
A History of TOGUS

149th Anniversary of VA's Oldest Veterans' Hospital



Introduction

On November 1, 1866, the first Federal veterans facility hospital-home established for disabled veterans who served in *volunteer* forces of the Union Army, known then as the Eastern Branch of the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, opened near Augusta, Maine. It was the first federal institution ever established for veterans of volunteer military forces and was the origins of today's VA hospital system.



Augusta, Me., Thursday, Sept. 27.
Gen. E. W. HINKS is in town making arrangements for the immediate occupation of the Togus Springs House, as the New-England branch of the United States Military Asylum, the property having been purchased for such purpose. Dr. BOWMAN B. BREED, of Lynn, Mass., will have charge of the Asylum.

Trot at the State Horse Fair.
Augusta, Me., Thursday, Sept. 27.
At a single dash of five miles to wagon at the Maine Horse show to-day, *Somerset* (formerly *Spokane Boy*) was the winner. His whole time being 14 minutes and 69 seconds. His first and best ride was made in 2:51. The Fair will close to-morrow.

In the wake of the American Civil War, thousands of men—many of whom were amputees and recent immigrants with no families—desperately needed help. Many of the men could not return to their prior civilian occupations as farmers, factory and railroad workers, and such, because of their war injuries and disabilities. The National Asylum for Disable Volunteer Soldiers, re-named as the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS) in 1873, provided medical care, housing, schools, job training, jobs, and other services to the disabled veterans in a residential setting.

The Civil War prison at Point Lookout, Maryland, was authorized as site for the first National Home in 1865, but a clear title could not be obtained, so the summer resort known as Togus Springs in Maine came under consideration instead. Horace Beals, a wealthy New York businessman, had purchased the resort in 1859 from Orren Emerson and invested roughly \$100,000 to make it into a summer resort comparable to Saratoga Springs. Beals died in the fall of 1864 and his family could not keep up the property, so his heirs sold it.

The urgent needs of disabled veterans, hindered by nearly a year of delays in forming a working Board of Managers, forced the first National Home to open before it was fully ready. A Congressional amendment reorganized the Board of Managers from a body of 100 to 12 in March 1866 and shortly afterwards two of its members, Gov. Frederick Smyth of New Hampshire and Hon. Lewis Gunckel, visited the Togus resort and recommended it as the first National Home.

Photos:

Top – 1891 lithograph of the Eastern Branch, Library of Congress

Bottom - Dr. B.B. Breed, Civil War surgeon/Togus' first surgeon, sitting inside tent to the right of the pole, 1864 c., Library of Congress