

A Comprehensive History of the
Washington Soldiers' Home
and Colony



Centennial Edition
1891 - 1991

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Washington Soldiers' Home
and Colony

1891 – 1991

100 Years of Service to Our State's Veterans



STATE OF WASHINGTON
Booth Gardner, Governor

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Jesse Farias, Director

WASHINGTON SOLDIERS' HOME AND COLONY
Ralph Mackey, Superintendent

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The Dedication Ceremony

Under a bright blue sky and with peace and gratitude in their hearts, The Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Washington performed the dedication ceremonies of the new Soldier's Home in Orting on June 25, 1891.

A special train bearing delegations from Sheridan and Custer posts of Tacoma, Custer Post Woman's Relief Corps and Sprague Camp Sons of Veterans left from the Pacific Avenue depot in Tacoma. At Puyallup the train met the delegation from Seattle. Here, the Puyallup post G.A.R. boarded the train and one train was made up bearing the three delegations.

About 11 o'clock the train arrived in Orting. At the depot a squad of the Orting Grand Army post was drawn up with presented arms to receive the visitors. The whole population of the Puyallup valley seemed to have turned out to give a hearty welcome to the soldiers both old and young. The red, white and blue of the stars and stripes fluttered everywhere along the little main street. Colorful bunting hung from homes and businesses alike, stirring martial music filled the air and excitement was everywhere. Patriotic citizens and veterans came flocking in from all directions for this festive day, all anxious to attend this historic event.

In order to reach the 185 acre Home grounds, where the Washington Barracks had just been completed, the visiting dignitaries were transported by horse-drawn carriage, while others walked. Those riding in carriages traveled over a newly constructed and very bumpy highway, crossing over the Puyallup River on the Leach Bridge. People who



*Washington Barracks was the first building to be completed at the Soldiers' Home.
The dedication ceremony was held on the west porch.*

walked followed a foot trail through deep woods to the river bank where they crossed a foot bridge of fallen logs. The march was through the prettiest of country scenery. Broad meadows and hop fields on one side, a dense forest on the other.

Finally the patriotic program began. Rev. Putnam, Chaplain of the I.M. Reed Post G.A.R. implored the divine blessing on the home.

The rhetoric flowed freely as the speakers delivered stirring eulogies, praising both the establishment of the Home and the worthy veterans who would find in it, a haven. Among those dignitaries was General R. G. O'Brien who represented the commander-in-chief of the state militia. Governor Elisha Ferry had sent O'Brien, being unable to attend himself. Other high state officials and officers of the G.A.R. and the W.R.C. attended.

The audience adjourned to the dining room where the ladies of the Orting Relief Corps had spread a lunch. That evening the opera house was the scene of the most brilliant ball ever witnessed in this little but lively town. While this ceremony is considered the official dedication, the Home did not enroll any residents for several weeks. More buildings needed to be completed.



The Soldiers' Home grounds as it appeared during the 1890's

Reasons for the Home's Creation

It is interesting to note that the authorization for a soldiers' home was actually provided for in the Washington State Constitution. We might wonder today what reasons would motivate the legislators of this remote part of the country, with less than a third of a million population, to create a veterans' home. Surprisingly enough, we must look back to the Civil War. When the war was over, and for many years afterwards, veterans heeded

the advice of Horace Greeley and headed west. They were lured by tales of the great job opportunities with the railroads. Railroad advertisements encouraged the veterans to go west and homestead on valuable timberlands newly opened up by the "iron horse." An expanding lumber industry also offered great promise. However, when these men arrived, often with families, they found the good land already taken. Good jobs were not easy to find and their meager savings were going fast. Naturally, the disabled veterans felt the job pinch most.

During the Postwar period, many veterans across the northern United States became nearly penniless. They and their families were virtually starving. As a result, many people became concerned for their welfare, realizing the need for prompt aid. Especially concerned were the veteran organizations, along with the legislators of the new State of Washington, for many of these men were veterans themselves.

Home Provided for in Washington State Constitution

A mandate was incorporated into the Washington State Constitution directing the first legislature as follows: "The legislature shall provide by law for the maintenance of a soldiers' home for honorably discharged Union soldiers, sailors, marines, and members of the state militia, disabled while in the line of duty and who are bonafide residents of the state."

Five trustees, appointed by the governor, gave a five thousand dollar bond to the state and supervised the home's construction. Considering that \$5,000 was worth a great deal more in those days, we can see that the trustees were men of fairly substantial means to tie up such a sum of capital.

J. R. Kinnear introduced the bill for the Soldiers' Home. Governor Ferry signed the bill on March 26, 1890. It took effect on June 24, 1890 when the new board of trustees conducted their first meeting in Seattle.

It appears that these five trustees were prominent in the community, in business and political activities. George Boardman from Tacoma was a prominent member of the Custer Post, G.A.R., a Union veteran, and president of the Washington Building & Loan Association. M. M. Holmes from Seattle, also a veteran, was at various times a county superintendent of schools, a court clerk, and worked in the real estate field. W. R. Dunbar a veteran from Goldendale, was a member of the Good Templars (a strong temperance organization). He solicited stock for a railroad, was a former Oregon legislator and a future mayor of Goldendale. John F. McLean, the fourth board member, came from Walla Walla but was born in Canada of Scottish parents. He was a veteran and owned a grocery business. Albert S. Cole came from Whatcom County but information about him is sketchy. He was obviously a lawyer, for in 1890 he was elected county attorney on the Republican ticket.

Board Selects Home Site

On July 3, 1890, the board of trustees was sworn to office by Richard Osborn, Probate Court Judge. Their first act was to take the necessary steps to secure a site for the Soldiers' Home.

To do this, they published adds in seven leading newspapers of the day asking for land donations. Their directions were to select a site no less than 40 acres of land. The price was not to exceed \$10,000. The advertisements brought forth several promising land propositions.

Ezra Meeker, on behalf of the citizens of Puyallup, submitted a proposal to donate 40 acres, which was later amended to 60 acres. The proposal received from Vashon Island offered 40 acres. The Board of Trade of Goldendale offered 160 acres.

A later proposal from Tacoma offered 400 feet on Trump Harbor, Vashon Island. The Seattle Land Company submitted a proposition to select 88 acres in Kitsap County. Another suggestion was submitted for the location to be on San Juan Island. H. S. Lillagar, on behalf of Orting, proposed two sites; one of 85 acres, and another for 160 acres. William Harman and T. o. Hanlan spoke in favor of these propositions. According to another more detailed account of this offer in the Orting Oracle the Orting citizens offered a 25 acre site as a donation, plus the opportunity to purchase a 157 acre site and the chance to acquire 38 additional acres as a grant from the railroads.



