

NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS,
NORTHWESTERN BRANCH, GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE
(Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Building No.
39)
5000 West National Avenue
Milwaukee
Milwaukee
Wisconsin

HABS WI-360-C
WI-360-C

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS –
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(Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Building No. 39)
HABS No. WI-360-C

Location: Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 5000 West National Avenue, Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

Present Owner: U. S. Federal Government

Present Occupant: Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Present Use: Residence for Medical Center Director

Significance: The Governor's Residence is thought to have been built in 1868-69 and designed by prominent Milwaukee architect Edward Townsend Mix, concurrent with construction of the Main Building. It housed the chief administrator, or Governor, for the Northwestern Branch of the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (renamed National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in 1873). This new federal institution was authorized by Congress in 1865 and charged with caring for Civil War veterans disabled by their military service. The Northwestern Branch was located in Milwaukee in 1866, mainly due to the fundraising and organization already completed by the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home Society. The Milwaukee women who spearheaded this effort donated \$95,000 and a picturesque campus was established west of the city.

The original design for the Governor's Residence was an Italianate villa with a square tower reminiscent of the designs promoted by Andrew Jackson Downing. The house was expanded sometime between 1896 and 1903. The new roofline and tower gave it a Queen Anne appearance. The house still serves as a residence for the Director of the Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1868
2. Architect: Attributed to Edward Townsend Mix, because of his concurrent work on the Main Building (HABS No. WI-360-A)
3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses: Residence for Governor of Northwestern Branch and his family
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: not available
5. Original plans and construction: Early photographs and engravings show that the original design for the Governor's Residence was an Italianate villa similar to the ones popularized by landscape designer and architect Andrew Jackson Downing. The house had a T-plan cross gable form and a tower with a steeply pitched mansard roof.
6. Alterations and additions: Various open porches and additional bay windows were added sometime during the 1880s. Around 1897 (between 1896 and 1903), the house was expanded by raising and reconfiguring the roof. The tower and upper portions of the gables were altered, creating a structure with a Queen Anne appearance. Sometime between 1919 and 1923 the large porch at the southwest corner was added and later enclosed. It is not known whether an architect was involved with any of these later changes.

B. Historical Context:

The National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (renamed National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in 1873) was established by an Act of Congress signed by President Lincoln in March 1865. Federal officials recognized the growing need to care for Union soldiers injured during their Civil War service and subsequently unable to support themselves. This unprecedented federal effort paralleled many state and local initiatives to care for disabled soldiers as the wounded filtered back North after years of fighting. The initial legislation did not specify where the Asylums would be located, but the general understanding was that several sites in different parts of the northern states would be needed. The Civil War would greatly increase the number of veterans and the size of the federal veterans' pension system. Historian Patrick Kelly has analyzed the unprecedented the scope of the National Asylums and the veterans' benefits bureaucracy in the late nineteenth century as representing a unique social welfare intervention of the

federal government in an otherwise laissez-faire era.¹ By 1930 when the National Homes were incorporated into the new Veterans Administration, the system had grown to include veterans of multiple conflicts cared for at eleven campuses located around the country. Many of the historic National Home sites are still part of the vast system of hospitals and other veterans' benefits managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (the Veterans Administration was converted into a cabinet-level department in 1989).

The Eastern Branch was opened in Togus, Maine on November 10, 1866 to serve veterans in the Northeast. The first of the original branches, the Togus property was a former health resort that offered a number of buildings for immediate use. The Northwestern Branch in Milwaukee also was established in 1866, after negotiations with the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home Society transferred the money and property already acquired by that group to the federal effort. The Central Branch was located outside of Dayton, Ohio in 1867 to be accessible to a large number of veterans in the lower Midwest, western New York and Pennsylvania, and states to the south. The citizens of Dayton donated \$28,000 to the effort, again illustrating local desire to capture the benefits of having a federal facility.² Each of these early branches included a single-family house for the use of the Governor, the chief military administrator assigned to the site. As was typical at military posts, the quarters for the officers resembled contemporary suburban houses. The rank hierarchy of the institution was reflected by the size and position of the assigned house. Here at the Northwestern Branch the Governor enjoyed both a private residence as well as a secluded site southeast of the Main Building.

In late September 1867, the construction contract for the Main Building was awarded to S. A. Harrison of Milwaukee.³ On October 11, 1867, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* announced that the building architect, Edward Townsend Mix, was appointed by the Board of Managers to oversee its construction.⁴ The 1867 *Annual Report* of the Board of Managers summarized the progress on the new Milwaukee home building by the end of that year, but did not mention the Governor's residence.⁵ A March 1868 article in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* noted that "work on the asylum buildings, including quarters for the officers, barns, etc., will be prosecuted as early as possible. Proposals for contract for the work will be invited as soon as the plan is perfected."⁶ This appears to be the only time that the associated structures were mentioned in the local press, in contrast to the interest in the impressive Main Building and landscape design.

¹ Patrick Kelly, *Creating a National Home: Building the Veterans' Welfare State, 1860-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2-4, 18. Kelly relates the unusual benefits of "martial citizenship" to the patronage traditions of the late nineteenth century.

² Julin, "Northwestern Branch," NHL Registration Form, 35.

³ "Bids for Construction, First Building Open," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 28 September 1867, 1.

⁴ "A Good Appointment," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 11 October 1867, 1.

⁵ Board of Managers – National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, *Annual Report* (1867), 3.

⁶ "National Military Asylum," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 13 March 1868, 1.

