

SAINT ELIZABETHS

HOSPITAL

HISTORIC DISTRICT





The Dining Hall, shown with the interior decorated for Independence Day (1900), allowed for as many as 600 patients to convene for meals. This was far different than dining in the Center Building, where patients took meals in their rooms or in more intimate dining spaces.

Opposite: This 1860 topographical site plan highlights the planned therapeutic and agricultural landscape features of the property.

SAINT ELIZABETHS HOSPITAL HISTORIC DISTRICT



Sitting pleasantly atop a wooded ridge

in the Anacostia Hills of Washington, the campus of Saint Elizabeths Hospital is a National Historic Landmark that embodies a rich and unique story of both local and national significance. With its sweeping views of Washington, Virginia and Maryland the story of Saint Elizabeths can be read in the historic buildings and landscapes that cover its 350 acres.

Established in the middle of the nineteenth century as a mental health facility, Saint Elizabeths is a living example of how public attitudes and public policy shape the built environment and how the built environment can shape public attitude and public policy.



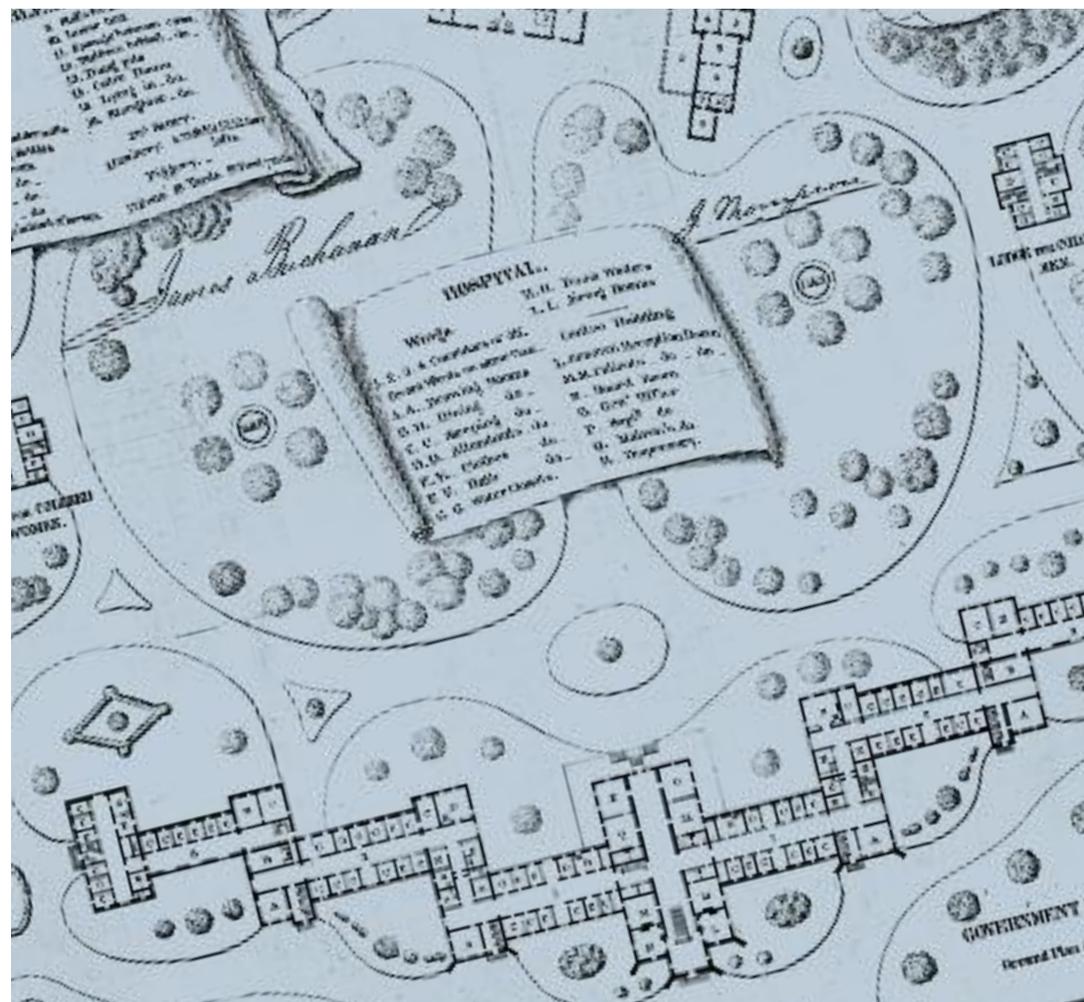
The Center Building (seen here in 1900) was constructed between 1852 and 1895 and is 948 feet in length. Described as “Collegiate Gothic,” the architecture is of a style that was considered appropriate for hospitals for the insane during the nineteenth century.

The location for the hospital was chosen for its capacity to support the philosophy of care promoted by Dr. Thomas Kirkbride, a Philadelphia physician. Kirkbride extolled the value of “moral treatment” or the humane care of the mentally ill in a peaceful, healthful and beautiful setting. Dix and Dr. Charles W. Nichols, the first superintendent of the hospital, chose the Saint Elizabeths site because it was located far from the city on a hill

THE BIRTH OF SAINT ELIZABETHS

Prior to the 1840s, when Dorothea Lynde Dix first began advocating for better conditions for the mentally ill, treatment and care of those with mental illness was at best haphazard and at worst inhumane. Dix brought her message of reform to Washington, convincing Congress in 1852 to provide \$100,000 for the purpose of establishing the first federal mental health hospital for members of the armed forces and residents of the District of Columbia. Originally named the U.S. Government Hospital for the Insane, the mission of the hospital was to provide the most humane care and enlightened curative treatment.

overlooking the Anacostia River. It offered appropriate views and vistas, natural surroundings, and plenty of space for physical activity and passive recreation. The site also



This 1860 site plan identifies planned uses within the Center Building and nearby secondary structures.

provided resources such as water, agricultural land, building materials, and fuel, giving the hospital a large degree of self-sufficiency for much of its history.

The evolution of care and mental health treatment at Saint Elizabeths is reflected in both the buildings and landscapes on campus.

THE NICHOLS PERIOD (1852-1877)

The Center Building, which is the earliest building complex on campus, was designed by Superintendent Nichols and Thomas U. Walter, the Architect of the Capitol. Like the selection of the site, the design of the first building complex was based on the “Kirkbride Plan,” which calls for a long structure with sections staggered *en echelon* so that each of the wards received plenty of fresh air and light for patients. This floor plan also allowed hospital staff to separate patients in different wards to keep them from disturbing one another. The brick for the Gothic Revival Center Building complex was baked on site using clay dug from the grounds. The interior woodwork was similar throughout but made from different species of wood by floor

Typical Center Building hallway lined with chairs used by patients.



