed circa 1902. In 1904 it was connected to the new central power house with steam pipes for emergency use.¹⁰⁹

After 1909 the population at this branch declined. In 1916 the Inspector General recommended that it be closed to avoid extensive repairs and the Board of Managers agreed. However shortly thereafter the potential influx of World War I veterans made it necessary to expand rather than eliminate branches.¹¹⁰ A report from an inspection conducted in August 1918 discussed the urgently needed deferred maintenance. The report noted that “the entire main building, housing five companies, is unsuitable for barracks, being unsanitary, dark, and in bad repair.”¹¹¹ The inspectors recommended adding spiral fire escapes to the east and west sides (\$4,000), replacing badly worn floors (\$3,000), and redoing the old plumbing (\$5,000). It was also recommended that the elevator be switched from steam to electric power (\$7,000, including elevator in hospital).

Immediately following World War I the Board of Managers launched a flurry of hospital building for the homes, much of it centered on specialized facilities for treating tuberculosis. The Northwestern Branch received \$1.2 million to build a modern tuberculosis hospital on the far southern edge of the property. The building was completed in 1922-23. Its location foreshadowed the future shift of development to medical facilities clustered closer to National Avenue.¹¹²

A series of photographs taken in 1923 provide a snapshot of Building No. 2 in this period. The exterior looks largely the same, with the trim painted a lighter color and ivy growing on the walls. An interior view of the dining shows remarkably similar long wooden tables and simple chairs arranged in rows. Ceiling fans and contemporary light fixtures seem to be the only changes since the late nineteenth century. A view of a sleeping ward shows a utilitarian space with metal bed frames and simple wood chairs pushed up against the walls. A round wood table and some small, mismatched cabinets are the only additional furnishings. The pointed arch windows have roller shades only covering their lower sections. A single glass shade pendant light is visible hanging from the ceiling and attached to external electrical conduits. There are no rugs or additional decoration other than some calendars tacked to the wall. These photographs were published in the 1924 souvenir history of the Northwestern Branch.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Maj. Thomas T. Knox, *Report of the Inspection of the Several Branches of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers made from September 3 to December 8, 1899* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1900), 14; Maj. Thomas T. Knox, *Report of the Inspection of the Several Branches of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers made from July 15 to October 22, 1902* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1902); Board of Managers – NHDVS, *Annual Report* (1904), 80.

¹¹⁰Julin, “Northwestern Branch,” NHL Registration Form, 57.

¹¹¹ Col E. D. Warfield, *Report of an Inspection of the Several Branches of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers Made July 26, 1918 to Sept 16, 1918*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1919), 21.

¹¹² Cetina, 379.

¹¹³ Tom L. Johnson, ed., *Souvenir History Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers* (1924). Copies of this booklet are available at the Zablocki VA Medical Center Library, Milwaukee, WI and Library of Congress, Washington, DC. There is also a 1921 aerial view of the Home from the West that provides a

Looking back in early 1930, General George H. Wood, President of the NHDVS, testified before the House Committee on Military Affairs that the World War had dramatically shifted demand for the Home's services. Between 1907 and 1919 no additional construction was undertaken anywhere in the system. By the end of the war, the potential membership had increased tenfold. In 1929, the state soldiers' home in Bath, New York became the eleventh branch of the NHDVS. This transfer was a partial solution for the rapidly rising demand in the late 1920s. In addition, the Board of Managers proposed to increase capacity at existing branches where possible and adding another branch somewhere in the South. Between 1927 and 1929 the population at the Northwestern Branch would increase from 1,490 to 2,017. By this time over half of the members were World War veterans, with a few hundred Civil War veterans still remaining.¹¹⁴

Around 1928, members of Congress began advocating for restructuring federal veterans' services. Three different agencies served veterans – the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, the Pension Bureau, and the Veterans' Bureau (founded in 1921 and primarily involved with medical care and insurance). Various restructurings were considered; the most straightforward and ultimately successful proposal was combining all three agencies under a new Veterans' Administration. This proposal was approved by Congress on July 3, 1930 and instituted through an executive order. The NHDVS Board of Managers resisted the initial proposals, but finally their eleven branches were folded into the new VA. The NHDVS was no longer an autonomous agency; now their primarily domiciliary services were just one of many offered by the Veterans' Administration.¹¹⁵

Life at the Milwaukee branch continued without many changes. When asked by a member of Congress whether facilities built for Civil War veterans were satisfactory to World War veterans, General Wood could only answer that the demand seemed to indicate that the Homes were still desirable to veterans.¹¹⁶ The Board of Managers had continued to push for expansion of the branches, arguing that these services would be needed regardless of the changes in administrative structure. In 1929 they had requested a new 300-bed barrack at the Northwestern Branch.¹¹⁷ The request was made again in February 1931, now for a 350-bed barracks to cost \$300,000.¹¹⁸

One of the few major projects at the Northwestern Branch after the end of the NHDVS era was construction of a new kitchen for the Main Building/Building No. 2. The original

rare view of the rear ell. However the image quality is poor. See Negative no. 2319, file – National Soldiers' Home Building, Toepfer Collection, Milwaukee Historical Society.

