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Historic Preservation**

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News Release

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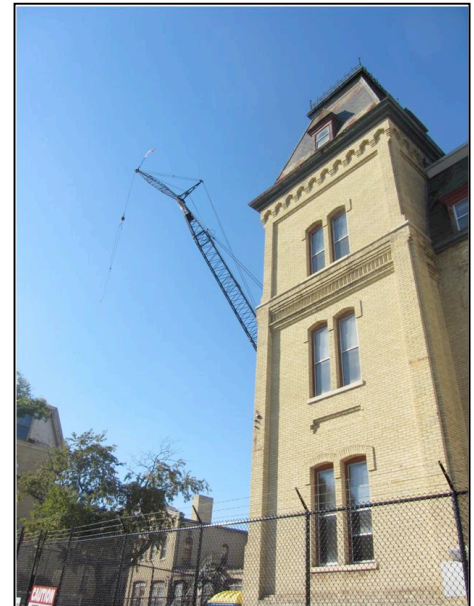
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Milwaukee VAMC Commences Repairs on Historic “Soldiers Home” Building

Construction crews begin work to save one of America’s most endangered historic places

Milwaukee (September 20, 2012) – The National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Milwaukee Preservation Alliance announced today that the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center has commenced the stabilization of one of the most remarkable historical buildings in Milwaukee – the main building, also known as Old Main, in the National Soldiers Home Historic District.

“This is an exciting step toward saving the Soldiers Home,” said Dawn McCarthy, President of the Milwaukee Preservation Alliance. “We are encouraged by the VA’s commitment to stabilize one of our community’s most important historical and architectural landmarks.”



The Gothic Revival-style main building is the most striking aspect of the original campus of the Northwestern Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS). Constructed by Edward Townsend Mix in 1869, it was the campus’ largest and most important building and contained facilities for the various functions of the Home including administrative offices, barracks, medical services, kitchen and dining room, chapel and meeting rooms, and laundry and bath rooms.

Today, the grand structure continues to dominate the landscape, but is in dire need of repair. In winter 2010, a roof collapsed under the weight of snow, creating a gaping hole that remained unrepaired and open to the elements for nearly two years. Thankfully, work has begun to repair the roof and protect the building from further damage.

Construction crews and equipment arrived onsite last week to begin the repairs. They expect to complete the roof repairs before the upcoming winter season to prevent any further damage. In addition to the roof repair, crews will be repairing the structural damage associated with the collapse and reestablishing the second floor truss structure.

“This is the first of many steps to get these buildings back into the service of veterans,” said Ralph Bagneski, Vietnam Veteran and chairman of Milwaukee Allied Veterans Council/Allied Veterans Council of Milwaukee. “I’m proud to be a part of the effort to save these buildings and honor our veterans.”

In addition to stabilizing Old Main, the VA has committed to similar stabilization work for the District’s Ward Memorial Theater, where work is needed to repair roof trusses before a similar collapse occurs, and to address water infiltration issues. Work on the theater is scheduled to begin in November.

“We are proud of how the local community has rallied to save the Milwaukee Soldiers Home’s most threatened buildings,” said Genell Scheurell, Senior Field Officer with the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Chicago Field Office. “We applaud the Milwaukee VAMC for their commitment to stabilizing Old Main and the Ward Memorial Theater and look forward to continuing our work to create a vision for the District’s future.”

For more information about the Soldiers Home, visit:

<http://www.savingplaces.org/treasures/milwaukee-soldiers-home>

<http://www.SavetheSoldiersHome.com>

<http://www.facebook.com/SavetheSoldiersHome>

<http://www.twitter.com/savesoldrshome>

About the Milwaukee VA National Soldiers Home Historic District

In 1865, Congress established the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS) system to care for volunteer Union soldiers who had been disabled during service in the Civil War.

In 1866, the NHDVS Board of Managers decided to locate one of the first three Homes in Milwaukee. It was established on approximately 400 acres of land west of the city, purchased from several local citizens.

The Homes were to provide holistic care for veterans – access to health care, safe living accommodations, vocational training, rehabilitation, and recreation. They were designed to be highly visible, reminding citizens of the federal government’s support of veterans and helping to forge a stronger link between the public and the federal government.

Since 1867, the Northwestern Branch of the NHDVS, popularly known as the Milwaukee Soldiers Home, has provided care to veterans from across the country. Today the historic district, located on the grounds of the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center, is the only one of the original three branches to have retained most of its original buildings.

About Old Main

The most striking aspect of the original Soldiers Home campus was its largest and most important building - the Main Building - developed in the Gothic Revival style. Designed by architect Edward Townsend Mix, the five-story structure contained facilities for the various functions of the Home, including administrative offices, barracks, medical services, kitchen and dining room, chapel and meeting rooms, and laundry and bathrooms.

Today, Old Main is in dire need of repair. In winter 2010, a rear roof collapsed under the weight of snow and the gaping hole remained unrepaired for nearly two years. Thankfully, work has begun to repair the roof and protect the building from further damage.

About Ward Memorial Theater

Ward Memorial Hall was designed by Henry C. Koch and constructed in 1881. The building was originally built as a two-story, multi-purpose building that included a hall, restaurant, and train passenger waiting room. The hall was used as a worship space until the construction of a free-standing chapel. In 1897, the building was remodeled for use solely as a theater and hosted many appearances by lecturers, vaudeville troupes, and musicians. Performers appearing elsewhere in Milwaukee often gave free shows at the re-named Ward Memorial Theater for the veterans' benefit. As the motion picture industry developed, the theater acquired equipment to show movies.

Today, Ward Memorial Hall has experienced significant roof and water infiltration damage, leaving portions exposed to the elements. In November 2011, one of the theater's most notable features, a stained glass window depicting a life sized figure of General Ulysses S. Grant mounted on a bay horse, was removed from the theater for safekeeping until repairs are complete.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a privately funded nonprofit organization, works to save America's historic places. www.PreservationNation.org