It seems reasonable to attribute the original design for the Governor's Residence to Mix, given his involvement with the Main Building and the similarity between the house and other Italianate villas designed by Mix (1831-1890). Few records survive that detail Mix's role in creating the Northwestern Branch, but his career is generally well known in Milwaukee history.⁷ Mix was born in New Haven, Connecticut. After studying architecture with a New York firm and the Chicago firm of William W. Boyington, he relocated to Milwaukee in 1856. He served as Wisconsin state architect from 1864-67 and then continued to practice in Milwaukee from 1867 until 1889. During the last year of his life he lived and worked in Minneapolis. In her dissertation on Mix, historian Christy Szczesny-Adams describes his "cosmopolitan" additions to the built environment of Milwaukee and region as "dominat[ing] the landscape and transform[ing] the town from a rough backwater into a sophisticated city during the second half of the nineteenth century."⁸ Szczesny-Adams does not mention the Governor's Residence in her brief section on the Soldiers' Home Main Building. In addition to his earlier connections to the Soldiers Home Society, Mix was Milwaukee's leading architect and designer of choice for the business elite, including Alexander Mitchell. Mitchell, one of Milwaukee's most powerful businessmen, was president of the Executive Committee of the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home Society.⁹ In his thesis on Mix, John Richard Burrows emphasizes his ties to the Mitchell family and the "Yankee" business elite in Milwaukee:

The Mitchells had dominated Milwaukee, both in social circles and in business, for a quarter of a century and the work of Mix was apparent in each facet of their lives. He designed their homes, which were focal points for prominent social events; he designed the Milwaukee Club, which they were instrumental in founding; and he designed the buildings to house their banking, real estate and railroad concerns which were cornerstones of the economic life of the city.¹⁰

In addition, historian Richard Perrin noted that "in connection with Milwaukee's earlier architecture, and particularly its finest church work, the name of Edward Townsend Mix appears very frequently. Socially prominent and active in many civic organizations, Mix

⁷ "Edward T. Mix," in Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*, (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970), 423-424; "Edward Townsend Mix," Dictionary of Wisconsin History, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp>; Joseph Korom, *Milwaukee Architecture: A Guide to Notable Buildings* (Madison, WI: Prairie Oak Press, 1995), xi. There is some inconsistency in these sources regarding Mix's early life and career.

⁸ Christy M. Szczesny-Adams, "Cosmopolitan Design in the Upper Midwest: The Nineteenth Century Architecture of Edward Townsend Mix" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2007), 1.

⁹ Kelly 112; Kristin Gilpatrick Halverson, Nancy J. Hubbard, Todd Hunter, and Patricia Lynch. "Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers Historic District, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin," (National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2005), 42. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C..

¹⁰ John Richard Burrows, *The Work of E. Townsend Mix from 1856 to 1890* (MArch Thesis: University of Virginia, 1980), 48-49.

appears to have been Milwaukee's favorite architect for quite a time."¹¹ Mix's major commissions in Milwaukee included the Music Hall (1865), the Plankinton House hotel (1868), Chamber of Commerce (1880), a major expansion of Alexander Mitchell's residence (1873), the Mitchell Building (a commercial structure at the corner of Broad and Wisconsin Streets) (1878), and the 12-story Guaranty Loan Building, one of Milwaukee's first skyscrapers.

Like other designers of his generation, Mix was well-versed in both the practical aspects of construction and a variety of the latest architectural styles. His work reflected the creative eclecticism prevalent during the second half of the nineteenth century. He exhibited a flexible use of fashionable historic motifs and forms in tandem with modern technology and building types. Perrin described Mix's career as including both restrained and exuberant designs. His Music Hall, an important early commission in 1865, introduced the stylish French Second Empire architectural mode to Milwaukee. His expansion of Alexander Mitchell's residence in 1873 transformed a staid Italianate house into a sprawling Second Empire confection. Mix also continued to use the earlier Italianate forms when necessary as well as a variety of Victorian Gothic-inspired motifs. Burrows describes Mix as the consummate professional, unwilling to divulge information about his design decisions for wealthy clients. This reluctance also means that historians have little firsthand information regarding his opinions and ideas. Undoubtedly his varied approach was guided by the budgets and tastes of his powerful clients. He certainly would have been familiar with the villa ideals popularized by A. J. Downing and the Northwestern Branch Governor's Residence fits in with that trend. One volume known to have been in his architectural library was *Rural Church and Cottage Architecture*, a compilation of designs by Downing, Richard Upjohn, and other contemporary architects.¹²

The Main Building was dedicated on September 28, 1869, again with no mention of additional buildings on the grounds, including quarters for the Branch Governor, Colonel Theodore Yates. Although officially the Deputy Governor, Yates oversaw construction and was in charge of the Branch at its opening. The first evidence of the presence of the governor's residence is on a site plan published in 1876. Here one sees two small clusters of buildings carefully arranged among the winding carriage drives. The farm house and barns for the Branch agricultural efforts were located just north of the Main Building. The other cluster is the small residential enclave of the Governor's residence, and the Surgeon's/Treasurer's duplex dwelling. The duplex was also designed

¹¹ Richard W. E. Perrin. *Milwaukee Landmarks: An Architectural Heritage 1850-1950* (Milwaukee Public Museum, Publications in History no. 9, 1968), 15. Architect Walter A. Holbrook worked as Mix's draftsman from 1869 and later his business partner.

