

# CHAIRMAN'S AWARD FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Dayton Veterans Affairs Medical Center  
American Veterans Heritage Center  
Ohio State University Extension-  
Montgomery County Master Gardener  
Volunteers

Grotto Restoration Project  
Dayton, Ohio

During and after the American Civil War, the plight of wounded and disabled Union soldiers needed to be addressed. To ensure quality care on a broad scale, Congress and the President, in 1865, established the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers—a permanent institutional care system—to provide long-term medical care for Union veterans in a comforting and homelike setting.



Wounded soldiers in hospital -National Archives Identifier: 524705

The National Soldiers Home in Dayton, Ohio, was opened in 1867 as one of three facilities to meet this need.



This Soldiers Home would evolve into the state-of-the-art veterans' hospital, care center, and recovery location that it is today.



The facility is well-known for its landscapes and gardens, originally begun in 1868.



The Grotto and adjoining gardens were developed by resident Civil War veterans in the area surrounding a limestone quarry.



Even in the early stages of design and construction, there was a collaborative effort between three different parties: Soldiers Home architect C.B Davis, resident veteran and trained florist Frank Mundt, and civilian gardener Mrs. Elizabeth Rohrer of Germantown, who supplied plants from her own garden.



Nat. Military Home Series, D.

National Military Home Series - Grotto

Over the years, veterans maintained the property, and it grew to be elaborate and famous, with the Grotto and gardens gaining renown amongst residents and visitors.



Grotto and Lake. National Military Home near Dayton, Ohio

At its high point, the Grotto featured themed gardens, springs, and ponds, and received hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.



As priorities and needs changed for the medical center and the veterans, the resources for maintaining the Grotto and gardens dwindled. Invasive plants overtook the landscape, and the gardens fell into disrepair.



In 2012, the Dayton VA Medical Center and the American Veterans Heritage Center began to return the historic Grotto to its earlier status as a national venue.

Entrance to Grotto and Falls, Soldiers' Home, Dayton, Ohio



A contractor was hired to work on the structural restoration, and around the same time, the National Park Service designated the medical center a National Historic Landmark.



Grotto Gate before restoration - 2010

In 2013, the Ohio State University Extension, Montgomery County Master Gardener Volunteers were approached to provide expertise and manage countless volunteer hours to restore and enhance the beauty of the Grotto and gardens.



Grotto (west end) after Renovation - 2014

For the past four years, through budget cuts and overgrown foliage, the partners worked to restore the healing grounds for the benefit of veterans and visitors.



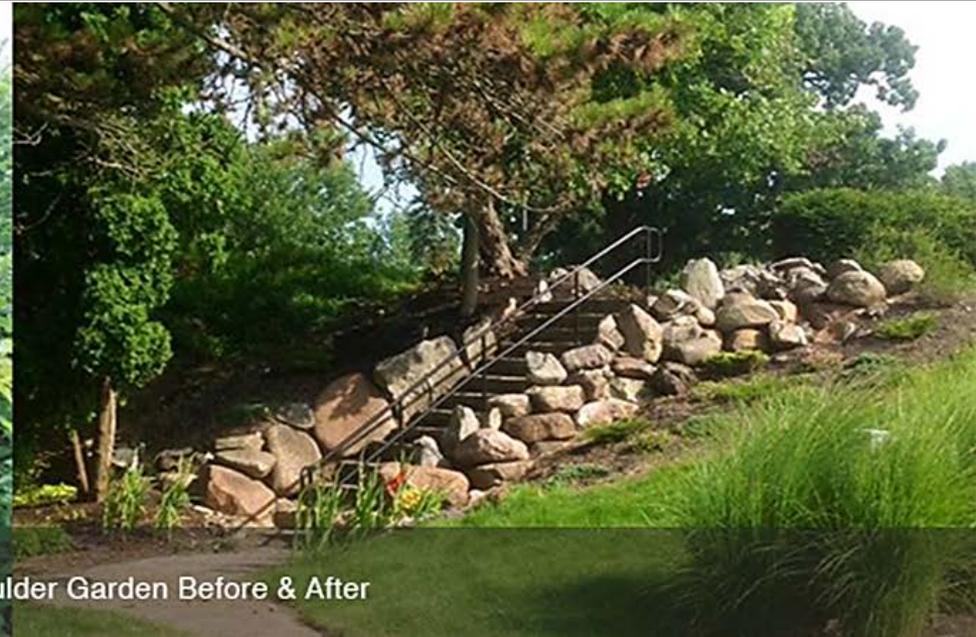
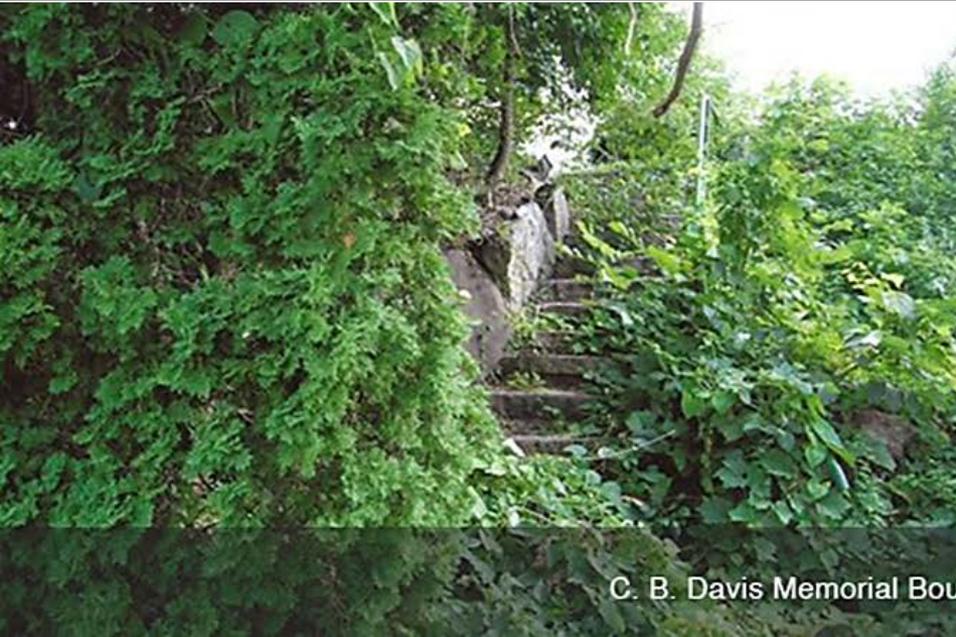
Grotto with Civil War reenactors - 2013

