

## HISTORY OF THE MANCHESTER VA MEDICAL CENTER

The Manchester Veterans Administration Hospital (now known as the Manchester VA Medical Center) was completed in 1950 as part of the post-World War II initiative of the Veterans Administration to provide modern medical care and facilities to veterans of the war, some 16 million in number. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the successor to the Veterans Administration, describes this postwar design and construction campaign as its “third generation” of hospitals. The Manchester VA Medical Center campus is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as the Manchester Veterans Administration Hospital Historic District. The historic district is significant as an example of the VA’s third generation of hospitals which provided consolidated, modern medical services to veterans throughout the post-World War II period. The district is also significant for its Prairie Style architecture, which was designed by two well-established private architectural firms, as opposed to being designed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which was common practice during the development of the first two generations of VA hospitals.



Photo 1: Historic postcard of the main hospital building at Manchester VA Medical Center.

### EXPLORE THE THREE GENERATIONS OF VA HOSPITALS

#### **First Generation (1866-1907): Civil War Era**

- Referred to as National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers
- Located on large tracts of land in rural areas
- Large campuses laid out like military bases, similar to mini cities
- Facilities for recreational and occupational activities, including associated farms
- Provided lifelong medical care
- On-site cemeteries

#### **Second Generation (1919-1950): World War I Era**

- Located on large tracts of land in rural areas
- Focused on rehabilitative care instead of lifelong care
- Often featured Colonial Revival or Classical Revival style architecture

#### **Third Generation (1946-1958): Post World War II Era**

- Referred to as the “Skyscraper-era” of VA Hospitals
- Main hospital buildings built as skyscrapers to consolidate services, many of which included wings dedicated to research
- Located in more populated areas near medical schools and other research facilities
- Hospitals sited near transportation corridors to provide improved access for veterans
- Hospital campuses were much smaller than the first two generations
- Largest VA hospital construction program in history

## PLANNING THE MANCHESTER VA MEDICAL CENTER

### **Campaign to get a VA Hospital in New Hampshire**

At the end of World War I, New Hampshire lobbied for a Veterans Administration hospital to serve its veterans, but was unsuccessful. The state put forth another strong effort starting in 1938. New Hampshire repeatedly sent a Congressional Delegation to Washington, DC to plead to the Veterans Administration Hospital Board for its selection to build a hospital. The state ultimately succeeded in 1945 when it was selected to receive one of 56 new hospitals. From there, Concord, Franklin, Keene, Nashua, Portsmouth, and Manchester competed for the contract. Manchester proved to be an ideal location for a new 150-bed medical center for several key reasons. Chief among these reasons was the city's close proximity to Boston, which boasted a number of research facilities, including one of the most prestigious in the world at Harvard University. With available land on the outskirts of the city, Manchester also had an existing robust infrastructure and transportation network, making access for the veteran population easier.

### **Acquisition of Land and Smyth Tower**

An approximately 34.5-acre site on the northeastern edge of Manchester was selected for the location of the new Veterans Administration hospital. This site included the 11-acre "Smyth Park" and Smyth Tower, which was donated to the city in 1939 by Marion C. Smyth, the widow of former New Hampshire Governor Frederick Smyth. Frederick Smyth served as the Governor of New Hampshire from 1865 to 1867, and was fittingly an advocate for veteran's health care after the Civil War. Inspired by Scottish lookout towers from his travels, Smyth erected the stone tower in 1888, which would later bear his name. Smyth Tower stands 40 feet high and features two-foot thick walls, an eight-foot deep basement, three upper floors, and a crenellated parapet that encircles the roof. The interior diameter of the tower measures 24 feet, and the exterior diameter measures 28 feet

Following the governor's death in 1899, Smyth Tower fell prey to vandals. Between November of 1938 and June of 1939, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) repaired the tower. Following its restoration, the City of Manchester accepted the tower and surrounding land as a gift from Governor Smyth's widow, Marion C. Smyth. In September of 1939, the tower was dedicated by the Manchester Radio Club, a group of amateur radio operators. When World War II began, the tower was used for communications by the Civil Defense System of Manchester.

When the land surrounding Smyth Tower was selected as the site for the new Manchester VA Hospital, plans originally called for the demolition of the tower to make way for tennis courts. A crane was in position to demolish the tower when several prominent friends of Marion C. Smyth, accompanied by her attorney, arrived to the scene and implored the Engineer-In-Charge to spare the tower for sentimental reasons. The Boston and Washington offices of the Veterans Administration were contacted immediately, and the decision was made to spare the tower. Smyth Tower is now managed by the VA as part of an agreement for use of the land, and it stands today as it did at the end of World War II.

Smyth Tower was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 24, 1978.



