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“Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty”

The Grand Army of the Republic and the Dakota Soldiers’ Home

“It Passes over the Governor’s Head Like a Bomb Shell,” read a headline in the 1 March 1889 issue of the *Hot Springs Star*. The newspaper reported that the legislature of Dakota Territory had overridden the veto of Governor Louis K. Church to pass House Bill 39, which established the Dakota Soldiers’ Home in the growing resort town of Hot Springs. The idea of a home where war-weary, disabled American Civil War veterans could rest and recover had finally passed muster.¹ Behind this success stood the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the largest and most influential association of former Union soldiers in both the territory and the country as a whole. To many GAR members in Dakota Territory, the project to build a home for their less fortunate comrades exemplified the values enshrined in the order’s official motto—fraternity, charity, and loyalty. Local chapters of the GAR, or “posts,” pressed their elected representatives to create the soldiers’ home, while the GAR leadership in the new state of South Dakota would play a prominent role in transforming the territorial legislature’s promise into a reality. Thus, the history of the Dakota Soldiers’ Home, now known as the Michael J. Fitzmaurice South Dakota Veterans Home, is forever linked to that of a fraternal organization whose last member passed away more than sixty years ago.²

The federal government created a system of homes for disabled veterans during the final months of the Civil War in 1865. Known as

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1. *Hot Springs Star*, 1 Mar. 1889.

2. The last known GAR member in the country, Albert Woolson, died in 1956. See Stephen T. Morgan, “Fellow Comrades: The Grand Army of the Republic in South Dakota,” *South Dakota History* 36 (Fall 2006): 236.

the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers after 1873, the institution developed into a “far-flung network of eight regional branches” and had served almost one hundred thousand Union veterans by 1900.³ The philosophy that underpinned the system was to “not keep the worthy soldier waiting at the door a single hour, but at the same time . . . not allow an easily excited sympathy to open wide the gates to every man who wears soldier’s clothes and leans on a crutch.”⁴ The need for a veterans’ home system was great, with over 281,000 Union soldiers having survived wounds during the Civil War. Nearly thirty thousand of the Union wounded were amputees. After 1879, several northern states followed the federal example and created soldiers’ homes of their own—often at the request of local GAR groups. New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, Illinois, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, and Nebraska had all established such facilities by 1888.⁵

Benjamin Franklin Stephenson, a former army surgeon, organized the first GAR post at Decatur, Illinois, in 1866. According to “a somewhat romanticized account” of the association’s origins, Stephenson’s purpose was simply to form “a broad brotherhood of veterans dedicated to ‘fraternity, charity, and loyalty.’”⁶ Whatever its founder’s original intent, leaders such as former Union general John A. Logan of Illinois used the organization to further their careers in partisan politics during the late 1860s. In 1869, the GAR instituted a rule against members using the association to run for public office, but this decision did not entirely remove the organization from politics. By the 1880s, the GAR actively lobbied state and federal officials in hopes of obtaining substantial benefits, such as pensions, hiring preference for government jobs, and financial assistance for the burial of indigent veterans, for its

3. Patrick J. Kelly, *Creating a National Home: Building the Veterans’ Welfare State, 1860–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 2.

4. Larry M. Logue, “Union Veterans and Their Government: The Effects of Public Policies on Private Lives,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22 (Winter 1992): 414.

5. Kelly, *Creating a National Home*, pp. 3, 15; Logue, “Union Veterans and Their Government,” p. 420; Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 143.

6. Morgan, “Fellow Comrades,” p. 230.

members.⁷ A decade later, as the GAR gained members and political influence, the order also concerned itself with “the portrayal of the Civil War in popular culture, and . . . the meaning of American nationalism.”⁸ Advocacy for state and federal soldiers’ homes was a natural fit with the rest of the GAR agenda.

The formal organization of the GAR in Dakota Territory took place at an assembly in Yankton on 27 February 1883. It was common practice for a new “department,” as a territorial or state GAR headquarters was called, to receive organizational assistance from an existing department. Hence, delegates from Iowa attended the Yankton meeting along with Civil War veterans who resided in Dakota Territory.

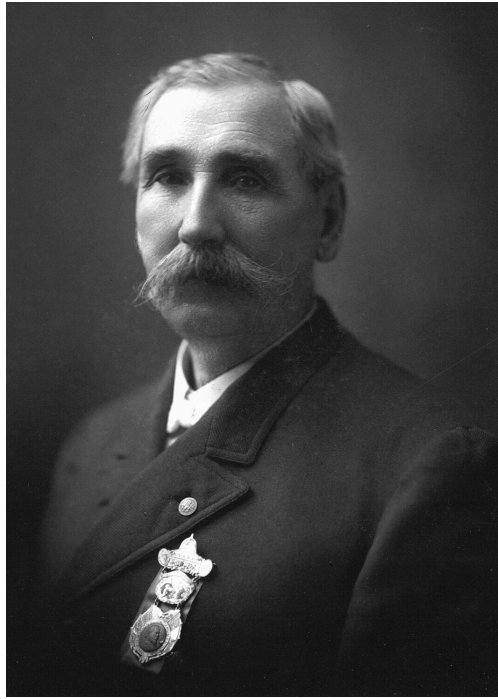
7. Ibid., pp. 230–31, 246, 252–54; McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, pp. 141, 148.

8. McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, p. 126.



A statue of General John Logan (right foreground) stood in front of the completed Dakota Soldiers' Home in testimony to the involvement of the GAR in the institution's establishment.

William V. Lucas mobilized veterans to fight for a soldiers' home in Dakota Territory and later served as the home's first superintendent.



The fledgling Department of Dakota initially comprised thirteen local posts that had received their charters at the gathering in Yankton. William V. Lucas of Chamberlain, a former Union army captain who eventually became the first “commandant,” or superintendent, of the Dakota Soldiers’ Home, attended this meeting.⁹

Three years later, Lucas was “commander,” or head of the Department of Dakota, when delegates assembled for the organization’s third annual encampment in Watertown. Following the precedent set in several northern states during the 1880s, the gathering approved a resolution asking the territorial legislature to build a home for disabled Civil War veterans.¹⁰ The convention appointed a three-man commit-

9. Morgan, “Fellow Comrades,” p. 233; “A History of the Department of South Dakota Grand Army of the Republic,” *South Dakota Historical Collections* 16 (1932): 9.

10. “History of the Department of South Dakota,” pp. 16–18; Morgan, “Fellow Comrades,” p. 242.

tee to attend the next legislative session and advocate for the proposal. Lucas later recalled that the GAR was determined to “keep the question before the people of the Territory until success came.”¹¹

On 21 January 1887, the territorial house of representatives referred the soldiers’ home proposal to its military affairs committee.¹² Editor Charles W. Starling of the *Aberdeen Daily News* believed that legislators would “surely” choose to build a facility, “but where is hard to say.” The leading candidates, he wrote on 27 January, were Pierre and Hot Springs, although “one or two dark horses” might yet make a bid.¹³ On 9 February 1887, the *Daily News* reported that the house had approved an appropriation of twenty-five thousand dollars to establish the soldiers’ home at Hot Springs. The council (the upper house of the territorial legislature) concurred later. However, Governor Church vetoed the measure.¹⁴

Louis Kossuth Church, a lawyer from New York, was the first and only Democratic governor of Dakota Territory. Appointed by President Grover Cleveland in late 1886, he did not take office until 21 February 1887 and arrived with the legislature already in session. The new governor carefully scrutinized every bill and frequently used his veto power to restrain what he considered excessive spending. Church’s fiscal conservatism and numerous vetoes diminished his initial popularity and eventually turned both Republican and Democratic politicians against him. Making things worse for the governor, his party was unpopular in the territory because congressional Democrats had consistently blocked Dakota statehood for partisan political reasons since the late 1870s.¹⁵

11. Lucas, “The Soldier’s Home: A History of the Origin and Work Establishing and Locating the Dakota Soldiers Home,” *The South Dakotan* 6 (Aug. 1903): p. 5.

12. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the House of the Seventeenth Session of the Legislative Assembly* (1887), p. 104.

13. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 27 Jan. 1887.

14. *Ibid.*, 9 Feb. 1887; Lucas, “Soldier’s Home,” p. 5.

15. Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4th ed., rev. John E. Miller (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), pp. 217–20; John E. Miller, “Setting the Agenda: Political Parties and Historical Change,” in *The Plains Political Tradition: Essays on South Dakota Political Culture*, ed. Jon K. Lauck, John E. Miller, and Donald C. Simmons, Jr. (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), pp. 77–78.

In his veto message for the soldiers' home bill, Church argued that the appropriation of twenty-five thousand dollars was not adequate to construct a suitable facility, especially given uncertainty over whether the city of Hot Springs would donate the necessary land. The governor also believed a territorial soldiers' home was not needed because the federal government had recently completed a branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in Kansas, which, he claimed, could care for disabled veterans from Dakota Territory. Remarking that the legislature had considered Pierre, Wahpeton, and Frankfort in addition to Hot Springs as possible locations for a territorial soldiers' home, Church recommended that the matter of site selection be referred to the GAR before the territory committed itself to the project.¹⁶

Despite the governor's veto, the GAR resumed its march toward the objective of a soldiers' home. William Lucas, who completed his term as commander of the Department of Dakota in 1887, estimated that there were over ten thousand former Civil War soldiers living in Dakota Territory. Regardless of whether Lucas's assessment was correct, the GAR membership in the territory agreed on the need for an institution to care for their disabled comrades. The organization's 1887 annual encampment, held at Jamestown in present-day North Dakota, passed resolutions endorsing the establishment of a soldiers' home and calling upon the territorial legislature to make the necessary appropriations. Although Governor Church was invited and attended the gathering, he gave no indication that he would support such a proposal.¹⁷

