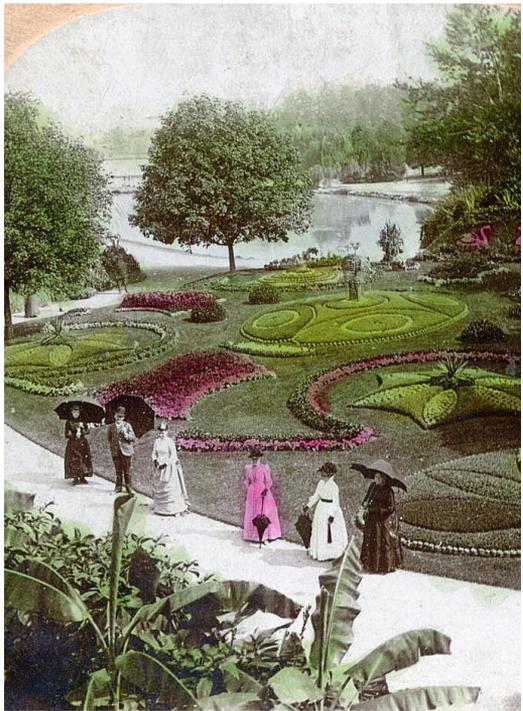




Dayton VA Medical Center
Historic Grotto Gardens
A National Historic Landmark





The Central Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers

The Dayton VA Medical Center

In 1867, a tract of farmland three miles west of Dayton was purchased by the federal government to become a home for disabled Civil War Veterans. Here, thousands of former Union soldiers created a small city in its own right, much of it self-sustained through the efforts of the people who lived and worked here. Often referred to as the “Mother Home” due to its physical size and large resident population, the Central Branch was considered by its leaders to be the best representation of their dream of what a National Home for Veterans could be.

Far from being an island of forgotten, war-ravaged men isolated from the world, it was instead a vibrant and active focus of the surrounding community. The gardens you are visiting are, in part, a restoration of the spirit of those long-ago Veterans who took great pride in their accomplishments and considered these beautiful grounds their Home.

History of the Grotto Gardens



In 1868, resident Veteran Frank Mundt began to plant vines and native wildflowers which he collected from nearby farms. This humble beginning was transformed into a magnificent garden by 75 full-time resident gardeners. It became a destination point for thousands of tourists each year; some came by train and often stayed at the hotel located on the grounds just north of the Grotto Gardens. The train depot still exists and can be seen off to your right as you enter from Gettysburg Ave.

However, as the Civil War Veteran population declined in later decades, the garden also fell into decline, and the site became overgrown and lost from view. Restoration was begun by the VA in 2012, and in 2013 the OSU Extension Montgomery County Master Gardeners joined in a combined effort with the Dayton VA Medical Center and the American Veterans Heritage Center (a group dedicated to the preservation of the history of the Dayton VA) to begin restoration and maintenance of the historic VA Grotto Gardens.

Local garden centers, garden clubs and donors have been generous in their support of this endeavor. Gardens were planted and a tree donation and adoption program were started to honor individuals for their service to the country.

1. Frank Mundt Memorial Garden



In 1868, Frank Mundt, a resident Veteran and florist by trade, thought the Mother Home would be perfect if it had a garden. Using found and donated plants, he began planting in the site of a former quarry on the east side of the grounds. Through his efforts, he inspired others to develop the Grotto Gardens into a destination attraction for as many as 100,000 visitors a year. The patriotic theme of this garden is intended to attract attention and to inspire individuals to explore, visit and enjoy the newly restored gardens.

2. Major Charles Beck Memorial Perennial Garden



Major Charles Beck oversaw the gardens from 1875 to 1906 and was the gardener/landscaper who developed the gardens into a major tourist attraction. This is the first garden that was developed in the Grotto Gardens restoration, established by the 2013 OSU Extension Montgomery County Master Gardener Intern Class. When prepping the area for planting, part of an original brick walkway was uncovered, and by the apparent age of the bricks, it was likely constructed during the late 1800s era.

This garden was designed to be seen by residents in buildings across the road. Perennials start blooming in early spring with tulips and daffodils. Alliums provide late spring color. Roses, day lilies and colorful coneflowers provide summer color.