¹² Perrin, 16; Burrows, 12. On Mix's library see Chris Szczesny-Adams, "Edward Townsend Mix: Books and the Professional Architect in Nineteenth-Century Milwaukee," in Kenneth Hafertepe and James F. O'Gorman, eds., *American Architects and Their Books, 1840-1915*, (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 149-172.

in the Italianate mode, although with a simpler form and more modest porches and decoration.

The earliest image of the Governor's Residence seems to be an engraving published in an 1881 souvenir booklet (Figure 1).¹³ The house is shown from the carriage drive at the southwest. It is a two-story Italianate villa with a square, mansard roof tower tucked into the northwest corner of the T-shaped plan. It has a simple cross gable roof and pairs of round arch windows. An ornamental hood is visible at the pair of first floor windows on the south gable end. The first floor of the west gable had a bay window. There appears to be a one-story entrance pavilion at the southwest corner of the T-plan. The concave curve of the tower roof is ornamented with alternating light and dark stripes of slate and topped by a finial. The image includes a horse-drawn carriage on the drive in the foreground, as well as two well-dressed couples strolling nearby. The shrubbery and mature trees create the impression of a park-like setting. The east façade of the residence is visible in a bird's eye view in the same publication (Figure 2). This view emphasizes the bucolic, wooded quality of the site, with the Governor's house nestled among large trees. This view confirms the basic T-shaped footprint, with a telescoping ell on the north gable end already in place. The east façade is unornamented except for the bay window at the dining room on the north end of the main wing.

An undated photograph of the Governor's Residence in the collection of the Milwaukee Historical Society confirms the accuracy of the 1881 engraving.¹⁴ Here the house is shown from the west. The architectural details are the same, except for a lack of polychrome slates in the tower roof. The landscaping is less manicured than the engraving, but there are still a number of trees around the house. It both its architectural details and siting, the Governor's Residence reflects the contemporary ideals about landscaped settings and an appropriately tasteful house for the American middle class popularized by the writings of A. J. Downing.¹⁵ These ideas about suburban villas and housing also complemented the vision of the Soldier's Home as a restful natural setting.

Incorporating family-oriented suburban residential structures into a site that emphasized barracks living for its primarily male residents would not have been unusual, given the long tradition of this sort of dual living arrangement at military posts. Women and children were not allowed to live in the veterans' barracks, but many lived on site as the families of Branch officers and staff. By 1889 new fashionable Shingle Style quarters were built for the Chief Surgeon (1887), a more modest front gable structure for the Chief Clerk, and the original Surgeon's residence was reassigned to the Quartermaster and/or Treasurer.¹⁶ Additional new quarters were built during the first decade of the twentieth

¹³ *National Soldiers' Home Near Milwaukee*, (Milwaukee, WI: National Soldiers' Home, 1881).

¹⁴ Negative #22,107, File – National Soldiers Home Building, Photographic Collections, Milwaukee Historical Society.

¹⁵ See Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, originally published by D. Appleton and Company of New York in 1850.

¹⁶ *National Soldiers' Home Near Milwaukee*. New York: The Albertype Co., 1889.

century in the former farm area, upgrading the accommodations for officers and their families. Like at regular military posts, these families usually lived in single-family dwellings. The size and privacy of the house was dependant on rank; with the Governor and his family living in a detached house in a spacious lawn and lower ranking members of the staff living in one side of a duplex dwelling arranged in rows with modest yards.

The current appearance of the Governor's Residence is the result of a series of late nineteenth and early twentieth century changes reconfiguring the original Italianate villa into a taller structure with updated Queen Anne features. Several photographs published between 1889 and 1895 show modest exterior upgrades to the Governor's Residence prior to its more drastic overhaul. An 1889 photograph of "Governor Knox's Residence" shows the west elevation partially obscured by trees. Open shed roof porches with decorative posts and brackets are clearly visible on the north and south sides of the west gable. The brackets and posts resemble those at Ward Memorial Hall (HABS No. WI-360-B). A similar, c. 1894 view, with less obstructing foliage shows the original tower and roofline still intact at this time (Figure 3). A south elevation view published c. 1895 offers a view of the open porch adjacent to the one-story entrance pavilion. A two-story bay has been added to the south gable, with a large window opening. A matching window opening appears on the south side of the entrance pavilion.

The 1895 booklet also offers a description of the duties of the Governor as well as mentioning his house:

Colonel Cornelius Wheeler is Governor of the Home, and he bears the same relation to this branch as does the commander of a military post to that post. All persons belonging to or residing at the Home are under his legal orders.

The Governor has special charge of all grounds, buildings, furniture, vehicles, draught and stock animals. He regulates the number of employees in the various departments, makes all subordinate appointments at the Home, has general charge of all operations connected with the farm and stables. He must examine, and if he approve [sic.], sign all accounts and vouchers of the treasurer; making such examinations of the books from time to time as he may deem proper. He shall examine and act on all estimates of goods wanted at the Home, and approve all contracts.

Colonel Wheeler lives in a neat brick house, in the midst of a grove of natural forest trees, about 100 rods southeast of the main building and a little south of the greenhouse. His lawn and flower beds are charming spots.¹⁷

¹⁷ Richard Corbett. *The Soldiers' Home: Detailed Description of the North-Western Branch National Military Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 7th edition*. (Milwaukee: Burdick, Armitage, and Allen, Print, c. 1895), 17.

Colonel Wheeler was branch governor of from 1892 until approximately 1913. It is likely that many of the changes to the Governor's Residence - including expanding the attic level and building a new tower – were executed during his tenure.