Roll call during the early days of the Soldiers' Home operation.

When it was found necessary to raise funds to purchase a site, Orting's public spirited citizens gave liberally of their money. The proposed site was property owned by Ed A. Lorenz. Little of the land was cleared and it possessed many large trees.

After an informal ballot vote, the site selection was narrowed down to Puyallup, Vashon Island, Whidbey Island, and Orting. Each site was examined for altitude, volume of water, grading, and sewerage expenses by a civil engineer.

A three-day board meeting was held on November 6, 7 and 8 in Seattle. On the first day, F. E. Eldredge of Orting, gave a glowing report pointing out the advantages of the Orting site. He emphasized how important the trains running through Orting would be to the disabled veterans. They would provide transportation of visitors, and mail twice a day. With newspapers to read they would not feel like the world had passed them by. He also noted that readily available telephone service would keep both the men and the Home in touch with the outside world. Other arguments for this site included the delightful summer location, a lake filled with beautiful fresh fish, local hunting, and fine rich soil.

At the trustees board meeting January 18, 1891, the final site vote was taken. They selected the Orting site and, as it turned out, the deciding factor was one which Mr. Eldredge had neglected to include. Mr. Cole, whose favorite site was Whidbey Island, gave the following statements:

"The sole thing that moves me to change my opinion, is the water! Also, I am satisfied that the water at the Island is not as good as at Orting, and I fear that there will not be sufficient water. The same objection I had to the site at Puyallup. I think there are very few places where we will find water as fine as we have at Orting. "

Although there was dissension over the Orting site for the new Soldiers' Home, the board members had made their decision and bids were let for construction of the main building and ten cottages. The bid finally accepted was for \$10,000 with work to be completed within 90 days of staking out the site.

The dedication program, in June 1891, was held on the west porch of the Washington Barracks (pg. 1 photo). It was a three-story, frame structure housing the office, a dining room and kitchen. The sleeping quarters were on the second and third floors.

Ladies of the Women's Relief Corps donated furniture and decorations for many of the rooms. Additional donations came from both individuals and veterans' organizations, thus setting a precedent for continuing outside volunteer help and participation at the Home.

Soldiers' Home Opens Its Doors

Just before the formal dedication of the new Home, Samuel F. Street was appointed the first commander. His salary was \$1,000 per year. His wife, who would serve as matron, earned \$500. They lived on the grounds in housing provided for them. About this time, two cottages were also erected. One was an office, the other was occupied by the doctor and his family.



Housing provided for the Commander and his family.

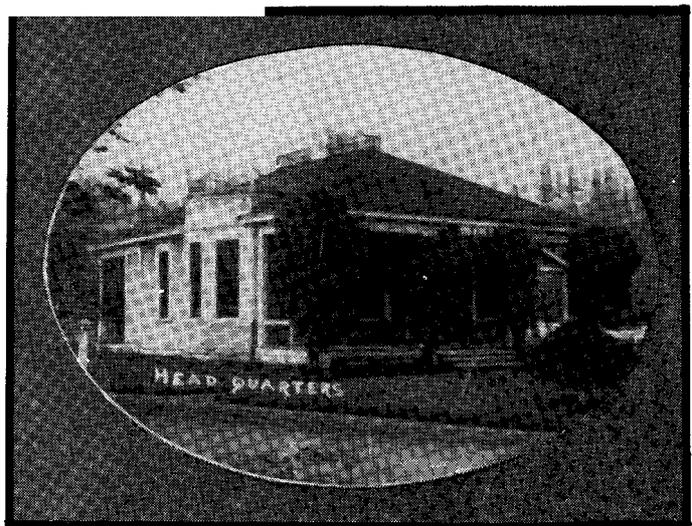
The admission data of the first men admitted to the Home show that their stays were often for varying lengths of time. Evidently, many were able to regain their health to the point of being able to leave and support themselves.

William Pencil was the first veteran to enter the Home on July 4, 1891. He had enlisted August 11, 1862, in Company "A", 92nd Illinois Volunteer Infantry at Freeport, Illinois. He was discharged 13 months later.

Upon Pencil's entrance to the Home, he agreed to turn over his \$12.00 pension to the Home. In May of the following year, he was discharged at his own request stating he was able to support himself.

The second veteran to enter the Home was John Curtis, who had served three years in the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, Johnsburg, Vermont.

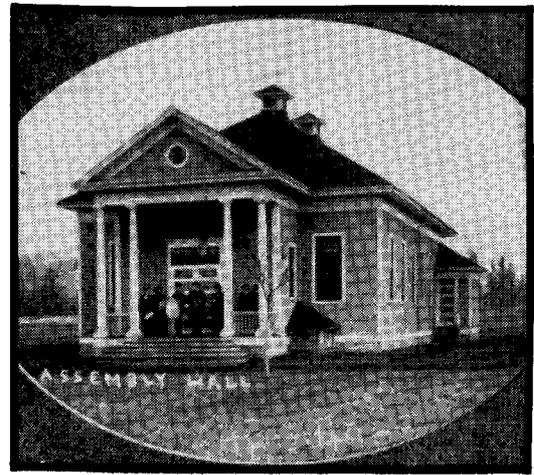
As the months passed, a steady flow of applications were received. By 1892 there were 37 residents.



The Administration Office of 1894.

One of the most necessary staff members was the Home Surgeon. A Doctor Cook of Orting first held this position; he was paid \$4.00 per visit. Doctors R. Frank and E. G. Stratton followed.

