NAVY MEDICINE IN THE AGE OF SAIL
THE ADVENT OF HOSPITAL CARE

- The concept of hospitalization in the Navy was a gradual development. Until the 1830s, the Navy shared marine hospitals (forerunners of Public Health Service hospitals).
- The Navy also operated several temporary hospitals near Navy Yards along the eastern seaboard and overseas to support the fleet.
- The Hospital Act of 1811 authorized the construction of the first permanent naval hospitals. Naval Hospital Norfolk (Portsmouth) was the first of these to open.
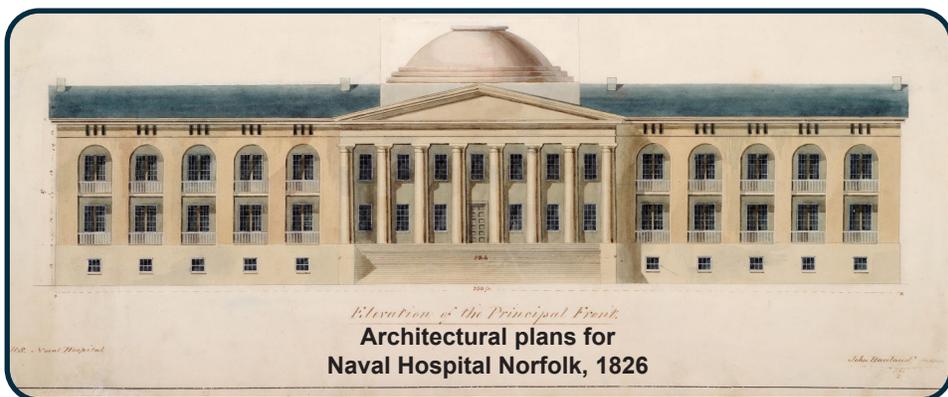
Architectural plans for Naval Hospital Norfolk, 1826

FIRST SITES SELECTED UNDER THE HOSPITAL ACT

Norfolk, Virginia
- **Site purchased:** on federally owned land since 1799; additional acreage purchased in 1827
- **Opened:** **1830**
- **Status:** Active. Part of Naval Medical Center Portsmouth.

Washington, D.C.
- **Site purchased:** 1821
- **Opened:** **1866** (occupied temporary buildings prior to this)
- **Status:** Active. Relocated to Foggy Bottom, D.C., in 1906 and Bethesda, Md., in 1942. Now part of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC) in Bethesda.

Chelsea, Massachussetts
- **Site purchased:** 1823
- Opened: **1836**
- **Status:** Inactive. Closed in 1974.

Brooklyn, New York
- **Site purchased:** 1824
- **Opened:** **1838**
- **Status:** Inactive. Closed in 1948.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- **Site purchased:** 1826
- **Opened:** **1834** as part of Naval Asylum (Naval Home, Naval School and Naval Hospital)
- **Status:** Inactive. Relocated in 1868, 1904, 1917, and 1935. Closed in 1993.

The Hospital Fund

- **1798.** Legislation allowing Sailors and Marines to be treated in designated marine hospitals (forerunner of the public health service). This was funded by a 20-cent monthly deduction from the pay of merchant seamen, Navy Sailors, officers, and Marines, creating a Marine Hospital Fund, which supported a network of Marine Hospitals in major port cities along the East Coast.
- **Feb. 26, 1811.** Congress approved "An Act establishing Navy Hospitals." The Act directed that money collected from naval personnel and the unexpended balance from the Marine Hospital Fund should be paid to the Secretaries of the Navy, Treasury, and Army. These were to act as "commissioners" of Navy hospitals. The commissioners were authorized to choose suitable sites for permanent hospitals and were then to oversee construction at these locations.
- **1820s.** Hospital commissioners select the first permanent naval hospital sites.
- **1830.** Naval Hospital Norfolk (Portsmouth) becomes the first to admit patients.
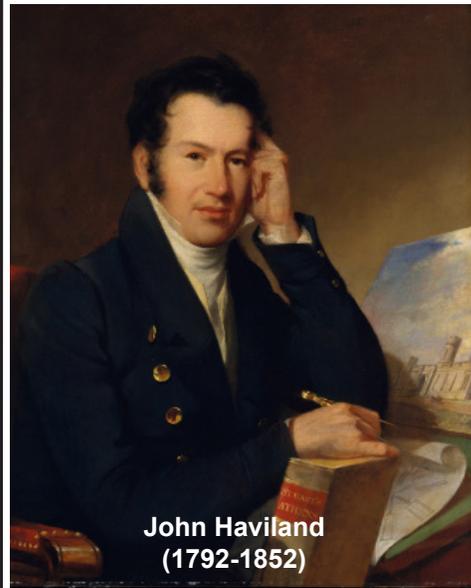
LEGENDARY AMERICAN ARCHITECTS AND U.S. NAVAL HOSPITALS

- Architects Benjamin Latrobe, William Strickland and John Haviland were the first to submit plans for naval hospitals.
- John Haviland was a British-born American architect best known for his neo-classical designs. Eastern State Penitentiary, Franklin Institute (original), The Toombs, and Naval Hospital Norfolk were among his best known designs.