An inventory of buildings at the Northwestern Branch included in the Inspector General's Report for 1897 provides a construction date of 1868 for the house, but also seems to describe the expanded structure by listing 12 rooms, 2 ½ stories.¹⁸ The cost for the brick structure is listed as \$7,000. Generally there is very little information in the NHDVS records about the Governor's Residence. Most annual reports group all of the officers' quarters together into one item, making it impossible to tell which structure benefitted from any noted maintenance funds. The Governor's Residence was not part of the facilities and activities for the veterans, which were the subject of the reports to the Board of Managers. It is also possible that the Governor self-financed any upgrades to the structure, putting those changes outside of the NHDVS bureaucracy and record keeping. Some anecdotal accounts attribute the renovations to a fire and/or Colonel Wheeler's large and growing family. No primary evidence has been found to support these claims. Elizabeth Corbett does mention in her memoir that Governor Wheeler's household included the extended family of his mother, two sisters-in-law, and two nieces.¹⁹

Another photograph of the Governor's Residence published in 1904 shows the substantial changes to the tower and west gable (Figure 4).²⁰ The pitch of the north roof slope was changed, and a large two-story bay topped by an octagonal tower was added to the west façade to expand the number of rooms on this side of the house. The original bay at the first floor of the west gable received a second floor level, increasing the space in that bedroom. It is likely that the similar second floor was added to the east bay at this time. The original tower located closer to the north ell was removed and the west slope of the roof extended to create an asymmetrical gable. The open porch near the main entrance on the south side of the west gable remained.

After 1909 the population at this branch declined. In 1916 the Inspector General recommended that it be closed to avoid extensive repairs and the Board of Managers agreed. However shortly thereafter the potential influx of World War I veterans made it necessary to expand rather than eliminate branches.²¹ Immediately following World War I the Board of Managers launched a flurry of hospital building for the homes, much of it centered on specialized facilities for treating tuberculosis. The Northwestern Branch

¹⁸ J.C. Breckinridge, *Report of the Annual Inspection of the Several Branches of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers made by the Inspector-General of the Army July 31, 1897-November 1897* (55th Congress, 2d sess., House Document No. 278, 1898), 173.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Corbett, *Out at the Soldiers' Home* (reprint), 117, 123.

²⁰ Richard Corbett. *The Soldiers' Home: Detailed Description of the North-Western Branch National Military Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*, (1904), 17.

²¹ Julin, "Northwestern Branch," NHL Registration Form, 57.

received \$1.2 million to build a modern tuberculosis hospital on the far southern edge of the property. The building was completed in 1922-23. Its location foreshadowed the future shift of development to medical facilities clustered closer to National Avenue.²² It is likely that additional upgrades to the Governor's Residence also were completed at this time. A photograph published in a 1916 souvenir booklet confirms that the older open porch on the southwest corner remained at least until then.²³

A photograph taken in 1923 shows the large enclosed porch currently located at the southwest corner of the house, which was probably added between 1919 and 1923.²⁴ The porch extends from the end of the west gable to encompass the original one-story entrance pavilion and nearly connect to the side of the south gable wing. The doorway is on the west side, on axis with the original exterior door. The porch is supported by square wood pillars connected by arched brackets. Currently each opening is filled by three windows with transoms above; it is possible that the original porch was open and then storm windows were added to winterize it. The flat roof creates a veranda accessed from the second floor (Figure 5).

Looking back in early 1930, General George H. Wood, President of the NHDVS, testified before the House Committee on Military Affairs that the World War had dramatically shifted demand for the Home's services. Between 1907 and 1919 no additional construction was undertaken anywhere in the system. By the end of the war, the potential membership had increased tenfold. In 1929, the state soldiers' home in Bath, New York became the eleventh branch of the NHDVS. This transfer was a partial solution for the rapidly rising demand in the late 1920s. In addition, the Board of Managers proposed to increase capacity at existing branches where possible and adding another branch somewhere in the South. Between 1927 and 1929 the population at the Northwestern Branch would increase from 1,490 to 2,017. By this time over half of the members were World War veterans, with a few hundred Civil War veterans still remaining.²⁵

Around 1928, members of Congress began advocating for restructuring federal veterans services. Three different agencies served veterans – the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, the Pension Bureau, and the Veterans' Bureau (founded in 1921 and primarily involved with medical care and insurance). Various restructurings were considered; the most straightforward and ultimately successful proposal was

²² Cetina, 379.

²³ *Souvenir of National Soldiers', Home, Milwaukee, Wisconsin*, 1916. Zablocki VA Medical Center Library Historical Collection.

²⁴ Tom L. Johnson, ed. *Souvenir History Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*, (Milwaukee, WI, 1924), 41.

²⁵ In July 1929 the population at the Northwestern Branch included 207 Civil War veterans, 640 Spanish War veterans, and 1,362 World War veterans. Inspector General's Report – NHDVS published in *Construction at Soldiers' Homes, Hearings Before the Committee on Military Affairs*, House of Representatives, 71st Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: GPO, 1930), 76.

combining all three agencies under a new Veterans Administration. This proposal was approved by Congress on July 3, 1930 and instituted through an executive order. The NHDVS Board of Managers resisted the initial proposals, but finally their eleven branches were folded into the new VA. The NHDVS was no longer an autonomous agency; now their primarily domiciliary services were just one of many offered by the Veterans Administration.²⁶