The Jamestown convention also took action to allay Governor Church's concerns over a proper location for a territorial soldiers' home. The assembled delegates instructed a committee consisting of Stephen F. Hammond of Ashton, Edwin T. Langley of Huron, and M. S. James of Columbia to visit the various towns that had offered to host the proposed facility and report their findings to the next GAR annual encampment. The committee toured a site on Lake Kampeska near Watertown, Pierre, Jamestown, and Hot Springs before the GAR

16. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the House* (1887), pp. 941–42.

17. "History of the Department of South Dakota," p. 18; Lucas, "Soldier's Home," p. 6.

met in Redfield in March 1888 but did not make a definitive recommendation. Each potential location sent representatives to the Redfield encampment to rally support. All four communities offered to donate land for the facility. Jamestown representatives also pledged ten thousand dollars in financial support, while Pierre boosters offered labor to build the home. Hot Springs community leaders promised timber and stone for use as construction materials and emphasized the potential benefits of the natural springs in the area for residents of the soldiers' home.¹⁸

In addition to community boosters, Hot Springs received support for its bid from former soldiers living in and around the Black Hills. On 31 January 1888, a mass meeting of veterans agreed to organize as the Black Hills Association of Volunteer Soldiers and Sailors. The new group urged GAR posts in the area to send as many delegates as possible to lobby for Hot Springs at the Redfield encampment in March. The Black Hills delegates succeeded in persuading their comrades at the GAR gathering, for the convention voted unanimously to recommend locating the Dakota Soldiers' Home at Hot Springs.¹⁹

Lucas had also promoted the Hot Springs location. In a 1903 magazine article, the former GAR department commander wrote that a bout of rheumatism during the winter of 1887–1888 had helped make up his mind in favor of Hot Springs. While Lucas was bedridden, a Lakota friend named Useful Heart had visited him and suggested that the warm waters of Minnekahta Springs might cure his ailment. Trusting his friend, Lucas visited the springs and found relief. He then “decided that what influence [he] possessed should be used for a location of the Soldiers Home at Hot Springs.”²⁰

Henry Newton and Walter P. Jenney had reported the existence of warm mineral springs in present-day Fall River County on their 1875 expedition to the Black Hills. Six years later, investors Rudolphus D. Jennings, Ervin G. Dudley, L. R. Graves, Alexander S. Stewart, and Fred T. Evans formed the Hot Springs Town-Site Company to build a health-resort town centered on several such springs within the city

18. Lucas, “Soldier’s Home,” p. 6; Morgan, “Fellow Comrades,” p. 249.

19. *Hot Springs Star*, 3 Feb. 1888; Lucas, “Soldier’s Home,” p. 6.

20. Lucas, “Soldier’s Home,” pp. 6–7.

limits. Physicians at the time prescribed mineral-water treatments for a wide variety of ailments, including tuberculosis, rheumatism, gout, psoriasis, and anemia. While the GAR apparently recommended Hot Springs as the location for a soldiers' home based primarily on health reasons, the institution would nonetheless aid townsites investors by solidifying the community's growth.²¹

After settling on a recommended location for the soldiers' home, GAR leaders looked forward to the next legislative session with confidence that they had answered Governor Church's objections to the proposal. Newly elected department commander Stephen Hammond

21. Suzanne Julin, "South Dakota Spa: A History of the Hot Springs Health Resort, 1882-1915," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 41 (1982): 198, 205-8, 216-18.



This souvenir ribbon commemorates the 1888 GAR encampment in Redfield, where veterans voted to locate the soldiers' home in Hot Springs.

led a GAR delegation to Hot Springs in July 1888 to inspect the town before the legislature assembled the following January. The *Hot Springs Star* reported that the committee was “especially pleased” with the community and would work “enthusiastically” during the next legislative session to persuade lawmakers to place the veterans’ home there.²² The *Bismarck Daily Tribune* remarked that “Hot Springs is famous as the prospective site for [the] Dakota’s soldiers’ home, and her citizens are looking forward to the next legislative assembly with hope.”²³

The eighteenth and final session of the territorial legislature convened in January 1889. The soldiers’ home proposal became House Bill 39. On 30 January, the appropriations committee of the house of representatives reported that a GAR deputation led by Hammond had testified in favor of locating the veterans’ home at Hot Springs. Armed with this information, the committee’s majority recommended an appropriation of forty-five thousand dollars to build the institution at the place the GAR representatives had suggested. Five committee members filed a minority report that opposed passage. The dissenters claimed that ex-soldiers had not asked for the home, that the bill failed to limit access to the facility to needy veterans only, that the future state of North Dakota would have access to the home but would not help South Dakota pay for it, that the Hot Springs location was not centrally located, and that the bill would open the door for more unnecessary spending.²⁴