A four-horse carriage used to take male patients to town (1900).

and by wing. Thus the “Beech Ward” had woodwork made from beech trees, the “Cherry Ward” had cherry wood, and so on. The prominent three-story entry porch still visible on the primary façade wasn’t added until 1874.

Other buildings of this period included the East and West Lodges for African-American patients, as well as the picturesque Gatehouse 1, a machine shop, a laundry, a gardeners’ dormitory, a farmer’s cottage, and stables. Although much of the site was still undeveloped, the brick and stone perimeter wall and the layout of campus roads and walkways that remain largely intact today were developed during this period.

By the early 1870s, Saint Elizabeths Hospital had reached its capacity, necessitating the construction of additional buildings and the purchase of additional land. The federal government’s 1869 acquisition of the parcel known as Shepherd Farm—encompassing what is now the East Campus—was an attempt to adhere to the hospital’s founding philosophy of enlightened treatment and self-sufficiency. As early as 1867, Nichols requested funds to purchase the property, considering its acquisition essential to the full development of the hospital and the proper care of its patients. Located across the road from the original campus, Shepherd Farm provided for the continuation and

Located at the original North entrance to the grounds, Gatehouse No. 1 was built in 1874 to provide additional security for the growing hospital.



expansion of Saint Elizabeths' agricultural program, providing food and occupational therapy for its patients. (Oddly enough, no one seemed to bat an eye at the fact that Dr. Nichols owned part of the land he was encouraging the government to buy.)

The newly acquired Shepherd Farm was used to graze milk cows and beef cattle and to grow vegetables and fodder.



In preparation, the land was cleared, drained and fertilized, with much of the work accomplished by hospital patients as part of their therapy. The earthworks of a Civil War fortification at the southeast corner of the farm were leveled. By 1874, 50 acres had been cleared of stumps and roots and cultivated. Funds had also been expended for the

Why is it called Saint Elizabeths Hospital (and what happened to the apostrophe)?

During the Civil War, part of the hospital was used to treat and care for soldiers wounded in the line of duty, especially amputees. Convalescent soldiers writing home were reluctant to let their families know they were staying at the U.S. Government Hospital for the Insane. Instead, they reported staying at Saint Elizabeths, which was the historic name of the seventeenth-century land patent on which the hospital sits. Congress made the name change official in 1916, maintaining the seventeenth-century name with its lack of apostrophe.

Between 1891-1959, the farm then known as Godding Croft, located in Prince George's County, Maryland, provided supplemental products for the hospital. Shown here in 1897, the property is known today as Oxon Hill Farm, the property is no longer part of the Saint Elizabeths holdings and is owned by the National Park Service.

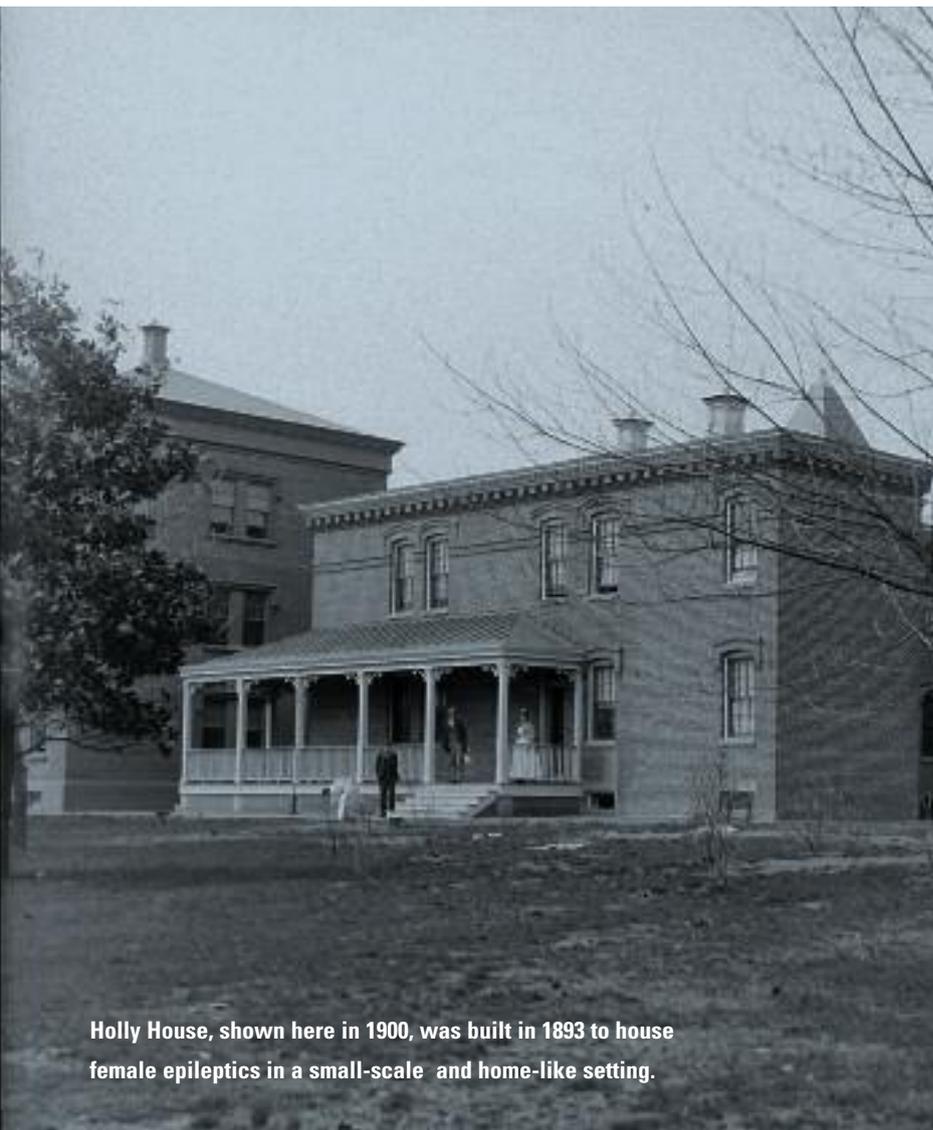


Patients leaving the Dining Hall circa 1900.