Life at the Milwaukee branch continued without many changes. When asked by a member of Congress whether facilities built for Civil War veterans were satisfactory to World War veterans, General Wood could only answer that the demand seemed to indicate that the Homes were still desirable to veterans.²⁷ The Board of Managers had continued to push for expansion of the branches, arguing that these services would be needed regardless of the changes in administrative structure. In 1929 they had requested a new 300-bed barrack at the Northwestern Branch.²⁸ The request was made again in February 1931, now for a 350-bed barracks to cost \$300,000.²⁹

The Governor's Residence has continued to serve as housing for the chief administrator for the facility. A set of drawings prepared in 1935 and revised with changes from 1956 confirms that the interior configuration and details have changed very little during the twentieth century.³⁰ The two living spaces on the west side of the first floor are labeled "music room" and "sitting room," with the sitting room located at the northwest corner in the c. 1897 addition. Other than minor repairs and maintenance, there were a few noteworthy exterior changes in this period. The southeast side of the basement was excavated to create a garage and driveway. This work was done in 1936 through a Works Progress Administration project. The other changes include addition of a large "thermapane" window to the north façade at the breakfast nook and an enclosed mudroom built to shelter the rear door also on this façade. It is not clear whether this work was done at the same time as the garage, or perhaps later. One photograph from the mid-1930s does seem to show the mudroom addition. The west elevation more clearly visible in this photograph seems to be nearly identical to today.³¹

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

²⁶ Cetina, 382-383.

²⁷ *Construction at Soldiers' Homes, Hearings Before the Committee on Military Affairs*, House of Representatives, 71st Congress, 3rd Session (Washington, DC: GPO, 1931), 8.

²⁸ *Construction at Soldiers' Home* (1931), 3.

²⁹ *Construction at Soldiers' Home* (1930), 3.

³⁰ The title block of the drawings contains the name Matzke and the drawing technique is somewhat crude. There is an incomplete series of drawings for various Northwestern Branch buildings with the same name and dates in the title block, suggesting that these were done for a survey or inventory purpose. Copies of the drawings are available at the Zablocki VA Medical Center Library.

³¹ A photograph of the completed WPA garage project and the view of the west elevation c. 1935 were accessed in the files of the Veterans' Administration Washington Headquarters, Historic Preservation Office, courtesy of Darlene Richardson.

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Governor's Residence is a two-and-a-half story brick and wood frame single-family dwelling with an irregular footprint and roofline. Italianate features such as round arch openings and much of the brick portion date to the original construction in the late 1860s, while a number of Queen Anne features such as the wood shingled octagonal tower and large bay windows date to extensive alterations executed around 1897.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This house is a two-and-a-half story structure roughly four bays by four bays, but largely asymmetrical in appearance.

2. Foundations: The very low foundation is a combination of brick and stone, with the stone only visible inside the basement. The site slopes away to the southeast.

3. Walls: The walls are constructed of local "Cream City" brick with its characteristic yellowish-tan color. These load bearing walls are laid in an all stretcher pattern. The upper section of the west gable and tower are sheathed with decorative wood shingles instead of brick. The bays feature some additional decorative touches such as bands of dentils at each floor of the south bay.

4. Structural system, framing: Wood frame common rafter roof nailed onto a center ridge board with load-bearing brick masonry walls.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: There is an enclosed porch that wraps around the southwest corner of the house. It is accessed via two concrete steps on the west side that are aligned with the main entrance now inside the porch. It has a concrete floor now covered with carpeting and sits on a concrete foundation. This porch has a shed roof with a very low pitch that also serves as a balcony accessed via a door at the second floor hall. A low rail surrounds the parapet here. There is a bead board ceiling inside. In between the square wood posts holding the roof are decorative brackets that form segmental arch openings. The openings are now filled with casement windows but perhaps originally were uncovered or just screened.

There are three curved concrete steps tucked into the corner at the kitchen ell on the north façade. These steps lead to the one-story, hipped roof mud room added during the second quarter of the twentieth century (c. 1936-1956).

6. Chimneys: The Governor's Residence has four brick chimneys, all painted gray with metal caps. Two tall cruciform chimneys flanking the center hip of the roof were probably extended when the roof was altered to create more living space in the attic, but

they no longer have the corbelled brick caps that made them even taller. There is a short chimney in the center of the east slope of the kitchen ell, close to the ridge, that is extended by a decorative terra cotta stove pipe. The fourth chimney extends through the northeast side of the pyramidal roof on the tower. It features several bands of raised brick.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is through the wrap-around porch. On the exterior there is a simple wood paneled door with two small glazed openings near the top. There is an additional storm door with screening/glazing in the top half. The former exterior doorway is located inside the porch facing west. This opening is a round arch with projecting brick frame and carved wood rope molding. The heavy wood door is also arched and features four recessed vertical panels framed with two layers of beaded molding. The top two panels are arched to echo the shape of the door and its opening.

The original door has been removed from inside the north mudroom, but the opening is still extant and features a round arch opening with carved wood rope molding and a fixed three light transom. The wood door for this opening is stored on the attic level; it has four long rectangular recessed panels arranged two over two. The exterior doorway is on the east façade of the mudroom has a modern storm door with a glazing/screening in the top half set directly into the brick wall.

The second floor opening to the balcony created by the main porch has a French door with eight rectangular lights. There is also a wood screen door on this opening with a solid paneling on its bottom half.

