

Form 10-300  
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>District of Columbia</b>
COUNTY:
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
**U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home**

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
**U.S. Military Asylum; The Old Soldiers' Home**

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Rock Creek Church Road, N.W.**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Washington**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

STATE: **D.C.** CODE: COUNTY: CODE:

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>retirement home</u>
			Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
**Lieutenant General F. T. Unger, U.S. Army Retired, Governor**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home, Rock Creek Church Road, N.W.**

CITY OR TOWN: **Washington** STATE: **D.C.** CODE:

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**D.C. Courthouse**

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: **Washington** STATE: **District of Columbia** CODE:

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**none**

DATE OF SURVEY:  Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: STATE: CODE:

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Four pre-Civil War structures formed the core of the early Soldiers' Home, housing all the important administrative and dormitory facilities. Situated in a row along the top of a hill overlooking Washington, the Anderson Cottage, Sherman South Building, Quarters 1, and Quarters 2 remain and function today in much the same manner as in the first decade after 1851.

An Army committee purchased the estate of about 256 acres from George Riggs in 1851. Then known as "Corn Riggs House," the present Anderson Cottage was built by Riggs about 1811<sup>1843</sup> as a summer home. Originally the house was a two-story brick structure in the Gothic style, with a wide front porch. The original exterior design of the house has remained basically unchanged, except that in 1897 the brick walls were coated with grey stucco, and in 1923 a small elevator shaft was constructed on the southwest corner. Today the house is still stucco grey, with white latticed windows, gingerbread, and wrought iron porches on the second floor.

The first residents lived in the Corn-Riggs House from 1851 until the completion of the new Main Building in 1857. In 1851 2nd Lt. Barton S. Alexander became the architect for the Washington Asylum, contracted to design three structures, the Main Building (later renamed for Scott, and today Sherman South), Building 1, the Governor's Resident, and Building 2, originally the quarters of the Secretary-Treasurer, later those of the Deputy Governor. Gilbert Cameron built the three buildings, all of similar design and faced with unfinished New York marble. Construction began in 1854 and was completed in 1857; there was no more major building until 1869.

The original Sherman South was a two-story Norman Gothic structure built on one of the highest points of land in the District of Columbia. At a 320-foot elevation, the main building provided living accommodations for the members and housed all activities of the home. In 1869 a third story was added over the mansard roof and a square castellated bellfry replaced the steeple of the clock tower. The building is connected by an annex to Sherman North, completed in 1891.

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**3. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Music		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation			

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home is the product of a quarter-century of effort by prominent military and political figures to secure legislation which would relieve the situation of old and disabled soldiers. The military asylum was the first attempt to provide for members of the regular army who had served during peacetime and had been disabled or retired from public service. The Washington, D.C. home is the only such Army institution in the Nation and the sole remaining of the original three asylums established in 1851.

The history of the establishment of the home significantly indicates the needs of the military personnel felt during this period, and reflects the awareness of the responsibility felt by Government and military leaders for the old and disabled soldiers.

History

Secretary of War James Barbour first officially recommended to Congress the propriety of founding an asylum for old and disabled soldiers November 27, 1827, in his Annual Message to the President. Such a plan was already in use by the Navy and other nations. He illustrated the need for Government action by the cases that the War Department even then was called upon to relieve. His suggestion was the first in a 25-year struggle to establish a military asylum during which proposals were constantly being made and shelved.

Between 1790 and 1861 the size and organization of the Regular Army changed almost yearly. During this time the Army engaged in two major and 23 lesser wars. Injury and disease took a terrible toll so that a great proportion of the veterans were discharged diseased or disabled, with no means of support. Totally disabled veterans of the Revolutionary War received \$5 per month and those of the War of 1812 received half-pay. However, soldiers of the Regular Army, injured or retired during peacetime, were left to shift for themselves.

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**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Goode, Col. Paul R., The United States Soldiers Home, Richmond, Virginia; William Byrd Press, 1957.

Eberlein, Harold Donaldson and Hubbard Cortlandt Van Dyke, Historic Houses of Georgetown and Washington City, Richmond, Virginia: Dietz Press, 1958.