3. Dr. Clarke McDermont Perennial Bed



The Dr. Clarke McDermont Perennial Bed is named in honor of the first surgeon of the Dayton National Soldiers Home. When General Cox was elected Governor of Ohio, he appointed Dr. McDermont as Surgeon General of the State, an office that ended at the conclusion of the Civil War. Afterwards, he served continuously here from 1867 until August 1874, with the exception of fourteen months spent as surgeon at the Southern Home at Hampton, Virginia. Dr. McDermont died in 1881 and is buried at Woodland Cemetery in Dayton, Ohio.

This garden is exposed to full sun except for the rock wall area. The perennial plants are grown to entice pollinators to visit and feed starting with the early season bulbs, hellebores, forget-me-nots,

celandine poppies and candytuft, leading into the late spring roses, yarrow, coreopsis, and hardy geraniums. The summer months showcase Shasta daisies, lavender, coneflowers, agastache, astilbe, day lilies and butterfly bushes. Gay feathers and goldenrod are joined by asters, mums and stonecrop sedum to finish the growing season.

4. Joseph Guy LaPointe, Jr. Purple Heart Garden



This garden honors Joseph Guy LaPointe, Jr., along with other Veterans who have received the Purple Heart medal. As a conscientious objector and a medic, Specialist LaPointe's unit came under fire in Vietnam, and he was killed while shielding two wounded soldiers with his body as he tried to bring them to safety. For his extraordinary bravery, he was awarded the Medal of Honor, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart Medal.

The Purple Heart Medal is the oldest military award, established by George Washington in 1782. It was not awarded again for 150 years, being reintroduced on February 22, 1932 on the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth. The medal is inscribed, "For Military Merit" and is awarded to those "wounded in as a result of hostile enemy action."

This garden is in homage to the picture gardens that were a highlight in the Grotto Gardens during its earlier days.

5. Elizabeth Rohrer Memorial Butterfly Garden



Elizabeth Rohrer of Germantown became interested in the original gardens at the Grotto and contributed large numbers of plants from her own gardens. The base of this garden is the old aviary. A dry rock stream was added to bring a focus to the outcropping on which the garden sits. One of the original Grotto Gardens fountains was brought in as a focal point of the Butterfly Garden.

This garden is designed with pollinators in mind using mostly native plants and illustrates what can be done with full sun and dry conditions. A highlight is the native coral honeysuckle growing alongside butterfly weed, cone flowers, and many other nectar plants.

6. James B. McPherson Garden



James Birdseye McPherson, born near Clyde, Ohio, was a career United States Army officer. He served as a general in the Union Army during the Civil War. He was killed at the Battle of Atlanta, facing the army of his old West Point classmate, John Bell Hood. He was the 2nd highest ranking Union officer killed in the war. At the height of the Grotto Gardens (1875-1906), a boat used to ferry tourists around the pond was named the McPherson.

The plants in the gardens surrounding the boathouse are selected by their preference for sun or shade. The majority of the plants are flowering annuals that allow for constant blooms late spring through fall. The flowers boast a variety of cheerful colors that are in harmony with the pond and beautiful setting. The gardens are designed to provide a peaceful environment for Veterans and visitors to sit, relax, and enjoy the beauty of nature.

7. Delphine Baker Access Ramp



During the Civil War, the female philanthropist Delphine Baker pushed for the creation and support of a federally run asylum for disabled Union Veterans. Eventually, Baker moved to New York City and established the National Literary Association, incorporated in May 1864. The association's goal was to establish a national home for disabled soldiers and sailors through the publication and sale of the National Banner, which also promoted literature, science and the arts. Baker worked diligently to collect signatures of prominent people (the list included: William C. Bryant, Henry Longfellow, Horace Greeley, Clara Barton, Ulysses S. Grant and P.T. Barnum) for a petition supporting her cause. On December 8, 1884, the petition

asking for “passage of a bill appropriating money for the founding and support of a national home for totally disabled soldiers and sailors of the Army and Navy of the United States” was referred to the Senate’s Committee on Military Affairs and the Militia. More than one hundred people had signed the petition. On March 1, 1865, Senator Henry Wilson, chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs and the Militia, introduced what he called “a little bill to which there can be no objection.” Wilson’s bill to “incorporate a National and Military and Naval Asylum for the relief of totally disabled officers and men of the volunteer forces of the United States,” passed on March 3, with no debate. This ramp was funded through a grant from Home Depot.®

8. Lt. William Putnam Memorial Garden



A library and reading room originally comprised the second story of the Headquarters building of the Central Branch. The room was a spacious 19’ high, with a handsomely frescoed ceiling. Cone reflectors shed brilliant rays for illumination at night, and one hundred and fifty chromos, engravings and photographs adorned the library wall. The room contained the renowned “Putnam Library.” Mary Lowell Putnam contributed over 10,000 books as a memorial to her son, William Lowell Putnam, who in 1861, fell in battle at the Battle of Balls Bluff. The Veterans in the Home built the massive bookcases of black and white walnut for the library, that at the time was described as one of the finest in Ohio.