Debate resumed on House Bill 39 the next day. Representative Frank R. Aikens of Lincoln County argued that Civil War veterans had indeed asked for a soldiers’ home at Hot Springs. He pointed out that 108 GAR posts in Dakota Territory had been represented at the 1888 Redfield convention, with only nine posts absent. Since that gathering had recommended Hot Springs without a dissenting vote, Aikens concluded that the legislature should “yield to this unanimous request from the old soldier.”²⁵ William S. Logan of Hanson County, who had

22. *Hot Springs Star*, 7 July 1888.

23. *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 17 July 1888.

24. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the House* (1889), pp. 262–64.

25. *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 2 Feb. 1889. According to the *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 6 Jan. 1889, all of the legislators quoted in the next several paragraphs were Republicans. Rep-

signed the minority report opposing the bill, argued that ex-soldiers would prefer to stay with their own families rather than enter an institution. Orsamus R. Van Etten, representing Hyde County, suggested that indigent veterans should return to the state where they had enlisted when they needed help and insisted that the territory should not spend money on new institutions because it would soon be divided into two states.²⁶

On 3 February, an article in the *Bismarck Daily Tribune* proclaimed the need for a territorial soldiers' home. Linda W. Slaughter, a former official of the Woman's Relief Corps, the women's auxiliary to the GAR, wrote that although there were five branches of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, the federal system was not meeting the entire need. Slaughter pointed out that "many of the older states in the union . . . have provided state homes for the homeless soldiers within their borders." She pleaded that Dakota Territory should avoid falling "behind in the march of progress."²⁷

representatives' home counties are listed in Dakota Territory, *Journal of the House* (1889), pp. 1–2.

26. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the House* (1889), p. 263; *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 2 Feb. 1889.

27. Quoted in *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 3 Feb. 1889.



Some of the aging veterans pictured here at the 1914 encampment of the GAR likely participated in the fight for the Dakota Soldiers' Home.

The house of representatives concluded debate on the soldiers' home bill and took a vote on 4 February. The measure, which established the veterans' home at Hot Springs, passed by a tally of 33 to 10. Only two of the opposing votes came from members representing future North Dakota districts. Two lawmakers from the southern half of Dakota Territory explained that they had voted against the bill due to instructions from their constituents.²⁸

If the number of petitions the house received was an accurate indicator, constituent interest in the soldiers' home debate was high. Between 31 January and 12 February, representatives received no fewer than twenty-eight communications on the subject from GAR posts around Dakota Territory. Of these, twenty-six supported locating the soldiers' home in Hot Springs, one requested that no home be built at all, and one did not indicate a preference as to location.²⁹ The post at Jamestown favored the Hot Springs site and expressed concern about the impending division of Dakota Territory into two states. The Jamestown petition read in part, "We as North Dakota veterans ask our Representatives to use legal care that our rights are protected so that in the event of the division of the Territory our right to become members of the Home will not be questioned."³⁰

The council would have to concur with the house in order to send a soldiers' home measure to the governor's desk. Councilman Coe I. Crawford, who represented Hughes County, introduced a bill to locate the veterans' home at Pierre on 16 January 1889. Between 27 January and 5 February, councilmen placed at least twenty communications from GAR posts and two petitions from other citizens' groups concerning the soldiers' home issue into the official record of proceedings. Fifteen GAR posts, most of them in what is now central and eastern South Dakota, along with the Pierre Board of Trade and a group of physicians practicing in that city, wrote in favor of establishing the institution in Pierre. Five GAR posts petitioned councilmen in favor of Hot Springs. Two posts in present-day North Dakota were among those favoring the Black Hills site.³¹

28. *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 5 Feb. 1889.

29. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the House* (1889), pp. 304–8, 331, 415, 471–72.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 305.

31. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the Council of the Eighteenth Session of the Legislative*

After House Bill 39 passed the lower chamber of the legislature, the council put the measure on its calendar. On 8 February, the council referred the bill to its committee on territorial affairs. When the issue came up for a vote in the full council on 15 February, Crawford withdrew his own proposal for placing the soldiers' home at Pierre. He explained that although his constituents would have been happy to host the facility, it appeared that most veterans in Dakota Territory preferred the Hot Springs location. Crawford then moved that the council concur with the house and pass the bill to establish the home at Hot Springs.³²