Photo 2: Photograph of Smyth Tower after an ice storm.



Interior photograph of the ground floor of Smyth Tower.



Interior photograph of the radio room in Smyth Tower.



## DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE MANCHESTER VA MEDICAL CENTER

Construction of the Manchester VA Medical Center was managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who hired private architects to prepare designs of the new hospital campus. This included two architecture firms: James H. Ritchie and Associates, and Faulkner, Kingsbury, and Stenhouse; and one landscape architecture firm: Shurcliff & Shurcliff.

Plans for the Manchester VA Medical Center were developed in 1948. Construction began in 1949 and extended over the course of roughly one year, reaching completion in 1950. The main hospital building was built by Boston construction firm George A. Fuller Company, and the support buildings were erected by Davison Construction, a local construction company. Over the years, the buildings and campus of the Manchester VA Medical Center have been modified and updated to support the facility's operations and care of our nation's veterans.



Photo 5: 1949 photograph of the main hospital building under construction.



NEW ENGLAND DIVISION BOSTON, MASS. CORPS OF ENGINEERS VETERANS ADMINISTRATION  
Contract by Davison Construction Co. No. W-19-016-eng-3760 9 March 1949  
Male Attendants' Dormitory - Boiler House and Garage  
File No. 161 Manchester, N. H. Veterans Administration Hospital 29 September 1949



NEW ENGLAND DIVISION BOSTON, MASS. CORPS OF ENGINEERS VETERANS ADMINISTRATION  
Contract by Davison Construction Co. No. W-19-016-eng-3760 9 March 1949  
Nurses' Quarters and Manager's Home  
File No. 159 Manchester, N. H. Veterans Administration Hospital 29 September 1949

Photo 6: 1949 photograph of the Male Attendants' Quarters (foreground), and Boiler House and Garage (background) under construction.

Photo 7: 1949 photograph of the Nurse's Quarters (foreground) and Manager's Home (background) under construction.

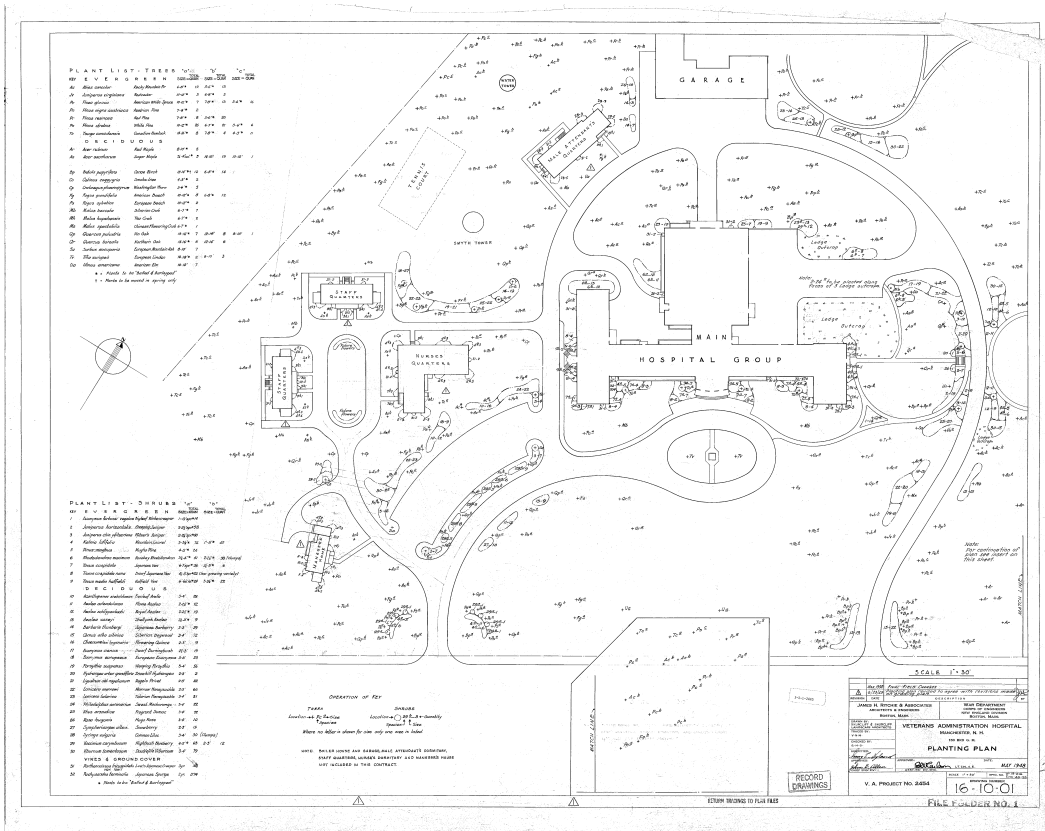


Photo 8: 1948 planting plan and site layout of the Manchester Veterans Administration Hospital.



