

Minnesota Veterans' Home Complex, Domiciliary No. 6
5101 Minnehaha Avenue South
Minneapolis
Hennepin County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-74-E

HABS
MINN,
21-MINAP,
19-E-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MINNESOTA VETERANS' HOME COMPLEX,
DOMICILIARY BUILDING NO. 6

HABS No. MN-74E

Location:

5101 Minnehaha Avenue South, Minneapolis,
Hennepin County, Minnesota.

USGS St. Paul West Quadrangle, Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates: Zone 15;
483960:4973380; 484140:4972680; 483640:4973140

Present Owner:

State of Minnesota

Present Occupant:

Minnesota Veterans' Home.

Present Use:

Housing for Senior Veterans.

Significance:

Referred to as "Building No. 6, it is situated atop the eastern bluff of the Minnesota Soldiers' Home site and near the center of the complex's eastern edge. The site is located on a peninsula bounded by the Mississippi River on the east and the Minnehaha Creek on the west just within the city limits of Minneapolis. The southern tip of the property is defined by the confluence of the two waterways. Immediately to the west is Minnehaha Park. Fort Snelling is located about three miles to the south.

Building No. 6 is originally the eleventh of the permanent buildings to be built. The previous ten were built between 1888 and 1905. These consisted of: One administration building, one hospital, five cottages, one laundry and heating plant, one pavilion, and a main dining hall. It is significant in the fact that it is the first permanent building to break from the previous pallet of building materials and style. The architects originally chose Kasota stone over the commonly used brownstone for trim work and used light colored bricks over the darker bricks of the surrounding buildings. However, due to budget difficulties prior to the construction, concrete castings were used in place of the Kasota stone.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1905 - 1906. (Source: The annual and biennial Reports of the Soldiers' Home, 1905 to 1913. Minnesota Historical Society). An additional wing was added on beginning in 1911 and was finished in 1912.
2. Architect: John Gaut. From a plaque in main entry vestibule. Other information is unknown.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: 1905 - Present. State of Minnesota.
4. Building, Contractor, Suppliers: Unknown.
5. Original Plans and Construction: Not Available.
6. Alterations and Additions: The northern wing was added on in 1912. (Source: 1911 - 1912 Biennial Report of the Soldiers' Home. Minnesota Historical Society). In a 1936 Biennial Report it stated that the Building was redecorated. (How, is unknown). Fire lights were installed, the entire basement was changed and rebuilt, a new kitchen and modern dining room was constructed in the north end of the building, the previous hospital section of the building was converted into six more rooms, fire walls and sprinkler systems were installed, and a section of the basement was made into a laundry room. In 1973, with the addition of Building No. 17, a basement corridor with windows located on the top half of the walls, was built to connect No. 17 to the basement of the north porch in No. 6.

B. Historical Context:

In 1847, Franklin Steele hired Ard Godfrey, a millwright from Maine to construct a sawmill at St. Anthony Falls. Because of the tremendous success of this endeavor, in 1852, Ard Godfrey had a claim made out for him by Capt. Monroe of Fort Snelling which included the present site of the Soldiers' Home Complex. In 1853, he had a mill built at the mouth of the Minnehaha Creek, in addition, he had a home built for himself standing on the site of the present Domiciliary Building No. 6. In 1854, Ard Godfrey commenced improvements with his mill and built up a levee at the junction of the creek and the river. This provided a convenient landing for steamers on their way up the Mississippi to St. Anthony Falls. Consequently, it became known as Godfrey Port and subsequently, Godfrey's Point. In 1866, a grist mill was constructed nearby, both mills, however, were destroyed by fire a few years later.

Ard Godfrey maintained the vast ownership of the land, and began to sell off small parcels between 1856 and 1871. In 1883, the Minneapolis Parks Commission was formed and between its formation and 1887, the land which makes up the present Soldiers' Home was given to the City of Minneapolis.

Under Chapter 148, General Laws for Minnesota 1887, an act for the relief of honorably discharged indigent ex-soldiers, sailors and marines, and widows, minor orphans and dependant parents of such deceased soldiers, sailors and marines, and for making an appropriation for the purchase of land and the construction of buildings including maintenance and revenue was enacted. On April 12, 1887 a Board of Trustees was established for the Home and consisted of the following men: Henry A. Castle of St. Paul, A. E. Christie of Austin, Wm. P. Dunnington of Redwood Falls, Lucius A. Hancock of Red Wing, Reese R. Henderson of Minneapolis, F. F. Cowing of Fergus Falls and A. A. Brown of Alexandria.

