

NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED
VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS, NORTHWESTERN BRANCH
DOUBLE-CAR GARAGE, BUILDING 81
(Milwaukee Veterans Administration Medical Center
Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center)
5000 West National Avenue
City of Milwaukee
Milwaukee County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WI-360-U

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS,
NORTHWESTERN BRANCH,
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- Location: Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 5000 West National Avenue, Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin
- Building 81 is located at latitude: 43.023633, longitude: -87.978922. The coordinate represents the center of the structure and was obtained via Google Earth. Building 81's location has no restriction on its release to the public.
- Present Owner: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- Present Occupant: Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center
- Present Use: Vacant
- Significance: The National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS) was established in 1865 as the first federal-level institution dedicated to the care of veteran soldiers. The Northwestern Branch in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was one of three original NHDVS branches. By the time NHDVS was absorbed into the newly formed Veterans Administration in 1930, there were eleven branches across the country.
- The buildings and grounds of each branch represent the Board of Managers' policies and practices regarding veterans' care. Their campuses featured significant architecture and landscape designs intended to instill pride in veteran residents as well as the cities who hosted each facility. The grounds for the Northwestern Branch were planned in 1867 by Thomas Budd van Horne. Avenues were laid out with respect to the undulating topography of the campus, consistent with the ideology of the Picturesque landscape movement. Charming pavilions, lush landscaping, and picturesque water features were linked by winding roadways. Scenic drives and promenades through the grounds became popular recreational activities for Home residents and for visitors, who reached the Home by carriage, trains, and public streetcars.
- As automobiles became more common in the first half of the twentieth century, transportation became privatized. The use of carriages and public streetcars diminished, especially for officers and administrators at the Northwestern Branch, who could afford personal automobiles. This privatization is reflected in a surge of garage construction in the 1930s.

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Garages are indicative of a change in lifestyle as automobiles became dominant features in American culture in the first half of the twentieth century.

Description: Building 81 is a two-car garage with structural clay-tile walls. Tri-fold wood garage doors on the east facade mark each of the bays, which are separated by a structural clay-tile post. Each door leaf has a recessed panel with a window above. Two vents are located on the rear (west wall) of the garage.

History: The Northwestern Branch was not only a recuperative environment for wounded soldiers and elderly veterans, but the park-like setting also provided recreation for visitors to the Home. An engraving from an 1881 souvenir book illustrates the popular activity of taking scenic drives through the grounds of the Northwestern Branch. The illustration shows horse-drawn carriages cruising around winding avenues circling charming pavilions on tree-lined knolls. Curvilinear pathways also facilitated visitors' promenades, making the grounds a place to see others and be seen, important interactions in Victorian culture. The Northwestern Branch attracted thousands of visitors each year, who accessed the grounds by carriage, railroads, or public streetcars.¹

Transportation became privatized as automobiles became more common in the first half of the twentieth century. This was true for visitors and Home residents alike. A site map from 1944 shows areas designated specifically for parking for visitors to the Home. Garages and driveways within the residential clusters are indicative of increased automobile use for officers and employees of the Home.²

There was a great surge in garage construction between 1935 and 1941. Prior to this time there were few garages on the campus. Between 1935 and 1941, however, thirteen garages were built. Many were built to store multiple vehicles and serve multiple employees. They were centrally located within the residential clusters throughout the grounds. The largest garage from this period housed sixteen vehicles and was located behind the nurses' quarters and chaplains' residences. Multiple stalls reflected the drastic increase in automobile use among Home employees.³

¹ General View of the Grounds illustration, 1881 souvenir book, Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center Archives (hereafter VAMC Archives).

² Building Number and Location Plan, Veterans Administration, Wood, Wisc., 1944, VAMC Archives.

³ Building Schedule at Veterans Administration, Wood, Wisc., 1944, VAMC Archives.

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Building 81 was constructed for the treasurer's house, Building 47, which was erected in 1899 just west of Lake Wheeler and is no longer extant. Building 81, a two-car garage, was one of two garages built in 1935, the first year of the construction surge. The other was a six-car garage that serviced the cluster of officers' duplexes north of Building 70 (Buildings 56, 61, and 79—no longer extant). Building 81 was one of two two-car garages built on the campus between 1935 and 1941; Building 60, which accompanied an officers' duplex, Building 38, in the southeast corner of the Home, was the other. (Building 38 was documented as HABS No. WI-303-A prior to its demolition in 1986; Building 60, extant, was documented as HABS No. WI-360-S in 2012.) In addition to these two structures, three one-car garages, two five-car garages, one six-car garage, one seven-car garage, one eight-car garage, and one sixteen-car garage were built.⁴

Though constructed later when funding became available, drawings for proposed garages were drafted in 1931. Their multiple-unit character was reflected in a modular design consisting of identical bays with folding wood and glazed doors separated by masonry piers. The drawings specify plans for one-, two-, and six-car garages, though they could be modified to facilitate additional bays. The design of Building 81 is based on the 1931 drawing.⁵

Sources: Building Schedules and Site Plans, Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center Archives, Milwaukee, Wisc.

Facilities Management Records, Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Milwaukee, Wisc.

Historians: Jessica Berglin and Charlene Roise, 2013

Project Information: The Department of Veterans Affairs has commissioned this report to comply with a stipulation in a memorandum of agreement between the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center (Zablocki VAMC), the Veterans Integrated Service Network 12, the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Park Service regarding the construction of a Fisher House within the boundary of the Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Drawing of Proposed Garage Buildings, National Home, Milwaukee, Wisc., October 26, 1931. A note in pencil indicates the following: Building 73 and 93 are one-car garages, Building 60 and 81 are two-car garages, and Building 80 is a six-car garage following the plans illustrated on the drawing.

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Volunteer Soldiers Home National Register Historic District. The Fisher House is a residential facility where loved ones can stay when relatives are undergoing treatment at the Zablocki VAMC. The construction will result in the demolition of Building 81, a contributing building in the National Register district.

Hess, Roise and Company, a historical consultant firm based in Minneapolis, has prepared this documentation study as a subcontractor to Chequamegon Bay Engineering, which has offices in Ashland and Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. Dave Cleary and Nicholas Migan oversaw the project for Chequamegon Bay Engineering. The report was prepared by Hess Roise architectural historian Jessica Berglin and overseen by principal Charlene Roise. Jerry Mathiason completed the photography as a subcontractor to Hess Roise.