

THE GROTTO GARDENS AT THE DAYTON VA MEDICAL CENTER

A National Historic Landmark



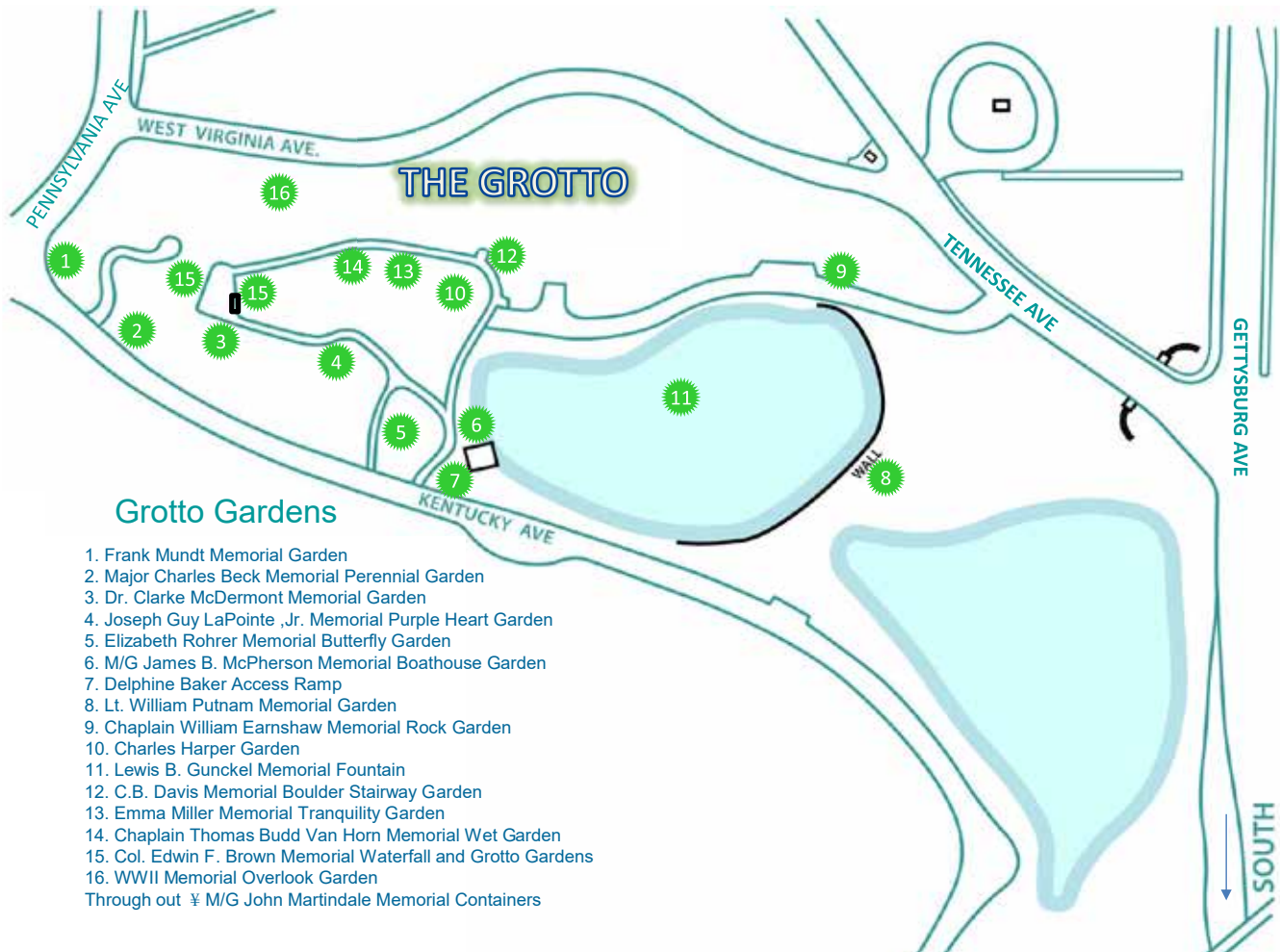
Montgomery County Master Gardeners
Ohio State University Extension
College of Food, Agricultural, and
Environmental Sciences montgomery.osu.edu



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www.americanveteransheritage.org

4100 W. Third St.
(937) 268-6511
Hours: 8AM- 5PM





New projects are always on the horizon and there is always gardening to be done. We do conduct tours and provide speakers for those interested in more in-depth knowledge of the history of the Grotto Gardens. VA Grotto Volunteers are present on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, weather permitting, from April through November. Volunteers are always welcome.