A modern overhead garage door is located at the opening and driveway excavated on the east façade basement level during the 1930s.

b. Windows: There are two primary types of windows at the Governor's Residence. A number of windows on the north and east facades have a round arch opening with a raised brick hood or frame. These openings have a thick wood sill, and some have additional decorative touches with a square block below each end of the sill or at the base of the hood. The windows are four over four wood sashes with a round arch top sash. The other typical window is a segmental arch opening set directly in the brick wall with a tall rectangular one over one wood sash. In both cases the wood sash has a thick rounded edge. Many windows are covered with wood or aluminum storm windows.

There are three two-story projecting brick window bays – the ones on the west and east façade are hexagonal and the south rectangular. The windows in these bays are a mix of round and segmental arched openings. Colored leaded glass fixed fanlights are located over the large picture window in the west (first floor only), south (first and second floors) bays, and east (second floor only). The large picture windows seem to have replaced pairs of tall double hung sash. There is another picture window/leaded glass transom

combination on the south façade now inside the enclosed porch. The pair of tall windows on the first floor of the east bay gives an example of an older window frame configuration for this structure.

There is a round window opening with a wood sash in the peak of the gable on the north façade divided into four equal lights. A similar diamond-shaped opening is in the gable over the bay windows on the south façade. The enclosed porch has pairs of tall single light casement windows. There is a large fixed single pane picture window set directly into the north façade at the kitchen. This “thermapane” window has a concrete sill and was installed by 1956. The typical basement level window is a two light wood sash casement located in a concrete window well.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The roof is a combination cross gable/pyramidal form covered with asphalt shingles. The original roof was covered with slate. Open gables face south, north and west; the gable for the north ell is asymmetrical (longer on the west slope). Historic images of the structure in its one-and-a-half story configuration show a more conventional T-shaped cross gable roof. The pyramidal section at the center was added when the roof was raised to create more living space in the attic.

b. Cornice, eaves: The Governor's Residence has a painted wood box cornice with enclosed gutters and aluminum downspouts.

c. Tower: There is a three-story octagonal tower at the northwest corner of the house. The brick base stretches halfway across the bottom two-stories of the west façade, and resembles a window bay. The third floor is wood frame and covered with decorative shingles in combination of curved and square shapes. It is topped by an eight-sided pyramidal roof with a metal (copper or bronze) finial.

d. Dormers: On the south slope of the west gable there is a hipped roof dormer. It includes two windows that are set at an angle creating a V-shaped footprint. The sides of the dormer are covered with asphalt shingles. There is another tiny front gable dormer on the west slope of the north gable roof. The small sash window is two over two with a triangular upper sash.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The floor plan of the governor's house is basically a center hall with flanking double parlors and a kitchen ell at the rear. However the plan has an asymmetrical footprint with numerous bays and porches, and a side entrance to the stair hall. The current layout of the house reflects a major enlargement sometime around the turn of the twentieth century. The attic level is unfinished on the east side and has three rooms arranged from west to south around a small stair hall. The second floor has a center stair hall with bedrooms on either side and a bath and additional bedroom towards the rear or north over the kitchen. Another bath is located just behind the main stair in

front of the passage to the northwest bedroom, formerly a sitting room with a connecting door to the front bedroom. The first floor has a central entrance hall with the door from the enclosed porch on the west side wall and the stair curving up on the west wall as well. Originally this center hall was roughly L-shaped, with a small passage behind the stair into the rear sitting room at the northwest corner. These openings have been closed off and part of the passage converted to a closet. All the rest of the rooms – living room and dining room on the east, front sitting room on the west, kitchen at the north – are accessed via the center hall. The kitchen ell can also be entered through the former butler's pantry behind the dining room on the east side of the plan. The basement contains a series of utilitarian spaces for laundry, vegetable storage, garage, coal bin, as well as unexcavated areas under the porches and rear sitting room at the tower.

2. Stairways: The main stair curves up the west wall of the hall to the second floor. It has a carpet runner over hardwood steps and risers, and an elaborate turned balustrade, turned newel post and curved hand rail. The thin balusters are turned in a complex pattern of rings, curved, and flat sections; each stair has two balusters and a curved tread return. This balustrade continues around the second floor hall back to the wall at the stair opening. The large, thick newel post follows a similar pattern, with a series of decorative curved projections around the plinth. The face string has applied wood decoration with a repeating stylized vine motif. The hand rail has a deep hand grip curve and is stained, as are the treads and newel cap. The rest of the balustrade, risers and strings are all painted ivory. There is a quarter turn service stair at the northwest corner of the kitchen ell between the first and second floors. The basement stair is below the service stair and makes a similar quarter turn with winder stairs near the bottom. At the east side of the hall is a door leading to the attic, with a steep wood staircase that makes a quarter turn with winder steps at the top.

3. Flooring: The floors are maple throughout the first and second floor living spaces, with painted concrete floors on the porches and in the basement. The wood floors in the attic rooms have wider boards that are probably pine. The bathrooms have tile floors. Most of the bedrooms and the halls now have wall-to-wall carpeting over the wood floors.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: There are plaster walls and ceilings throughout the house, except for the painted brick and stone walls and unfinished ceiling in the basement. There is a finish coat of plaster in the basement garage. Physical evidence indicates that a plaster ceiling has been removed from the former vegetable storage room. Most of the walls are plaster on wood lath, but some repaired sections used metal grille lath. The hallways have late twentieth century wall paper. Both the first and second floor halls and the first floor living room and sitting rooms feature a decorative plaster cornice with acanthus leaf, beading, and rope motifs. The dining room has a plainer plaster cornice. The typical baseboard is approximately eight inches high with a thick beaded and ogee molding at the top. In the attic the plaster walls have a delicate decorative cornice and

plain baseboards and molding. There is a plaster bullseye ceiling medallion in the front and rear sitting rooms and the dining room.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The typical door is wood with four recessed panels edged with two layers of projecting molding. The panels are vertical rectangles arranged two over two with the lower ones shorter than the top two. The typical door surround is a thick wood molding with a wide flat section framed by a thick bead and several layers of fluting on the outer edge. The doorframes often stand on a curved decorative plinth. The door between the dining room and the former butler's pantry is on a swinging hinge. The attic bedroom doors have five rectangular recessed panels arranged two vertical, one horizontal, two vertical. The door to the unfinished section of the attic has four vertical recessed panels without the additional molding on the downstairs doors.