Despite Crawford's maneuver, the measure did not sail through the council unopposed. Councilman Abraham L. Van Osdel of Yankton County moved to strike all references to appropriating funds for the soldiers' home. After his colleagues defeated the motion, Van Osdel then proposed to reduce the allotted funding from forty-five thousand dollars to only ten thousand.³³ The Yankton County councilman failed to sway his fellow lawmakers once again, but his efforts to trim spending on the veterans' home provoked further contention. Robert Lowry from Beadle County stated that any reduction would be "a disgrace to the territory." Alexander Hughes, who represented Burleigh County in present-day North Dakota, declared that the bill was not intended to "create a home in name only." Hughes remarked that he "knew of old soldiers who were in the poor houses."³⁴

Councilman John H. Patten of Miner County then took the floor, stating that it was inappropriate for councilmen from northern Dakota Territory to vote for a facility for which the future state of South Dakota would pay. He suggested that the matter be deferred until after statehood. John Miller, who represented Richland County, supported the concept of aid for needy veterans but believed that "as a North Dakota man" he should not "have anything to say as to the location or the appropriation for a South Dakota home." David W. Poindexter of Spink County remarked that he thought a mere ten-thousand-dollar

Assembly (1889), pp. 63, 159–66, 177–80, 199, 211–13, 227–30, 577–78. For home counties of the councilmen mentioned in the following several paragraphs, *see* *ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 343, 451; *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 16 Feb. 1889.

33. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the Council* (1889), pp. 451–52.

34. *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 16 Feb. 1889.

appropriation for the veterans' institution would be "an insult to every old soldier in the territory." Smith Stimmel, from Cass County in present-day North Dakota, stated that if a soldiers' home were to be built, it should be given sufficient funding. However, he doubted the necessity because a similar home in Dayton, Ohio, reportedly accepted veterans from other states. Stimmel asked whether it would be best to send needy Dakota veterans to Ohio. In response to Stimmel's question, Robert Dollard of Bon Homme County asserted that a soldiers' home was needed in Dakota Territory. He declared, "The fact that a soldiers' home was located two years ago in Minnesota indicated that we were two years behind the times."³⁵

Following this debate, the council passed House Bill 39 by a vote of 15 to 9 on 15 February. One Democratic councilman and one independent voted "no," with the seven remaining negative votes coming from Republicans. Councilmen representing northern Dakota Territory cast only two of the nine votes against the bill. Two councilmen from the southern half of the territory explained their "no" votes by stating that they wished to allow South Dakota and North Dakota to locate their own institutions as separate states.³⁶

Having passed both houses of the territorial legislature, the soldiers' home bill now moved to the governor's desk. Despite GAR leaders' confidence that the new legislation addressed the concerns Church had expressed about the 1887 proposal to build a facility for disabled veterans, the governor vetoed the measure on 21 February 1889. The *Bismarck Daily Tribune* printed Church's full veto message on 22 February—the same day President Grover Cleveland signed the Enabling Act, which would lead to separate statehood for South Dakota and North Dakota less than nine months later.³⁷

Governor Church gave several reasons for his action. He argued that "an institution of this kind, at the present time, is not needed." Church based this assertion on the fact that Dakota Territory had supplied only a small number of soldiers to the Union army during the Civil War.

35. Ibid.

36. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the Council* (1889), p. 453; *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 16 Feb. 1889.

37. *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 22 Feb. 1889; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 219.

The governor's veto message included tables that listed the number of troops each state or territory had recruited, the population of each jurisdiction, and the number of soldiers' home residents in the states that had such facilities. Church reasoned that a veterans' home in Dakota Territory "would have to be occupied largely by those from other states where homes are now already located." Furthermore, he doubted whether a territorial facility would serve enough ex-soldiers "to justify the expense incurred." He remarked that Hot Springs was "far away from the center of population" in Dakota Territory and believed that "such isolation would not be an attraction." Church described the legislature's appropriation of forty-five thousand dollars for the soldiers' home as "insufficient for the purpose contemplated." Instead, the governor thought that one hundred thousand dollars would be needed to establish an adequate facility. Finally, he pointed out that Civil War veterans were aging, leading him to conclude that "in a few years the purpose for which an institution of this character was established will cease to exist."³⁸

According to William Lucas, Church's action "enraged the Soldier element of the Territory," and the veterans "were joined by most of the citizens in denunciation of the veto." Leaders of the GAR resumed lobbying the legislature until they were "satisfied the veto would be overridden [*sic*]."³⁹ In its edition for 26 February 1889, the *Bismarck Daily Tribune* remarked that although the veterans' home measure was "not making much noise at present," the newspaper was "reliably informed that its lungs are in excellent condition." When the expected veto override vote arrived, the *Tribune* predicted, "You will experience no difficulty in hearing it."⁴⁰

Territorial lawmakers wasted little time in sending a clear rebuke to Governor Church on the soldiers' home issue. On 27 February, the house of representatives received a report from its judiciary committee that emphatically repudiated the chief executive's veto message. The panel, chaired by Milton M. Price of Sanborn County, rebutted

38. *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 22 Feb. 1889.