Contact us at:

Garden697Grotto@gmail.com
 You can also visit our website at:
DaytonGrottoGardens.org
[Facebook.com/@VAGrotto](https://www.facebook.com/VAGrotto)

Donations

All donations should be sent to:
 American Veterans Heritage Center
 P.O. Box 1366
 Fairborn, OH 45324
 (Please mark all donations "Grotto Project")



History of the Grotto Gardens

During the late 1880s and early 1900s, the Grotto Gardens were a major attraction at the Central Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Often referred to as the “Dayton Soldiers’ Home”, the facility was built as a refuge and home for disabled soldiers of the American Civil War, and at its peak, sheltered over 7,000 Veterans. The Grotto area and lakes were formed from the quarrying of limestone as building material for some of the Home’s initial structures (such as the Protestant Chapel), walkways and roads.

The Grotto’s water flows from natural underground springs, but the surrounding landscaping, rock walls and nearby lakes are all man-made. Seventy-five full-time Veteran gardeners planted and cared for magnificent gardens in the Grotto and adjacent areas, and it became a destination point for hundreds of thousands of visitors a year. Some came by train and often stayed at a hotel located on the grounds just north of the Grotto.

As the Veteran population at the Home declined during the mid-1900s, the Grotto Gardens fell into disrepair as the site became overgrown and mostly lost from view. Restoration began in 2012, and the next year, the OSU Extension Montgomery County Master Gardeners joined in a combined effort with Dayton VA Medical Center and AVHC to begin the restoration and maintenance of the historic VA Grotto Gardens.

Local garden centers, garden clubs, and donors have been generous in their support of this endeavor. Gardens have been planted and a tree dedication program has been initiated to honor various individuals for their service to our country.

1. Frank Mundt Memorial Garden

In 1868, a resident Veteran named Frank Mundt, a florist by trade, began collecting vines and native flowers from nearby farms and planted them in the rock walls around the Grotto. Soon, the barren landscape was covered in lush foliage, creating a beautiful respite area for Veterans and visitors alike. His efforts inspired other gardeners to develop the Grotto and Gardens into the tourist attraction it would later become. The patriotic theme of this garden is intended to attract attention and to inspire individuals to explore, visit and enjoy the newly restored gardens.



2. Major Charles Beck Memorial Perennial Garden



Major Charles Beck oversaw the gardens from 1875 to 1906, and was the gardener/landscaper who oversaw the development of the gardens into a major tourist attraction. His son, Walter Beck, grew up at the Dayton Soldiers Home, and later became a well-known artist and teacher. During the mid-1900s, Walter and his wife Marion, along with landscape architect Lester Collins, designed the famed Innisfree Gardens in Millbrook, NY.

This is the first garden that was developed during the recent Grotto restoration and was established by the 2013 OSU Montgomery County Master Gardener Intern Class. While prepping the area for planting, an original brick walkway was uncovered. This walkway was built by Civil War Veterans during the late 1800s.

3. Dr. Clarke McDermont Perennial Bed



The Dr. Clarke McDermont Perennial bed is named in honor of the first surgeon of the Dayton Soldiers Home. He served continuously at the Central Home from 1867 until August 1874, with the exception of fourteen months spent as Surgeon at the Southern Home at Hampton, Virginia. Dr. Clarke was born in Ireland in 1823, received his medical and surgical education in the USA, and was one of the first to enlist when President Lincoln called for troops at the outbreak of the "War of the Rebellion." He left behind a wife, a child, and his practice to follow his regiment to Washington and was present for the first Battle of Bull Run. When General Cox was elected Governor of Ohio, he appointed Dr. McDermont as Surgeon-General of the state, an office that ended at the conclusion of the war. He died in 1881 and is buried at Woodland Cemetery in Dayton, Ohio.

4. Joseph Guy LaPointe, Jr. Purple Heart Garden



4. Joseph Guy LaPointe, Jr. Purple Heart Garden (Continued)

This garden honors Joseph Guy LaPointe, Jr. along with the Veterans who have received the Purple Heart medal. As a conscientious objector and a medic, Specialist LaPointe's unit came under fire in Vietnam and he was killed while shielding two wounded soldiers with his body as he tried to bring them to safety. For his extraordinary bravery, he was awarded the Medal of Honor, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart Medal. The Purple Heart Medal is the oldest military award, established by George Washington in 1782. It was not awarded for 150 years and was reintroduced on February 22, 1932 on the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth. The medal is inscribed, "For Military Merit" and is awarded to those "wounded as a result of hostile enemy action."