Photo: Margaret Kruckemeyer, AVHC

# Reclaiming the historic landscape . . .



Grotto Before & After



C. B. Davis Memorial Boulder Garden Before & After



Emma Miller Memorial Tranquility Garden Before & After



Thomas B. Van Horn Memorial Natural Springs Garden Before & After

In addition, volunteers helped plant eight new gardens and 32 new trees.



Grotto Gardens - 2015

The work continues, with recent updates including improved handicap access and continued plantings.



Grotto Gardens - 2015

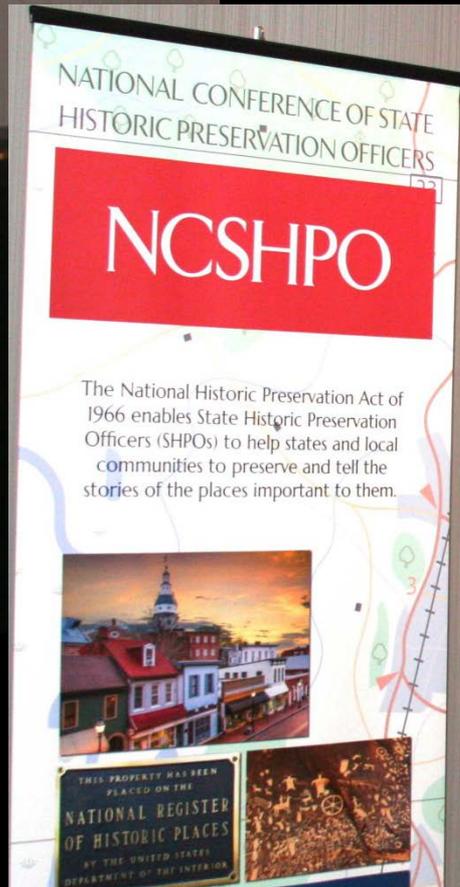
The current partnership emulates the original efforts by the Soldiers Home, veterans, and civilians to develop the Grotto and gardens, begun nearly 150 years ago. Their dedication has returned the historic landscape into an enjoyable showpiece and tranquil setting.



The ACHP Chairman's Award ceremony was hosted by the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers during its annual meeting reception, March 8, 2016.



ACHP Expert Member Robert Stanton



NCSHPO President Elizabeth Hughes

# ACHP Chairman's Award Recipients (L to R)

American Veterans Heritage Center (Margaret Kruckemeyer),  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (Stella Fiotes), ACHP Member Robert Stanton,  
OSU Extension-Montgomery County Master Gardener Volunteers (Bob Neff),  
Dayton Veterans Affairs Medical Center (Director Glenn Costie)



## Photo credits:

Dayton VA Medical Center, Ohio – Virtual Museum  
(<http://www.dayton.va.gov/museum/intro.asp>)

American Veterans Heritage Center