On June 21, 1887, A. A. Ames, the Mayor of Minneapolis had the City of Minneapolis donate land for the Soldiers' Home. It was valued at \$75,000 and on July 12, 1887, the Board of Trustees accepted the offer for the present site of the Home. Construction for the complex began in 1888, and in 1905, the construction for the Domicilliary Building No. 6 commenced.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Domiciliary Building No. 6 is a three story building with a basement. It is built of light colored brick and is supported on a limestone foundation. The building is U-shaped in plan and contains two impressive rounded corners with circular double story wooden porches arcaded with Ionic ordered columns.
2. Condition of Fabric: Domiciliary Building No. 6 appears in poor condition. The wooden column bases are rotting and the lower level porch flooring is well worn. The interior smells of mildew and is in need of a facelift. Its only structurally sound system appears to be its stone and brick perimeter bearing walls.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: Domiciliary Building No. 6 is U-shaped in plan. The main body of the building faces west and measures 112 feet by 27 feet. The western corners of the building are round in plan. Its radius measures 12 feet. The south wing measures 27 feet by 34 feet and the north wing measures 27 feet by 60 feet. A six foot wide circular double story porch wraps around the rounded corners. A two story entry porch is centered on the main building and measures 16 feet by 6 feet in plan. A double story porch is also attached to the length of the east elevation on the north wing, it is also 6 feet in width. The building measures 45 feet to the soffit and consists of three stories. Above the central entry of the main body is a hip roofed tower a half story in height. The rounded corner elements contain a low pitched conical roof. The building is encircled by a three foot high parapet.
2. Foundations: A two foot thick limestone foundation supports Building No. 6.
3. Walls: The detailing is virtually the same on all elevations of Building No. 6 with only a few variations which will be called out. The building sits atop a five foot high rock-faced limestone foundation which is capped by a concrete sill plate. Light brown brick rise above the foundation constructed in standard coursing techniques. At the termination of the second floor is a single horizontal band of concrete. Several coursings below the soffit, two horizontal bands of single coursed brick are in relief. All of the windows have concrete sill plates. All of the cornice and balustrade details are formed plate-metal painted white. The siding of the towers are also of metal in the appearance of brick.
4. Structural System, Framing: The perimeter walls of Building No. 6 are all load bearing. The floors are framed with wooden joists and iron columns at ten feet on center support the floors. The walls are wooden drywall building system. The main roof is flat and is framed in the same manner as the floors. The exception to the roof are the hip shaped entry tower and circular corner elements, these are framed in wood.
5. Porches: Building No. 6 contains two basic porch forms, the round porches at the west elevation corners, and the main entry porch along with the porch on the east elevation of the north wing. The detailing for all the porches is of the same manner. The material is wood painted white. The double story columns are Ionic in order and are spaced at eight feet on center. Midway the columns are broken up by a floor spandrel. The spandrel is detailed with three strips of wood clapboard siding. The columns overlap the spandrels by its radius.