Report of National Capital Planning Commission

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES				
CORNER	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	38°	56'	30"	77°	00'	49"			
NE	38°	56'	30"	77°	00'	39"			
SE	38°	56'	24"	77°	00'	39"			
SW	38°	56'	24"	77°	00'	49"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **6 acres**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: Blanche M. Higgins, Research Assistant and Benjamin Levy, Senior Historian

ORGANIZATION: Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service      DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington      STATE: D.C.      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

**12 STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National       State       Local

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Significance (page 1) U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home

In 1833 Lewis Cass, Secretary of War, presented the case for the superannuated soldiers in a letter to President Jackson:

"In our service as is presently organized, a soldier can be retained only as long as his physical powers are sufficient to enable him to perform the duties required of him. When his constitution fails, unless it is the result of disabilities incurred in the line of his duty, he is discharged without any provision for his support, and generally, from the habits of his life, without the disposition and too often the power to labor and without the means of support. He is then thrown on charity of the community after devoting the best of his life to the service of his country."<sup>1</sup>

Winfield Scott sparked the actual establishment of the home by earmarking Mexican tribute money for the fund of the still non-existent asylum. Upon the capture of Mexico City, Scott levied a tribute of \$150,000 on that city in lieu of pillage. Of this sum Scott deposited a check for \$100,000 and endorsed it "The Bank of America, New York City, will place the within amount to the credit of the Army Asylum, subject to order of Congress." Scott has always been considered the Father of the home, since he was personally interested in the project and was instrumental in its establishment and growth by virtue of his position as Chief of the Army, and, consequently, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Asylum.

Spurred by Senator Jefferson Davis, Congress, on March 3, 1851, finally passed the bill founding "a military asylum for the relief and support of invalid and disabled soldiers of the Army of the U.S." President Fillmore signed it into law the same day. The legislation of 1851 authorized three asylum sites, one in D.C., and branch sites in New Orleans, Louisiana, and East Pascagoula, Mississippi, and later one at Harrodsburg, Kentucky. All these branches closed prior to 1860.

The present Washington home opened December 24, 1851, in a building on 17th Street, N.W., while the committee considered local sites for the permanent asylum. They purchased the George Riggs estate of 256 acres

<sup>1</sup> Paul R. Goode, The United States Soldiers Home, (Richmond, Virginia, 1957), p. 23

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8. Significance (page 2)

U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home

in 1851 and in June moved the first members to the Riggs House, the Anderson Cottage. The members moved to the Main Building, now Sherman South, in 1857 when that structure was finished. By 1857 the Governor and Deputy Governor occupied their new residences also.

General Scott, in 1857, invited President Buchanan and Secretary of War Floyd to take up summer residence at the asylum, which was then a country estate outside of swampy downtown Washington. Buchanan resided there for the summers of 1857-60. President Lincoln and his family occupied the Riggs House from mid-summer to November 1862-64. President Hayes stayed at the home during the summers of 1877-80 and President Arthur 1882-84.

President Lincoln stayed in the cottage during the battle of Fort Stepens, only 2 miles to the north. He recorded that while staying at the home he wrote the second draft of the Emancipation Proclamation:

"I put the draft of the Proclamation aside, waiting for a victory. Well the next news we had was of Pope's disaster at Bull Run. Things looked darker than ever. Finally came the week of the Battle of Antietam. I determined to wait no longer. The news came, I think, on Wednesday that the advantage was on our side. I was then staying at the Soldiers' Home. Here I finished writing the second draft of the Proclamation; came up on Saturday, called the cabinet together to hear it, and it was published the following Monday. I made a solemn vow before God that if General Lee was driven back from Maryland I would crown the result by the declaration for freedom to the slaves."

Since 1851 the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home has been in continuous operation, providing room, board, clothing, medical care, laundry and extensive recreation facilities freely to any 20-year veteran or disabled soldier who had contributed from his monthly pay. By December 27, 1859, there were 127 members living at the asylum and today it is the home of 2,700 men and women.

<sup>2</sup>Paul R. Goode, The United States Soldiers Home, (Richmond, Virginia, 1957), p. 68.

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