Figure 39. Architectural rendering of the site plan for the Veterans Administration Hospital in Manchester, New Hampshire (VA).

Photo 9: Architectural rendering of the site plan of the Manchester Veterans Administration Hospital. The rendering includes tennis courts (center), which were never constructed, and designs for the employee residences (left) that differ from what was built.

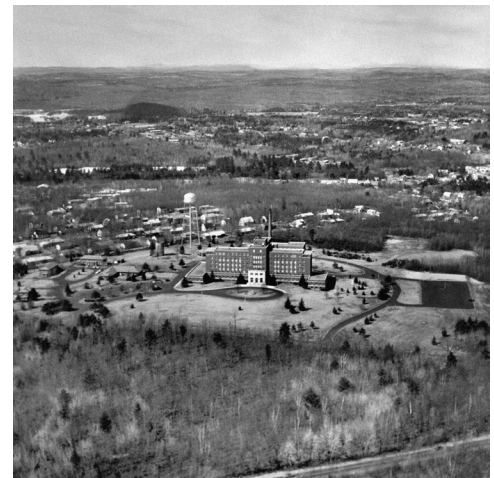


Photo 10: Circa 1960 bird's eye photograph of the Manchester VA Medical Center campus.

## Landscape Design of the Manchester VA Medical Center

The landscape of the Manchester VA Medical Center was planned by Boston landscape architecture firm Shurcliff & Shurcliff. The firm was founded by Arthur A. Shurcliff, who was renowned for his excellence in city planning. Some of his most prominent work includes the American Colonial Revival landscape design for Colonial Williamsburg. Shurcliff also worked with well-known landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted in founding the four-year landscape architecture program at Harvard University. In 1904, Shurcliff opened his own firm and was later joined by his son Sidney to form Shurcliff & Shurcliff. Including a thoughtfully and beautifully designed landscape was a tradition seen across all three generations of VA hospitals, and was believed to aid in the recovery process of patients. Shurcliff & Shurcliff continued this tradition by incorporating a planting plan that was interspersed



between the main hospital building and the associated support buildings at the Manchester VA Medical Center, primarily using mature pines and lawns, to create a bucolic, campus-like setting.

### **The Architects of the Manchester VA Medical Center**

Two architecture firms designed the buildings of the Manchester VA Medical Center. Located out of Boston, James H. Ritchie and Associates designed the main hospital building. The building was conceived as a modern skyscraper with tiered wings extending into the landscape, which is emblematic of Prairie Style architecture. In keeping with the philosophy of the third generation of VA Hospitals, the skyscraper design allowed for the consolidation of hospital services. The firm also designed the boiler and garage building, which was built to the rear of the hospital. James H. Ritchie and Associates was known for its work at the University of Massachusetts campus in Amherst, as well as for winning the commission for the Boston Consumptives Hospital, which was designed between 1929 and 1935, and later listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The remaining support buildings, including the employee residences, were designed by the Washington, DC-based firm, Faulkner, Kingsbury, and Stenhouse. The firm was well established as a hospital designer, and designed additional campuses in the region, a number of which won awards. These campuses include Bethesda Suburban Hospital in Maryland (built 1943), and the George Washington University Hospital (built 1946) and Holy Cross Hospital (built 1963) in Washington, D.C., among others.

### **Prairie Style Architecture**

The buildings of the original design for the Manchester VA Medical Center are late examples of Prairie Style architecture. Prairie Style architecture is considered to be a distinctly American architectural style that was popularized by architect Frank Lloyd Wright during the early twentieth century. Inspired by the expansive American plains, or prairie, this style of architecture was adapted into a variety of eclectic forms and used into the mid-twentieth century. Identifying features of Prairie Style architecture include long horizontal forms, flat or low-pitched hipped roofs with wide overhanging eaves, asymmetrical facades with stone or brick horizontal banding, and windows often grouped in horizontal ribbons. Prairie Style architecture was most commonly constructed throughout the Midwest. A collection of buildings in this style like those of the Manchester VA Medical Center are a rare occurrence in the Northeast/New England region of the United States. Manchester is also home to two Prairie Style dwellings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright: the Zimmerman House (built 1951) and the Toufic H. Kalil House (built 1955), which are both located on Heather Street.

### **EMPLOYEE RESIDENCES AT THE MANCHESTER VA MEDICAL CENTER**

When designed and built, the Manchester VA Medical Center campus included five residential buildings. The residences housed the facility's manager, staff, nurses, and male attendants.