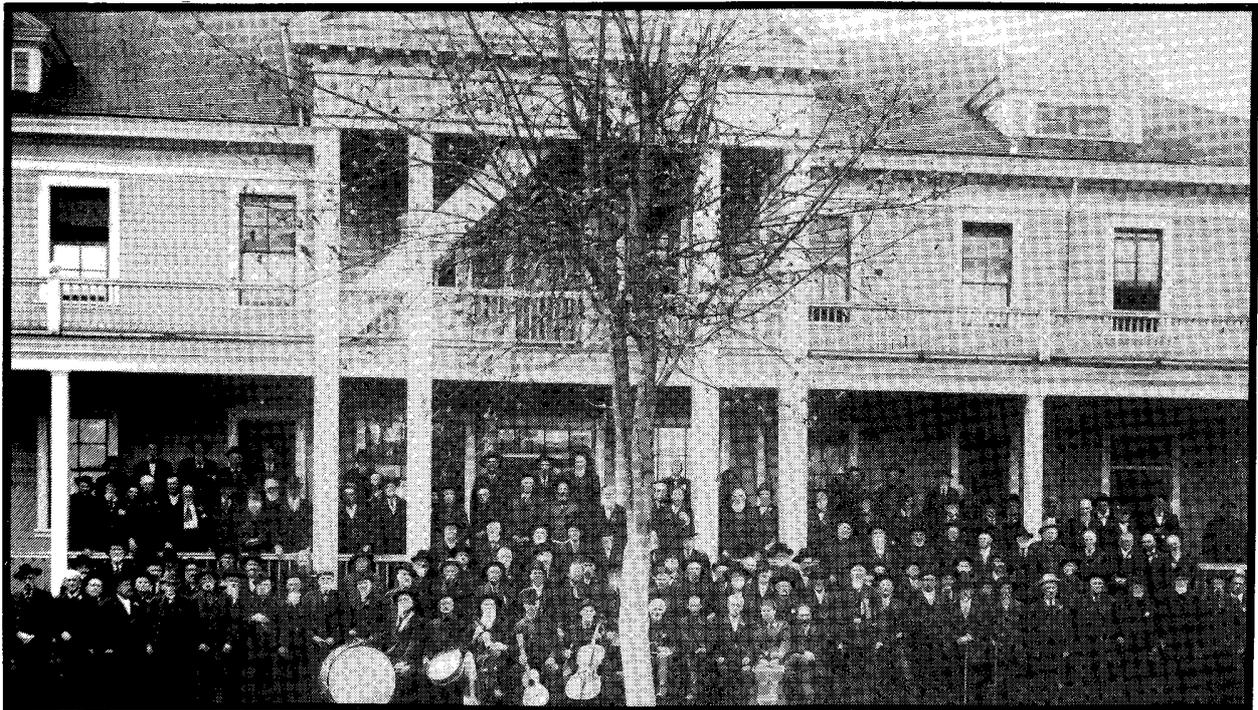
Thompson Brothers' Grocery in Orting is listed as being the low bidder for the supplying of groceries and provisions for the establishment; this being an important issue within the new budget.



First Assembly Hall 1894

When the "Panic of 1893" hit the country, many veterans found themselves without jobs. An increase in applications rose dramatically. More buildings were completed. They included Rogers Barracks, the first Assembly Hall, the commander's house, and a hospital. The small cemetery on the Home grounds now contained 31 graves.

In 1895, the Home was visited for the first time by General William Averell from the United States Inspector General's office. It was his job to inspect all such homes around the country on a yearly basis. He then submitted reports to his superiors. There were Homes in 22 of the 44 states. Of this number, the one at Orting received one of the very highest ratings.



Rogers Barracks 1894



The first Hospital at the Soldiers' Home

At the time of his report, there were 99 men in the Home, most of whom were growing in age and body. General Averell reported that he was impressed with the staff and board members, "all are interested in one common desire, to see this young state be among the foremost in the care of its' disabled veterans".

His report went on to say, that improvements were going well. However, only a few "Amusements" are available. There is only a small library and smoking room where the men play cards and dominoes.

In 1897, General Averell reported that the Home water supply was inadequate to fill the demand. There now were 110 residents with ages ranging from 48 to 70. His report also included a dispute about the title.

Creation of the Colony

In 1898, J.C. Taylor suggested the interesting idea of forming a colony for the Soldiers' Home. Taylor, a legislator for this district, noticed unhappiness among many of the veterans coming to the Home because they had to leave their families behind.

His proposal was that the veterans with families move into housing within the City of Orting. The whole family would then receive medical care. The federal government would pay its share of the expenses by paying the state \$100.00 a year, per Home resident.

The state legislature accepted this proposal. The Washington Soldiers' Home Colony was thus established. In order to be eligible for the Colony, the veteran must be indigent and unable to support himself. His family must also be without state aid and live as bonafide state residents for two years. This meant the man could live out of the Home in his own family residence but within the Orting voting precinct. Yet, he and his family would be "participants to all intents and purposes, subject to all rules and regulations except fatigue duty".

This plan, according to an Orting newspaper article, brought to Orting "some of the most prominent, active and useful families to figure in the town's history."

A controversy, concerning pensions arose during the year after the Colony was established. This was cleared up by a ruling of the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs in Washington, D.C., aided by the efforts of Senator C. C. Dill.

Quoting from an Orting Oracle story, "William A. Sickles, Adjutant of the local G .A.R. Post, stated the Colony veterans will receive full pension ... on the grounds that the Colony is neither considered as members or actual residents of the Home". It was added that they would also receive their back pay.

All this took place at a time when more and more veterans were flooding into the establishment as they grew older and more feeble. This overcrowding influx was a result of elderly veterans who fought in the Mexican War of 1846 - 48. The Home was even beginning to admit veterans from the recent Spanish-American War.

The commander's report of 1906 stated that the Home was so overcrowded that many crippled and old men were sleeping in an attic three flights up. The Home was still over crowded despite the institution of the Colony the previous year.

The Home Farm

The farm was a very important part of Home life. It was run by the residents, was very productive, and provided almost everything needed in the way of produce and vegetables. In 1906, it was reported that there was even a winter surplus of 1,000 quarts of canned fruits and ten barrels of sauerkraut.



William Bicknell had charge of the chicken yards, an important part of the farm that provided all the eggs and an occasional chicken dinner.

The following year, State Veterinarian H. B. Nelson and State Dairy Instructor L. W. Hanson visited the Home. These men suggested that an experienced farmer be employed to take charge of the farming operation. They also suggested the livestock barn be improved to accommodate the herd of 38 cows. A visiting horticultural expert similarly suggested enlarging and improving the orchard.

A Second Home is Planned

By 1907, the overcrowded conditions had become so severe that Governor Albert E. Mead appointed a committee to investigate the situation. The shocking results indicated that 385 men were crowded into an institution with a capacity of less than half that. One large room held 40 cramped cots. Rogers Barracks was "overflowing" with 80 disabled men and only two water-closets to accommodate them. The overfilled hospital had "terrible ventilation." The committee also noted that many of the buildings had become very old and decrepit.

Even those buried in the cemetery (located about where the baseball field is today) were not really "resting in Peace." The cemetery evidently was located on low ground with a high water table. Graves had to be "bailed out as dug" and that, in all probability, meant the remains of the 200 veterans buried there were resting in watery graves.

