

Hot Springs Arkansas is a city of firsts. Most people know that the Hot Springs National Park was the first national park in the United States. Some may know that Hot Springs is home to Arkansas' first skyscraper. But most are unaware that Downtown hosts the nation's first military hospital. The former Army and Navy Hospital, now known as the Arkansas Career Training Institute, towers above the historic district, striking awe and grandeur into tourists and locals alike. This building, first opened in 1887, contains over 130 years worth of rich history. It has treated over 125,000 patients throughout its lifetime, including Helen Keller and Jo Dimaggio. The hospital was one of the leaders in the world on polio and arthritis research. Due to its' location being chosen solely on its proximity to the "healing waters" of Hot Springs, the hospital is a testament to the glory days of bathing. There is so much to be explored behind these grand walls.

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Early history

After the Civil War, exhausted and wounded soldiers made pilgrimage to Hot Springs for the healing properties that they believed the waters to possess. In 1852, Senator and General John A. Logan, a veteran himself, visited Hot Springs as prescribed by his physician Dr. A.S. Garnett. Garnett was a former Navy surgeon who based his practice in Hot Springs. Garnett had long been advocating for the establishment of an Army Navy hospital in his town, which would prove beneficial to his business. He successfully conveyed this idea to General Logan. When he returned to Washington D.C., Logan proposed the plans to Congress. At last, on April 20th, 1882, President Chester A. Arthur signed the bill, stating that “ \$100,000 be, and hereby is, appropriated for the erection of an Army and Navy Hospital at Hot Springs, Arkansas, which

shall be erected by and under the direction of the Secretary of War.” (text fade over image of the pres which is zooming out)

This amendment was the creation of the first peacetime general hospital under the army. The *original* Army and Navy General Hospital was designed by John L. Smithmeyer, Superintendent of Southern Architecture. This building, built of brick and wood, had a Swiss chalet style and could hold a capacity of 100 patients. Construction began in February of 1884 under the supervision of Captain J. W. Jacobs.

Many hospitals were built with pavilion-plans, which consisted of wards that were physically separated from one another and connected by corridors. This was because doctors mistakenly believed that diseases were transmitted through vapors. The original navy hospital was built pavilion-style, and because of this, the original wooden structure was very spread out, resulting in inconveniently long walking distances between doctors and patients.

New Building/ Architecture

Around the turn of the century, the Navy began remodeling its hospitals built on pavilion-plans. The new “Type Naval Hospital Plan” replaced the old style. This new scheme generally consisted of a multi-story main hospital, a contagious disease hospital, and living quarters arranged in a T-shape. The modern design eliminated the cumbersome distance between patients and doctors. Following World War I, this plan became a necessity, as pavilion hospitals were unable to accommodate large amounts of patients in time of crisis.

In 1929, the average number of patients at a single time in Hot Springs were 239, but the wooden hospital could only hold 80-100. So, in 1930, Congress appropriated \$1,500,000 for the construction of a new hospital built in the fashion of the new “Type Naval Hospital Plan”. The

military appointed Captain Edward M. George as the overseer of construction in December of 1931. Unfortunately, the architect's identity remains unknown. (Photo of construction here).

On December 13th, 1931, Captain George described the plans for the new hospital to the Arkansas Gazette.

“The structure, will be of the reinforced concrete type, veneered with light colored brick, trimmed with white stone, and ornamented with ornamental bronze, It will have a central tower 12 stories high, standing 189 feet above the roadway at the main entrance. ... Provision will be made throughout for the piping of both hot and cold domestic water and hot and cold mineral water. The hospital will be equipped with the best materials and latest features throughout.

Marble, tile and terrazzo will be used freely” - “To Receive Bids for New Hospital," Arkansas Gazette, 13 Dec 1931

(fade in and out of the construction photos)

Captain George did exactly what he planned to, and spared no expense in constructing one of the most impressive architectural masterpieces in the south. But the building's imposing and breathtaking image was not the only thing that served to the hospitals' significance; this new Type-Naval structure was far more advanced than its' predecessor. It's maximum capacity was 500 patients, whereas the former hospital could host only 100. The new hospital contained a refrigerated morgue, an x-ray treatment wing, the most modern equipment money could buy, and the finest operating rooms in the south. The hospital was known throughout the nation as one of the finest facilities in existence.

This all changed during World War II. Despite all efforts at revitalizing the hospital into a modern masterpiece, the medical center simply could not keep up with the influx of patients. Normally, the hospital admitted around 400 patients per month. However, in June of 1945 alone, over 1,800 soldiers were admitted. The Army and Navy hospital rented out several hotels in the

area to accommodate the influx of patients, including the Arlington Hotel, the DeSoto hotel, the former Majestic Hotel, and the former Eastman Hotel.

The Army and Navy hospital specialized in other things than general care for soldiers. The hospital was a training facility throughout World War II, where men could receive technical training in various medical fields, including dentistry, surgery, and pharmacy. The army also established the first Medical Department Enlisted Technicians School for members of the Women's Army Corps at the Army & Navy General Hospital. The women there were responsible for developing the program guide that insured standardization throughout all existing and future Women's Army Corps technical schools.

The hospital was the leader in the nation at treating poliomyelitis and arthritis. Patients from all over the world traveled to Hot Springs to be admitted into the care of the hospital. It was globally renowned for its state-of-the-art facilities and proximity to the healing waters. It was also one of the top five employers in all of Garland County. Despite its gleaming reputation, on October 20th, 1952, the military announced the closure of the Army & Navy General Hospital. It is unknown why the hospital was closed, but it is possible that it was due to the lack of servicemen after World War II, or the fact that the hospital was not located on or near an active army base. The final closure date was set for April 1st, 1960. Leading up to the closure, many sought out alternative uses for the infrastructure.

The hospital was determined to be given to the state. On the last day of operations, April Fools Day of 1960, the army sold the hospital to the State of Arkansas for \$1. On January 3rd,

1961, the Army & Navy general hospital was opened as the Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center. Approximately 25,000 Arkansans with disabilities were treated there.

In 2009, the building changed hands once again. The HSRC became the Arkansas Career Training Institute, as it is still known today.

The Army and Navy General Hospital has made immense contributions to the field of military medicine. It has admitted thousands of patients, including General John (Black Jack) Pershing, Al Jolson, Jo DiMaggio, Eddie Duchin, Kay Kyser; Alan Ladd; and Helen Keller. It was one of the first technical schools in the world to teach both men and women in various medical disciplines. This grand building was once known by all as the best institution in the world for treating polio and arthritis. The walls of this structure have seen over a century's worth of rich history. So much of this history is unknown today; lost to time. Let us celebrate this building's past, and appreciate the future that it helped to give us.