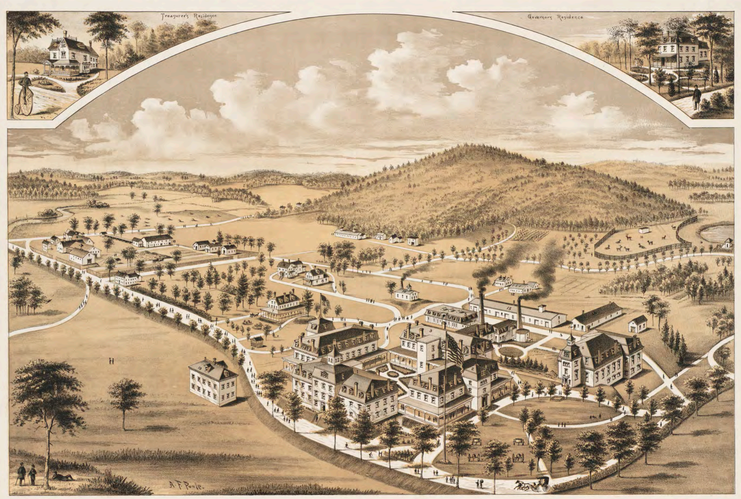
TOGUS NATIONAL CEMETERY

National Home

The Eastern Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS) opened in 1866. This first and oldest National Home was established in a former resort, called Togus, in southeast Maine. In its first year, more than 250 service-disabled Civil War veterans found refuge at the Togus facility. Its average residential population grew to more than 2,000 in the early twentieth century.

By 1900, any honorably discharged U.S. soldier, sailor, or marine (who had not fought for the Confederacy) was eligible to live at a National Home if a disability or old age prevented him from supporting himself or his family. Veterans lived, worked, and received medical treatment here.

The population fell significantly by 1910 as aging Civil War veterans' death rates rose. The National Homes were merged with the U.S. Veterans Bureau and the Bureau of Pensions to form the Veterans Administration (now U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) in 1930.



Bird's-eye view of the Eastern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1885. Boston Public Library, Norman B. Leventhal Map Center.

NHDVS Cemetery

In 1867, a cemetery was established on the west side of the Togus campus. The irregular layout is a result of the rolling and rocky terrain. August Moller, a former New York volunteer soldier, died in spring 1867 and was the first veteran buried here. Memorial Day programs began in 1868 and continue to this day.

Funeral scene with bugler and honor guard firing salute, from 1910 souvenir booklet "Eastern Branch National Home for D.V.S. Maine."

Funerals held for the veterans were solemn and formal. The U.S. flag flew at half-mast. The casket rode to the cemetery on a horse-drawn caisson, accompanied by comrades and the National Home band. A chaplain spoke at the gravesite, an honor guard fired a salute, and a bugler played "Taps." The original or West Cemetery was used until 1936 when a second, East Cemetery, opened. They became jointly known as Togus National Cemetery in 1973.

One Civil War recipient of the Medal of Honor is buried here: John Preston, landsman, U.S.S. *Oneida*. First bestowed in 1863, it is the highest award for military valor in the U.S. Armed Services. For acts above and beyond the call of duty, 1,522 individuals who served in the Civil War received the medal. Preston's commendation cites his heroic actions during the Battle of Mobile Bay, August 5, 1864. He died at Togus in 1885 (Section H, Grave 456).

Constructed by Veterans

The Soldiers and Sailors Monument was designed and built by Togus residents. The 30-foot-tall granite-block obelisk was dedicated in 1889.

During a major restoration project, a time capsule containing NHDVS annual reports, newspapers, and photographs was discovered in the monument. A new time capsule was placed under the pyramidal capstone when the monument was rededicated in September 2010.

Postcard view of Soldiers and Sailors Monument, c. 1913. National Cemetery Administration.