To add to the internal problems, there were disturbing outside influences. There were five licensed saloons and drinking places in Orting which were easily approachable by the "Boardwalk." Apparently these places were being frequented by the Home residents, with the proprietors not discouraging them. Consequently the men very often returned back to the Home intoxicated and proceeded to disrupt the discipline already so difficult to sustain under the Home's overcrowded condition.

To remedy the whole home situation the committee made a number of recommendations to the governor. These included a thorough renovation of all buildings except the new hospital, assembly hall and the commander's residence. They further suggested that another new and complete hospital be erected, with the present one being converted into a dormitory. The most important suggestion made was that the legislature not only appropriate monies for the improvements, but that they vote a sum to establish a branch state home for veterans.

This home would include not only honorably discharged soldiers of the Civil, Indian and Spanish-American Wars, but their wives and widows as well.

Several Puget Sound waterfront sites were inspected by a selection board of three. The Annapolis site (near Port Orchard) was the one chosen.



Bayview Cottage, Washington Veterans Home

The first two buildings built were Rosecliff and Bayview cottages, two identical structures designed to accommodate eight couples each.

The Washington Building was the next to be completed. It was originally known as the Washington Barracks and accommodated single men.

It was decided that February 22, 1910, would be the day for the formal dedication and admission of the first members. It was a photo finish for it seemed impossible to have things ready by then.

In anticipation of the opening of the new Home, some of the applicants were already living on the property in tents and shanties which they had set up on a stretch of beach across the road from the Home. Among them was C. D. Rowley, who was a member at Orting but had set his heart on becoming the first member of the new Home, which he did achieve.

The Washington Veterans' Home was officially opened on February 22, 1910. The total number of men and women registered the first day was 127.



Washington Barracks, Washington Veterans Home

Pre-World War Period

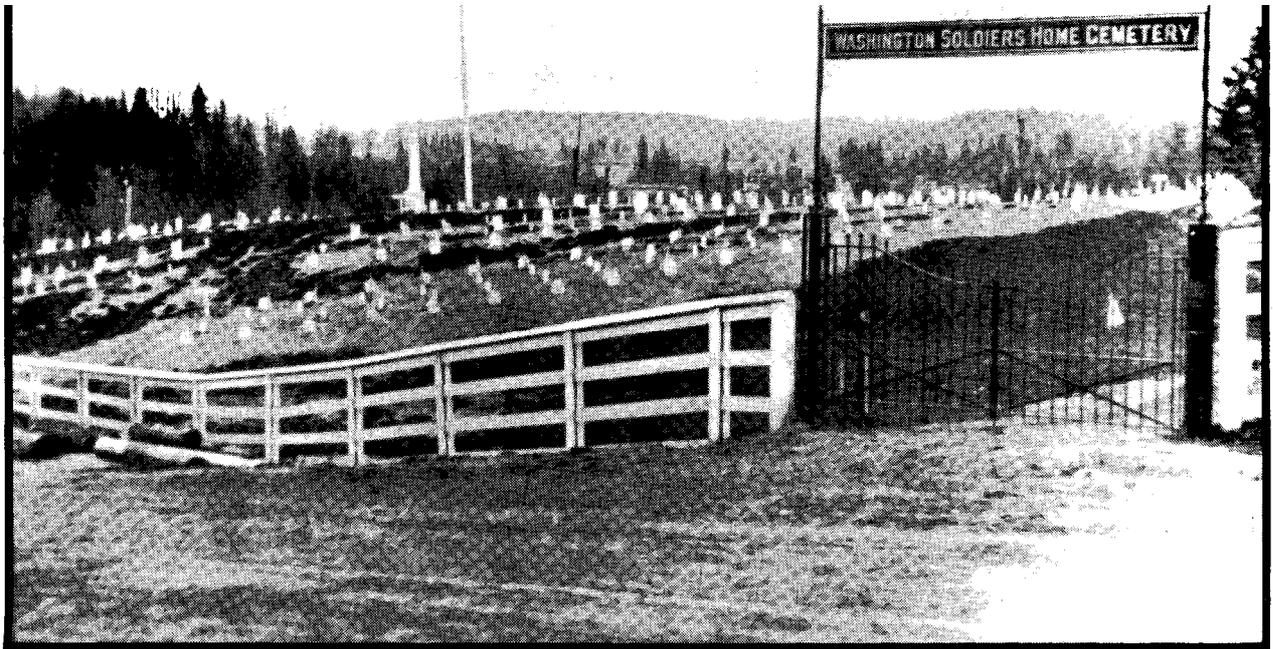
The opening of the branch home obviously relieved a great many of the pressures and problems the Orting Home had. While not much material was available to make the suggested building improvements, records indicate that a number of changes occurred.

In regards to the drinking problem, the commander filed a "saloon grievance" with the governor.

The Home also purchased a new cemetery plot in 1907 from James R. O' Farrell. After all the bodies had been moved to higher ground there, the old site was abandoned.

In 1909 hundreds of veterans, citizens, state and military officials attended the dedication of the Soldiers' Home Cemetery Monument in the new cemetery. The inscription on the large memorial stone read: "Erected by the Women's Relief Corps of the Department of Alaska, June 23, 1909".

One of the changes that occurred during this pre-war period was the system of having nearly all the work done by the residents themselves. It was no longer proving successful or practical. Many of the men were becoming too old to do such tasks as gardening and janitorial duties (the average age was now in the middle 70's). Finally, in 1915, the detail system was abolished and more outside help hired. Some residents continued to volunteer their assistance.



Soldiers' Home Cemetery (taken approximately 1910)



Fourth of July, 1917 Soldiers' Home.

One thing that obviously had not lessened in all the years since the opening of the Home was the great patriotic feeling of the citizens in this country. This was clearly illustrated by those crowds attending patriotic ceremonies being held at Orting. On days such as Decoration Day (Memorial Day), Lincoln's and Washington's Birthdays and on the Fourth of July, people flocked to Orting to pay tribute to their fighting men. Disabled veterans of the Spanish-American War were especially fresh in their minds.

During the period of time (between 1914-16), while the great World War was gaining in Europe, the Home was still receiving Civil War Veterans at the ratio of 15 to 1. Admissions during this period numbered: 1 Mexican War, 16 Indian War, 407 Civil War and 43 Spanish-American War.