39. Lucas, "Soldier's Home," p. 7.

40. *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 26 Feb. 1889.



Governor Louis Church raised the ire of veterans with his vetoes of appropriations for a territorial soldiers' home.

Church's arguments regarding cost with the observations that residents of Hot Springs would donate all necessary building stone and that lumber "can be furnished from mills in the immediate vicinity." For good measure, the group reported that Iowa had built a soldiers' home for \$36,500 and Minnesota had done the same for \$50,000. Ten thousand dollars of the latter sum had been spent to purchase the site.⁴¹

41. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the House* (1889), p. 728.

Price and his colleagues on the judiciary committee also refuted the governor's assertion that there was no need for a territorial soldiers' home. The panel estimated that there were over twenty-five thousand Civil War veterans living in Dakota Territory. The committee further claimed that about one hundred veterans in the territory were destitute and at least two hundred depended in whole or in part on aid from their GAR comrades. Furthermore, the group asserted that it was unrealistic to expect needy or disabled ex-soldiers to return to the states where they had originally enlisted in order to seek help. Veterans living in Dakota Territory had lost residency status in their states of origin, which could lead to denial of their applications to enter those states' homes.⁴²

The judiciary committee ended its report with an unabashed appeal to political partisanship. The panel wrote: "This is the second time the Legislature of Dakota has decided this question and the second time that a Democratic Governor has by his arbitrary veto power thwarted the expressed will of the people. The old soldiers ask this; the people want to bestow it. Shall we represent the soldiers and citizens, or the Governor? A Republican Legislature must answer this question."⁴³ The house approved the committee report and overrode the governor's veto of the soldiers' home bill by a vote of 33 to 10. Only two representatives of northern districts voted "no."⁴⁴

The council took up the measure for reconsideration on 27 February, the same day that the house had acted on it. The upper chamber entered both Church's veto message and the house committee report into its official record and proceeded to override the veto by a vote of 14 to 4. Republican councilmen from the southern half of Dakota Territory cast all four "no" votes. All fourteen votes in favor were also from Republican members.⁴⁵

Members of the GAR and residents of Hot Springs alike exulted over the bill's passage. On 8 March, the *Hot Springs Star* reported that the "tidings received from Bismarck" had generated "such a thrill as

42. Ibid., p. 729; Morgan, "Fellow Comrades," pp. 235–36.

43. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the House* (1889), p. 729.

44. Ibid., pp. 729–30.

45. Dakota Territory, *Journal of the Council* (1889), pp. 583–89.

was never before witnessed in the town.”⁴⁶ William Lucas later recalled, “It was a proud victory and all the more appreciated because of the difficulties overcome.”⁴⁷ Department of Dakota commander Stephen Hammond had the pleasure of announcing the legislative win at the 1889 GAR encampment in Aberdeen. He remarked, “The crowning act of the last Territorial Legislature was the establishment of a soldiers’ home. . . . Dakota is the first of all the territories to provide the needy veterans a home.”⁴⁸

The legislation that authorized construction of the Dakota Soldiers’ Home at Hot Springs also set criteria for admission to the facility. Honorably discharged veterans of the United States armed forces who were “disabled by disease, wounds, old age, or otherwise” were eligible. This language did not restrict access to the institution to Civil War veterans alone. Applicants were also required to have resided in Dakota Territory for at least a year unless they had served in a Dakota unit during the Civil War. The institution’s board of commissioners had the authority to make admissions decisions based on the parameters outlined in the law.⁴⁹

The soldiers’ home measure also made provisions for the eventual division of Dakota Territory into more than one state. The territory issued bonds to fund construction of the facility. In the case of division, the state in which the home was located would assume the obligation of repayment. However, any state created from Dakota Territory could send disabled veterans to Hot Springs until it had established a similar institution of its own. Thus, South Dakota took responsibility for administering and financing the soldiers’ home at statehood, while North Dakota veterans remained temporarily eligible for admission. North Dakota did not take long to create its own veterans’ home, as its 1889 constitution authorized a facility at Lisbon and granted forty thousand acres of land to support the institution.⁵⁰

46. *Hot Springs Star*, 8 Mar. 1889.

47. Lucas, “Soldier’s Home,” p. 8.

48. “History of the Department of South Dakota,” p. 21.

49. Dakota Territory, *Laws Passed at the Eighteenth Session of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Dakota* (1889), chap. 114, sec. 2.

50. *Ibid.*, chap. 114, sec. 3; North Dakota, Constitution (1889), art. 19, sec. 216.

