

Historic Campus Tour

We were established in September of 1867 and were the first racially integrated VA. Originally known as the Central Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, we were one of the first 3 original branches established just after the Civil War. Due to the long name, it was more commonly known as the Dayton Soldiers Home. (The other 2 were: Eastern Branch in Augusta, Maine and North Western Branch in Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

This location was chosen because it met several criteria established by law-makers in Washington D.C.: it was located near a metropolitan area (Dayton), had railroad access, a spring-fed water supply, and finally, it was on high ground which helped to ventilate the original buildings with fresh air.

Received National Historic Landmark status in October of 2012.

[Click Here to watch the entire Historical Campus Tour](#)

Oldest Buildings:

Protestant Chapel— 1868 –finished 1870

Clubhouse—1881

HQ Building. (Bldg. 116)—1871

Putnam Library—1880





Building 305

Built in the 1940’s Building 305 was primarily used for recreation activities: containing a theater, bowling alley, arts and crafts rooms and is still used for that purpose today.



Ground Maintenance (Building 135)

Now housing the ground maintenance department and equipment, this building was historically used as the horse stables



Building 410

Building 410 was primarily barracks-type housing and now houses our Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program.



General Franklin (Building 412)

Built in 1902 this building was named after one of the Board of Managers of the Home System (prior to 1930). Several buildings or features of the campus were named after “resident managers” – meaning that the official lived locally, but was the facility’s liaison to Washington D.C. and sat on the Board there.

The building was originally built as a duty barracks and all members were expected to work. It was referred to as the “old men’s home” because it specifically housed aging Veterans. It is now leased to the Miami Valley Housing Opportunities and used as temporary housing for the people they serve.

[Click Here to take the tour of the General Franklin Building](#)



Patrick (Building 302)

Built in 1940 and originally called “Patrick Hospital”, named after one of the early Governors (Medical Center Director) of the Dayton Soldiers Home, Marsena Patrick. It was converted to a geriatric hospital in 1950. It currently houses our Mental Health Program offices.



Freedom House (Building 226)

The Freedom House was built in 1872 and was originally the housing quarters for the Steward and the Secretary of the Home.

[Click here to tour the Freedom House](#)



Liberty House (Building 225)

The Liberty House was originally built in 1870 as an amusement hall containing billiard tables, bagatelle tables and a bowling alley. The Home Band practiced in the upper rooms. Eventually it was remodeled and became the Treasurer's residence.

The open fields beyond the houses once housed a deer herd, overseen by a Veteran deer keeper, who in his home country, once cared for the deer herd for the King of Prussia. There was also a small zoo containing elk, antelope, alligators, and birds.

[Click here to tour the Liberty House](#)



Barracks (Building 401 and Building 402)

These 2 brick buildings were originally built as housing barracks to replace wooden structures that preceded them. Each floor had an open floor plan – each Veteran would have a bed and footlocker, they were supplied with bedding, blankets and clothing for the duration of their stay.

Building 401 was built in 1899 and replaced the wooden barracks built in 1867.



Building 402 was built in 1900. This building is now leased to the Miami Valley Housing Opportunities and serves as a co-ed building for the homeless.



Community Living Center (Building 320)

Built in 1980, it originally was a domiciliary dorm for resident Veterans. It is now used as a nursing home facility and a hospice unit.



Bandstand

The historic bandstand, dates back to 1870. This is where the Home Band would perform every evening in the summer, and dignitaries would give speeches here. All the ground you see used to be the parade grounds, where the Veterans would practice military maneuvers, which they would perform for visitors on special occasions. Imagine several thousand Veterans lined up and doing marching drills as the Home Band played. It is rumored that John Philips Souza performed here.



Grotto

These large ponds are man-made – they were dug and landscaped by the Civil War Veterans mainly in the 1870's. This is a site of one of 2 quarries that were used to provide limestone for buildings and crushed gravel walkways and roads. The grotto's ponds are fed by natural springs, which at one time were used to supply drinking water for the campus.

In the early years, the Grotto had a very tropical landscaping plan; the Veterans would raise tropical plants such as palms and ferns in a large greenhouse, and bring those potted plants out for the summer. Ivy vines covered the rockwork and benches were provided so that Veterans and visitors could rest in the shade. Adjacent to the north, where the greenhouses once stood, were elaborate gardens planted and tended to by the Veterans. The beautiful gardens, lakes and grotto contributed to our becoming a large tourist attraction, which hundreds of thousands of people visited every year. We were known as “the most popular tourist attraction west of the Allegheny mountains”, and in 1910 we had an all-time high of almost 670,000 visitors.

[Click here to watch and tour the Historic Grotto](#)



Anderson Gate

The Anderson Gate was constructed in 1904. The ornamental Italian Renaissance style structure consists of the double stone pillars surmounted by eagles. There used to be a white oak tree that stood just outside the gate. It was about 90 years old, but had to be taken down in 1930 due to disease. Theodore Roosevelt, Warren G. Harding and William Taft all spoke under the tree to the Veterans as candidates because political speeches are not permitted on Government property.