From the beginning of the Home to this time there had been various types of religious services offered, with varying degrees of regularity. Now, in 1916, regular church services were maintained at the Assembly Hall. Various groups also conducted Bible classes.

During Judge Charles G. Austin's 13 month term as commander, badly needed construction was accomplished. This included a new "fireproof" barracks (Garfield), an ice plant, and a



Pickering Building



Garfield Barracks, 1917.

cold storage plant. By 1917 the old hospital was remodeled into a barracks, housing 40 to 50 men, and a new one built. The Pickering Building was demolished.

The construction of a concrete wall prevented leakage in the water supply, providing a year round flow. In addition, 2,500 feet of steam pipes between buildings were covered and a drainage system built. New farm equipment was purchased, along with a Buick car for the commander.

Post-war Days

In 1919, the great World War had ended and patriotic pride seemed more evident than ever. Attendance at the Home ceremonies reached a new high. In fact, the Memorial Day service held May 30, 1920, drew one of the largest crowds ever. Many of the audience were attired in khaki "doughboy" uniforms as well as other types of uniforms worn in memory of fallen or disabled comrades. Governor Louis F. Hart of this state was speaker of the day. Other state and military officials also participated.

During the late 1920's, new buildings replaced the old ones. The very first barracks, Washington, was torn down along with McKinley Barracks and the Colony commissary buildings. Much of the materials from these were salvaged for other building, for repairs or were sold. In 1927, a substantial brick, two-story commissary building was finished. A duplex cottage was built to used as living quarters



Superintendents residence (1952 photo)

for the adjutant and quartermaster. In 1930, a root and vegetable house was erected, and a new 84 foot deep water well was sunk. The grounds were leveled and landscaped with shrubs. When the new superintendent (commander) G. H. Wallace arrived in 1929, he found a brand new brick veneer residence waiting.

Two Veterans Get Recognition

On Memorial Day in 1920, thousands of miles away in Washington D.C., the national Armistice Day celebration was being held. Two veterans from the Home, William Sickles, 77 and Albert O'Conner, 78 were among those being honored.

Both veterans had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for battlefield bravery, while serving in the 7th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, known as the "Iron



William Sickles

Albert O'Conner

Brigade" during the Civil War. These brave men fought through thirty engagements. Now, some 56 years later they were being honored and, by coincidence, both resided in Orting in their own cottages.

Early in 1925, another Home resident gained recognition by virtue of his age. Joseph Bishop celebrated his 101st birthday and thereby became the oldest veteran ever to receive care at the Home.

Since his time, several other residents have obtained the title of "centurion". James Freeley, who had served with Company "D" of the 8th Regular Illinois Infantry

during the Civil War, was presented with a large cake by Governor Albert Rosellini on December 7, 1958.

William Smoot, born July 27, 1877, died at age 102 in May of 1979, thus making him the oldest veteran ever to reside at the Soldiers' Home.

When Albert Tanner died in July of 1985, his records indicated a discrepancy on his date of birth. Apparently Tanner lied about his age in order to be accepted into the Spanish American War. His family claims his birth date is February 4, 1883 thus making him only 15 when he entered the armed forces. Tanner was at least 102 when he died, not 105 as first thought.

Victor Johnson was born July 19, 1886, and died at age 102. He had lived 19 years at the Home. Jay Foster was born February 11, 1888. After 20 years at the Home, Foster died only one month following his 100th birthday.

Another resident, John Boeringa is about to reach the Centurion milestone. The Home will be celebrating with John and his family in August of this year (1991).

The Depression Era

During the depressed years of the 1930's the members of the Home undoubtedly appreciated the varied assistance of numerous veterans' groups and auxiliaries. The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans and other service groups had been coming for a long time. Now they were particularly helpful, providing much of the entertainment that brightened the residents' lives. They arranged and put on programs, card parties etc., two or three times a week.

During this same time, several of the service groups banded together and provided a radio for the public use of the residents. This helped to keep the men occupied, entertained and in touch with current happenings.

While the Depression was at its worst a number of able-bodied but unemployed veterans were admitted to the Home. Although this helped to reduce the number of welfare cases in the state, the federal government adamantly refused to consider these men eligible for federal reimbursement.

In May of 1933, a new superintendent, George C. Whitlock suggested the legislature enact more definite laws governing admission to both the Home and Colony.

In 1934, out of the 117 men residing in the Home itself, only 11 were Civil War veterans with an average age of 89. In the Colony, only 15 Union veterans were left, two took the long journey back to the Gettysburg Reunion that summer. One of these, Isaac N. Hall, had reached the ripe old age of 97.

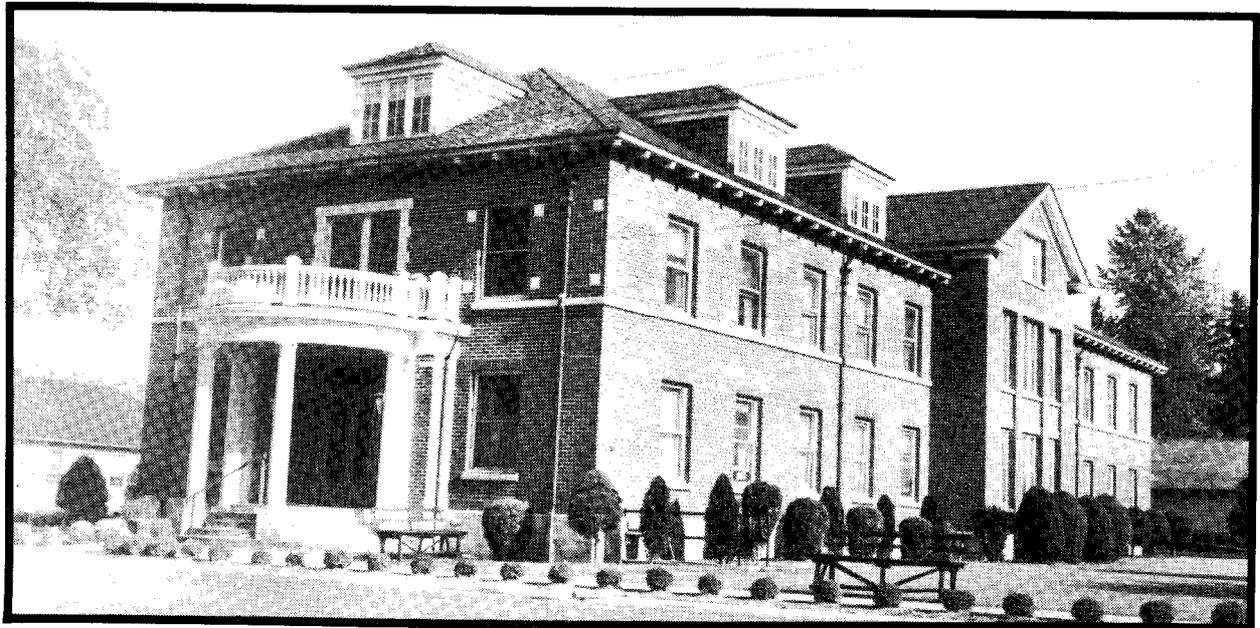


Betsy Ross Hall was originally used for female employees. It's now used as a Ladies Domiciliary.