Burroughs Cottage

Although there were several single-family homes built at Saint Elizabeths for staff who lived on site, only one was built for patient care. In 1886, Sarah Borrows, a patient from an affluent Washington family, was admitted to Saint Elizabeths. Her mother, C.Z. Borrows, concerned with Sarah's care, had a cottage built on campus for her daughter and other female patients from affluent families. In 1893, Mrs. Borrows admitted herself into the hospital and presumably resided in the same cottage until her own death in 1896. Sarah lived there until her death in 1917. The cottage was named for the family but was often misspelled in later years, and is now known as Burroughs Cottage.



Holly House, shown here in 1900, was built in 1893 to house female epileptics in a small-scale and home-like setting.

Above right: Shown in 1897, this imposing Queen Anne cottage was built for a wealthy DC patient by her family. The building is mentioned in the 1891 Board of Visitors Report as a place where "residents of the District of Columbia having means, when overtaken by insanity, can be suitably accommodated..."



Built in 1884, the Dry Barn is one of two farm buildings remaining from the agricultural operations on the East Campus.

As the patient population increased so too did the need for additional support buildings, including a firehouse, a mortuary, a patient dining hall, kitchens, a bakery, a creamery, greenhouses and the first new agricultural buildings on the East Campus.

Farming operations continued to expand on the East Campus during Godding's tenure. In the 1880s a two-story "dry barn" was built to house dairy cows and hay. A new piggery replaced one on the West Campus.

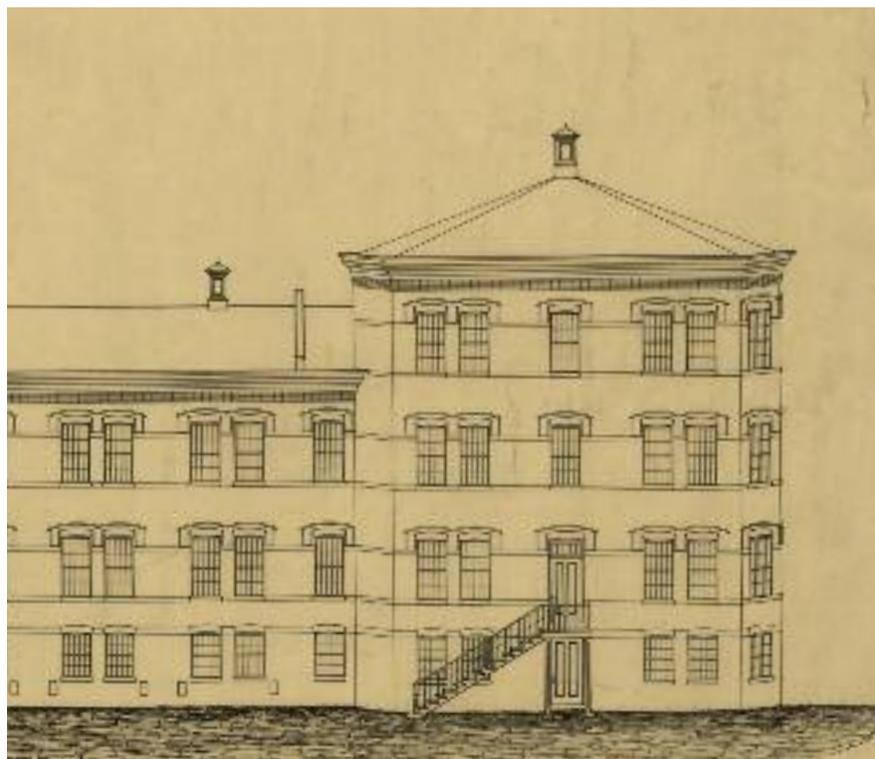
THE GODDING PERIOD (1877-1899)

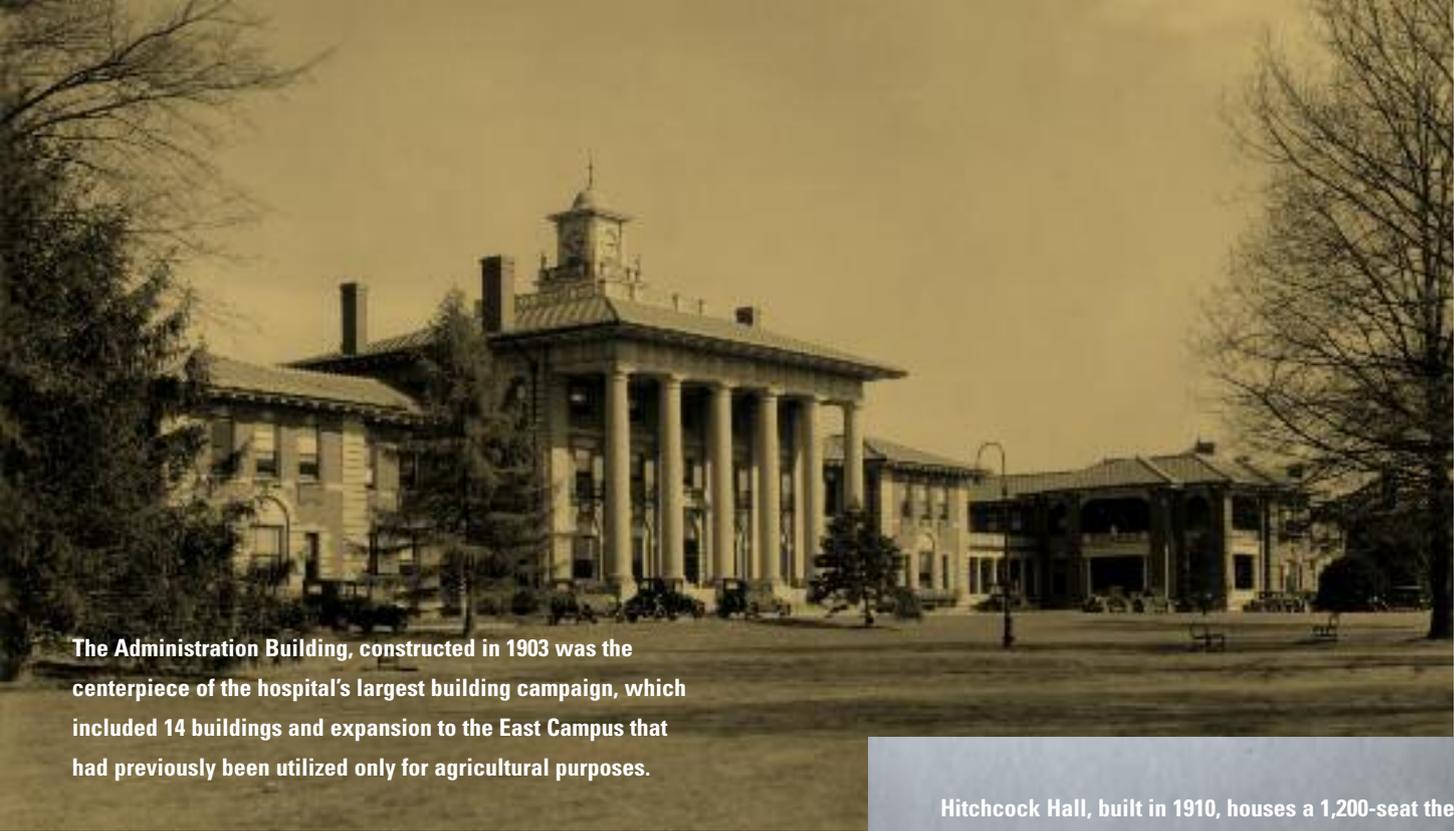
By the time Dr. William W. Godding was appointed superintendent in 1877 the patient population of 700 was almost triple the capacity available. As a consequence, during Godding's 22-year tenure, more than 21 buildings were added to Saint Elizabeths. The hospital expansion under Dr. Godding did not just add additional patient capacity, but it changed the approach to patient care at Saint Elizabeths. New patient buildings were mainly smaller, cottage-like, detached structures that provided a more home-like atmosphere but were still architecturally compatible with the Center Building. These new buildings made it easier to provide appropriate, separate living space for those with milder illnesses and those needing less supervision. Because these smaller buildings were detached, it was easier for the hospital administrators to phase construction based on the sometimes erratic funding.