5. Elizabeth Rohrer Memorial Butterfly Garden



Elizabeth Rohrer of Germantown became interested in the original gardens at the Grotto and contributed large numbers of plants from her own gardens. The base of this garden is the old aviary. A dry rock stream was added to bring a focus to the outcropping on which the garden sits. One of the original Grotto fountains was brought in as a focal point of the Butterfly Garden. This garden is designed with pollinators in mind using mostly native plants and illustrates what can be done with full sun and dry conditions.

6. James B. McPherson Garden



6. James B. McPherson Garden (Continued)

James Birdseye McPherson, born near Clyde, Ohio, was a career United States Army officer. He served as a general in the Union Army during the Civil War. He was killed at the Battle of Atlanta, facing the army of his old West Point classmate, John Bell Hood. He was the 2nd highest ranking Union officer killed in the war. At the height of the Grotto Gardens (1875-1906), a small boat named McPherson was used to take visitors on tours of the grotto lakes.

7. Delphine Baker Access Ramp



During the Civil War, the female philanthropist Delphine Baker pushed for the creation and support of a federally run asylum for disabled Union Veterans. She, along with her notable and wealthy supporters (including Henry Longfellow, Clara Barton, Ulysses S. Grant and P.T. Barnum), submitted a 100-signature petition to the U.S. Senate in 1864 asking Congress to create such a home on the banks of the Hudson River, north of New York City. Although that proposal did not come to pass, it did serve to bring attention to the issue of Veterans' care, and on March 1, 1865, Senator Henry Wilson introduced a bill to Congress to create a system of federal asylums "for the relief of the totally disabled officers and men of the volunteer forces of the United States." The Act passed quickly and was subsequently signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on March 3, 1865.

This ramp was funded through a grant from Home Depot.

8. Lt. William Putnam Memorial Garden



8. Lt. William Putnam Memorial Garden (Continued)

When Chaplain Earnshaw first established a library and reading room at the Home, it resided on the second story of the Headquarters building. The room was described as light, airy and cheerful, with a 19-foot high, handsomely frescoed ceiling. One end of this room contained the renowned Putnam Library collection of books, engravings, art and other memorabilia contributed to the Home by a wealthy Massachusetts author and abolitionist, Mrs. Mary Lowell Putnam. During her lifetime, she contributed over 10,000 books as a memorial to her son, William Lowell Putnam, who died in 1861 at the battle of Balls Bluff. William's portrait was hung over a massive, ornamental bookcase made by the Veterans, and every year in commemoration of the anniversary of his death, his mother sent a wreath to the Home, and it was placed in a glass case that hung over the portrait. The book collection eventually became so large that the library was moved to the vacated Quartermaster Building (B. 120). It garnered the reputation of being one of the finest libraries in the State of Ohio.

9. Chaplain William Earnshaw Rock Garden



This rock garden is named for Chaplain William Earnshaw who originally mustered into the 49th Pennsylvania Infantry at the start of the Civil War and served as an army chaplain throughout the course of the conflict. In September 1867, he was appointed Chaplain of the Central Branch of the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, and accompanied the first Veterans coming to the Home from the State Soldiers' Home in Columbus, Ohio. Chaplain Earnshaw also served as the official librarian of the Home, and he helped organize the first school and was its first teacher. He died at the age of 54 due to illness and is buried in Woodland Cemetery, Dayton.

The center of the rock garden is the phrase "Last Full Measure". This phrase appears in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: "that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion."

The phrase was chosen to honor all our Veterans. This garden was designed to be low maintenance by using easy care low-g evergreens and sedums. The intent was to focus on the boulders. The garden is sponsored by the Centerville Garden Club.

10. Charles Harper Garden



Charles Harper was a long-time employee and groundskeeper at the VA Center in the 1980's. Under his direction, the VA grounds crew did major restoration on the Grotto in the early 1980's, by shoring up much of the rockwork, clearing weeds and planting flowers. However, due to the funding and personnel challenges of that era, it became difficult to maintain the Grotto in a consistent manner in later years. This garden is dedicated to Charles for his initial efforts in restoring the Grotto to its former glory.

Since many visitors use the parking lot, this garden is the first one they encounter when entering from there. The garden offers color, texture and scents to welcome visitors to the Grotto Gardens.

11. Lewis B. Gunckel Memorial Fountain



The fountain is a replica of the fountain that can be seen in the original Grotto gardens and is dedicated in honor of Lewis B. Gunckel's efforts to bring the National Home to Dayton.

The Board of Managers wanted to place a National Home branch in Ohio, because of its central location, and because many powerful politicians in Washington were from Ohio. Through the diligent efforts of the Board's Secretary, a Dayton-area attorney named Lewis B. Gunckel, the Board was convinced to locate the new Home in Dayton.