In light of the fact that an influx of veterans from the World War was expected, the superintendent requested a definite building plan be adopted to replace and extend facilities. He modernized the Home routine by discontinuing both the farm and laundry operations as being no longer practical or economical. As a sign of progress, a Chevrolet truck was purchased for Colony ration delivery. An Oakland sedan was also purchased.

Following the superintendent's request for a building plan, in 1935 a new 55bed facility, (the west wing of Roosevelt Barracks) was nearing completion on the site of the old Rogers Barracks. The next year a power house was erected. In 1937 a dorm for female employees was finished, followed by a new administration building in 1938.

Two WPA programs were undertaken. One involved clearing and enlarging the irrigation pond site, the other involved grading and draining the cemetery. They replaced the old pipeline from the spring with one of wood. A cement tennis court was built and the lawns were extended.



Roosevelt Barracks (west wing).

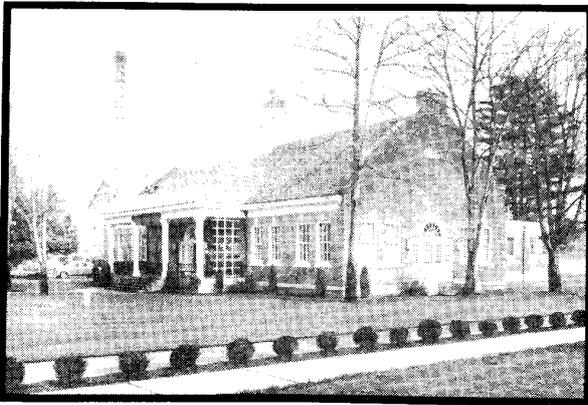
The Depression was still having its effect in 1938 and many World War I veterans were destitute, or nearly so. Some of them managed to get on WPA programs, but many with families were forced to go on direct relief. This situation was gradually relieved by our country gearing up for increased defense work, as World War II started in Europe in late 1939.

America's entry into the war had a great effect upon Home members. These men had constituted a "taken-for-granted" seasonal labor supply for the Puyallup River valley. Now, in this critical time, they were of "utmost value" in saving essential crops. With much of the available manpower gone to war or to defense industries, Home members were so in demand that the Home population dropped to less than 1 00.

By the end of the war, the last Civil War soldier at the Home had passed on, with only one Indian War veteran left. There were now two World War II residents, the forerunners of many more to follow. The population stood at 111, 133 for the Colony.

During this post-war period, the veterans' organizations again gave very generously to Home residents. Such groups as the American Legion, VFW, United Spanish-American War Veterans and their auxiliaries, plus the Women's Relief Corps, donated many needed and enjoyed items. They gave radios, books, tobacco, cigarettes, and a Christmas package for each man.

Changes and Improvements During the 1950's



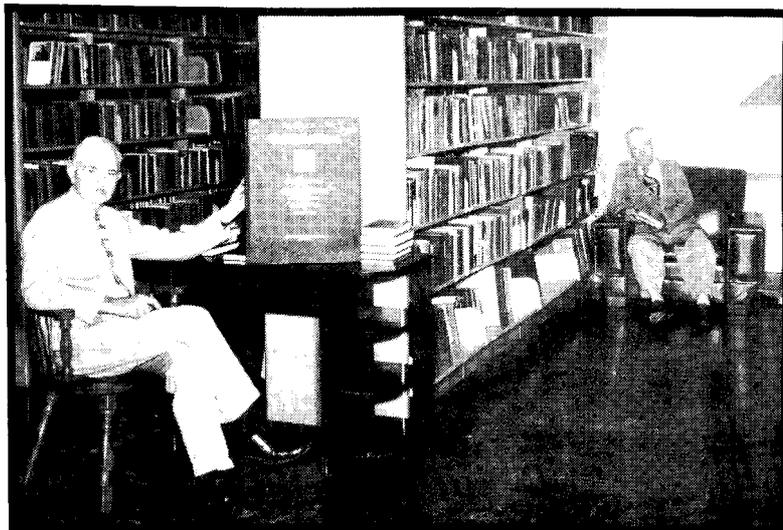
Now the main dining room had a 250 person capacity.

A number of physical changes occurred over the next 6 years. By 1947, a new kitchen-dining hall had been completed.



The cemetery was filling rapidly during this period, with over 1,500 veterans buried there by 1950. Its size expanded to four acres.

As to the veterans themselves, they found their time filled with such things as visits to their library. It now contained 3,500 donated books, and was supervised by a member.



Soldiers' Home Library (photo by AI Gray 1957).

They were also kept busy and entertained by movies, hobby and handicraft activities, croquet, bingo, card parties and games. Later on, a park and fishing pond were provided for their outdoor enjoyment.

In addition, in 1952, profits from the Home PX fund were added to by a larger sum supplied by the Puyallup G.A.R. and through this joint effort a much needed electrocardiograph was purchased for the Home hospital.

Contributions were not just coming into the veterans with no reciprocation. Home residents were doing their best through these years to participate in community service. They contributed to several organizations and took an active part in the annual Red Cross drives. A 1952 newspaper account tells of a number of them voting in the Orting school election.



Home members enjoying a game of cards in Roosevelt Barracks.

Some of the Home's oldest and most familiar landmarks bowed to inevitable progress during this time and were demolished between 1952 and 1954. These included Union Hall, built in 1892 and Lincoln Barracks (the latter being replaced by the east wing addition to Roosevelt Barracks).

A new auditorium building was completed in 1955, with one and two-story sections. Housed there were the library, card and pool room, barbershop, PX, snack-bar and a large auditorium.

The Home became annexed to the town of Orting on February 3, 1959, nearly 68 years after its establishment.

