

History of the Grand Island Veterans' Home

Nebraska's oldest and largest home was established in 1887.

The following is an excerpt taken from the Senate Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska Twentieth Regular Session held in Lincoln on January 4, 1887:

*“**WHEREAS**, There are many old soldiers in Nebraska who, from wounds or disabilities received while in the union army during the rebellion, are in the county poorhouses of this state; therefore be it*

***RESOLVED**, That it is the sense of this Senate that a suitable building be erected and grounds provided for the care and comfort of the old soldiers of Nebraska in their declining years;*

***RESOLVED**, That a committee of five be appointed to confer with a committee of the House on indigent soldiers and marines to take such action as will look to the establishment of a State Soldiers' Home.”*

Legislative Bill 247 was passed on March 4, 1887 for the establishment of a soldiers' home and the bill stipulated that not less than 640 acres be donated for the site. The Grand Island Board of Trade had a committee meeting with the citizens of Grand Island to secure funds to purchase land for the site of the home.

On March 31, 1887, a town meeting was held in the Bartenbach Opera House, and within 36 hours local citizens pledged the \$25,600 needed for the purchase of the land, which was originally located three miles north of Grand Island.

On October 20, 1887, Governor John M. Thayer placed the cornerstone of the new Soldiers and Sailors Home, and Oliver P. Duncan was the first Civil War veteran admitted to the home on June 28, 1888.

The facility was established to house only Civil War veterans of the Union Army, but later it was decided that we were one country, and Confederate Army veterans were also allowed. Subsequent laws were passed to allow veterans serving in all of the wars and conflicts since that time, to be eligible to live at the facility. (The name of the facility was changed to “Nebraska Veterans Home” in 1969 to reflect all branches of the service.)

In 1895, a bill was passed to create another soldiers' home in Milford, Nebraska, and it opened in 1903. However, funding was pulled from the facility later, and it closed in 1941. Bills were passed to establish other veterans' homes in Norfolk in 1963, in Scottsbluff in 1974 and in Omaha in 1980.

We salute all who have lived, worked, or volunteered at our veterans' homes during the past 120 years!