Other changes altered the look of Saint Elizabeths and began to fill in the West Campus. Howard Hall was erected to house the criminally insane and was surrounded by its own security fence. This was also the period of development of the Toner Building infirmary and the Oaks Building for epileptic patients, south of other earlier patient care buildings on land that had been agricultural. The intent was to separate those convalescent buildings to a quieter spot on campus.

Although agricultural activity was still integral to the daily lives of patients, the Godding years signaled a shift in the character of the West Campus landscape. It was during this period that large expanses of campus began to take on a feel of landscaped pleasure ground and arboretum. Formal water features, pavilions, benches, and bridges were added to the landscape. Throughout the West Campus, and particularly on the plateau south of the Center Building, a collection of native and exotic tree species was introduced by Alvah

The hospital served not only as a treatment center for the mentally ill, but also as a facility for the criminally insane within the enclosures of Howard Hall, demolished in the 1960s.



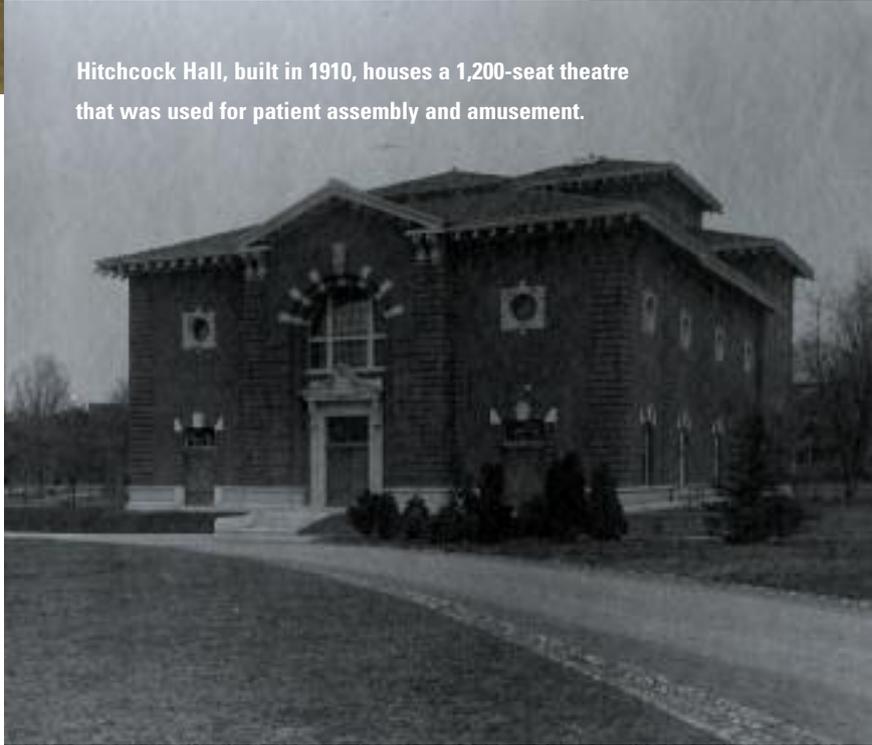


The Administration Building, constructed in 1903 was the centerpiece of the hospital's largest building campaign, which included 14 buildings and expansion to the East Campus that had previously been utilized only for agricultural purposes.

Godding, the son of the superintendent. Having grown up on the hospital grounds, the younger Godding brought back specimen trees from around the world that he thought would do well in Washington's climate. By 1900 he was officially the superintendent of grounds, a position he kept until his death in 1949.

THE RICHARDSON AND WHITE PERIOD (1899-1937)

The third and final major building phase under Superintendents Alonzo B. Richardson (1899-1903) and William Alanson White (1903-37) significantly expanded the hospital and provided modern facilities to accommodate the latest therapeutic theories of the time. With the hospital desperately overcrowded, planning for expansion began in early 1900. Since Superintendent Richardson did not want to have the treatment and administrative buildings divided by the public road, the initial intent was to swap 80 acres of the agricultural land on the East Campus for 80 acres, privately owned, immediately south of the West Campus. After almost



Hitchcock Hall, built in 1910, houses a 1,200-seat theatre that was used for patient assembly and amusement.

a year of negotiations, however, the deal fell through, and it was decided to construct patient care buildings for the first time on the East Campus.