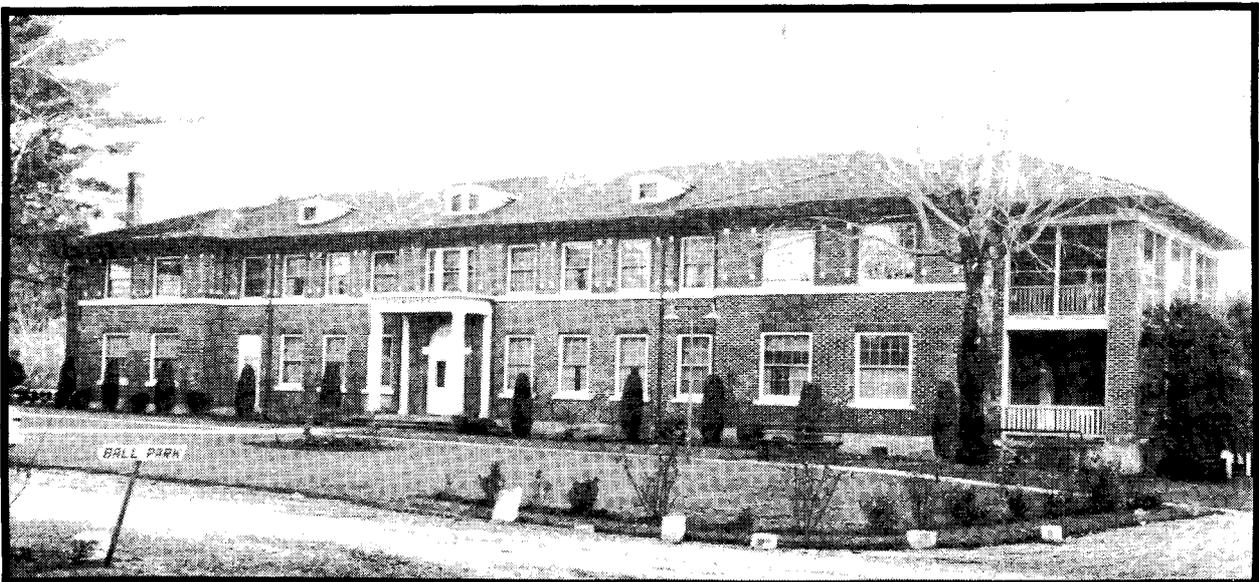
Progress Continues

In 1961, a 60-bed infirmary was completed for the Home. This facility was a necessity by now, with greater care required for new members being received. Figures compiled by the Washington State Department of Institutions showed that 40 percent of new Home members were under permanent hospital care.

In this year, the Home population declined, decreasing by about 20% over its former long-time average level of about 200. This was due largely to increased social security payments and higher pension benefits.

The Home suffered physical damage caused by two major natural disturbances in 1962 and 1965. The first, a near-hurricane windstorm on Columbus Day of 1962 did extensive damage on the grounds. Many trees were damaged to the extent that they had to be removed. An equipment shed was destroyed and later replaced when emergency funds were made available.

Following this, on April 19, 1965, an earthquake of considerable intensity damaged several of the buildings. Garfield Barracks, the smoke stack, the boiler room and exterior brick work on the dining Hall were included. This seismic damage was repaired by emergency funds made available through the federal government.



The Hospital that was damaged by the earthquake in 1965.
The first floor now houses Administrative Services.

Home members continued to live in Garfield Barracks until 1978 when it was condemned. Because of new housing codes, a study showed that it would not be cost-effective to remodel Garfield Barracks. In addition, extensive interior and exterior damage was done to the house occupied by the superintendent. After structural and cost estimates were made, it was determined that this building was no longer economical to repair and was it torn down.

The old hospital-infirmary was also heavily damaged. The second floor was removed and the roof lowered. The first floor was then utilized for therapeutic activities for the residents until 1988, at which time the administrative services moved in. The activities program moved its headquarters to the auditorium.

On July 4th, 1966, the 75th anniversary of the Washington Soldiers' Home and Colony was celebrated with a large crowd in attendance. In addition to the traditional fireworks display (a custom revived by superintendent, Willard Geesman), there were also such modern-day innovations as midget car races.

The Diamond Anniversary also marked the Home's emergence into yet another period where residents were concerned. In the 75 years of its existence it had served veterans ranging from the Civil and Indian Wars up through World War II, and now it was beginning to see the arrival of men from the latest conflict, recently fought in Korea.

Also, in 1966, a temporary baseball diamond was built and became home of the Home's Little-league-sponsored baseball team, the ORVETS. This activity is still being enjoyed by members today.



Little League Game July 4, 1969.

The following year saw the completion of a handsome, non-sectarian, interfaith brick chapel, erected entirely with donated funds.

Another improvement made in 1968 was the installation of covered walkways on the grounds to ease the movement of members between buildings. A blacktop walkway to the pond was also added to accommodate members in wheelchairs who enjoy fishing. Later, the outdoor picnic shelter was remodeled.



Stella Smith, first female veteran to become a member of the Soldiers' Home.

The year of 1969 brought an exceptional change at the Home. Tradition was shattered when the first female veteran was admitted. She was Mrs. Stella Smith, a World War II veteran.

Physical improvements were not the only ones taking place, as changes rewarding to the residents were also being instituted.

For instance, in line with strengthening and expanding volunteer programs, the American Red Cross initiated a volunteer program involving teenagers. Also, adult volunteers have provided services to the Home under the sponsorship of veterans' organizations, churches, and other community

groups. Soldiers' from Fort Lewis "adopt" the home residents, often visiting them and assisting with programs.

Illustrating that volunteering need not be a one-way street, some of the residents volunteered in a "Foster Grandparent" program. The residents regularly visited the children at the nearby Rainier State School in Buckley. Today the residents share companionship with the Child Study and Treatment Center residents in such activities as fishing on the Home grounds and playing Bingo together.

Yet another innovation which has helped to strengthen and uplift the resident's morale and interest in their Home is the establishment of a Members' Council. This group is elected from the general membership for the purpose of advising the administration of the needs and concerns of the residents.

The decade of the 1970's saw major changes in all aspects of the Home. During 1974, a legislative appropriation set up funds for Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Recreational Therapy. Immediate action was taken to establish the newly funded programs. Staff was hired and equipment was purchased. The members were soon enjoying the benefits of these new services.