11. Lewis B. Gunckel Memorial Fountain (Continued)

Citizens of Montgomery County donated \$20,000 for the purchase of land for the facility. In the summer of 1867, the Board acquired 380 acres of farmland three miles west of the city, and construction began almost immediately. Because of his tireless efforts to locate the Home here, oversee its construction, and become its first Resident Manager, Lewis B. Gunckel is often referred to as the "Father" of the Dayton Soldiers Home.

12. C.B. Davis Memorial Boulder Garden



C.B. Davis was the architect appointed to lay out the garden walks, promenades and flower beds. The natural feel of the gardens and parks provided the Veterans with an enjoyable place to spend their leisure time. Davis was also the architect responsible for designing the first permanent hospital at the home, built in 1870. The three-story brick edifice, with its seven pinnacled towers, massive porch and ornamental balustrade could accommodate three hundred patients and was considered a state-of-the-art medical facility.

This garden was buried under a layer of honeysuckle for many years and once cleared, the beautiful boulders were revealed.

13. Emma Miller Memorial Tranquility Garden



13. Emma Miller Memorial Tranquility Garden (Continued)

Emma Miller was fondly known as the “little Mother of the Soldiers Home.” Widowed early in the Civil War, she began caring for soldiers as a member of the United States Sanitary Commission in Cleveland. When the Ohio State Soldiers Home opened in 1866, she transferred to Columbus to continue her mission. A year later when the Central Branch began receiving Veterans on September 2, 1967, she traveled to Dayton with the first group to make her home here for the next 50 years. Her official title was Matron, and with her tireless energy and attention to detail, she also became Superintendent of the General Depot (which provided clothing for all the National Homes), and manager of the Home’s hotel and restaurant. For her selfless service to Veterans, Emma was the first woman to receive a commission in the United States Army. When she died in 1914, her body was wrapped with an American flag as she lay in state in the Chapel, and she was buried with full military honors in the officer’s lot in the Home’s cemetery.

This garden was developed to promote healing for patients, families and staff. It was designed with colors, texture and scents to produce a calming effect. The garden was funded by a generous donation from the Dayton Garden Club.

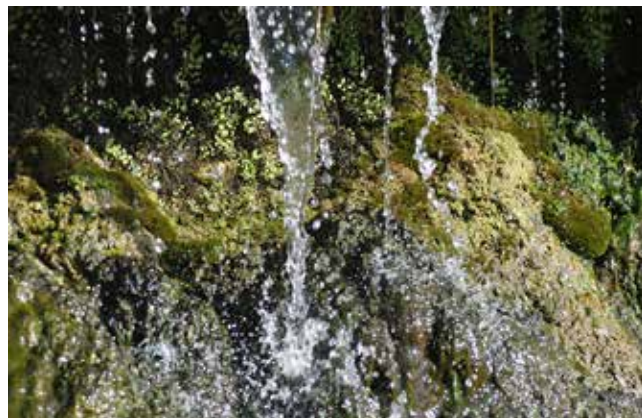
14. Chaplain Thomas B. Van Horne Memorial Wet Gardens



Thomas Budd Van Horne, a Civil War Veteran and Army chaplain, designed the layout of the Central Branch grounds. The campus resembled a small village, with streets following a grid pattern, and a major thoroughfare dividing the barracks from the administrative offices. Around these streets and buildings, Van Horne designed large parks and open spaces using a curvilinear pattern with extensive walking paths and gardens.

This garden is a micro-climate garden, meaning its soil and growing conditions are different than other areas in the Grotto. The natural underground springs seep water constantly through the limestone rock wall that is the backdrop of the garden and causes a bog-like environment. This is the perfect condition for the magnificent Bald Cypress tree and its “knees” that grace the area.

15. Col. Edwin F. Brown Memorial Waterfall & Grotto Gardens



Dedicated to Col. Edwin F. Brown, the first permanent Governor of the Central Branch. A wounded Civil War Veteran himself, Col. Brown lost an arm during the Battle of Cedar Mountain, near Culpepper, Virginia, and was taken as a prisoner of war. He escaped, was recaptured and then sent to Libby Prison. In a prisoner exchange, he was returned to his regiment where he took command as Colonel. After the war, he governed the Central Branch for eleven years until 1879, when he was made Inspector General of all the National Homes. In 1930, a new inpatient facility was built to replace the original Home Hospital and it was named after Col. Brown to honor his memory.

16. WWII Memorial Overlook Garden

Dedicated to all veterans who served in WWII. The site provides a relatively unobstructed view of the Grotto landscape.