¹¹⁴ In July 1929 the population at the Northwestern Branch included 207 Civil War veterans, 640 Spanish War veterans, and 1,362 World War veterans. Inspector General's Report – NHDVS published in *Construction at Soldiers' Homes, Hearings Before the Committee on Military Affairs*, House of Representatives, 71st Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: GPO, 1930), 76.

¹¹⁵ Cetina, 382-383.

¹¹⁶ *Construction at Soldiers' Homes, Hearings Before the Committee on Military Affairs*, House of Representatives, 71st Congress, 3rd Session (Washington, DC: GPO, 1931), 8.

¹¹⁷ *Construction at Soldiers' Home* (1931), 3.

¹¹⁸ *Construction at Soldiers' Home* (1930), 3.

kitchen on the north side of the ell was demolished and a new structure built using the salvaged bricks.¹¹⁹ There are photographs of the kitchen interiors by the Downey Heating Contractors that are dated August 30, 1934. Drawings dated February 1937 show the current form of the north ell extension and are titled “Alterations and Additions.” It is not clear exactly what work is being done each of these years. Floor plans of the main building from the same period also show the current configuration of a pair of elevators on the south side of the central hall. This double elevator shaft was inserted into the room on this side of the corridor.¹²⁰

World War II again created a large influx of eligible veterans for the Milwaukee (or Wood, Wisconsin as it was known in the VA system) institution. Building No. 2 continued to function as a domiciliary (sleeping quarters and mess hall) into the 1980s. Much of the signage, window treatments, and wall coverings remaining in the structure appear to date to this period. In the late 1980s, a crash test facility leased space in the lower three floors of the north side of the main block. Much of the rest of the structure has been treated as a storage facility with the exception of a few rooms arranged as displays for the educational events of the non-profit Soldiers' Home Foundation.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Main Building is a Victorian Gothic Revival institutional structure with a tall central tower and block flanked by long symmetrical wings and four corner towers. Later additions and expansions of service ells to the rear give the Main Building an irregular footprint.

2. Condition of fabric: Good/Fair

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The symmetrical main block has a five part plan of central block (five story) with tower (six stories plus two levels to access roof), flanking three-story wings, and a four-story tower at each corner. There is a long two-story ell at rear of the main block plus another later addition on its north side. The main ell has a perpendicular two story wing at its west end and a one story shed roof section attached to its south elevation. The later ell extension is one story on a raised basement.

2. Foundations: The foundation consists of cut stone laid in an irregular ashlar pattern, with a wide sloped water table made of smooth cut stone. The visible foundation is approximately three

¹¹⁹Halverson et. al., “Northwestern Branch,” NR Registration Form, 57.

¹²⁰ Photographs in Zablocki VA Medical Center Library; The c. 1937 drawings have been scanned by Zablocki VA Medical Center Facilities Management. An additional scanned plan notes that the fifth floor roof was replaced in 1974.

feet high at the center block and five feet at the end towers as the site slopes down to the north and south.

3. Walls: The walls feature local “Cream City” brick (a distinctive yellowish-tan color) with a pier between each bay and a corbelled cornice. The center block is the most highly decorated, with a two stone string courses at each floor and decorative cast iron pilasters (third floor) or capitals and base (first and second floors). One string course is located at the sill and another near the top of the window opening on the first, second, and third floors. The wings have a raised brick decorative spandrel between the first and second stories. The ells are also “Cream City” brick, either plain or with a pier between each bay and a corbelled brick cornice. The main block and tower walls are laid in an all stretcher bond. The north wall of the main ell is all stretcher bond. The ell extension and west and south walls of the main ell are laid in a six to one common bond. The brick was manufactured by George Bingham and Sons, the largest brickyard in Milwaukee. The distinctive “Cream City” brick was made from extensive clay deposits found on the south side of the city.¹²¹

4. Structural system, framing: The Main Buildings features load bearing masonry in the main block, concrete and metal post and beam in portions of the ell, and some metal structural elements including a roof truss in ell extension.

5. Porches:

Entrance Portico: This portico serves as the bottom level of the central tower. It is accessed up seven granite steps from three sides to a landing, and then up four more steps to the main entrance. The landing has a red ceramic tile floor that is probably a later replacement. The portico ceiling is wood board and batten. The portico has piers at the corners with a heavy stone base and capital. All three openings are framed by a compound Gothic brick arch with recessed spandrel panels and applied wood ribs. Each side of the portico openings has a series of three freestanding metal (probably cast iron) columns. These columns have Gothic Revival characteristics such as tall, thin proportions and capitals with curved fluting and large wrapped acanthus leaves. A painted metal string course runs along the top of the columns and around the inside of the portico. The wood and metal elements are all painted dark red.

Originally open wood or wrought iron stairs with large landings/balconies and decorative rails were mounted on the exterior of the north and south ends of the wings. Historic photographs show that these stairs created an entrance portico into the ground floor level and direct access to the first floor via a staircase up either side parallel to the wall.¹²² These stairs were replaced by metal ones with a similar configuration of exterior stair and platform during the twentieth century. Currently there are no exterior stairs at the ends of the wings and the doorways have been converted to small windows. Low entrance foyers with commercial windows shelter the ground level entrances.