John Haviland (1792-1852)

"This building is constructed of granite and freestone, . . . its entrance facade faces the north-east and Norfolk, and embellished with a bold Doric Portico of ten columns accessible by twenty steps that stretch ninety two feet the whole length of the portico. the whole length of this front is finished of chisel dressed Virginia Freestone, all other external surfaces of the edifice is finished with hammer dressed granite."
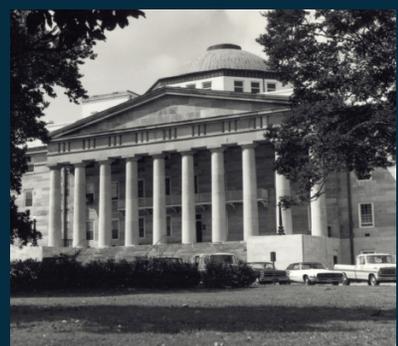
~Haviland's description of his design for Naval Hospital Norfolk (now building 1 at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth), 1827

FIRST OCONUS HOSPITALS

- The first outside the continental United States (OCONUS) naval hospital was established in support of the Mediterranean Fleet during the First Barbary War (1801-1805).
- In October 1804, Surgeon Edward Cutbush, USN, secured the use of a villa in Syracuse (Siracusa), Sicily as a hospital.
- The hospital was used by the U.S. Navy until December 1806 when it was transferred to the British Royal Navy.
- The U.S. Navy operated hospitals in Port Mahon, Mallorca, and Leghorn (Livorno), Tuscany in the early nineteenth century.

Former home of U.S. Naval Hospital Syracuse, ca. 1971
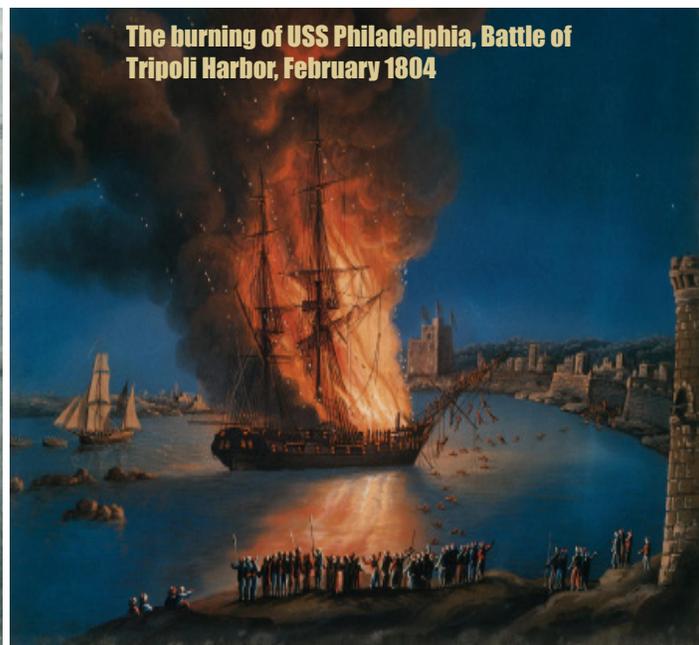
The burning of USS Philadelphia, Battle of Tripoli Harbor, February 1804

Did you know?

- Despite initial land acquisition in 1821, Naval Hospital Washington did not open until 1866.
- The hospital was located at 9th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, Southeast, from 1866 to 1906. Remarkably, this structure endures today as the Hill Center, a vibrant hub for arts and education.
- Before the hospital's construction, the Navy operated a series of temporary medical facilities and apothecaries in close proximity to the Washington Navy Yard.

SOURCES:

Artwork:
- All artwork courtesy of BUMED Archives, Mariners Museum, Navy Art Gallery, Navy History and Heritage Command.

Publications:
- Holcomb, R. (1930).

A Century with Norfolk Naval Hospital, 1830-1930. Portsmouth: Printcraft Publishing Co.
- Langley, H.L. (1995). *A History of Medicine in the Early U.S. Navy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.