Six architecture firms were invited to compete for the job of designing the site plan and buildings for the campus expansion. A planning committee rejected the six competition entries as of insufficient quality. In the hope of obtaining better design concepts and at the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, the well-known firms of McKim,

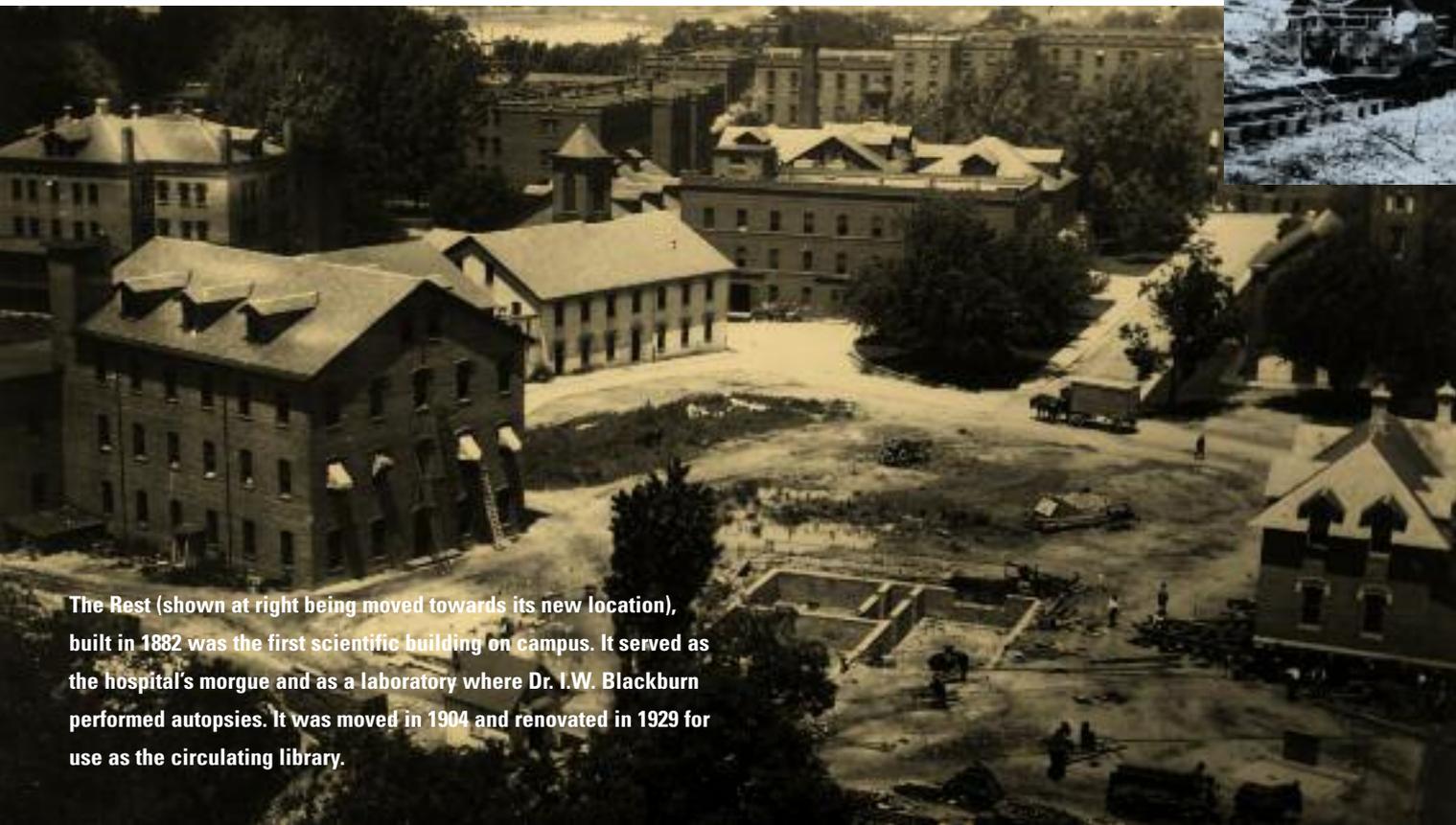
What's the name of that road?

The two campuses of Saint Elizabeths have been both served and divided by a major public road that is known today as Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue. Perhaps the earliest detailed map of its alignment dates to 1794 and identifies it simply as the "Road to Bladensburg." In colonial times it was part of the "King's Highway" post road along the fall line, but it became known more commonly as the Piscataway Road for its termination at that tobacco-port town. At times segments of the road have had distinct names: Monroe Street for the section through the Uniontown subdivision, now historic Anacostia; Giesboro Road that bounded the plantation of the same name just south of Saint Elizabeths; and Asylum Road, between the Saint Elizabeths campuses. In 1872 its entire length was officially named in honor of Dr. Charles Nichols, the first superintendent of Saint Elizabeths. The road remained Nichols Road until 1971, when it was renamed after civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.

Mead and White of New York, and Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge of Boston were invited to submit plans. McKim, Mead and White declined to participate, and Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge landed the job.

Although the planning for the expansion began under Superintendent Richardson, the majority of the construction took place under Superintendent White. Nine large buildings for patient care and administrative offices were arranged around a central lawn in the southern portion of the West Campus. Four additional patient care buildings and an immense stable were built on the East Campus and were connected to the hospital's core by a tunnel beneath today's Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue.

Saint Elizabeth No. 4 was built in 1950 by the H.K. Porter Company to pull hoppers of coal from a B&O rail connection to hospital. The steam locomotive was one of the last produced in the United States. "Little Lizzie" was given to the B&O Railroad Museum in Baltimore in 1980.



The Rest (shown at right being moved towards its new location), built in 1882 was the first scientific building on campus. It served as the hospital's morgue and as a laboratory where Dr. I.W. Blackburn performed autopsies. It was moved in 1904 and renovated in 1929 for use as the circulating library.

Burying the dead at Saint Elizabeths

In most cases, funeral arrangements for patients who died at Saint Elizabeths were made by family members of the deceased, and the remains were not interred on the hospital grounds. In some cases, however, when no next of kin could be found or other arrangements made, deceased patients were interred in cemeteries on both the West and East Campuses. The oldest burial ground was created in 1856 on the wooded western slope of the West Campus. Poor recordkeeping of the period make it difficult to determine the exact number of graves in the West Campus cemetery. In addition to the approximately 450 graves of Civil War veterans there is an unknown number of civilian burials. Early interments were marked by wooden slabs, with civilian graves identified only with numbers. Stone markers were provided for military graves by the U.S. Government after 1873. In that year, the three-quarter-acre West Campus burying ground was deemed full, and a new cemetery was opened on the East Campus. Approximately 2,050 military and 3,000 civilian interments took place in the nine-acre cemetery on the East Campus over the next 120 years.



