

MINNESOTA VETERANS HOME COMPLEX, CAMPUS PLAN
5101 Minnehaha Avenue, South
Minneapolis
Hennepin County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-74-P

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MIDWEST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, NE 68102

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I. INTRODUCTION

- 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
- Date of Design: 1888 (Source of Information: letter by H.W.S. Cleveland to the
Board of Trustees of the Minnesota Soldiers' Home, submitting his
designs for the grounds, August, 8, 1888).
- Present Owner: State of Minnesota
Department of Veteran' Affairs
St. Paul, Minnesota.
- Present Occupant: Minnesota Veterans' Home.
- Present Use: Some of the original Campus Plan is still evident in the current
configuration of the Complex.
- Significance: The campus plan for the Minnesota Soldiers' Home was developed
by Horace W.S. Cleveland, a prominent nineteenth century
landscape architect who stressed the importance of using the
natural topography of the landscape in his designs. In conjunction
with the architect, Warren Dunnell, Cleveland created "the cottage
plan," siting the buildings and roads to enhance the natural scenery
of the grounds, and through this, provided the residents of the
Home access to the medicinal benefits of nature.

II. HISTORY

In the winter of 1886, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), Department of Minnesota, met in Faribault, Minnesota to petition the state legislature for aid for indigent veterans of the Civil War. In its petition, the GAR requested direct financial assistance for veterans as well as shelter for those in the most dire need. Upon their request, the legislature of 1887 approved Chapter 148 of the General Laws, granting financial relief for the veterans through the Soldiers' Fund and providing money for the construction of the first state Soldiers' Home (the historic name of the Minnesota Veterans' Home).¹

In 1885, the city of Minneapolis purchased 173 acres at the mouth of Minnehaha Creek for the establishment of a state park; fifty-two acres of this site were given in 1887 to the state for the construction of the Soldiers' Home. A competition was held for the selection of an architect; Warren B. Dunnell was chosen to design the buildings for the site while Horace W.S. Cleveland was selected as the landscape architect. Together Cleveland and Dunnell developed a comprehensive plan for the Soldiers' Home Complex, many aspects of which still exist today.²

Cleveland, a prominent landscape architect at the end of the nineteenth century, designed what came to be known as the "cottage plan" for the Soldiers' Home. In it, Cleveland situated the buildings and roads of the Campus to conform to the natural topography of its landscape. Cleveland believed that the role of the landscape designer was to evoke the natural beauty of a site. As nature, in its unadorned state, was beneficial to a community's health and well-being, the landscape architect should work with what existed naturally--the topography, plants, trees and shrubbery--to create the picturesque as an idealized version of itself and thus, promote its useful qualities.³ Rather than manipulate the landscape with excavation and infill that was both "costly and unsightly,"⁴ the landscape architect should enhance the already existing elements to bring out their innate beauty.

Cleveland laid out his plans for the Home in his letter to the Board of Trustees dated August 8, 1888. In his design, he included three major north-south traffic arteries with several east-west tributary roads that "embrace in their course all the peculiar features of natural scenery, which constitute the attractive charm of the place."⁵ Cleveland also planned for the locations of buildings: three that were immediately built as well as positioning for as many as eleven additional buildings for future construction. Along with this, Cleveland allocated spaces for open lawns. He thinned some of the thick woods while maintaining irregularly scattered groupings of natural-growth trees. The bluffs, in contrast, he proposed to preserve in their current state of rugged density and indigenous growth to be distinct from the level, open, public park-like atmosphere above.⁶

In the 1870s and 80s, Cleveland was hired by the Minneapolis Board of Park Commissioners and the St. Paul City Council to develop a system of parks and parkways for their respective cities, serving as the official landscape architect of both cities at various times during his career.⁷ Cleveland sought to create a unified Twin Cities by establishing a single vision for their park systems. By using their natural features--their hills, trees, lakes and rivers--Cleveland designed a unique look for each city within the larger context he established for both.⁸ Cleveland was able to incorporate his plans for the Soldiers' Home into his greater plan for the Twin Cities. The Home, with its physical location near both cities at the confluence of the Mississippi River and Minnehaha Creek, served as the link between the two cities in Cleveland's master plan. Cleveland had previously developed a Grand Round system in Minneapolis in which the city lakes were connected to Minnehaha Park by a winding boulevard. In his plans for the Soldiers' Home, Cleveland expanded on this design. A grand parkway, an extension of the existing boulevard, would run along Minnehaha Creek through the Home and cross the Mississippi to St. Paul. The Home, therefore, would be a focal point of his "proposed great interurban park"⁹ for the two cities. Many aspects of this plan were initiated and can be seen today.

