FOREST HOME SOLDIERS’ LOT

Milwaukee at War
On April 15, 1861, citizens of Milwaukee met to answer President Abraham Lincoln’s call for troops to suppress the southern rebellion. Less than ten days later, the 1st Wisconsin Infantry mustered in at nearby Camp Scott. It was the first of six regiments raised in the city.

Soon after the Civil War began, the Milwaukee Ladies Association formed. They worked tirelessly to send supplies to recuperating soldiers. In 1862, the association split into the Wisconsin Soldiers’ Aid Society—a U.S. Sanitary Commission branch (predecessor to the American Red Cross)—and the Wisconsin Soldiers’ Home Society. The latter provided food, temporary lodging, and medical care to soldiers from its West Water Street storefronts.

In 1866, Milwaukee was selected as a site for a National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS). The Wisconsin Soldiers’ Home Society transferred its assets to support land purchase and building construction. The Northwestern Branch NHDVS opened to needy veterans the following year.

Soldiers’ Lot
Forest Home Cemetery was established by St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in 1850 on 72 acres located about 4 miles southwest of downtown Milwaukee. It was the first rural-style cemetery in the region, and it would grow to nearly 200 acres.

An 1868 War Department inspection of national cemeteries detailed twenty-four Union troops buried in a soldiers’ lot here. All had died in the Milwaukee general hospital. The report also listed forty-one soldiers in private lots. The federal government purchased the soldiers’ lot (Block 5, Section 24) from St. Paul’s for $525 in 1872. There are twenty-one marked graves here today.

A second lot at Forest Home Cemetery contains the remains of veterans who died at the Milwaukee NHDVS between 1867 and 1871. That year, a cemetery was established at the home. It became Wood National Cemetery in 1973.