

1. Veterans History Walk: Memory Garden

* The 16-acre site for the National Veterans Park and History Walk encompasses historic buildings and landscape features that date from the opening of the Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in 1888 through its 120 year evolution to become the West Los Angeles Medical Center of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

* The site's historic resources can serve as the foundation to tell the story of the Veterans, the Pacific Branch, and the care the government has provided to Veterans. Plantings and artifacts can commemorate the history of the site and veterans use of the Park. The historic resources will be revived and adapted for contemporary use in the National Veterans Park. The Memory Garden scenario is inspired by the many parks and gardens around the world that respect and build upon important cultural landscapes, including the recently completed Parc de Bercy in Paris and the current restoration and revitalization of Governors Island, New York, a former military base in New York Harbor, also designed by McKim, Mead and White.

* The Park area is recognized by the National Register of Historic Places. Changes will be guided by preservation and design standards that protect the architecture and landscape features.

*** *Site History and Historic Resources***

The History Walk Memory Garden scenario will revive and incorporate the historic buildings and picturesque landscape. Rather than slavishly recreating the 19th-20th century landscape, the historic elements will become the foundation for the contemporary park and the Veterans History Walk.

The three major periods of development of the site include:

1. Founding and original design and development (1888-1930) The Pacific Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers was designed in 1888 by noted architect Stanford White of McKim, Mead and White. All buildings were designed in the Shingle Style. The grounds featured picturesque/romantic plans popularized by Frederick Law Olmstead, Calvert Vaux, H.W.S. Cleveland, and Andrew Jackson Downing. The Pacific Branch landscape included lush plantings and open spaces, meandering paths and roadways, groupings of specimen trees, water features, natural growth and a zoo. The Soldiers Home was a leading Los Angeles tourist attraction at the turn of the 20th Century and considered one of the catalysts for the development of West Los Angeles. Two original buildings exist: the 1900 Shingle-style Chapel and the 1900 Trolley Depot (moved north of the site). Vestiges of the early landscape are visible in the broad, open meadow, the clusters of Moreton Bay Fig Trees, the Deodor Cedars and the Eucalyptus Grove which may have bordered the trolley track that ran through the west section of the site. (The geography and early settlement of the site is also relevant and significant --as part of the homeland of the Tongva Gabrielino Indians, and as a prominent Mexican rancho, San Jose de Buenos Ayres.)

2. Veterans Administration Consolidation (1930-1960). The single, national agency for veterans' affairs imposed standardization of design as an important tool for efficiency and cost effectiveness. Many original buildings were demolished and the site's landscape was modified in order to develop buildings meeting the new standards. Art-Deco style buildings, such as the 1938 Wadsworth Theater, characterize this period.

3. Contemporary Use as the Los Angeles Medical Center (1960-2010) The past fifty years altered the landscape significantly with the construction of the 405 Freeway, parking lots, and deferred maintenance. Most recently the VPC Conservancy replaced the chain-link fence surrounding the property with appropriate wrought iron fencing and re-established a ceremonial Wilshire Boulevard entrance.

** Using Historic Resources to Preserve Memory and to Inspire*

** Veterans Promenade*

The Veterans Promenade, a linear walkway, will traverse the north section of the Park, linking the two parts of the site from the Chapel on the east to the Eucalyptus Grove on the west. The Promenade will include markers and stations, which will tell the story of the park, the VA and the Veterans. The information will be developed so that one side of the promenade proceeds chronologically, creating a literal timeline experience. The other side of the walkway will treat themes associated with that period. This approach has been used effectively at the New Orleans World War II Museum's exhibition spaces dealing with the Pacific Theater in World War II.

The promenade timeline will allow the veteran and visitor to experience the Park chronologically, understanding the site's evolution and the relationship to larger themes of military history and veteran care. In this report are preliminary timelines that illustrate a range of milestones related to the history of the Los Angeles Veterans Center and the Department of Veterans Affairs

** Veterans Chapel*

The restored Chapel will become a distinctive icon for the Park and the veterans History Walk. As the oldest building remaining on the site and the oldest building on Wilshire Boulevard, the shingle-style Chapel illustrates the scale and character of the original campus. More important, the Chapel represents the landmark legislation enacted by Congress in 1900 to authorize a government-funded dual-denomination chapel. With this Chapel, the Congress recognized that support and healing for veterans are multi-faceted: "Something more than mere food, shelter and clothing seems due to these men." The Chapel will again provide a sanctuary for veterans and visitors to express emotion, to renew their faith and to receive services. The Veterans Chapel might also provide exhibition space and visitor services.

* *Landscapes and Public Spaces*

The landscapes and public spaces will retain their historic character with selective planting of trees and other plant material, the restoration and repair of earlier footprints of buildings and the rejuvenation of key spaces.

-Great Lawn

The broad, open meadow at the center of the Park will become a natural setting for listening to music, for concerts and gatherings as well as the site for pick-up games of soccer, frisbee or baseball. The Great Lawn can support, for example, concerts on Veterans Day, a parade of vintage automobiles and military vehicles, and a children's carnival on the 4th of July.