The site for this garden was chosen for its view of the lake, boathouse, and twin towers. It was created out of heavy clay soil, amended, and planted with a variety of shade loving perennials, spring bulbs and annuals, with more sun-loving perennials near the spillway.

9. Chaplain William Earnshaw Rock Garden



This rock garden is named for Chaplain William Earnshaw. In September of 1867, he was appointed chaplain of the Dayton Soldiers Home. It was during his tenure that the Civil War Veterans quarried the rugged eastern edge of the grounds to acquire the limestone they used to build the Home Chapel. The cornerstone was laid on November 21, 1868, and the building was dedicated in 1870, making it one of the oldest churches in the area, and was the first church built in the National Home (now the VA) system. Chaplain Earnshaw served as the official librarian of the Home and also played an important part in one of the earliest examples of Veteran rehabilitation when he helped to organize a school and served as one of its original teachers. He died at the age of 54 due to illness and is buried in Woodland Cemetery, Dayton, Ohio.

The focal point of the rock garden is the phrase “Last Full Measure”. This phrase appears in Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address: “...that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion.” The phrase is chosen to honor all of our Veterans for their service and pays tribute to all who gave their last full measure of devotion to protect each of us.

There is no irrigation for this rock garden so there are no annuals here. The amount of sun over the 300 feet of garden ranges from full shade to full sun. As a result, half the garden is designed to handle full sun. That area of the garden is filled with drought-tolerant plants including several varieties of sedum and thyme. The other half also contains sedums and some other sun-loving plants but has shade-loving plants such as liriopse, hostas, pulmonaria and hellebores.

10. Charles Harper Garden



Charles Harper was a long-time employee and groundskeeper at the Dayton VA Medical Center in the 1980’s. Under his direction, the VA grounds crew did major restoration on the Grotto Gardens in the early 1980’s by shoring up much of the rockwork, clearing weeds and planting flowers. However, due to the funding and personnel challenges of that era, it became difficult to maintain the Grotto Gardens in a consistent manner in later years. This garden is dedicated to Charles for his initial efforts in restoring the Grotto Gardens to their former glory.

This garden is the first one visitors encounter when entering from the parking lot. The garden offers color, texture and scents to welcome them to the Grotto Gardens.

11. Lewis B. Gunckel Memorial Fountain



When considering where to build the Central Branch, the National Home's Board of Managers knew they wanted to locate it somewhere within reasonable traveling distance for the largest number of Veterans, and Ohio was determined to be an ideal region for that purpose. Lewis B. Gunckel, an attorney from nearby Germantown who served as the Board's Secretary, lobbied to bring it near his hometown in Dayton. Although the Board originally preferred a site near Columbus, when that failed to meet their criteria, they finalized their decision to locate it here. Along with \$20,000 donated by Dayton citizens, they purchased 380 acres of farmland west of the city during the summer of 1867 and construction began immediately. The first Civil War Veterans began arriving that fall, as they were transferred from the state Soldiers Home in Columbus.

The fountain was dedicated in honor of Lewis B. Gunckel's efforts to bring the National Home to Dayton and for his tenure as the Central Branch's Resident Manager for many years, a position which he used to advocate passionately for the welfare of the resident Veterans. The fountain is a replica of the one that can be seen in images of the original Grotto Gardens.

12. C.B. Davis Memorial Boulder Garden



C.B. Davis was the architect appointed to lay out the garden walks, promenades and flower beds. The natural feel of the gardens and the parks provided the Veterans with an enjoyable place to spend their days. The gardens were so attractive that tourists made day trips out to the Central Branch to enjoy the natural beauty. As early as the mid-1870's, approximately 100,000 people visited the Central Branch annually. This garden was designed for ease of maintenance and to showcase the original rocks placed by the Veterans.