¹²¹ On local brick see the preface to Korom, *Milwaukee Architecture*, esp. page x.

¹²² For example see photograph of north façade, no date, “Soldier’s Home,” E. Hickox Collection, Milwaukee Historical Society or perspective view with south façade, no date, Negative No. 21,886, Milwaukee Historical Society.

6. Chimneys: There is a metal ventilator at the center of each side tower. There are two large rectangular internal chimneys near the center of each wing, with a slate slab on top. There are two small internal brick chimneys with slate slab caps in the center block. A plain external brick chimney is located at the west end of the main ell and oriented parallel to the ridge line in this section.

The north section of the rear ell (originally the kitchen) has a large chimney through the south wall at the main ell, plus additional ventilator pipes in the center of the roof. The chimney is an external brick chimney with a thin concrete cap.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Main block, central tower – The door here is a glass and metal commercial double door that is a fairly recent replacement. The original wood door with pointed Gothic arch details was located inside the entrance hall in June 2008. Ornate Gothic Revival decorative detail still appears in the door surround. The opening is framed by a monumental compound arch flanked by thin metal columns matching those on the portico openings. The fixed transom over the door has two sets of three pointed arches with thick mullions.

Main block, south entrance – There is a modern glass and metal enclosure over the entrance at the south façade. A double glass and metal commercial door with wide fixed sidelights was cut into the stone foundation here. This enclosure would have been added after the multi-level external stairs were removed from this façade.

Main block, north entrance – There is a small glass and metal enclosure on a brick foundation over a doorway on this end of the main block. The opening appears to have been cut into the foundation sometime after construction. This enclosure would have been added after the multi-level external stairs were removed from this façade.

Main rear ell, south façade – A double wood door here that appears to be of recent vintage has an original brick hood over the opening.

Main rear ell, south fire escape – There is an opening here that may have originally been a window.

Main rear ell, west façade- There is a double door here that is accessed via seven concrete stairs to a landing. Additional steps below lead to a basement door that appears to have been cut through the foundation sometime after construction.

Main rear ell, north façade – There is a doorway on the north façade where the ell joins the rear wall of the main block.

Ell extension – There is a loading dock and two doors on the north façade of this addition.

b. Windows: Main block - The typical window is a four over four double hung wood sash. The upper sash is either rectangular or a pointed arch. The window openings have either pointed or

segmental arch brick hoods and plain stone sills. Otherwise the window sash is set directly into the brick wall. The ground level windows are casement.

More decorative window openings appear on the central block and tower and require additional mention. The first and second floor windows on the east façade, or front, are grouped in threes with a blind arcade of pointed arches above and framed by brick pilasters with metal bases and capitals. The capitals are decorated with quatrefoil motif. The third floor features five lancet windows separated by four metal pilasters. Similar window opening decoration appears on the side facades of the main block; this portion of the building projects from the side wings at a forty-five degree angle before again turning parallel. The windows here have similar decorative surrounds but are arranged in pairs, singly, or groups of three in the case of the lancet windows on the third floor. Also on the east façade, the center bay of each wing features a pointed arch recessed surround incorporated into the brick wall. On the first floor this surround springs from pilaster capitals near the top of the window and is in the form of a double pointed arch. On the second floor, a similar but larger pilaster and arch arrangement frames a pair of lancet windows and a blind circular recess.

Towers - The windows on the northwest end tower have additional decorative carving at the top of the wood frame that does not appear elsewhere.

Main rear ell – The first floor features pairs of four over four wood sash windows with segmental arch brick hoods. The second floor windows are smaller, single openings with wood sash divided unevenly into four lights. These windows have a pointed arch wood frame, brick hood, and concrete sills.

Ell extension – Here the modern metal sash windows are arranged in pairs. There are some large openings in deep window wells.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Building No. 2 prominently features a collection of tall mansard roof forms on the main block and towers and flat or low-pitched roofs on the service ells.

Main block - The roof of the main center block is still sheathed with red, black, or green slate shingles, in both fish scale and rectangular shapes. Rows of alternating red and green fish scale shingle triangles highlighted with black fish scale shingles frame the top and bottom of the mansard. A row of green diamond shapes with red centers executed with fish scale shingles appears at the center and is flanked by thick bands of red rectangular slates. The lower roof of the wings has a mansard shape from the front and rear but an open gable with a very shallow pitched gambrel roof line on the ends (north and south) between the towers. In these sections the roof is sheathed with green asphalt shingles. Above the slate on the sides of the mansard, the tops of these roofs are covered with a tar and chipped aggregate surface.

Main rear ell – The two story portion has a L-shaped cross gable form, covered with a tar and chipped aggregate surface. The open gables appear at the west end, on the south and northwest sides. The parapet for a fire wall projects from the two-story section just beyond the center of

the ell. The one story portion on the south elevation has a shed roof covered with a tar and chipped aggregate surface.