-Widow's Row

Where trees surrounded buildings, the trace of those buildings will be indicated with symbols of the original use. For example, "Widows Row" along Wilshire Boulevard, which was the historic location of cottages provided to widows of Civil War soldiers, could be commemorated with a stone garden representing building foundations along with plants that symbolize faith and perseverance.

-Eucalyptus Grove and Moreton Bay Fig Trees

The Eucalyptus Grove which once bordered the trolley line will once again become part of the circulation in the Park incorporating old rail lines as part of the path's design.

The Majestic Fig Trees will signal the transition of activities on the east and west sides of the Park.

- *Pool of Remembrance*

The restoration of water within the Park will be an important symbol of the site's renaissance. A Pool of Remembrance honoring the dead, the missing, the POWs and the wounded at a reflecting pool will provide a meaningful stop on the History Walk.

2. *Veterans History Walk: Commemorative Rooms*

A series of contemplative outdoor rooms will be created along a linear History Walk. The garden rooms will allow the veteran and visitor to personally focus on the bravery and memorable accomplishments of service persons and the Veterans Administration over time. The gardens may be interpreted as "rooms" in which themes and history will be illustrated using artifacts, maps and other tools that depict the armed forces and veterans care in a particular era or service. The precedents for the commemorative garden rooms are classical gardens and national memorial monuments. Along the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

- Founding and Creation of the National Veterans Park: This room might include the artifacts from the 20th century such as medical instruments, military transport, and volunteer support through institutions such as the Red Cross. The location of this room near the Chapel will allow one to envision the pace, character and reality of war and care at the turn of the 20th century.
- Post World War One: Commemorating World War I and its aftermath might include the use of military vehicles, the ambulance corps and the advent of military flight. Commemorating the vast change at the National Soldiers Home and the surrounding area in this period suggests that this garden room be located near the WPA-era Wadsworth Theater on the Veterans History Walk
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- **Post World War II:** The massive change in medical care and post-war technology at the LA Medical Center, the pioneering defense industries, and the support from Los Angeles arts and entertainment community might be the focus of the Post World War II contemplative garden. The Conservancy has recognized the significant women's history in the armed forces in the Rose Garden. An outdoor room close by on the linear history path will be complementary.
- **Korean War and Vietnam:** The garden associated with these two conflicts will deal with the increased US involvement in Asia as well as the vast changes at the Soldiers Home and the area, such as the bifurcation and transformation of the site.
- **Wars in the Middle East:** The LA Medical Center has become a center for the care of disabled veterans. The changed character of war and injury, advances in medical care and rehabilitation, and the role of the Department of Veterans Affairs will be included at this room.

3. Veterans History Walk: The Interactive Timeline

In order to engage the wide range of persons who will visit the Veterans History Walk, interactive technology will be used to appeal to their varied interests, to their multi-generational and multi-cultural character as well as to their preferred learning style—that of observer, participant, independent or enthusiast. The development of interactive technology-based devices to enliven the visitor experience is advancing rapidly. LACMA, the Dallas Museum of Art and others are pioneering this approach to exhibition design and programming. KWH assisted the VPC in defining a project for a senior history class at the Brentwood School to research exhibit technology and this may be a resource for the Conservancy planners in the further development of the Veterans History Walk.

- Using WI-Fi enabled mobile devices, veterans and visitors can listen to an audio tour, can view video features, see portraits of related persons, view related subjects, explore maps and photographs of locations that are the subject of the particular thematic or chronological marker, the historic resource or commemorative garden room.
- Kiosks will explain significant milestones and will allow the veteran and visitor to search and to contribute his /her record, experience and memory. Links with the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress will be developed.

Veterans Administration and National Cemetery *A Walking Tour*

Information provided by VETERANS PARK
Written by Evelyn Lager

Can you imagine the Westside of Los Angeles without the last green "breathing space" in this part of our county? It took generous donations of land carved from two great ranchos to move our town from last to first place on the list of choices for a Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers and Sailors. Luckily for us and for veterans of the Civil War and every conflict since then, Congress approved the gift in 1887. A 400-acre complex of hospital and special services continues to serve members of our nation's armed forces while providing a rich depository of historical and architectural treasures. From Victorian gingerbread to Art Deco grace, from chapel to barracks to trolley station, we can see it all on a comfortable stroll, allowing two and a half hours to enjoy the attractive grounds of the VA and National Cemetery. If you've brought your camera, you can create your own "souvenirs."