*Foster Grandparents are shown with respective grandchildren.
Home members from left to right: Claude Haskins, Elmo Easley,
Ken Reel, Irving Hasbrouck, August Spiegel, and Wilford Nelson.*

Some major changes in the administration of the Home took place during 1975 and 1976. The two veterans' homes were at the time administered by the Department of Social and Health Services. Home members and many veterans organizations throughout the state felt that the needs of the state's veterans could be better met by the establishment of a separate Department of Veterans Affairs. They made a concerted effort to let their legislators know how they felt. In 1975, Representative Paul Connors introduced Bill #2006 to create a separate Department of Veterans Affairs. The bill was approved, and the separation from D.S.H.S. took place on June 24, 1976. Mr. Donald Ryan was appointed as Director of the new Department of Veterans Affairs.

To accommodate the number of residents requiring nursing-care, a 40 bed addition, physical and occupational therapy rooms and a multipurpose room were added onto the infirmary. The dedication of this addition in 1979 was especially exciting to the Home residents because it included the unveiling of a bronze statue which had been created on campus.

A bond between the young and the old is reflected in the handsome bronze statue, "Legacy", created by sculptor Larry Anderson. Anderson's project has special meaning for members and staff since many watched the construction process at the Home. Home member Sam Eizman, a 79-year old Navy veteran and former professional boxer, posed for the project along with 4-year-old Andy Stone of Orting.

Auditorium Dedication Ceremony

April 29, 1983, the Home held a dedication ceremony honoring Master Sergeant Llewellyn M. Chilson.

Master Sgt. Chilson was decorated by President Harry S. Truman on December 6, 1946, with the most awards ever made to a soldier at one time, giving him the title of the most decorated soldier of World War II.

Retired Master Sergeant Chilson, his wife Mary and two daughters settled in the Puyallup Valley, just a few miles from the Home. Mary Chilson, a World War II veteran in her own right, worked as a charge nurse for many years at the Orting Soldiers Home. It was she who asked that the memorial be placed at the Home.

The contributions of artist Larry Anderson in creating the memorial sculpture and poet George Skypeck's poem "Soldier" for the inscription, were fitting and beautiful. The sculpture was placed in front of the auditorium, designating it Chilson Hall.



Chilson Memorial Sculpture created by Larry Anderson. The memorial was presented by the AMVETS National Service Foundation.

Soldier

by George L. Skypeck

I was that which others did not want to be.

I went where others feared to go, and did what others failed to do.

I asked nothing from those who gave nothing, and reluctantly accepted the thought of eternal loneliness ... should I fail.

I have seen the face of terror, felt the stinging cold of fear, and enjoyed the sweet taste of a moment's love.

I have cried, pained, and hoped ... but most of all, I have lived times others would say were best forgotten.

At least someday I will be able to say that I was proud of what I was ... a soldier.

Superintendents of the Washington Soldiers' Home and Colony

Samuel F. Street _____	3/1891 - 1896
H. L. Achilles _____	1896 - 1897
G.M. Allen _____	1897 - 1902
H.J. Coffman _____	5/1902 - 1903
S.A. Callvert _____	1903 - 5/1905
C.H. Hyde _____	5/1905 - 2/1906
Captain Willis L. Ames _____	3/1906 - 3/1907
George W. Tibbets _____	3/1907 - 9/1914
J.D. MacLean, M.D. _____	10/1/1914 - 9/30/1915
Edward C. Werner _____	9/30/1915 - 5/1/1919
Major George W. Thompson _____	5/1/1919 - 8/1/1919
Judge C.G. Austin _____	8/1/1919 - 9/1/1920
H. W. North _____	9/1/1920 - 4/1/1929
G.H. Wallace _____	4/2/1929 - 5/1933
George G. Whitlock General _____	5/1933 - 6/15/1941
Maurice Thompson _____	6/15/1941 - 2/29/1947
James Henderson _____	3/1/1947 - 4/10/1948
William N. Weaver _____	7/1/1948 - 2/15/1954
Lynam "Hum" Keene _____	4/15/1954 - 12/15/1954
Joseph Reeves _____	12/16/1954 - 3/15/1957
Alfred H. Tisch _____	3/16/1957 - 8/31/1963
Willard W. Geesman _____	9/1/1963 - 1/18/1974
Gordon L. Omdal _____	1/1974 - 10/1976
Dale M. Hoagland _____	10/4/1976 - 4/2/1986
John Reynolds _____	4/18/1986 - 11/10/1986
Alan Harrah _____	2/10/1986 - 10/13/1989
Herbert Stumpf _____	10/1989 - 12/1989
Ralph Mackey _____	1/2/1990

Future Plans

The Washington Soldiers Home has successfully concluded its first 100 years of service to Washington States deserving veterans. The veteran picture is now undergoing dramatic changes and Veterans facilities must gear themselves to accept these changes, to be ready for perhaps a new and enlarged role in caring for these veterans in increasing numbers.

One out of six persons in the State of Washington is a veteran. The state's current veteran population stands at nearly 600,000. The continuing growth of our state will bring with it a proportionate increase in the number of veterans.

Due to the strides of medical science and a corresponding increase in longevity, an older population is requiring more and more nursing care. To help meet this need, Roosevelt Barracks was upgraded to accommodate approximately 50 members who receive some type of nursing intervention. This brought the approximate total number of nursing care beds up to 165, leaving only 35 domiciliary beds including Betsy Ross Hall. Still, a waiting list exists for nursing beds.

In order to accommodate the constant increase of veteran's needing care, the Department of Veterans Affairs is planning to remodel the old Garfield Barracks into an 80 bed nursing care unit. The existing nursing care unit will also be remodeled to satisfy the special needs of the Alzheimer and the severely confused members.

Current plans include not only updating and improving the two existing Veterans Home's but also the creation of a new Veterans Home to be located in Eastern Washington.

With today's life span, programs and services of the Homes must be devoted to helping the elderly retain a sense of accomplishment, aiding the veterans to remain active with full participation in community activities. Both Homes share a common goal, which is to provide a high level of medical and/ or supportive care to eligible persons who cannot provide for themselves; and to provide treatment and rehabilitation to those able to return to the community.

In recognizing the sacrifices and significant contributions of Veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs is committed to serving veterans by advocating the preservation and enhancement of their rights and entitlements. The department strives to provide an environment that respects individual dignity and worth and assists veterans and their dependents in achieving a quality life.

We look forward to the future with enthusiasm and hope for the attainment of these goals.



“The Legacy”

This sculpture is located behind the nursing care building, where all members can view it while enjoying its peaceful park-like setting.