13. Emma Miller Memorial Tranquility Garden



Though her official title was Matron, Emma Miller was fondly known as the “little Mother of the Soldiers Home.” A war widow, she had been caring for injured soldiers of the Civil War at the Ohio Soldiers Home in Columbus when they were transferred here in 1867. She was to remain working here for almost 50 years, many of which she was the superintendent of the General Depot that supplied clothing to the rest of the National Homes. For her dedication and exemplary service, Emma received an honorary commission in the US Army, and when she died in 1914, her body was wrapped in an American flag and lay in state in the Protestant Chapel of the Home. Following the service at the chapel, the body was escorted to the Home cemetery and laid to rest in a grave selected in the officer’s lot. The burial was accompanied with scenes of military pomp such as has honored few women in this country, and only the women of royalty in other countries. As part of the ceremony, a last salute was conducted over the grave by the firing squad and the sounding of taps. The military character of the funeral lent a special significance to the occasion.

This garden was designed with a walkway through it to allow visitors to immerse themselves in the plantings while still getting a view of the overall garden. A natural limestone bench invites visitors to sit and take in the beauty.

14. Chaplain Thomas B. Van Horne Memorial Wet Garden



Thomas Budd Van Horne, a Civil War Veteran and a chaplain, designed the overall layout of the Central Branch campus. It featured a grid pattern for the streets with a major thoroughfare dividing the barracks from the administrative offices. This had the effect of creating small neighborhoods and sections on the campus meant to mimic a small village. Van Horne designed large parks and open spaces around the streets and buildings, laid out in a curvilinear pattern with extensive walking paths and gardens. In addition to the Central Branch, Van Horne also designed the layout of the Northwestern Branch in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This garden is a micro-climate garden, meaning its soil and growing conditions are different than other areas in the Grotto Gardens. The natural underground springs seep water constantly through the limestone rock wall that is the backdrop of the garden and causes a bog-like environment. This is the perfect condition for the magnificent Bald Cypress tree and its “knees” that grace the area.

15.Col. Edwin F. Brown Memorial Waterfall & Grotto Gardens



This garden is dedicated to Col. Edwin Brown, appointed Governor of the Central Branch in 1868. He was a former prisoner-of-war who had lost his left arm in the Battle of Cedar Mountain, Virginia. Descriptions of him paint a humble man, possessing strength of

character, patience, and a sense of humor. He led the Central Branch for twelve years, and In 1879 he was made Inspector General of all National Homes. He served in this capacity 22 years until his death.

The garden includes a hardy banana tree and other tropical plants that were typical in the early days along with shade-loving plants in the upper Grotto Gardens area.