Headquarters (Building 116)

Built in 1871, this is the second oldest building on the VA campus. The governor, secretary, steward and treasurer administered the daily activities of the Home from this building. It is planned to house the administrative offices for the National VA History Center.

[Click here to tour Building 116](#)



Administration (Building 115)

Built in 1937, was once used to house all the administration offices for the facility and now houses our Nursing Education Service.

[Click here to tour Building 115](#)





Miller Cottage (Building 400)

Building 400 was built in 1937 as housing for women Veterans, and was named after the first matron of the home, Emma Miller. She was affectionately known as the “little mother of the Home” by the men she cared for, and she herself was a war widow who served at the Home from its first days. When she died, she was given a full military burial, the first ever for a woman in US history. She is buried here in the National Cemetery



Doctor's Row (Buildings 210-214)

The duplexes were built in the 1920s to accommodate the physicians and their families. They are now vacant and have been protected against weather and damage until a new use is found for them.

[Click here to tour Doctor's Row](#)



Funeral Tunnel

The tunnel was built in 1870 and was used to transport deceased Veterans to their final resting place. The Home Hospital use to be up on the hill and there was a tunnel connected from the basement out to the cemetery.



Soldiers Monument - 1877 unveiling by Rutherford B. Hayes

The Soldier's Monument stands 30 feet tall and made of marble and mounted on a granite base and crowned with an ornamental cap with a statue of an infantry soldier. The column was originally part of the old United States Bank in Philadelphia. Benjamin Henry Latrobe designed the column and is most noted for his work on the White House and the Capitol in Washington D.C. In 1877, the monument was dedicated and unveiled by President Rutherford B. Hayes with about 25,000 visitors on looking. Later, the four statues on the base were added; they represent the infantry, cavalry, artillery and navy.

Notice the four cannons on display, we used to have many more cannon displays on the grounds, however during WWII, many of our civil war era cannons were donated as scrap metal and melted down to support the war effort.

The National Cemetery Administration oversees the National Cemetery and there are currently about 50,000 full-casket burials.



Catholic Chapel (Building 119)

The Catholic Chapel was built in 1898, and most of the funds used in its construction were raised by the community. Up until then, the catholic services were either held during the week in the main sanctuary of the Protestant Chapel, and later they had their own space in the basement.

[Click here to tour Catholic Chapel](#)



Protestant Chapel (Building 118)

The protestant chapel is the first permanent chapel constructed by the U.S. Government. Construction began in November of 1868 and it was built from the quarried limestone by the more able-bodied Veterans who had experience in building and masonry. The original chaplain for the Home was William Earnshaw who was an army chaplain during the civil war, and became one of the most important and influential leaders of the Home. The church is the oldest in the VA system, and the bell in the clock tower was installed in 1876, and called the Centennial Bell. One component of the metal used cast the bell was melted down cannon from the confederate army.

[Click here to tour Protestant Chapel](#)



Putnam Library (Building 120)

Constructed in 1880 this structure originally belonged to the Quartermaster, from whom clothing and supplies were distributed for the Home. This library was regarded as one of the finest in the state of Ohio, and was in continuous use by patients until year 2000. Currently, it houses the offices of the American Veterans Heritage Center, a small non-profit corporation which is dedicated to preserving the history of the Dayton VA Campus.

[Click here to tour Putnam Library](#)



Clubhouse (Building 129) - Look Right past the Police Srvcs Bldg off in the distance.

Built in 1881, this was originally used as the Veterans Clubhouse, it had billiard tables, areas for card-playing, chess, letter-writing, reading and visiting areas. The upper floors contain small rooms for club meetings (such as the local chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic). This building is currently one that will house the artifact collection and provide research and preservation facilities for the National VA History Center.

[Click here to tour the Clubhouse](#)



Building 411 (On your left [south])

Building 411 was originally built as a Dining Hall. It's used to accommodate our Food and Nutrition Service administration offices, food storage and preparation.



Fisher House Site

Similar to a Ronald McDonald House, but for Veterans. A temporary “home away from home” for families of Veterans and active duty military receiving inpatient medical care or on-going outpatient care, free of charge.

[Click here to tour the Fisher House](#)



Colonel Harris (Building 408)

Built in 1903, this was originally the barracks and dining hall for the Veterans, it also was named after a resident manager of the Home, Col. Harris. The circle in front contains our National Historic Landmark Plaque, and the building is currently used to house our Chaplain offices.

[Click here to tour the Colonel Harris Building](#)

Conclusion:

**That brings us back to the Main Medical Center and the end of our Historic Campus Tour.
Thank you for taking time to learn more about our historic campus.**