III. PHILOSOPHY

During the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the field of landscape architecture was just beginning to develop in the United States. Within this burgeoning field, there was a group of architects who believed there should be a component of social responsibility to landscape design in addition to its aesthetic obligations. Frederick Olmsted, the designer of Central Park in New York City and a leading landscape architect as well as writer and thinker of his day, was probably the best known adherent to this school. Public parks did not exist in the United States, and Olmsted believed that as a democratic nation, it was essential for space to be provided for public use, space open to everyone--rich and poor, young and old.¹⁰ He believed this to be a necessary component for a physically and mentally healthy society. Especially in the rapidly expanding urban centers where many citizens were left without access to the medicinal benefits of nature, public spaces needed to be created. On a trip to England in 1850, Olmsted was struck by the beauty and availability of the European public parks, writing in his journal, "The poorest British peasant is as free to enjoy it in all its parts as the British queen."¹¹ This idea was an important premise of all Olmsted's designs and is evident in his writings:

Consider that the New York Park and the Brooklyn Park are the only places in those associated cities where, in this eighteen hundred and seventieth year after Christ, you will find a body of Christians coming together, and with an evident glee in the prospect of coming together, all classes largely represented, with a common purpose, not at all

intellectual, competitive with none, disposing to jealousy and spiritual or intellectual pride toward none, each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others, all helping to the greater happiness of each. You may thus often see vast numbers of persons brought closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile.¹²

Horace Cleveland was a friend and associate of Olmsted and similarly subscribed to these ideas. In an address to the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, Cleveland remarked on the European model of public parks and its merits when he quoted another writer "as the best illustration of my meaning... 'Public gardening [in Paris] is not confined to parks in one end of town, and absent from the places where it is most wanted...it presents to the eye of the poorest workman every charm of vegetation; it brings him pure air and aims directly and effectively at the benefit and recreation and refinement of the people.'"¹³

His plans for the Soldiers' Home were no exception to his philosophy. Although not public in the true sense of the word, the Soldiers' Home, with its juxtaposition next to Minnehaha Park and inclusion into his "great interurban park" design, had the design elements Cleveland believed were necessary to include as a socially responsible landscape architect. According to Cleveland's philosophy, a park was where society's health was maintained and restored. Therefore, he established a public park-like atmosphere at the Home through his use of open spaces and the site's natural features and thus, granted its residents access to the benefits of nature. As the Home was an institution developed to aid needy veterans, Cleveland's design was a fitting response to its mission.

Both Olmsted and Cleveland believed that the beauty of nature must be made available for all to benefit from and enjoy. Public parks and the people who designed them enabled this to occur. In his plans for the Soldiers' Home, Cleveland incorporated his philosophies about the medicinal benefits of public spaces and provided a "public park" for the Home's residents.

IV. EVOLUTION OF THE SITE

In 1888, the state legislature appropriated \$50,000 for the establishment of the Home. Under the direction of Dunnell and Cleveland, two cottages and a laundry and heating plant were built with the first money given. In 1889, a hospital was erected and the laundry and heating plant were enlarged. In 1891-92, more money allocated by the legislature provided the Home with another cottage, a domestic structure and administrative offices while a sewer system was installed and the heating plant was expanded.¹⁴ All the buildings during this initial stage of the Home's development were designed by Dunnell and all had been specified in Cleveland's plan.

Improvements and construction continued through the 1890s. In 1894-95, another cottage was built and money was allocated for site improvements. Under Captain A.J. Merritt, a landscape engineer, the Campus was enhanced: trees were planted, roads and walkways were resurfaced and two mock forts were constructed. Merritt, an associate of Cleveland, closely followed the Cleveland plan¹⁵ ornamental aspects of which, with the maturation of its floral and arboreal features, were beginning to be realized at this time.¹⁶ In the *Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Trustees* of 1898, the Campus is described:

...all the buildings erected on the Soldiers' Home grounds have retained a general uniformity of architectural style, and have aimed at a uniform standard of excellence in construction. The comprehensive plan...has been as strictly adhered to that each new structure has fitted properly into its position, and made the institution...complete at each successive step.¹⁷

