

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Jan. 31, 2014

CONTACT: Jeff Mammenga, Media Coordinator, (605) 773-6000,
Jeff.Mammenga@state.sd.us

State Historical Society Opposes VA Closing Hot Springs Facility

PIERRE – Officials with the South Dakota State Historical Society in Pierre have voiced their opposition to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced plans to close Battle Mountain Sanitarium in Hot Springs.

Battle Mountain is a National Historic Landmark (NHL) that has served veterans since 1907 and is the oldest facility in the VA system established solely for the purpose of providing medical care, according to the society. There are only 16 NHLs in South Dakota, 13 of which are archeological sites.

The VA plans to relocate services to Rapid City while opening a new outpatient clinic in Hot Springs.

“Battle Mountain is one of only three National Historic Landmarks in South Dakota that contains buildings,” said Jay D. Vogt, director of the State Historical Society. “It would be considered architecturally spectacular in any state, but they’re especially important to us here in South Dakota.”

“Battle Mountain Sanitarium has a rich history of serving our nation’s veterans, and the long line of veterans that have passed through those doors represent all that is good and honorable about our state’s service and treatment of veterans,” said Ted Spencer, director of the society’s State Historic Preservation Office at the Cultural Heritage Center. “As a combat veteran of three wars, I feel it is critically important to preserve this one-of-a-kind monument to our veterans, and allow this complex to continue to serve veterans in this capacity.

“Ironically, that’s why Battle Mountain was recognized as a National Historic Landmark – for the integral contribution it has made in serving veterans for over 100 years.”

The focal points of the campus are the administration building and six wards which radiate out from the central court of the hospital complex.

Architect Thomas Kimball Rogers designed the original buildings using a Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival style that incorporated elements of Romanesque Revival and Richardson Romanesque styles.

Battle Mountain Sanitarium was a branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS). The Grand Army of the Republic championed the site due to the mineral waters used in Hot Springs for various treatments.

Veterans were admitted to treat a variety of musculoskeletal, gastrointestinal and respiratory conditions. Only veterans with a chance of recovery were admitted. Treatment was the sole purpose, and once a recovery was made patients were discharged to other branches.

Battle Mountain Sanitarium represents a policy of veterans' benefits that influenced veteran care nationwide, Spencer said. Before the NHDVS branches were created, care focused on professional soldiers. Under this new system, the government committed to the well-being of civilian soldiers as well.

All interested parties and organizations may comment on the proposal. The VA will post information at www.blackhills.va.gov.

-30-

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.