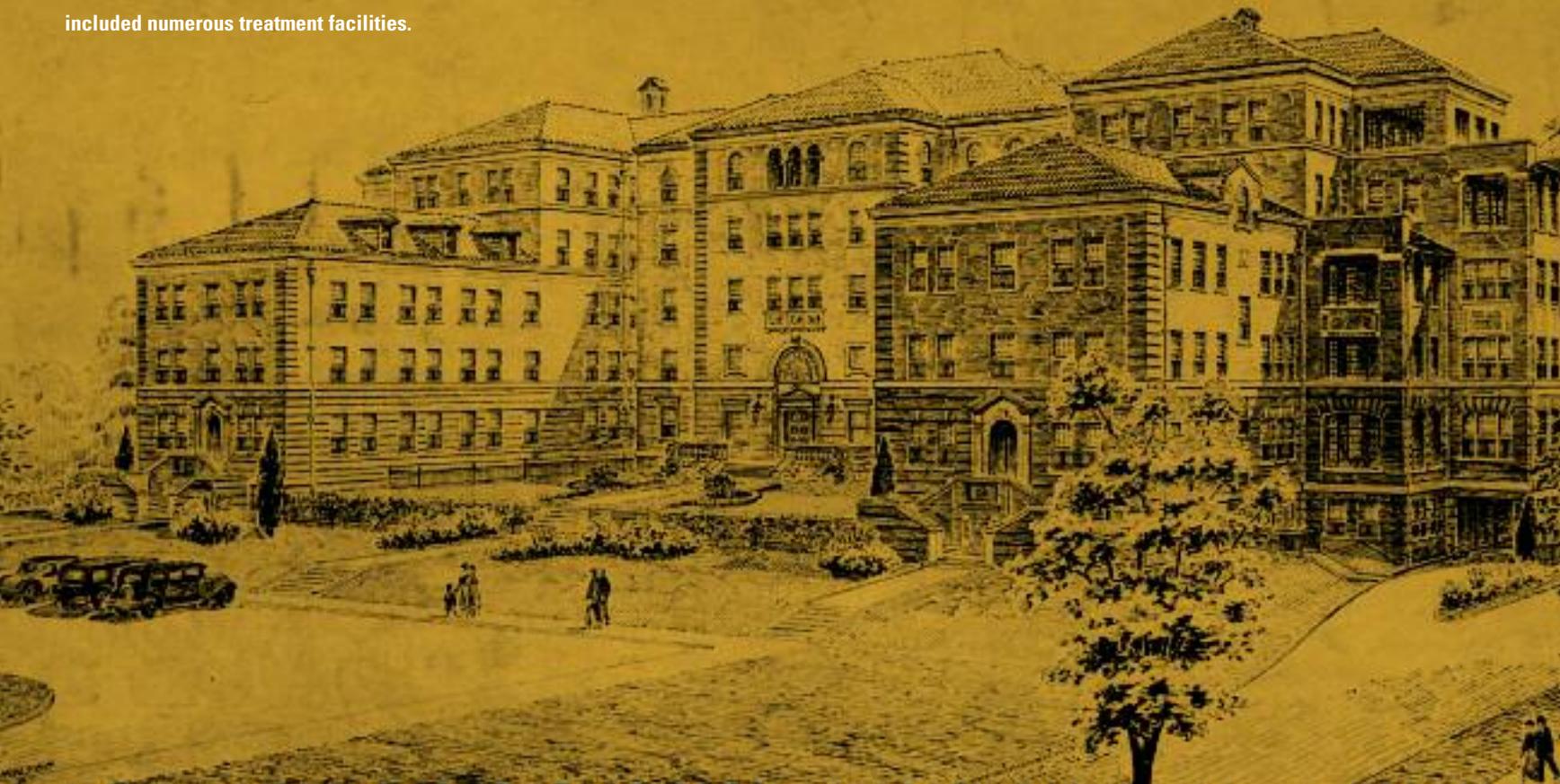
The West Campus Cemetery contains the remains of both civilians and Civil War soldiers who died as patients. The graves hold both Union and Confederate troops and whites and African-Americans.



The buildings designed by Shepley, Ruten and Coolidge, were built in a Beaux Arts-inspired Renaissance Revival style that marked a distinct departure from the style, scale, and setting of the existing campus buildings. Made of red brick and buff Ohio sandstone, the buildings were symmetrical in layout and detail, made use of the classical architectural orders, and had low-pitched clay tile roofs with large overhanging eaves with bracketed cornices. The patient wards incorporated large, bright common rooms and open-air terraces and piazzas.

At the urging of the architects, Superintendent Richardson invited renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. to visit Saint Elizabeths and offer suggestions for the layout of the campus expansion and the hospital landscape in general. In his report, Olmsted encouraged the separation of disparate uses and the de-cluttering of portions of the site including the area behind the Center Building. Although Olmsted's work at Saint Elizabeths did not go beyond conceptual recommendations, the spirit of his comments were taken to heart in the layout of the new buildings and resulted in relocation of the firehouse and the mortuary, opening up the landscape behind the Center Building. New patient buildings on the East Campus were separated from the remaining agricultural uses by a wooded ravine.

One of five buildings facing a central open space on the East Campus, the Men's Receiving Building included numerous treatment facilities.



During the same period, there were changes at Saint Elizabeths' western boundary. In 1901, a new railroad spur brought coal trains to the hospital's power plant from the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad trestle along the Anacostia River shoreline. A portion of the spur followed the path of an earlier carriage trail. The Anacostia's mud flats were filled by 1911, with those on Saint Elizabeths' western boundary becoming Bolling Air Field, severing the hospital's connection to the river.

In the years following World War I, the East Campus was the site of continued hospital development, with a new quadrangle including the Blackburn Laboratory and the Medical and Surgical Building. This signaled a shift of scientific study from the West Campus and the diminution of space devoted to crops and grazing. The 1891 purchase of a 400-acre farm at the mouth of Oxon Creek allowed much of the agricultural uses to be transferred there.

AFTER 1937

The last major project begun during Saint Elizabeths' pre-World War II period of significance was the construction, between 1932 and 1940, of nine large "continuous treatment" buildings on the southern portion of the East Campus.

After World War II, agricultural production ceased at Saint Elizabeths. In 1948, the hospital disposed of its dairy herd because of the availability of inexpensive commercial milk. The farm staff residences were moved, and the cow barns mostly demolished.

In addition to a chapel, four additional large buildings were built on the East Campus after 1950. These included the Dix Pavilion, named for the founding force behind Saint Elizabeths, and the John Howard Pavilion, the relocated facility for the criminally insane.

Changes to the West Campus since that time have been significant but have altered little of its overall setting and feeling. In addition to the construction of a large warehouse and laundry facility on the western slope of the property, the West Campus lost about fifteen acres and its railroad spur with the construction of Interstate 295 between 1961 and 1966.

EVOLUTION OF CARE

Saint Elizabeths Hospital was the first and only federal mental facility with a national scope. Its early mission, as defined by pioneering mental healthcare reformer Dorothea Dix, was to provide the “most humane care and enlightened curative treatment of the insane of the Army, Navy, and District of Columbia.”