Ell extension – This portion of the building has a flat roof with a tar and chipped aggregate surface.

b. Cornice, eaves: The main block and towers have wood box eaves over corbelled brick cornices. Older portions of the rear ell have closed eaves over a small corbelled brick cornice while the later sections have a parapet with a concrete cap. All sections of Building No. 2 have enclosed gutters and integrated downspouts.

c. Towers: Building No. 2 has five prominent towers with steeply pitched mansard roofs covered with slate fish scale shingles. Except for the monochrome black shingles on the northwest tower, black, green, and red shingles on the tower roofs are arranged in a decorative pattern. The central tower is the tallest and most prominent, rising eight levels, with the top two levels contained within the mansard attic. Between the second and third floors the corner piers terminate in a hipped cap with a finial top. There is a corbelled brick string course running under the base of these caps. Between the fifth and sixth floors there is a corbel table with three pairs of arches on each tower façade. A larger and more robust corbel table with carved wood drops is located at the cornice. Each floor has a slightly different decorative treatment of pointed arch windows. See section on window openings and dormers for a detailed description of these elements on the towers.

The four corner towers are four stories, with the top floor contained within the attic created by the steep mansard roof. The two east towers are connected to the main block by small stairways in hyphens; the two west towers are flush and more continuous in floor plan with the rest of the structure. The brick walls are laid in an all stretcher bond, with a corbelled blind arcade of Gothic arches at the cornice. The corners of the towers are beveled with a raised brick pier on each wall surface. There are two courses of corbelled brick below the arched corbel table at the cornice. Another thick corbelled string course is located between the second and third floors, with five courses of brick turned at a forty-five degree angle. There is also a small rectangular spandrel panel of recessed bricks between the first and second floor windows and a corbelled brick base between the tower wall and stone foundation. The northwest tower differs slightly from the other three with paired instead of single openings and additional decorative touches in the wall surfaces. Additional decoration incorporated into the brick walls include a line of five recessed Greek crosses below the first floor window and vertical recesses flanking the window openings and running from the first to second floors. There is a multi-layered brick string course at the sill of the first floor, with a band of alternating recessed and projecting vertical bricks below the windows. There are decorative cast iron railings around the top of the four end towers that feature a stylized floral motif and appear to be original. This railing is missing from the central tower and has been replaced by a pipe railing.

d. Dormers: The mansard roofs of the main block feature front gable dormers to facilitate use of these attic spaces for living quarters. The dormers vary in size and detailing depending on their

location, with the largest, most elaborate ones appearing on the central tower and block, smaller ones along the main block wings, and even smaller ones on the corner towers.

For the center tower and main block, the typical dormer is a tall front gable form that spans two floors. On the tower the dormer have a tall wood sash window with a pointed arch upper sash and curved mullions. The windows are framed by an entablature with carved rafter ends and supported by pairs of engaged wood columns as tall as the lower sash. On the main block the lower two-thirds has a pair of tall, thin rectangular sash windows, separated by a wood pilaster. The upper third has a small sash window set into a pointed arch recess framed by a trefoil motif in wood. The roofs are sheathed with sheet metal painted green, over wood and feature a box eave. On the wings of the main block the typical dormer has a steeply pitched front gable roof and contains a window with a pointed top sash. The roofs are sheathed with the same green asphalt shingles as the mansard and feature a shallow box eave.

Each corner tower has a small hipped roof dormer on each side of the mansard roof. These dormers are sheathed with metal on the roof and wood on the sides. They contain a small wood sash window that is either glazed or louvered. Similar hipped roof dormers that are slightly larger are located on the ends of the main block at the connections between the main block and corner towers.

e. Skylights: The roof of the center block has six hipped metal frame skylights with a metal ventilator pipe adjacent to each. These wire glass skylights provide natural light to center of the fifth floor, a usable attic space. There are also two peaked metal frame skylights in the roof of the ell in a hyphen section between the original ell and its north extension. These skylights are also paired with metal ventilator pipes and glazed with wire glass.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The basic plan of Building No. 2 is a central hall connecting to a long transverse hall, both double loaded with rooms. On the ground, first and second floors, there is a perpendicular ell extending from the rear with an irregular footprint. On the ground and first floors the ell includes a kitchen extension to the north that is parallel to the main building. Access to the dining room at the ell on the first floor is down a short flight of stairs through a lounge area. On the second floor this area was originally open to the first floor with a mezzanine. The one major alteration to the plan is in the crash test laboratory on the ground and first floors of the north wing. The ceiling was removed from several of the rooms on the west side corridor to create a two-story high space for test equipment. The modern double elevator shaft partially fills one of the large rooms on the south side of the entrance corridor on all levels. Several other spaces, such as the second floor of the rear ell and the west side of the fifth floor, appear to have non-load bearing partition walls that alter the original plan.

Each of the corner tower levels contains a few small rooms; those in the northwest tower were built as bathrooms. A later bathroom is still intact at this location on the first through fourth floors. The west side towers are at the same floor level as the main building. The rooms in the east side towers are accessed via staircases branching off the secondary stair landings. The front

of the central hall on the second through fourth floors is a lounge area, sometimes accessed via a sort flight of stairs.

