

HAMPTON VAMC NATIONAL CEMETERY

National Soldiers' Home

In 1870, the federal government bought the building that had served as Chesapeake Military Hospital during the Civil War. It became the Southern Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, the fourth such facility. This Tidewater Virginia site was authorized for Civil War veterans, including former U.S. Colored Troops, who required a milder climate than other National Homes, at the time, located in Maine, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

The old hospital became part of a sprawling campus. Its buildings included a theater, library, chapel, and beer hall. Operated like the military, barracks at the National Home had company designations and men wore uniforms. It was initially open to disabled veterans of the Mexican and Civil wars who received pensions of less than \$16 per month.



Hospital building at the Southern Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1902. Library of Congress.



Newspaper headlines from the Daily Press, Newport News, Virginia, August 1 (front) and 16 (back), 1899.

Yellow Fever Scare

In 1899, more than 3,700 veterans resided at the Southern Branch. On July 29 that year, the chief surgeon sought the services of a yellow fever expert. Doctors quarantined the National Home and the adjacent town of Phoebus.

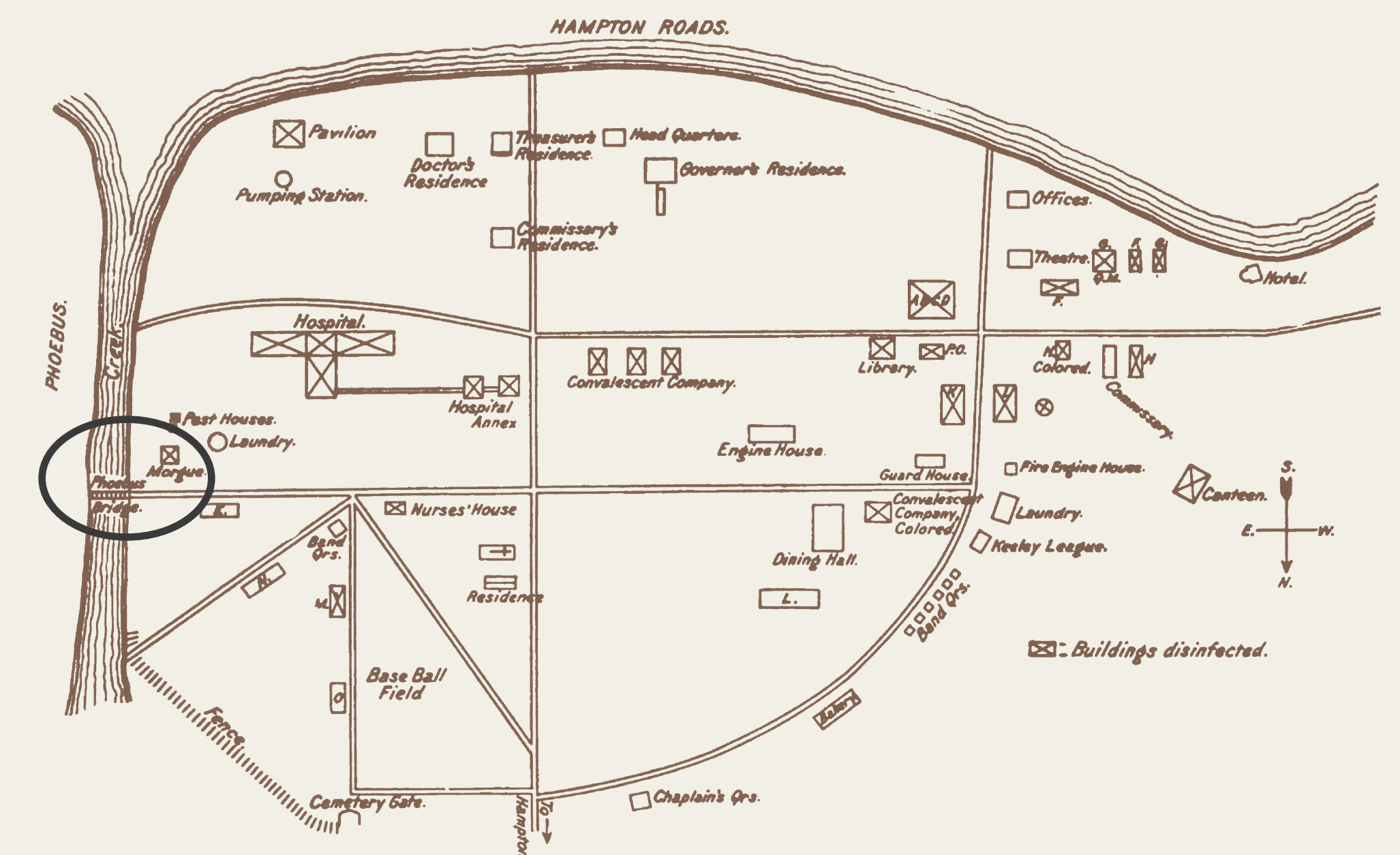
Authorities relocated 1,500 veterans, nearly half of the National Home population. Men occupied tents set up on the grounds while residence halls were fumigated and bed linens were disinfected or burned. The decisive actions by medical authorities controlled the spread of the disease. About forty cases of yellow fever were confirmed at the Home; of those thirteen died.

The Cemetery

An earlier yellow fever outbreak had killed more than 2,000 people in Hampton. Thus, medical authorities and local, state, and federal government officials took an epidemic threat seriously. Though Hampton National Cemetery was just outside the National Home, the quarantine forbade anyone from leaving the campus. Home officials were forced to create a new cemetery on the grounds.

By September 1899, twenty Civil War and Mexican War veterans were buried in the small cemetery, including eight yellow fever victims. The rest died of other causes during the quarantine. Two civilians who died in 1909 and 1912 brought the total number of graves to twenty-two.

Established as the result of a short-lived health crisis at the National Home, the smallest national cemetery has no lodge or enclosing wall. It has been erroneously called the “Spanish-American War” cemetery because the yellow fever outbreak occurred while the United States was engaged in that war.



National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers campus at the time of the 1899 yellow fever outbreak. Annual Report of the Marine Hospital Service. Note the cemetery gate at bottom left, that led to Hampton National Cemetery. The new cemetery was established near the morgue, circled.