Throughout its more than 150-year history, Saint Elizabeths was often at the forefront of mental healthcare in the United States. In its early years the approach to patient treatment focused on providing the best possible physical environment

for patients. Sited and designed to provide patients with fresh air, sunshine and exercise in a pastoral setting, the hospital was a dramatic departure from the harsh treatment of the mentally ill before Dix began her advocacy in the 1840s.

In the 1880s, as the field of psychology matured so did approaches to providing care for the mentally ill. The concept of moral therapy and its emphasis on physical setting began to give way to more scientific methods.

In July 1881, Charles Guiteau assassinated President James Garfield. Superintendent Godding testified that the assassin was insane and incompetent to stand trial. Guiteau was nonetheless convicted and executed for his crime. Autopsy results indicated brain abnormalities that seemed to support the notion that he was indeed insane.





Godding's experience in the Guiteau case convinced him of the need to know more about

the physiology and pathology of the brain. As a result, he appointed Dr. Isaac Wright Blackburn as pathologist, and Saint Elizabeths became the first mental hospital in the

Built in 1924, Blackburn Laboratory was named for Dr. Isaac Wright Blackburn who had been appointed special pathologist at the hospital in 1884. By 1900, he had established a collection of more than 1,000 brain specimens that helped establish a universal set of reference data for teaching and scientific purposes. Some of these specimens are on display in the new Saint Elizabeths Hospital complex.

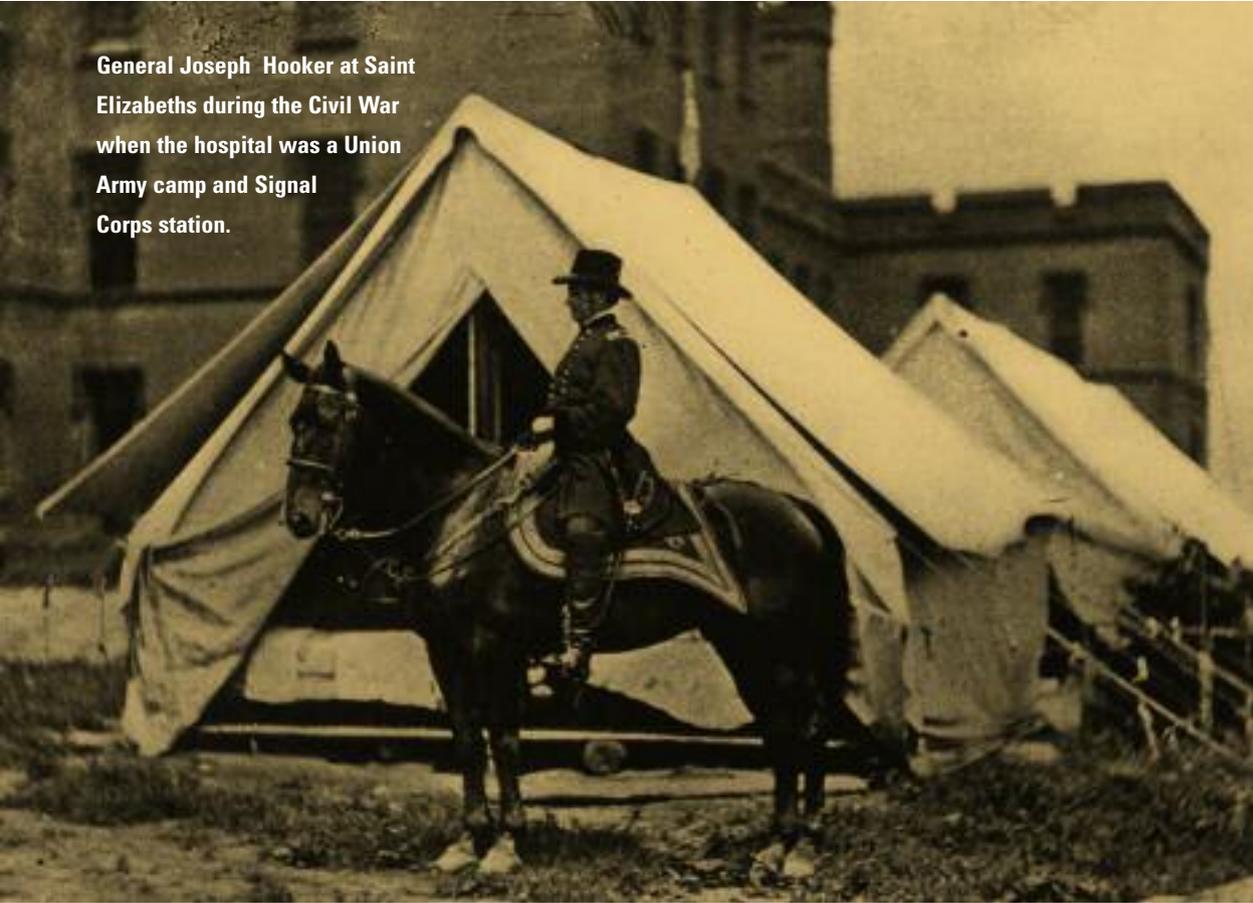
United States equipped with a pathology laboratory. Dr. Blackburn was regarded as one of the finest pathologists in the country and was a pioneer in the field of neuropathology. During his 27 years at Saint Elizabeths Dr. Blackburn performed more than 2,500 autopsies. His research and meticulous pen and ink drawings and photographs were invaluable contributions to the understanding of pathologic lesions. A new laboratory built in 1924 was named in Blackburn's memory and continued to function until 2010, making it the earliest and longest-running pathology lab in a mental institution.

Saint Elizabeths was also the first mental hospital in the country to create a psychotherapy department and the first public mental hospital to be accredited to train medical interns. Saint Elizabeths also included a nursing school from 1894 to 1952. Over the years, the hospital was quick to take up pioneering treatments such as hydrotherapy, art therapy, psychodrama, dance therapy, and others.

At its peak in the 1940s, Saint Elizabeths had over 7,000 patients on campus. The patient population began declining in 1946 when the care of military and veteran patients shifted to the veterans' hospital system. Advances in



General Joseph Hooker at Saint Elizabeths during the Civil War when the hospital was a Union Army camp and Signal Corps station.



African-American males, was converted into a 60-bed general and quarantine hospital for the sailors of the Potomac and Chesapeake fleets. An artificial limb manufacturing shop was established by 1862. Amputees from nearby hospitals were transferred to Saint Elizabeths to be fitted for prostheses and to learn how to use their new limbs. President Abraham Lincoln regularly traveled to the hospital to visit wounded service members.

psychopharmacology, the development of community-based alternatives to institutionalization, and new attitudes toward mental-health care further reduced the need for large public mental health hospitals. By 1978 the patient population had shrunk to around 1,200. Today the patient population of just fewer than 500 is accommodated in a single hospital building opened on the East Campus in 2010.