The fifth floor encompasses the attic space of the central block only. A central circulation space and transverse hall is surrounded by rooms with sloped ceilings along the outer walls.

The upper floors of the central tower are utilitarian spaces housing a cistern, wood flagpole, and stair to the roof hatch.

2. Stairways: All of the stairways have been modernized and are fully enclosed. The steps are covered with linoleum and non-skid tread covers. The typical form is a dog leg stair with half pace landings between floors. The main stairway is located just south of the central entrance hall and rises to the fifth floor. There are secondary stairs at each end of the wings, with additional stairs branching off from the landings to allow access to the end towers on the east side of the structure. These stairs go from the ground floor up four levels to the roof of the wings. Roof access here is provided by a modern brick extension of the stairwell. The flights get shorter because of the lower ceiling heights on the upper floors.

Another secondary stair, this one with an open balustrade instead of a wall-mounted hand rail, is located near the center of the rear ell and goes from the ground to second floor level.

There is a short flight of stairs now partially covered by ramps from the first floor hall to the dining room via the sunken lounge area. The lounge area in the front central tower is accessed via a variable number of stairs on the second, third, and fourth floors.

A combination of modern metal stairs, wood ladder and the original narrow winder stair in the upper levels of the central tower allows access to the cistern and the roof.

Plans from 1892 indicate that main stair has been reconfigured and another stair near the original elevator removed.¹²³ These changes probably took place at the same time the pair of modern elevators was added on the south side of the entrance hall through one of the larger rooms. Additional stairs between the first and second floor at an open mezzanine in the center of the plan have also been removed. The end stairs at the east towers appear to maintain the same configuration.

3. Flooring: The original wood floors have been repaired and/or replaced many times. Currently the floors are covered by terrazzo in the halls of the main building and linoleum in the flanking rooms and ell rooms. The corridor at the ground floor has a red square mission tile floor while many of the bathrooms have white and light gray ceramic tile floors.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Building No. 2 has plaster on lath walls and ceilings throughout with beaded wood wainscot in many of the former ward rooms. On the upper floors under the mansard and in the dormers the ceilings are sloped or coved. The painted wainscot features a

¹²³ Floor plans of Main Building by John A. Moller (1892), copies in Zablocki VA Medical Center Library.

thick, sloped chair rail and tall baseboards. Many of the halls have a burlap wall covering (c. 1980) and stick-on acoustic tile ceilings (c. 1940). There is a drop acoustic tile ceiling in the former dining room. There are plaster arches across the hall ceilings demarcating the shift from more public areas to the ward rooms at the ends of the halls. In the halls the terrazzo floor continues up to form baseboard. The bathrooms have tile wainscoting probably from mid-twentieth century.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Many of the original room doors survive and are thick wood with deeply recessed panels. The typical door opening is a tall with a segmental arch top, three-light transom, and a thick carved molding. There are French doors for the rooms along the center first floor hall that were used as offices. These tall doors have twelve lights arranged three over four, with a mix of clear and frosted glass. Three pairs of tall thin French doors (two over six) are located between the first floor center lounge and the dining room.

The former baggage storage rooms on the third and fourth floors have a pair of swinging wood doors glazed with wire glass.

The center hall on the first floor has a large pointed arch cased opening with decorative plaster pendant drops at the transverse hall. A similar cased opening on the second floor features a pointed arch arcade with square columns.

b. Windows: The typical window is a double hung wood sash with either a flat or pointed arch top; these windows appear to date from the nineteenth century and may be original. Many window openings feature the thick wood trim, such as in the offices and ward rooms, while other windows are set directly into the masonry walls with deep sloping sills. The fourth floor windows are set into coved dormers on the mansard and feature huge six light sash with a lancet form at the top. On the ground floor the window sills are level with the outside ground level. The dining room ell has large two over two wood sash windows set directly into the walls with metal sills.

6. Decorative features and trim: There are a few remnants of decorative stenciling on the metal columns in the dining room. The ornate column capitals visible in historic photos are not extant; perhaps they were removed when the acoustic tile drop ceiling was installed. Examples of an older generation of cast iron capital (square capitals with a raised quatrefoil motif) are still above the drop ceiling. Wood bulletin board cases with glass doors are mounted on many of the hallways and appear to date from the second quarter of the twentieth century.

A wood flagpole originally extended through the center of the roof of the central tower. The flagpole had been cut in half and the pieces remain in the upper level of the tower. The roof opening has been sealed.

7. Hardware: A few ornate metal doorknobs survive that appear to be c. 1890, as well as some early twentieth century porcelain knobs. Most of the hinges and knobs appear to be modern replacements.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Building No. 2 originally had a steam boiler radiant heating system. It was converted from high to low pressure in 1892. In summer 2008 several generations of radiators were still extant, the earliest ornate ones dating to c. 1890 and more utilitarian ceiling mounted ones in the ground floor halls dating to c. 1930. However old radiators were starting to be removed from the building shortly thereafter. There are also some decorative metal grilles on vents that appear to be late nineteenth or early twentieth century. After 1895, steam for the system was provided by a central plant.