Our itinerary includes these landmarks:

1. Wadsworth Theater. Once a showcase for memorabilia, including letters from President Abraham Lincoln and yearly registers of enrollment in the facility, this entertainment facility has more recently been shared with UCLA for performance of theatrical events.
2. The Victorian Chapel. Still a dominant feature of the landscape to be seen from Wilshire Boulevard looking north, its late-Victorian elegance provides a suitably graceful and decorous setting for religious services.
3. The Central Steam Plant. This 1949 Art Moderne building provides all the steam for the Veterans Administration.
4. The Chief Engineer's Building. Another Victorian structure, this is the oldest building still standing on the VA grounds. It was built by the Bandini family on a large piece of property that they then owned.
5. The Old Trolley House. After serving as a station for a railway from the shore down to Long Beach, this Victorian building was used for the Red Car system. It now houses an art gallery.

6. The Hoover Barracks. Built in 1930 to accommodate homeless and jobless veterans, it originally had no plumbing or washroom facilities. Such amenities were thought to encourage "staying around."
7. The Japanese Gardens. An opportunity for meditation and spiritual renewal is afforded here where tradition joins art and nature in a harmonious partnership. Nearby, *Vets' Garden* makes plant materials available for sale to both the professional and amateur enthusiast. Monday, Tuesday and Thursday hours are from 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. and Friday from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. Call (310) 824-6771 for additional locations.
8. Civil War Cannon. Cannon and ordnance wagon dated 1865 remind us that the Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers and Sailors was established by Congress in response to public support for service to veterans who'd fought for the Union.
9. Columbium of the Los Angeles National Cemetery. Built under the Works Progress Administration, this is the only indoor columbium in the National Cemetery System. Spanish architecture inspired the design of the columbarium and its matching pergola, reflecting the city's rich Spanish heritage. Two plaques adorn the outside walls. One reads "*Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States Ladies Auxiliary Department of California Humbly Honor the Memory of the Brave Men and Women of the United States Armed Forces Who Offered Their Lives in the Service of Our Country 1946.*"
10. Rostrum and Statue of Civil War Soldier. In the center of the cemetery, the annual Memorial Day Ceremony is held before a rostrum bearing a plaque containing President Abraham Lincoln's address at the dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery in 1863. Nearby is a statue "*Dedicated to the Department of California and Nevada Grand Army of the Republic,*" placed there by the Women's Auxiliary Relief Corps in 1942.
11. Geranium Circle. Dedicated to "*women who served for God and country,*" a bronze monument is surrounded by a circle of red and white geraniums.
12. Sculpture of Liberty and Her Defenders. We end at the corner of Wilshire and Veterans Avenues. Roger Noble Burnham's creation in bronze was commissioned in 1950 by the United States War Veterans. Its inscription reads "*To Those Who Volunteered and Extended the Hand of Liberty to Alien Peoples 1902.*"

If it weren't for the Civil War, many of us wouldn't be living and working on the west side of Los Angeles County. Responding to public desire to assist veterans of that conflict, in 1887 Congress established the Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers and Sailors.

Despite its natural appeal, the site of the present Veterans Administration Medical Center and National Cemetery was originally at the bottom of the list of candidates. Now, of course, we'd hate to think of our community without its last significant "green" breathing space.

The grounds today still offer clues to the natural history of West Los Angeles. From a drainage headwall at the northwest of the property, an arroyo of about 109 acres emerges as watershed for a small tributary. Denatured after grading and dumping, this canyon was once a wide and steep habitat for native plants and wildlife. But remnants of a rich riparian ecosystem can be glimpsed. (For a detailed description, see pp. 16-23 of the Strategic Plan prepared for Veterans Park Preserve in September, 1991 by Robert S. Harris, FAIA, Emmet L. Wemple & Associates, and Achva Stein, ASLA.)

Deposits of broken rock line the canyon bottom, while sand, gravel, silt and other composites elsewhere make the site vulnerable to water runoff and erosion. Proximity to a number of fault lines means earthquake activity can be expected to alter the landscape from time to time.

As part of the watershed system of the Santa Monica Mountains, a tributary runs from the northwestern portion of the VA site to a drainage channel at the southern end and eventually flows into Ballona Creek and thence to Santa Monica Bay. The portion freely flowing within the VA could provide "an ideal urban riparian ecosystem demonstration site," according to the 1991 Strategic Plan, which also cites the spring from the Japanese Garden as "free from pollutants and....invigorating the creek."

Landscaping currently mixes exotics with a number of surviving native species. Their presence allows reconstruction of a natural history of the site, including plant communities and the animal populations they probably supported in the recent past. Not far from the creek bed can be seen several healthy coastal live oaks and sycamores, indicating water has been present here for some time. Very old willows grow in the bed of the creek itself, as do a cottonwood and scattered cattail, although they don't appear to be reproducing. A few specimens of bunchgrasses hint at an earlier oak woodland or open oak savannah nearby. The west and south slopes may once have been covered with California coastal sage, but now Salvias and other grasses grow there.

Valley grassland occupies the remainder of the VA site, where a few native bunchgrasses mingle with widespread invasive exotic plants such as thistle, plantain, and wild oats. Giant reeds dominate the creek bottom, while Eucalyptus, Acacias, and castor bean appear elsewhere. Because of their toxicity,