These substantial nineteenth-century stables built to serve the West Campus are no longer extant.

SAINT ELIZABETHS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

In October 1861 the U.S. Congress authorized temporary use of the unfinished east wing of the Center Building as a 250-bed general hospital for the sick and wounded soldiers of the Union Army. The West Lodge, which had been used for insane





Pavilions like this one were scattered throughout the therapeutic landscape to entice patients to “take the air”.

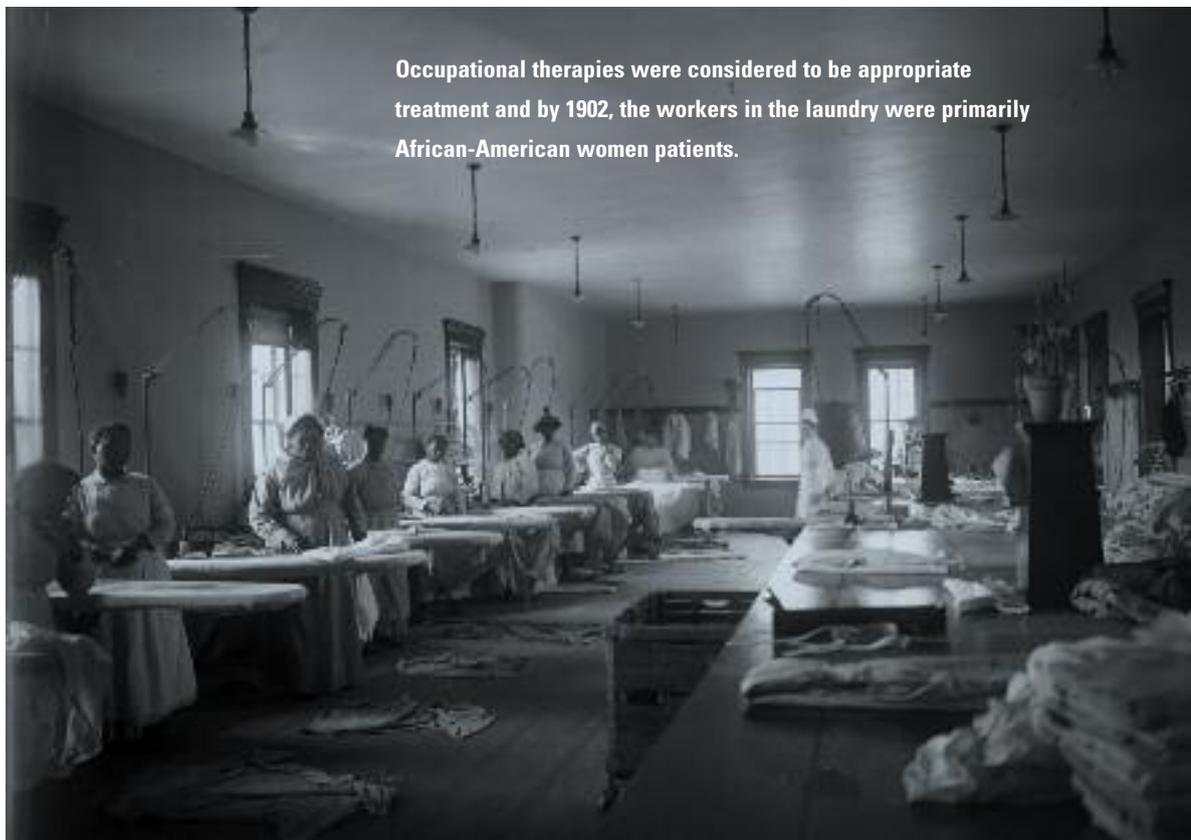
A portion of the hospital farm was converted into a cavalry depot and an encampment for a Marine company. Tents were placed on the grounds for convalescent patients due to overcrowding. What was known as the “Pencote Battery” was constructed on the riverside opposite the Navy Yard. Fort Snyder, one of the fortifications that ringed the Capital was constructed on the East Campus.

In 1866, Congress passed an act permitting the hospital to admit all Union veterans diagnosed with mental illness within three years of discharge.

THE FUTURE

Both the federal government-controlled West Campus and the District-controlled East Campus are slated for significant redevelopment over the next decade. The West Campus and a small portion of the East Campus will become the headquarters for the Department of Homeland Security. This project will bring a cabinet-level agency headquarters and 14,000 federal employees to the Congress Heights neighborhood. The remainder of the East Campus not in hospital use will be redeveloped with a mix of public and private uses.

The new developments planned by the federal and District governments will bring risk and reward to the historic fabric of Saint Elizabeths. The development will change the look and feel of this National Historic Landmark, but it also offers an unprecedented opportunity to preserve and re-use the buildings and landscapes that make Saint Elizabeths such an important part of our history.



Occupational therapies were considered to be appropriate treatment and by 1902, the workers in the laundry were primarily African-American women patients.



Why is Saint Elizabeths a National Historic Landmark?

In 1990, the U.S. Department of Interior designated the Saint Elizabeths Hospital campus a National Historic Landmark (NHL). It is one of only 2,500 historic places in the country to receive this high distinction. Saint Elizabeths is recognized as an NHL for its architectural and social importance to the history of the United States, its Gothic Revival, Italianate and Classical Revival architecture, its landscapes, its association with advancements in the treatment of mental health, and its association with significant individuals such as mental-healthcare reformer Dorothea Dix, Saint Elizabeths' first superintendent Dr. Charles W. Nichols, and Architect of the Capitol Thomas U. Walter.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Developed by the DC Preservation League, this brochure was written by Thomas Otto for the U.S. General Services Administration. The author wishes to extend special thanks to Dr. Suryabala Kanhouwa, Dr. Jogues R. Prandoni, Carter L. Wormeley, William B. Willis, Robinson & Associates, Inc., Heritage Landscapes, LLC, John Milner and Associates, and Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc.

This project has been funded in part by a U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund grant administered by the DC Historic Preservation Office/Office of Planning. However, the contents and opinions contained in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

This program has received Federal financial assistance for the identification, protection, and/or rehabilitation of historic properties and cultural resources in the District of Columbia. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability in its federally assisted programs. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240.

This project has been funded in part by a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation through the Dorothea de Schweinitz Preservation Fund for Washington, DC.

Photographs and drawings used throughout this brochure were compiled from the National Archives and Records Administration, Dr. Suryabala Kanhouwa and Dr. Jogues R. Prandoni.

**DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
1100 4TH STREET, SW, SUITE E650
WASHINGTON, DC 20024**