There are large stainless steel exhaust hoods on the north side of the dining room.

b. Lighting: Building No. 2 had electric lighting starting in the late nineteenth century. Now the lighting is a mix of c. 1980 fluorescent fixtures and incandescent pendant lights, c. 1930. There are still working push button light switches. The modern wiring runs through external conduits on the walls and ceilings.

c. Plumbing: The northwest tower was originally constructed to house a toilet room and running water for the ground through fourth floors. The extant porcelain sinks, toilets, and metal shower stalls were installed during the twentieth century. Additional group bathrooms with twentieth century fixtures are near the center of each transverse hall and the rear of the ell on the second floor. Small private or semi-private bathrooms with mid-twentieth century fixtures are adjacent to the sleeping quarters in the east towers. There are numerous exposed overhead pipes for later systems, particularly in the ground floor halls.

A large cast-iron cistern with riveted seams sits on a wood reinforcing beam on the sixth floor of the central tower. A cistern was first installed in this location in 1875 and used gravity to provide water for fire protection.

d. Elevators: There is a bank of two elevators on the south side of the central hall that go from the ground floor to the fifth floor and partially fills these rooms (the main staircase is located behind the elevators). The current elevators are modern replacements, probably dating to the 1970s. This building's first elevator was installed in 1883; on the 1892 floor plans it is shown at the northwest corner of the entrance corridor.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design: The Northwestern Branch Main Building was prominently placed on a rise overlooking the Menomonee River valley and among rolling landscaped grounds considered therapeutic for the disabled veterans who would reside there. The site falls away to the west, east and south, creating ground level entrances on those facades while entering via the main east entrance brings one into the first floor hall. Army chaplain and landscape designer Thomas Budd Van Horne laid out the grounds for the Northwestern and Central Branches of the National Asylum.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings:

Zablocki VA Medical Center, Facilities Management

Floor Plans, 2nd through 5th Floors, John A. Moller, Architect, 1892. [copies, location of originals unknown]

Additions and Alterations to Domiciliary Mess Building No. 2, February 13, 1937

Plans. Domiciliary Barracks and Mess Building No. 2, December 31, 1942, revised October 9, 1952.

B. Early Views:

Milwaukee County Historical Society:

Photograph, c. 1870, Perspective view from southeast, prior to construction of end towers in 1876.

Photograph, c. 1870, Perspective view from east with men and cannons in foreground, prior to construction of end towers in 1876.

Photograph, Neg. # 21.886, Perspective view from southeast, after construction of end towers in 1876.

Photograph, E. Hickox Collection, Perspective view from northeast, n.d., good view of balcony/exterior stair on north end of wing.

Aerial Photograph, 1921, View from west.

Milwaukee Public Library – Vertical Files, Humanities Room

Photograph, SOLD H-4, November 28, 1907, View of south elevation.

Wisconsin Historical Society

Engraving, c. 1867, Place File, Perspective view from east of “National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers,” shows larger end towers as originally designed by Mix. [WHi-23678; Zablocki VA Medical Center Library also has a copy]

Color Lithograph, c. 1867, Place File, Perspective view from east of “National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers,” shows larger end towers as originally designed by Mix. [WHi-54315; Zablocki VA Medical Center Library also has a copy]

Stereopair, before 1875, Place File (L. Black and Co. Photo), Perspective view from southeast, prior to construction of end towers [WHi-54264].

Stereopairs, c. 1887, H.H.Bennett Studio Collection, Perspective view from southeast [WHi-34883]; Interior of dining room [WHi-34876];

Photograph, before 1916, J. Robert Taylor Collection, East elevation.

Zablocki VA Medical Center Library

Lithograph, c. 1880, Elevated perspective view from southeast with paths and trees in foreground.

Souvenir Booklet, 1889 – Exterior perspective view from southeast, interior photographs of dining room and kitchen.

Souvenir Booklet, 1894 – View of East elevation.

Photographs, Interior of Living Quarters, Interior of Main Dining Room, Murdoch, c. 1923.

C. Selected Bibliography:

Board of Managers – National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, *Annual Reports*, various years starting in 1867; many volumes include *Proceedings* of the Board of Managers meetings.

Burrows, John Richard. *The Work of E. Townsend Mix from 1856 to 1890*. MArch Thesis: University of Virginia, 1980.

Butler, Maria Barrett. "The National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 73:437 (October 1886): 683-695.

Cetina, Judith Gladys. "A History of the Veterans' Homes in the United States, 1811-1930," Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1977.

Corbett, Elizabeth Frances. *Out at the Soldiers' Home: A Memory Book*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1941.

Corbett, Richard. *The Soldiers' Home: Detailed Description of the North-Western Branch National Military Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*, 7th edition. Milwaukee: Burdick, Armitage, and Allen, Print, c. 1895.