16. WWII Memorial Overlook Garden



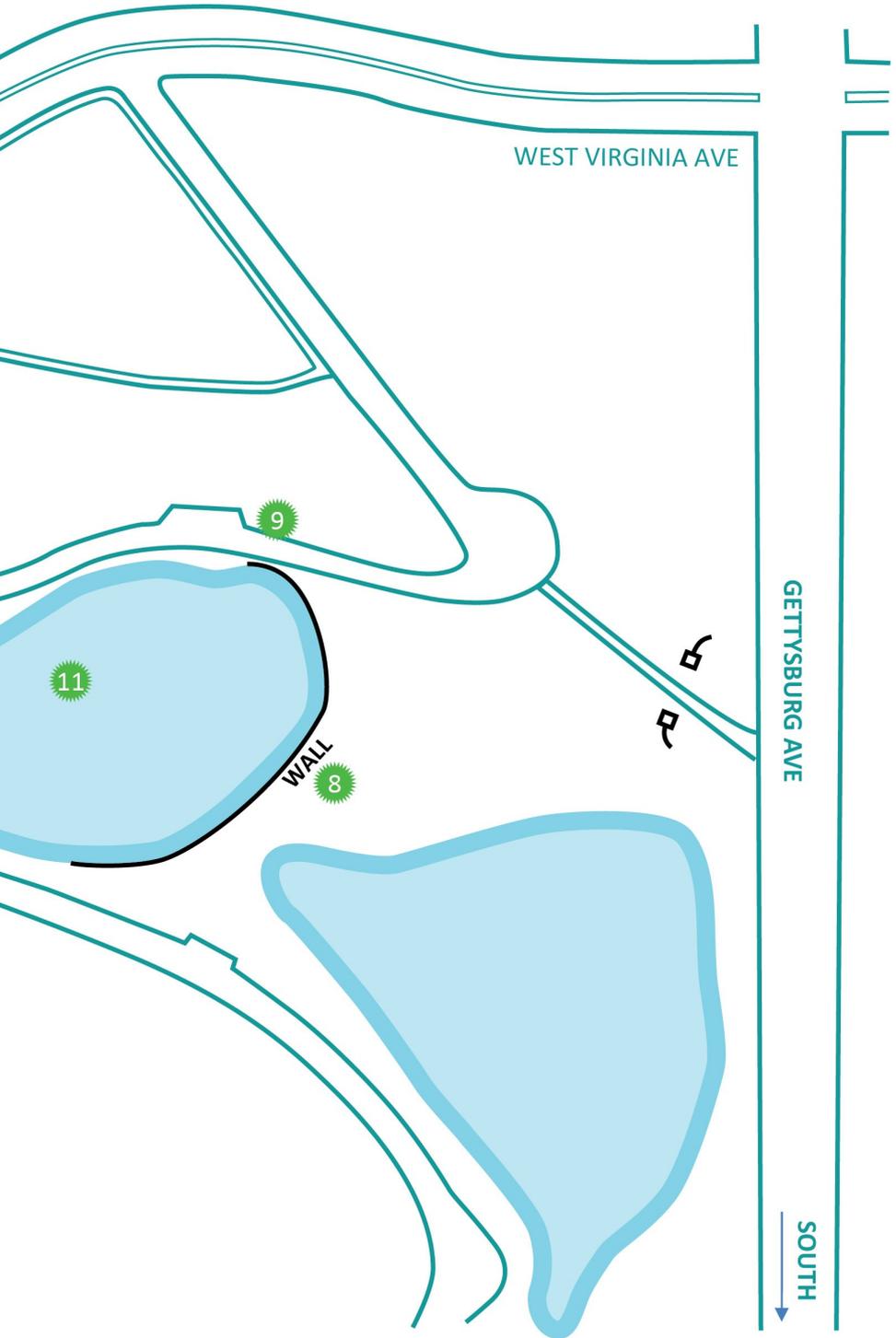
Dedicated to all Veterans who served in WWII, this is an overlook garden with a magnificent view of the Purple Heart garden as well as the great lawn and boathouse.

It must be noted that this garden has many plants with silver foliage, used to light up the garden and enhance the many colorful flowers in bloom. Several yellow/gold groundcovers entice people as they light up the shady areas of the garden like rays of the sun. Stones and rocks have been added to the flower bed to create a rock garden effect that adds excitement and contrast to the multitude of various plant textures and colors.



Grotto Gardens

1. Frank Mundt Memorial Garden
 2. Major Charles Beck Memorial Perennial Garden
 3. Dr. Clarke McDermont Memorial Garden
 4. Joseph Guy LaPointe ,Jr. Memorial Purple Heart Garden
 5. Elizabeth Rohrer Memorial Butterfly Garden
 6. M/G James B. McPherson Memorial Boathouse Garden
 7. Delphine Baker Access Ramp
 8. Lt. William Putnam Memorial Garden
 9. Chaplain William Earnshaw Memorial Rock Garden
 10. Charles Harper Garden
 11. Lewis B. Gunckel Memorial Fountain
 12. C.B. Davis Memorial Boulder Stairway Garden
 13. Emma Miller Memorial Tranquility Garden
 14. Chaplain Thomas Budd Van Horn Memorial Wet Garden
 15. Col. Edwin F. Brown Memorial Waterfall and Grotto Gardens
 16. WWII Memorial Overlook Garden
- Throughout – M/G John Martindale Memorial Containers



WEST VIRGINIA AVE

GETTYSBURG AVE

WALL

11

9

8

SOUTH

New projects are always on the horizon and there is always gardening to be done. We conduct tours and provide speakers for those interested in more in-depth knowledge of the history of the Grotto Gardens. VA Grotto Gardens Volunteers are present on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings – weather permitting from April through October. Volunteers are always welcome.

Contact us at:

Garden697Grotto@gmail.com

You can also visit our website at:

DaytonGrottoGardens.org

Facebook.com/VAGrotto

Donations:

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