6. Chimneys: There are three chimneys in Building No. 6. One is centered ten feet from the west end of the south wing. It is rectangular in shape, made of brick and eight feet in height. The second chimney is located at the first third on the north end of the main body. It is similar in shape, yet smaller than the first. A third is located ten feet from the west end of the north porch.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: The main entry door and the north and south porch doors are the most significant. The trim is of white painted wood and the doors are framed in wood and dark brown in color. The doors all contain transoms which are located to the left and right and above the door. There are nine subdivisions with the door as one and the others at one half the width of the door as the short dimension.
 - b. Windows: One on one casement windows. Exterior trim is three inch metal framing.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, Covering: The corner towers are conical in shape and the entry tower is a hip roof. The remainder of the roof is flat. The exterior material is pitch and gravel on plate metal. The tower elements are roofed in metal.
 - b. Cornice, Eaves: The cornice and eaves with brackets are Classical Beaux Arts in style. There is approximately an eight inch overhang. They are all made of formed plate metal painted white. The drainage occurs through holes located at various points on the flat roof.
 - c. Towers: There are two conical towers, one each located above the north and south porches. The siding is pressed metal in the shape of brick and painted white. The entry tower is located above the entry and contains similar material. All contain windows dimensioned at 2 x 3 feet and trimmed in wood painted white. In random places, some windows contain leaded mullions with the remainder being a single pane of glass.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The overall plan is double loaded along a central corridor with an opening in plan located behind the porches.
2. Stairways: Thirty inch dark stained mahogany stairways are located adjacent to the porches. Similar stairways are located on the east end of the north and south wings. A 24 inch stair leads from the third floor into a room located under the north tower.
3. Flooring: Two inch polished maple plank flooring. This has been covered by linoleum in the corridors and many of the rooms are now carpeted. The basement slab is concrete and is mostly covered in carpeting.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The walls and ceiling are of a smooth white or mustard yellow plaster finish. Iron columns are painted white or mustard yellow.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways: The doors are of mahogany and finished off in dark brown stain. The trim-work and jambs correspond with the doors.
 - b. Windows: The windows are simply framed with mahogany finish.
6. Decorative Features and Trim: Plaster brackets appear to support wood beams at near the rounded porches. They are painted to appear as mahogany in finish similar to the doors.
7. Hardware: Much of the hardware seems original to the building. The type, however, is unknown.
8. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating, Air Conditioning, Ventilation: Heating is by steam radiators.
 - b. Lighting: Clear bulbs hung two feet from ceiling.
 - c. Plumbing: Unknown. Plumbing for the sprinkler systems is exposed and hangs from the ceilings.
 - d. Elevators: One 5 x 5 elevator located just north of the main entry.

9. Original Furnishings: Tables, beds, and chairs.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation: The building faces southwest. The grade is fairly consistent around the buildings base. Thirty feet to the east of the building the bluff drops off sharply towards the Mississippi River. Building No. 17 (1973) is located to its northwest and does not affect its lighting. A corridor connects Building No. 17 to the north porch of Building No. 6.
2. Historic Landscape Design: A grand staircase fronted Building No. 6 and mature trees surround the building.
3. Outbuildings: Originally, small temporary buildings were located to the north of Building No. 6. A large water tower also sat within the open ended court.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: Not Available.
- B. Photographs: Several photographs showing general views of the building were found in the Audio-Visual collection of the Minnesota Historical Society. Other photographs were found in the Minneapolis History Collection at the Minneapolis Public Library.
- C. Maps: Plat maps describing the previous ownership of the site, 1874, 1879, and 1887 were found in the Minneapolis History Collection of the Minneapolis Public Library. Insurance maps, 1905 Rascher, 1912 Sanborne were found in the map library at the Minnesota Historical Society. These show subsequent development of the building and other outbuildings that have since been removed.
- D. Interviews: Not Available.
- E. Bibliography:
 1. Primary and Unpublished Sources:
 - a. Annual and Biennial Reports: These were found in the miscellaneous file under Minnesota Soldiers' Home, Call No. UB384.M65 (year) at the Minnesota Historical Society. 1905 to 1912 and 1936 give general reports concerning costs, construction, additions, and alterations for Building No. 6.

- b. Wilson Library Government Publications: Minnesota Executive Documents: Filed under 328.768 SM66E. Very little useful information. The Minnesota Legislative Documents: Filed under JK6136.A3X. From 1901 - 1909. They give good historical summaries of the Home and briefly describe the materials used.
- c. Tract Records: Hennepin County Government Center: From 1856 to 1871, Deeds describe transactions of land prior to the establishment of the Soldiers' Home.

2. Secondary Sources:

- a. Holcombe and Bingham, History of Minneapolis and Hennepin County. Henry Taylor and Co., 1941.
- b. Hudson, Half Century of Minneapolis. Hudson Publishing Co., 1908.
- c. Personal Recollections and It's People. Minneapolis Public Library History Collection, 1890.
- d. Warner, George E., History of Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis. North Star Publishing Co., 1881.
- e. Likely Sources not yet Investigated: Minnesota Soldiers' Home Library: Possible plans and more complete dated information to be found.
- f. Supplemental Material: Xeroxed photos, plat maps, and insurance maps are attached at the end of this report. (18 images).

Prepared by:
Daniel L. Isackson
University of Minnesota
June, 1988

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was prepared as a class project for Architecture 5143, Historic Building Research and Documentation, a class offered in the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota. The class project was prepared under the direction of Professor Foster W. Dunwiddie in cooperation with the State Historic Preservation Office of the Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, Minnesota. Historical data was compiled by Daniel L. Isackson, University of Minnesota, June, 1988.