Photo 11: 2022 photograph of four of the five historic employee residences at the Manchester VA Medical Center. Beginning in the back left and moving clockwise, there is the Manager's Home (back left), Staff Quarters (back center and back right), and Nurse's Quarters (front center).

First and second generation hospitals included employee residences on their campuses out of necessity due to their rural, secluded locations. Third generation hospitals, such as the Manchester VA Medical Center, also included employee residences, despite being located on smaller, more easily accessible urban campuses. Employee residences at third generation hospitals typically included a director or manager's house, staff quarters, and nurse's quarters, which were clustered together on the campus. Quarters for the male attendants were separated and often placed on the other side of the campus, away from the rest of the residential buildings. Residences at the Manchester VA Medical Center reflected this traditional layout, which separated the male attendants' quarters from the other residences.

In the 1990s, the staff quarters and nurse's quarters of the Manchester VA Medical Center were converted into offices, and the male attendants' quarters were converted to serve as a research center.

Four out of the five of the original employee residences are scheduled to be demolished in 2023, including the former Manager's Home, two Staff Quarters, and the Nurse's Quarters. The former residences are being demolished to make way for two new state-of-the-art clinical care buildings and a parking lot to expand patient services at the Manchester VA Medical Center. After the scheduled 2023 demolition, the only former residential building still standing on the Manchester VA Medical Center campus will be the male attendants' quarters, which currently serves as a research center for the facility.

### **Manager's Home**

The Manager's Home was a single-family dwelling with an attached garage. The dwelling was among the more architecturally detailed buildings of the Manchester VA Medical Center campus when compared with the other residences. Its design included a number of prominent elements of Prairie Style architecture, including horizontal banding along the second floor, a low-pitched hipped roof with wide eaves, and asymmetrical facades.



Photo 12: 2022 photograph of the Manager's Home.



Photo 13: 2022 photograph of the primary entrance to the Manager's Home.



Photo 14: 2022 photograph of the rear of the Manager's Home and its attached garage.



## Staff Quarters

The Manchester VA Medical Center included two Staff Quarters, which were designed and built as duplexes. Each duplex featured two side-by-side units that were mirror images of each other. Each individual unit contained a kitchen, dining room, and living room on the first floor, and three bedrooms and a full bathroom on the second floor. A standalone, two-car garage was also included for each building, to be shared by the tenants.



Photo 15: 2022 photograph of one of the Staff Quarters.



Photo 16: 2022 photograph of one of the Staff Quarters.



Photo 17: 1948 architectural drawing of the Staff Quarters elevations.

## Nurse's Quarters

The Nurse's Quarters at the Manchester VA Medical Center was intended to house only female residents when built. The building contained a kitchen, lounge, social room, laundry room, and 10 bedrooms. A bathroom would typically be located between two bedrooms, whose occupants would share that restroom. The head nurse had a private bathroom and living room attached to the bedroom.



Photo 18: 2022 photograph of the Nurse's Quarters.



Photo 19: 2022 photograph of the primary entrance to the Nurse's Quarters.

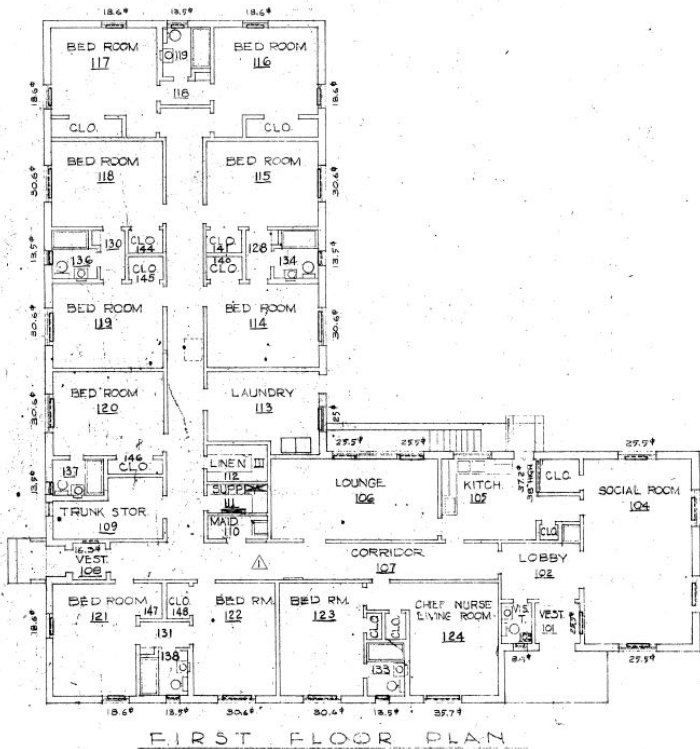


Photo 20: 1948 architectural drawing of the floorplan of the Nurse's Quarters.



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