Halverson, Kristin Gilpatrick, Nancy J. Hubbard, Todd Hunter, and Patricia Lynch. "Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers Historic District," Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2005. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C..

Ingersoll, E. "Milwaukee," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 62:371 (April 1881): 702-718.

Inspector General. *Annual Report of Inspection - National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*. Washington, DC: GPO, 1894- . [author name and exact title vary]

Johnson, Tom L., ed. *Souvenir History Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*. 1924.

Julin, Suzanne. "National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers – Assessment of Significance and National Historic Landmark Recommendations." 2008. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C..

Julin, Suzanne. "Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers," Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. National Historic Landmark Registration Form (draft), 2008. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

- Kelly, Patrick. *Creating a National Home: Building the Veterans' Welfare State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Korom, Joseph. *Milwaukee Architecture: A Guide to Notable Buildings*. Madison, WI: Prairie Oak Press, 1995.
- “National Asylum for Soldiers,” *Harper's Weekly* (29 January 1870): 77-78.
- Neugent, Robert J. “The National Soldiers' Home,” *Historical Messenger* 31, no. 3 (1975), 88-96.
- Perrin, Richard W. E. *Milwaukee Landmarks: An Architectural Heritage 1850-1950*. Milwaukee Public Museum, Publications in History no. 9, 1968.
- Szczesny-Adams, Christy M. “Cosmopolitan Design in the Upper Midwest: The Nineteenth Century Architecture of Edward Townsend Mix.” Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2007.
- Szczesny-Adams, Chris. “Edward Townsend Mix: Books and the Professional Architect in Nineteenth-Century Milwaukee,” in Kenneth Hafertepe and James F. O’Gorman, eds., *American Architects and Their Books, 1840-1915*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.
- Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn Withey. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970.
- Woolson, Constance F. “Round by Propellor,” *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 45:268 (September 1872): 518-532 – travel account that includes visit to the National Asylum in Milwaukee and reprint of 1870 engraving
- Yanni, Carla. *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2007.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Main Building (Building No. 2) at the Northwestern Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (now Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center) was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS, Catherine Lavoie, Chief) during the summer of 2008. HABS is part of the Heritage Documentation Programs (Richard O’Connor, Chief) of the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. The project is sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Construction and Facilities Management, Kathleen Schamel, Federal Preservation Officer, as part of a multi-year effort to record the significant examples of National Soldiers Home architectural currently under the jurisdiction of that agency. It was made possible through the cooperation Robert H. Beller, Director, Zablocki VA Medical Center and many members of his staff, especially Librarian Jill

Zahn. The drawings team was led by HABS architect Mark Schara, working with HABS architects Paul Davidson, Anne Kidd, and Jason McNatt, and student architects Daniel DeSousa and Alex Matsov. The historical reports were prepared by HABS Historian Lisa P. Davidson. Large-format photography was undertaken by HABS Photographer James Rosenthal.

