

DAYTON NATIONAL CEMETERY



Central Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, c. 1877. The Soldiers Monument is visible in upper right. Library of Congress.

National Home

President Abraham Lincoln signed a bill in March 1865 that funded the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS). The Central Branch in Dayton, one of the original three, opened in September 1867. Ten years later the 355-acre campus had 132 buildings. The modern campus boasted steam heat, gas lights, a sewage system, four lakes, and paved roads. A 250-acre farm worked by resident veterans helped feed those who lived here.

By 1884, the Central Branch housed 7,000 veterans. It was the largest facility of its kind in the world. As a tourist attraction, it drew more than 600,000 visitors a year.

The National Homes were merged with the U.S. Veterans Bureau and the Bureau of Pensions to form the Veterans Administration (now U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) in 1930. Today, the Dayton VA Medical Center carries on the tradition of care that began in 1867. In 2012 the VA campus, including the cemetery, was designated a National Historic Landmark.

Cemetery and Monument

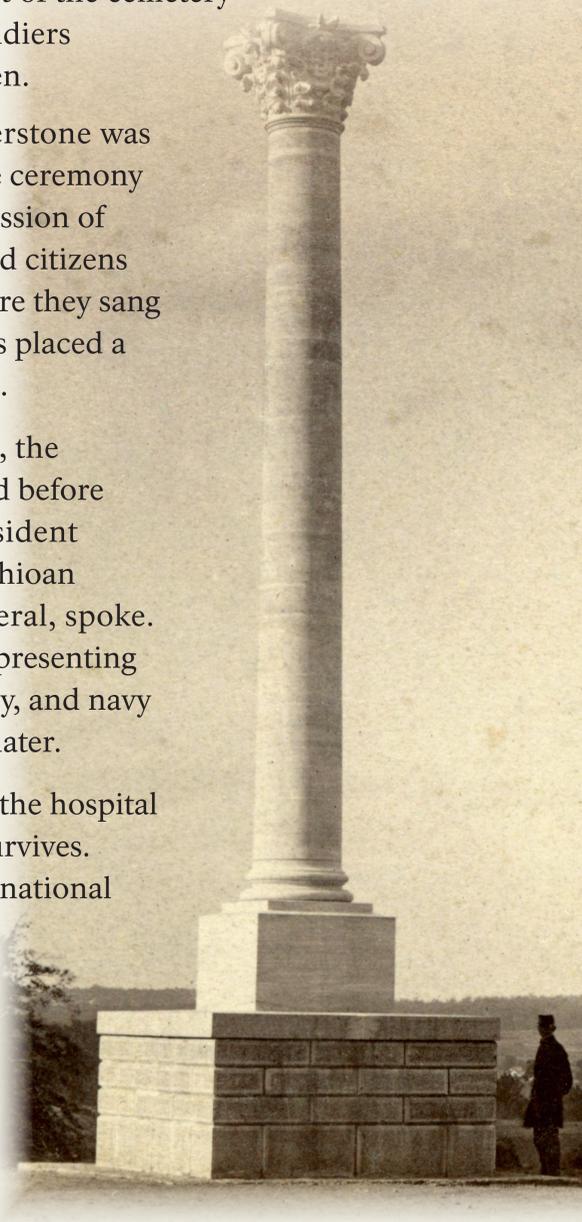
The first Civil War veteran was buried here in 1867, the last in 1947. Design of the original 52.8-acre cemetery is attributed to William B. Earnshaw, a former U.S. Army chaplain. Earnshaw joined the Central Branch staff in 1867 and served until his death in 1885. The focal point of the cemetery is the hill where the Soldiers Monument is easily seen.

The monument's cornerstone was laid during an elaborate ceremony on July 4, 1873. A procession of veterans, dignitaries, and citizens led to the cemetery where they sang patriotic songs. Officials placed a time capsule in the base.

On September 12, 1877, the monument was unveiled before a crowd of 20,000. President Rutherford B. Hayes, Ohioan and former Union general, spoke. Four marble figures representing artillery, cavalry, infantry, and navy were added to the base later.

Part of a tunnel linking the hospital (razed) and cemetery survives. The property became a national cemetery in 1973.

Soldiers Monument before it was completed in 1877. Dayton Veterans Affairs Archive.



Temporary wooden headboards, c. 1870s. Dayton Veterans Affairs Archive. Civil War Army Medal of Honor (below). Gettysburg National Military Park.

Three Civil War recipients of the Medal of Honor are buried here. First bestowed in 1863, it is the highest award for military valor in the U.S. Armed Services. For acts above and beyond the call of duty, 1,522 individuals who served in the Civil War received the medal.

Second Lt. Henry W. Downs, 8th Vermont Infantry, twice crossed an open field under fire and returned with ammunition at Winchester, Virginia, September 19, 1864 (Section Q, Grave 24).

Seaman John H. James manned his gun on the U.S.S. *Richmond* with skill and courage at Mobile Bay, Alabama, August 5, 1864 (Section 1, Grave 58).

Pvt. Charles A. Taggart, 37th Massachusetts Infantry, captured an enemy flag at Sailor's Creek, Virginia, April 6, 1865 (Section R, Grave 14).