There is a curved jib door now inside the closet added at the small hall behind the stairs. It no longer functions as a passage to the rear sitting room. There is a large cased opening between the front and rear sitting rooms.

b. Windows: The typical window molding is wood with fluting and fillets close to the sash, a wide flat section, and a thick bead around the outer edge. The corners are mitered. The round arch windows have a recessed spandrel between the curved top sash and rectangular frame.

There are two skylights in the attic ceiling. One is on the north slope and the other on the south of the pyramidal section of the roof.

6. Decorative features and trim: There is a small semi-circular niche in the wall near the top of the main stair. There is a built-in chest of drawers under the main stair near the curved door. There are built-in bookshelves flanking the fireplace in the living room, and adjacent to the fireplace in the rear sitting room. The living room bookshelves are open above and enclosed by paneled doors below. They are also set into a segmental arch opening with a fluted oval plaster medallion attached to the wall above. All of these built-ins were probably added during the early twentieth century.

The Governor's Residence retains four historic fireplaces on the first floor, each with a different decorative mantel and hearth. The living room and front sitting room fireplaces have the most elaborate mantels. The living room mantelpiece is dark pink marble with white veining. It has fully articulated Doric columns on either side. These columns each stand on a plinth and support the architrave and projecting mantel above. There are three raised bullseye forms across the frieze and the firebox opening is a curved arch filled with a cast iron liner and coal grate. The hearth is approximately three inch square red quarry tile that is probably a later replacement. The decorative motifs and forms of this fireplace surround are characteristic of the original Italianate design in the late 1860s.

The dining room fireplace has a mantelpiece and hearth of white marble with light gray veining. It has a round arch opening with a curved shield at the keystone. The spandrels are defined by a shallow carved channel. The mantel top has a gentle curve. The firebox has a cast iron insert and coal grate.

The front sitting room fireplace is white marble with light gray veining. Both the mantelpiece and hearth are constructed of the same marble. This mantelpiece also has a round arch firebox with a cast iron liner, and fully articulated Doric columns supporting the architrave and mantel. The columns stand on square plinths. The curved form of the architrave is decorated with stylized floral carving inside two spandrel panels offset by a deep carved channel and meets in the center at a curved shield keystone. This keystone has scrolls at the corners, a carved floral form at the center and a high-relief carved shell at the bottom. The mantel top is a rectangular slab of white marble with a curved beveled edge.

The rear sitting room fireplace has a wood mantel piece that is rather plain except for two pairs of quarter-circle brackets supporting the mantel top. It is currently painted off-white. The firebox opening is framed by a band of black marble with yellow veining. The hearth is tiled with approximately two inch square bright blue tiles with wide grout joints. There are checkerboard motif tiles and one floral interspersed among the blue ones. The back of the firebox is canted and tiled with similar tiles in shades of red and orange. This fireplace would have been added as part of the c. 1897 expansion.

7. Hardware: Original hardware includes porcelain doorknobs in the attic, including one with a box lock on the door to the unfinished section. The first floor doors have plain brass handles.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: This house is now heated and cooled with a modern forced air system. There are also electric baseboard heaters in the enclosed front porch. The original heating system was probably hot water radiators. There is physical evidence of radiators in the attic bedrooms. An earlier boiler used coal fuel, as indicated by the remnants of a coal bin in the basement, including a groove worn into the wood window sill at this basement window, probably from coal delivery.

b. Lighting: This house probably had gas lighting when it was constructed and converted to electric lighting in the 1890s when that service was provided for other buildings at the Soldiers' Home. All of the light fixtures are more recent.

c. Plumbing: It is unknown whether this house was originally constructed with indoor plumbing. There is a small white porcelain sink in the corner of the attic stair hall. It has chrome fixtures and probably dates to the early 20th century. The bathroom fixtures in first floor power room and the two second floor bathrooms are more recent.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design: The concrete retaining wall and garage entrance on the east side of the house were added in the 1930s as a WPA project. The retaining wall includes nine concrete steps leading from the yard down to the driveway.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings:

Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center Library, Milwaukee, WI

Floor Plans, Elevations, Section – June 20, 1935, revised November 21, 1956.

B. Early Views:

Milwaukee Historical Society, Milwaukee, WI

Photograph, Neg. # 22,107 (view from west/southwest), n.d. (c. 1880s)

Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center Library, Milwaukee, WI

Lithograph, "Governor's Residence" (view from southwest), published in *National Soldiers' Home Near Milwaukee*. Milwaukee, WI: National Soldiers' Home, 1881.

Photograph, "Governor Knox's Residence" (view from northwest), published in *National Soldiers' Home Near Milwaukee*. New York: The Albertype Co., 1889.

Photograph, "The Governor's Quarters" (view from west), published in A. Wittmann. *National Soldiers' Home Near Milwaukee*. New York: The Albertype Co., 1894.