The Soldiers' Home Board was committed to the plan developed by Cleveland until the early 1900s when the second major phase of construction began. In 1905, the first deviation was made with the erection of Building 6, the Women's Building.¹⁸ This Neoclassical building was a departure from Dunnell's Richardsonian Romanesque style that had previously dominated the Campus. In addition, Building 6 was sited further north than Cleveland had intended any buildings to go. Its placement in the northeast section of the Campus resulted in changes to Cleveland's original intent. Two winding avenues, designed by Cleveland in deference to the natural contours of the landscape, were straightened: one, the road directly in front of Building 6; and the other, one of the two entrances into the Campus. Straightening the latter, the entrance to the Campus from Minnehaha Park to the north, established a long, straight drive across the Campus whose sightline terminated at the Administration Building, a prominent building on the eastern edge of the site. According to a study by Roald Evensen, there was precedence for this change in some of Cleveland's previous designs.¹⁹

The changes made with the construction of Building 6 did not completely subvert Cleveland's designs, however, and even added positively to his intentions. Although the alterations erased the roads' adherence to the natural landscape, they also introduced a broad parade ground between the two straightened roads. This new expanse, an easily adapted extension of Cleveland's open park design, became the center of Campus activity. This resulted in another change; in Cleveland's design there had been no one area emphasized for communal gatherings. Even with the changes, Cleveland's basic schema was still evident. The circulation pattern on the Campus as he envisioned was not altered. Traffic, although on a straighter course, continued to flow in the same direction with the same easy and convenient access to all the buildings.

In addition to Building 6, other structures were added during the second phase. Building 7 was completed in 1903. Its position within the campus closely resembles a building included in the original campus plan, although the need for such a large dining hall may have been unanticipated.²⁰ In 1909, a steel arch bridge was erected. This bridge replaced a pedestrian bridge that was built on the same spot in 1893-94.²¹ Cleveland had planned for traffic to flow into the Campus from the west; the steel arch bridge made this possible. Also in that year, a new laundry building was erected and in 1911, an addition was built onto Building 6.

In the 1930s, the third major construction phase began. Although there had been some minor construction--a second floor was added to the laundry building in 1914 and a root cellar and carpenter shop were built in 1920 and 1921--and some infrastructural improvements were made with the updating of roads and utilities, no major projects were undertaken. In the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration came to work for the Home. In addition to site improvements of paving and curbing the roads and Campus-wide painting and rewiring, the WPA built two buildings.²²

In 1937, Building 9, the Infirmary, was erected to the north of Building 6. Again, this was a departure from the Cleveland Plan in which no buildings were positioned in the northeast section of the Campus. Architecturally, it was a deviation as well; it introduced the Streamline Moderne style to the Campus. Building 9 was placed on the drive that was straightened due to the construction of Building 6. Its entrance was aligned with the Steel Arch Bridge entrance to the Campus. Rather than cross the Campus perpendicularly by establishing a drive leading directly from the bridge to Building 9, the WPA, in sympathy with Cleveland's intent, chose to maintain the north-south traffic flow and use the existing site gradients as established by Cleveland.²³

The second building erected by the WPA during this phase was Building 14, the new powerhouse. This structure was built on the site of the original powerhouse, which had been selected by Cleveland and designed by Dunnell. This building introduced the Art Deco style to the Campus.

The Campus changed little in the years between 1938-1980. There was some construction as well as demolition. Buildings 14 and 15 were erected in the 1950s, both of which were generally included in Cleveland's plan; they were located in the southwest quadrant of the Campus, where Cleveland intended buildings to be. Neither building greatly altered the flow of traffic--pedestrian or vehicular. In 1971, another building, Building 16, was constructed at the southern tip of the campus. This also was in the spirit of Cleveland's plan as he had planned for a hospital in this area. The hospital was razed to make room for Building 16.

In the 1970s, it was generally agreed that some modernization needed to occur at the Soldiers' Home. One master plan was developed that called for the demolition of the majority of the historic buildings.²⁴ Another led to what exists today. In 1980, Building 17, a modern Skilled

Nursing Care unit, was constructed. Although no buildings had to be demolished to accommodate this sprawling modern building, the original character of the Campus was drastically changed. Before the construction of Building 17, under Cleveland's Plan and still extant at this time, there were three major arteries of traffic flowing north-south. These allowed for convenient accessibility to all buildings in all areas of the Campus. Building 17, however, was sited right in the middle of the northern half of the Campus. With its construction, two of the three arteries were cut-off; the most westerly and central arteries were eliminated. This left the eastern boulevard as the only access to the southern end of the Campus. All traffic was funneled, therefore, to the eastern side, leaving little of the fluid mobility as originally designed by Cleveland. A warehouse was subsequently built (1989-90) that was connected to 17 and further blocked the flow of movement throughout the Campus.