The enabling legislation for the Dakota Soldiers' Home established a five-member board of commissioners selected by the territorial governor to set policy for the facility. No two commissioners could be from the same county. No member of the legislature could serve on the panel, but all board members had to be "ex-union soldiers."⁵¹ At the March 1889 GAR encampment in Aberdeen, department commander Stephen Hammond recommended that the delegates name five "comrades whom they desire as commissioners." Hammond planned to submit the names to the governor with a "request that they be appointed."⁵²

Governor Church did not make any appointments to the soldiers' home board before submitting his resignation to newly inaugurated President Benjamin Harrison on 9 March 1889. Harrison then chose Arthur C. Mellette, an active GAR member, as governor of Dakota Territory. Shortly after taking office, Mellette appointed Hammond, Lucas, Thomas A. Bones of Webster, John J. Kliener of Pierre, and William P. Phillips of Hot Springs as the first commissioners for the Dakota Soldiers' Home. All five were GAR members.⁵³

Once assembled, the board proceeded to employ an architect for the soldiers' home. On 22 June 1889, the commissioners accepted a preliminary design submitted by W. N. Perry of Mitchell. The group approved Perry's updated plans on 5 July, thereby making him superintendent of construction under the terms of the enabling legislation. The panel then solicited bids for the construction project and selected the firm of Turneure and Shoupe, also based in Mitchell. However, when the initial contractor failed to post the thirty-thousand-dollar bond required by law, the commissioners accepted a bid of \$34,224 from Jacob Wright and C. Olson of Sioux City, Iowa. The builders began excavation and foundation work in mid-August. Sandstone from a quarry a few miles southeast of Hot Springs provided building material.⁵⁴

51. Dakota Territory, *Session Laws* (1889), chap. 114, sec. 7.

52. "History of the Department of South Dakota," p. 21.

53. Lucas, "Soldier's Home," p. 8; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 220; Morgan, "Fellow Comrades," pp. 241, 244; "History of the Department of South Dakota," pp. 285, 371, 429.

54. Minutes of the Board of Commissioners for the Dakota Soldiers' Home, 22 June,

Once construction of the soldiers' home had progressed sufficiently, the board of commissioners made plans for the ceremonial laying of the cornerstone. The panel invited George V. Ayres, grand master of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Dakota, to participate. Other dignitaries expected to attend the ceremony were George F. Silsby, who had succeeded Stephen Hammond as commander of the GAR in Dakota Territory; Milton Price, the legislator who had introduced House Bill 39 and had been instrumental in overriding Church's veto; and Governor Mellette, who was slated to deliver the main address. In addition, GAR members from across the territory were invited to participate in the ceremonies.⁵⁵

On 11 November 1889, just nine days after South Dakota attained statehood, workers put the cornerstone of the Dakota Soldiers' Home in place.⁵⁶ The event brought a large crowd to Hot Springs despite the snowstorm that struck the area that day. However, Mellette, who was now governor of South Dakota instead of Dakota Territory, canceled his plans to attend in order to go to Washington, D.C., on state business. The ceremony began with a procession that started outside the local GAR headquarters and proceeded up the hill to the construction site. After several speeches and prayers, the stone was lowered into position while a band played "Nearer My God to Thee." Inside the cornerstone was a box that contained a history of the GAR, a roster of its members in the Department of Dakota, a list of the veterans who attended the ceremony, copies of several Black Hills newspapers, and Masonic mementoes. The stone itself was situated in the northeast corner of the building and bore a simple inscription consisting of the words "SOLDIERS' HOME," a star, and the date 1889.⁵⁷

5 July, 7 Aug. 1889, Records of the Board of Charities and Corrections, Vol. 1849, State Archives Collection, South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre; *Hot Springs Star*, 19 July, 16, 22, 30 Aug. 1889; Dakota Territory, *Session Laws* (1889), chap. 114, sec. 12, 13.

55. *Hot Springs Star*, 1 Nov. 1889; Morgan, "Fellow Comrades," pp. 232–33.

56. The date would gain national importance thirty years later, on 11 November 1919, when President Woodrow Wilson called for the commemoration of the armistice that effectively ended World War I. Armistice Day, which became a national holiday in 1938, was renamed Veterans Day in 1954. www.va.gov/opa/vetsday/vetdayhistory.asp.

57. *Hot Springs Star*, 15 Nov. 1889.



This photograph shows the Dakota Soldiers' Home under construction shortly after the laying of the cornerstone in November 1889.



Photographer John C. Grabill recorded this view of the soldiers' home and its scenic setting in 1891, not long after the building was completed.