Photograph, "Governors Quarters" (view from southwest), published in Richard Corbett. *The Soldiers' Home: Detailed Description of the North-Western Branch National Military Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*, 1904.

Photograph, "Governor's Quarters, National Soldiers' Home, Wisconsin" (view from southwest), published as postcard c. 1930.

C. Bibliography:

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Architects (Deceased)*. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970.

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Co., 1894.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Governor’s Residence (Building No. 39) at the Northwestern
Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (now Zablocki Veterans
Affairs Medical Center) was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey
(HABS, Catherine Lavoie, Chief) during the summer of 2008. HABS is part of the
Heritage Documentation Programs (Richard O’Connor, Chief) of the National Park
Service, United States Department of the Interior. The project is sponsored by the
Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Construction and Facilities Management,
Kathleen Schamel, Federal Preservation Officer, as part of a multi-year effort to record
the significant examples of National Soldiers Home architectural currently under the
jurisdiction of that agency. It was made possible through the cooperation Robert H.
Beller, Director, Zablocki VA Medical Center and many members of his staff, especially
Librarian Jill Zahn. The drawings team was led by HABS architect Mark Schara,
working with HABS architects Paul Davidson, Anne Kidd, and Jason McNatt, and
student architects Daniel DeSousa and Alex Matsov. The historical reports were
prepared by HABS Historian Lisa P. Davidson. Large-format photography was
undertaken by HABS Photographer James Rosenthal.



Figure 1 – View of Governor's Residence, c. 1881
Courtesy of Zablocki VA Medical Center Library



Figure 2 – Detail of Governor's Residence in Bird's Eye View of Grounds, c. 1881
Courtesy of Zablocki VA Medical Center Library



Figure 3 – West elevation of “Governor’s Quarters,” c. 1894
Courtesy of Zablocki VA Medical Center Library



Figure 4 – View of “Governor’s Quarters” from southwest, c. 1904.
Courtesy of Zablocki VA Medical Center Library

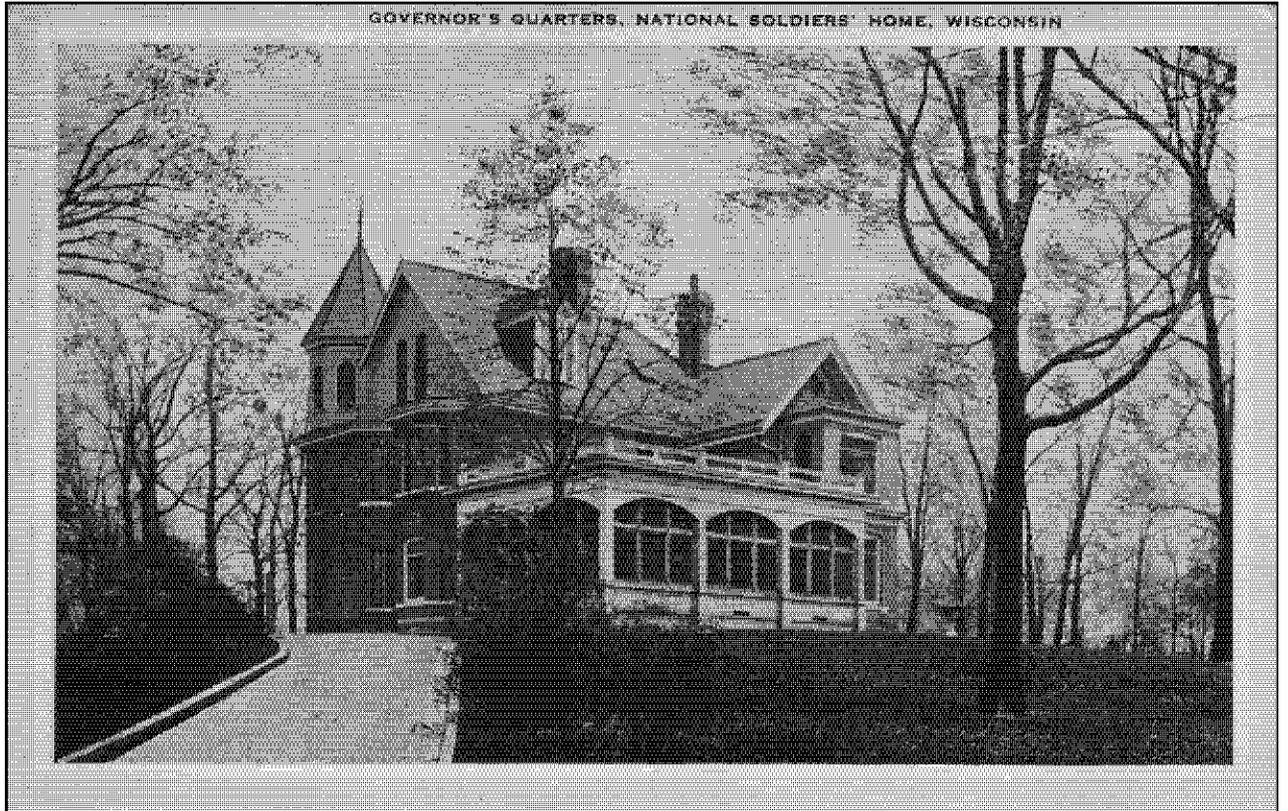


Figure 5 – Photocard view from c. 1930 showing enclosed porch added prior to 1923
Courtesy of Zablocki VA Medical Center Library