Today, the eastern side of the Campus is considered the historic core. This is the area which was not adversely affected by the construction of Building 17 and its warehouse. In the southern half of this core are Buildings 10, 1, 2 and 4 all of which were designed by W.B. Dunnell²⁵ and all were planned for by Cleveland. Many of the roadways in this area are as Cleveland designed, meandering with the landscape. The park-like openness is similarly retained. In addition to the other buildings mentioned above, Buildings 6 and 9, to the north, are considered part of this core.

V. BIOGRAPHY

Horace William Shaler Cleveland was a prominent landscape architect of the late-nineteenth century whose designs can be seen all over the United States. Cleveland subscribed to the school of thought that emphasized the importance of allowing the landscape to dictate the design; the landscape architect should embrace and use the natural topography of a site to enable its innate beauty to emerge. As he said, "The landscape gardener has no other duty than to serve as high priest of Nature."²⁶ This engendered beauty, the thought went, was an important component for the well-being of society. Cleveland and the other adherents to his beliefs dominated the field of landscape architecture at the turn of the century and changed the way space and nature were viewed by society.

Born in Massachusetts in 1814, Cleveland spent the majority of his formative years in New England, aside from a short stay in Cuba where his father, a sea captain and writer, served as vice-consul. From an early age, Cleveland felt an affinity for the outdoors, delighting in the variety of topography New England afforded: from the rivers, mountains, lakes and forests to the ocean. In his years on the East Coast, Cleveland studied civil engineering and engaged in agriculture, buying a farm in New Jersey where he later founded the New Jersey Horticultural Society and through this, propelled himself into the field of landscape architecture.²⁷ He

developed personal friendships with other prominent naturalists who, like Cleveland, dominated their respective fields like Charles Sumner and Henry Longfellow.²⁸ He similarly cultivated professional relationships that equally furthered his career, working for Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux on their design for Prospect Park in Brooklyn and establishing a partnership with Robert Morris Copeland in Boston.

In 1869, seeing an opportunity to extend landscape architecture into the unchartered Midwest, Cleveland settled in Chicago where he went into partnership with William M.R. French, an engineer. Cleveland, the designer and French, the engineer, were responsible for all aspects of landscape architecture from cemeteries to parks to suburban development. In Chicago, while with French, Cleveland designed South and Washington Parks as well as Drexel Boulevard. In addition, he planned the Omaha, Nebraska park system and the Roger Williams Park in Providence. In the South, Cleveland designed Jekyll Island Winter Resort in Georgia and the grounds around the Natural Bridge in Virginia. In 1872, Cleveland was hired by the City of St. Paul to develop a plan for its parks and boulevards and was similarly hired by Minneapolis in 1883. He moved to Minnesota in 1886.²⁹

During his thirty years in the Twin Cities, Cleveland had an enormous impact on the area. Rather than duplicate the mistakes he thought were made by city planners in Chicago following the Great Fire of 1871, he saw a golden opportunity in the Twin Cities. Instead of the strict grid-like street plan of Chicago, Cleveland emphasized curvilinear, tree-lined boulevards in the center city. These not only served as a barrier for fire protection, they also provided breathing space and visual beauty for city inhabitants. Similarly, he stressed the need for centrally located parks, unlike Chicago where all the parks were, as he said during a lecture series at the University of Minnesota, "on the prairie, beyond the city limits, where the poor laboring classes will reap no benefits from them."³⁰ His philosophies were evident in his work for both Minneapolis and St. Paul: in his designs for the St. Anthony Park area of St. Paul, for the University of Minnesota campus in Minneapolis and in the Grand Round parkway system around the Minneapolis city lakes.

Cleveland foresaw the inevitability of city expansion and the necessity to designate land for public use to compensate for this expansion. He preached the importance of spending money to obtain large quantities of land for parks rather than using that same money for ornamental gardening, as was the inclination of some designers. Cleveland felt that all people needed public spaces to maintain their health and sense of well-being. Pointing to Boston Common which he saw grow from a bucolic pasture where cows grazed to an urban park surrounded by city and used by thousands of city inhabitants, he emphasized that land that seemed too far out on the periphery would in fact, one day be a part of the city. A missed opportunity to obtain and shape the landscape while it was still relatively inexpensive and pristine, could be lost forever.³¹ Stressing this idea, Cleveland helped the City of Minneapolis acquire ten parcels of land for

recreational purposes as the superintendent of Parks for Minneapolis in the 1880s. Similarly, during his tenure in St. Paul, large amounts of land were set aside for public spaces.