Although the construction contract specified that the building was to be complete by 30 June 1890, a lumber shortage caused delays. The board of commissioners officially received the completed structure from the contractors in October 1890. At that time, the commissioners selected William Lucas to be the first commandant of the facility, which became the South Dakota State Soldiers' Home. The first ten residents moved in on Thanksgiving Day, 27 November 1890.⁵⁸

Early residents of the soldiers' home received basic care in a dormitory-like setting. Clothing, food, bathing facilities, books, chapel services, and simple medical attention were provided. In 1891, the GAR raised money to build a hospital adjacent to the main building. As a condition of admission, residents were expected to participate in the

58. Minutes of the Board of Commissioners, 7 Aug. 1889; *Hot Springs Star*, 30 May 1890; South Dakota, *Legislative Manual* (1909), p. 537, (1923), p. 479, and *Governor's Message to the Second Legislative Assembly, State of South Dakota, Delivered January 6, 1891* (1891), p. 14.



The soldiers' home had its own "relic room" filled with war memorabilia and local curiosities.



By the 1920s, the home had its own bus, pictured here outside the front entrance.

work of operating the home. Common tasks included cooking, cleaning, and waiting tables. By 1904, this work was becoming difficult for many aging veterans. That year's annual report for the institution included a request from the commandant for additional civilian staff to ease the burden on the residents.⁵⁹

While the State Soldiers' Home was the first care facility for disabled veterans in Hot Springs, it would not be the last. In 1898, the South Dakota GAR began a campaign to convince the federal government to locate a branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in the town. The national GAR organization also lent its support. The effort gained an endorsement from the South Dakota Legislature, which passed a resolution asking Congress to build a branch home the following year. In 1902, Congress authorized the construction of what

59. South Dakota, *Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Soldiers' Home to the Governor* (1892), pp. 6–7, (1904), p. 16.

became known as Battle Mountain Sanitarium. The state legislature aided the project by granting a section of land for the sanitarium to the federal government in 1903. The facility, which opened in 1907, differed from other branches of the national home in that it provided short-term treatment for diseases (especially tuberculosis) rather than long-term residential care. It is now part of the health care system of the federal Department of Veterans Affairs.⁶⁰

The soldiers' home has evolved as an institution since it began to serve South Dakota veterans in 1890. The state added buildings to the campus, including hospital facilities in 1907 and 1913, accommodations for female residents in 1926, and additional housing for male veterans in 1951 and 1956. The facility's name changed to the South Dakota State Veterans' Home in 1967. Twenty-one years later, the institution was re-dedicated as the Michael J. Fitzmaurice South Dakota Veterans Home. The name honors a South Dakota army veteran who won the Congressional Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War.⁶¹

On 25 September 2013, workers broke ground for a large, modern building to serve as the centerpiece of the Fitzmaurice Veterans Home well into the twenty-first century. The new facility has a capacity of one hundred residents, with seventy-six beds available for nursing care. Veterans began moving into the new complex, which was completed at a cost of approximately \$43 million, in January 2016. A dedication ceremony took place on 30 March 2016. While the original 1889–1890 structure no longer shelters ailing veterans, it remains in service to the institution. As of September 2016, the building housed a media learning center, a billiards room and canteen for residents, staff quarters, and the archives of the veterans' home.⁶²

60. U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "Battle Mountain Sanitarium, Hot Springs, South Dakota," www.nps.gov/nr/travel/veterans_affairs/battle_mountain_sanitarium.html; South Dakota, *Session Laws* (1899), chap. 104, (1903), chap. 186.

61. South Dakota, *Biennial Report of the Board of Managers of the South Dakota Soldiers' Home, Hot Springs, South Dakota* (1912–1914), pp. 2–3, (1924–1926), pp. 3–4, (1956–1958), p. 13, and *Legislative Manual* (1965), p. 30, (1967), p. 49, (2013), p. 265.

62. South Dakota, *Legislative Manual* (2015), p. 279, and *Department of Veterans Affairs 2015 Annual Report*, p. 18; *Rapid City Journal*, 31 Mar. 2016; telephone conversation with Brad Richardson, director, Michael J. Fitzmaurice South Dakota Veterans Home, 16 Sept. 2016.

The three virtues embodied in the motto of the Grand Army of the Republic—fraternity, charity, and loyalty—were instrumental in bringing the Dakota Soldiers' Home to fruition. Fraternity brought Dakota GAR posts together in encampments and conventions where they envisioned a soldiers' home for the territory. Charity, which the GAR already practiced in the form of relief for needy veterans, widows, and orphans, fueled the “boys in blue” to find a way to provide a home for their disabled comrades. The old soldiers of Dakota Territory displayed loyalty to their cause, to each other, and to the ideals for which they had fought the Civil War. Together, they left a legacy that touches the lives of South Dakota veterans to this day.



Today, the original soldiers' home houses administrative offices. The building at right was constructed in 1925 as living quarters for veterans' wives and widows. The barn, at far left, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.

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On the cover: The Interstate 90 bridge over the Missouri River at Chamberlain is one of just nine highway crossings connecting the eastern and western portions of South Dakota. In this issue, Steven J. Bucklin examines the development of the Interstate Highway System, which marked its sixtieth anniversary in 2016.

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