PART V. ILLUSTRATIONS

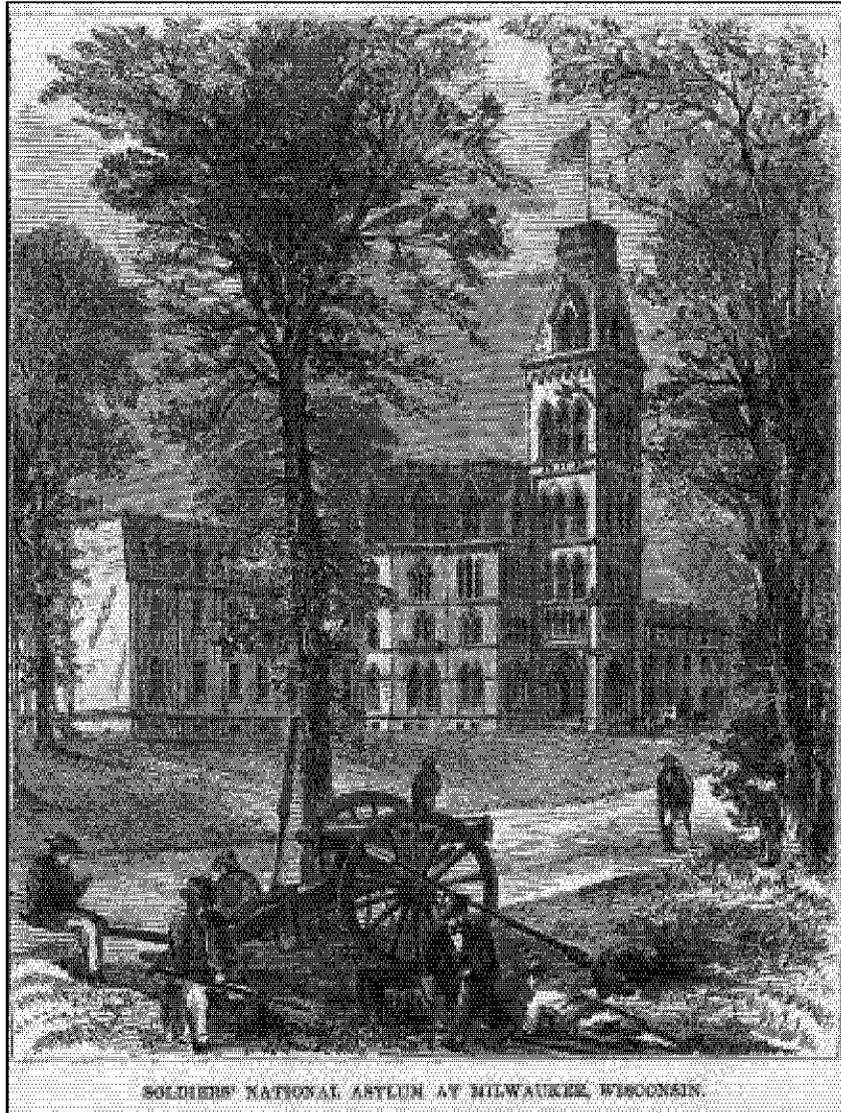


Figure 1: Engraving of Main Building, Northwestern Branch NHDVS.
Source: "National Asylum for Soldiers," *Harper's Weekly* (29 January 1870): 77.

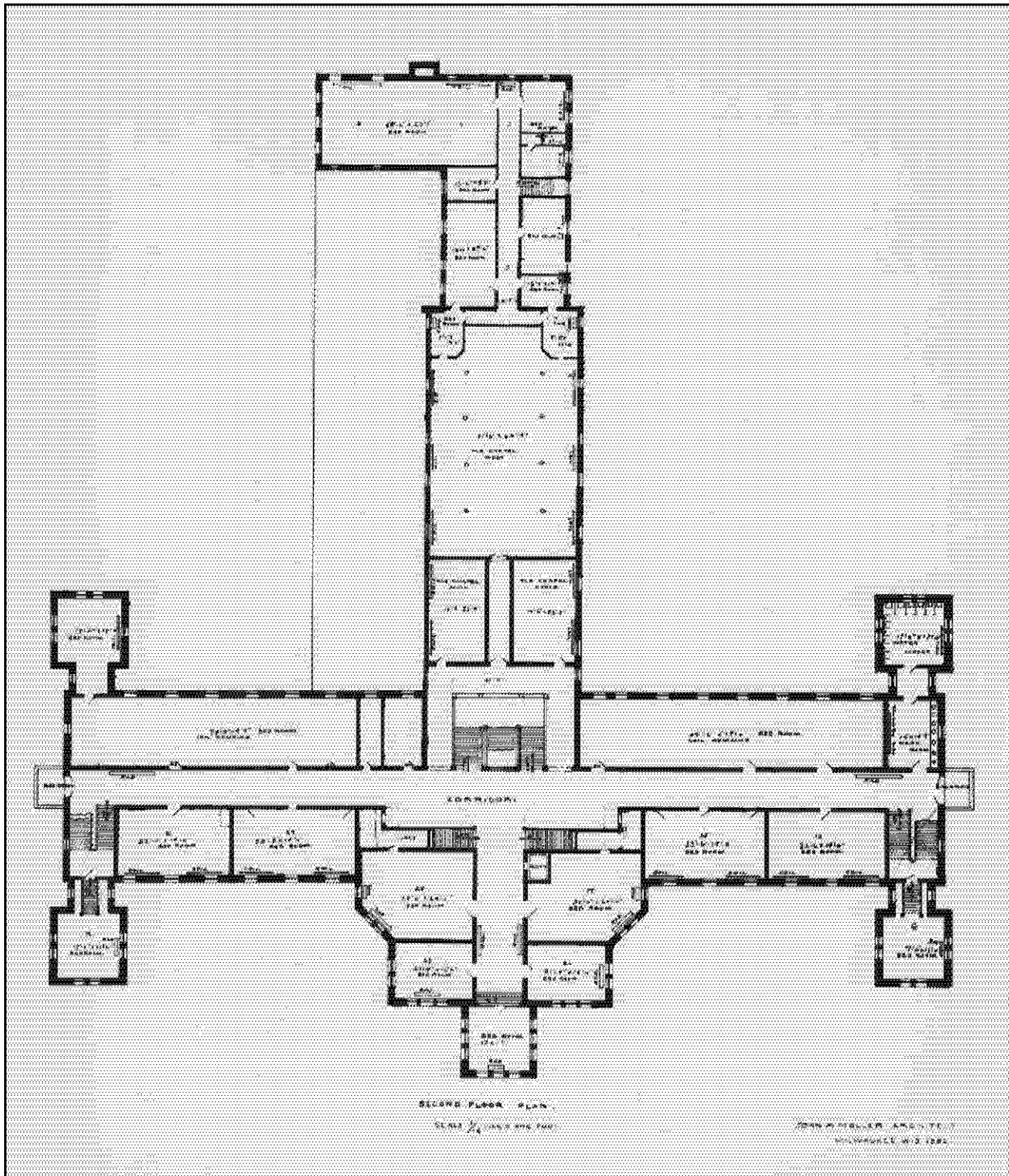


Figure 2: Second Floor Plan, Main Building, (1892)
Source: Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center Library