In 1888, Cleveland designed the Minnesota Soldiers' Home. He employed all his skills and beliefs and created a beautiful park in which the soldiers could reside. Curving drives embraced the organic features of the site, the Mississippi River bluffs remained naturally wooded and open spaces graced the landscape. Cleveland was able to incorporate his plans for the Home into his grand plan for Minneapolis and St. Paul. Explaining that, "St. Paul and Minneapolis eventually, and at no distant day, will become virtually one city,"³² in his Outline Plan of a Park System for the City of St. Paul, Cleveland made the Soldiers' Home a focal point for his "great interurban park" that connected the two cities.³³ Some of the design elements for his grand scheme can still be seen today.

After making an enormous impact on the physical make-up of the Twin Cities and the country as a whole, with his emphasis on maintaining the natural topography of a landscape to create public expanses for the benefit of an increasingly urban society, Horace Cleveland died on December 5, 1900 in Hinsdale, Illinois, shortly before turning eighty-six.³⁴

VI. ENDNOTES

1. "Historic Structures Report Minnesota Veterans Home, Minneapolis Campus." Prepared for the Minnesota Veterans Homes Board by Bernard Jacob Architects, Ltd. January, 1993.
2. *First Annual Report of the Board of Trustees, Minnesota Soldiers' Home*. St Paul, Minnesota: Pioneer Press Company, State Printer, 1888.
3. Cleveland, H.W.S. "The Aesthetic Development of the United Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis." An address to The Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, April 20, 1888.
4. Cleveland, H.W.S. Letter to the Board of Trustees of the Minnesota Soldiers' Home. Minneapolis, Minnesota. August 8, 1888.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Koop, Michael. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Minnesota Soldiers' Home. June 14, 1988. section 8, p. 2.
8. Evensen, Roald N. "Campus Preservation Planning Study, Minnesota Soldiers' Home National Historic District." May, 1991, p. 17.
9. Cleveland, August, 1888.

10. Johnston, Johanna. Frederick Law Olmsted, Partner with Nature. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1975, p. 45.
11. Ibid.
12. Olmsted, Frederick Law. Civilizing American Cities. Edited by S.R. Sutton. Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1971, p.75.
13. Cleveland, April, 1888.
14. Koop, section 8, p. 1.
15. *Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Trustees, Minnesota Soldiers' Home*, July 31, 1895. St. Paul, Minnesota: Pioneer Press Company, State Printer, 1895.
16. Evensen, p. 8.
17. *Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Trustees, Minnesota Soldiers' Home*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Pioneer Press Company, State Printer, 1898.
18. Evensen, p. 19.
19. Ibid.
20. Evensen, p. 45.
21. "Historic Structures," p. 20.
22. Ibid. p. 25.
23. Evensen, p. 19
24. "Historic Structures," p. 20.
25. Ibid.
26. Blegen, Theodore C. "Horace William Shaler Cleveland, Pioneer American Landscape Architect." for the St. Anthony Park Area Historical Association. Minneapolis, Minnesota: H.N. Bruce Printing Company, 1949.
27. Luckhardt, Virginia and Tishler, William. "H.W.S. Cleveland, Pioneer Landscape Architect to the Upper Midwest." *Minnesota History*. Fall, 1985, p. 281.
28. Blegen, p. 3.
29. Ibid.

30. Luckhardt and Tishler, p. 283.
31. Blegen, p. 4.
32. Luckhardt and Tishler, p. 284.
33. Cleveland, August, 1888.
34. Luckhardt and Tishler, p.291.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Olmsted, Frederick Law. Civilizing American Cities. Edited by S.R. Sutton. Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1971.
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VIII. PROJECT INFORMATION

Due to improvements being made at the Minnesota Veterans' Home, including the renovation of nine buildings and the Steel Arch Bridge, the Cleveland Plan and its evolution was researched. This historical documentation was completed by MacDonald and Mack Architects of Minneapolis in January, 1997. This is an addendum to already existing documentation done in 1988. It is in conformance with the Standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior.