NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(TYPE ALL ENTRIES - COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS)

1. NAME

COMMON:
PORTSMOUTH NAVAL HOSPITAL

AND/OR HISTORIC:
NORFOLK NAVAL HOSPITAL

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:

From Norfolk-Portsmouth tunnel, right on Washington St., left on Crawford St.

CITY OR TOWN:
Portsmouth (G. William Whitehurst, Congressman, Second District)

STATE:
Virginia

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (CHECK ONE)

- District
- Site
- Building
- Structure
- Object

OWNERSHIP

- Public
- Private
- Both

PUBLIC ACQUISITION:

- In Process
- Being Considered

STATUS:

- Occupied
- Unoccupied

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC:

- Yes
- Restricted
- No

PRESENT USE (CHECK ONE OR MORE AS APPROPRIATE)

- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Educational
- Entertainment

- Government
- Industrial
- Military
- Museum

- Park
- Private Residence
- Religious
- Scientific

- Transportation
- Other (Specify)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
U.S. Government - Rear Admiral Joseph L. Yo, MC. U.S.N.

STREET AND NUMBER:
Commanding Officer Naval Hospital

CITY OR TOWN:
Portsmouth

STATE:
Virginia

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:

City Hall

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Portsmouth

STATE:
Virginia

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE OF SURVEY:
1970

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:
Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN:
Richmond

STATE:
Virginia

CODE:
51
In a letter of 1827 the architect, John Haviland, described the building as follows:

"This building is constructed of granite and Freestone, three stories high on a Basement of twelve feet. Its form is that of a hollow square 172 feet on its principal front, by 192 feet in depth; its entrance facade faces the north-east and Norfolk, and is embellished with a bold Doric Portico of ten columns accessible by twenty steps that stretch ninety-two feet, the whole length of the portico; the whole of this front is finished of chisel-dressed Virginia Freestone; all other external surfaces of this edifice is finished with hammer-dressed granite.

The center part of the two longitudinal or side elevations recede eight feet, leaving a 40 feet wing at each extreme, the recess thus formed is filled up with a Piazza floor, post, and railing, to each story from which every room has access the windows being finished down to each floor combine the property of doors. Similar piazzas are carried round the interior of the hollow square.

In the rear front is disposed the baths water-closets and reservoir insulated from the main building but accessible under cover in each story by means of the piazzas.

The whole of the building is made fire proof with arched ceilings of brickwork with the exception of the two upper floors of the principal front.

The rooms of the whole building are of the most approved dimensions, particular attention has been paid to the very important properties of ventilation, warming, superintendence and classification of the different wards, and the necessary conveniences required at each department. Four fire proof stairways, one at each angle of the plan afford with the assistance of the piazzas private and easy access to each room.

The culinary department is located in the arched Basement of the front nearest the apartments of the superintendant with the bakery and laundry adjoining. The fuel, store rooms, larder and dairy occupy the rooms formed by the foundation of the portico contiguous to the kitchen, washhouse etc., etc.

"This edifice is calculated to accommodate from three to five hundred beds for sick besides sufficient rooms for the superintendants, doctor, nurses, domestics, and the public offices belonging to them."

The roof was of Welsh slate. Haviland had provided for quarters for the superintendant and for the senior surgeon at the left and right front of the hospital, respectively, but these buildings were never erected. However, there was a house with a wharf in front of it which stood in front of the hospital (near the present tennis courts) until about 1860. It was occupied by the superintendant during the first twelve years.

The building needed extensive repairs and improvements in 1877, and in 1907 work was begun to completely reconstruct the building, leaving only the outer walls. Following are just a few of the criticisms of the old building made by Surgeon-General P. M. Rixey:

"The portico, though dignified in appearance, seriously interferes with the usefulness of the building, as it darkens and renders practically useless a large part of the basement and two upper floors."
The piazzas were constructed of wood, and therefore were a fire hazard. The wards "consist of a series of vaults in the form of alcoves, each with a window. Owing to this peculiar arrangement the patient's bed must be in all cases placed in the corner, where there is not sufficient circulation of air. The massive walls are not suitable for a hospital, as the deep embrasures tend to shut out the light and air. In general the wards have the appearance of cells. This is the radical defect of the plan."

The walls were cracked from unequal settling, and the mortar was poor. "The woodwork as originally designed is not of a kind suitable for hospitals. There are a great many projecting cornices and moldings which afford resting places for hospital dust."

In the reconstruction, tons of bricks were removed, and the building was supported with steel girders. Many of the old doors, trim, marble mantel and fireplaces, and inside window-blinds were retained. The shallow dome was added at this time. A structure to the rear, containing the tub rooms, was removed to increase the depth of the foyer and main front. In 1909-10, the new wings were built and further additions were made in 1942-43. In 1960 the 15-story hospital was added to the complex.

There are two monuments on the grounds in front of the hospital. One is a marker erected by Haviland over the grave of Major Saunders, one-time commander of Forts Nelson and Norfolk, who died March 15, 1810. The second is a memorial cannon with inscriptions commemorating Fort Nelson.

8. Architectural firm of Wood, Don and Deming of Washington, D.C. During the remodeling the patients were placed in hospital tents on the grounds. In 1921 the first veterans were admitted for care and in 1960 a modern fifteen story building was added to the complex.

The original portions of the Naval Hospital stand not only as a testament to the nation's early interest in the welfare of its seamen but as a major example of Greek Revival architecture by a leading architect of the period.
In 1798 the United States Congress passed an act creating the Marine Hospital Service, the forerunner of the Public Health Service, and set up a Naval Hospital Fund to be filled by taking twenty cents a month from the pay of every seaman, officer and marine. When plans developed for establishing a marine hospital, the state of Virginia in 1801 offered to supply an appropriate site and in 1826 the city of Norfolk was selected. In 1827 the Commissioners of the Naval Hospital--the Secretaries of War, Navy and Treasury--picked eighteen acres at Fort Nelson, a fortification built during the Revolution to protect Norfolk and later purchased by the federal government in 1800, as the site of the future hospital. Sixty-one acres were purchased to add to the property and John Haviland, well-known Philadelphia architect, was commissioned to draw plans for the new building. Although a similar hospital was begun in Philadelphia at the same time, work on both installations was halted in 1829 due to lack of funds. By July, 1830, however, the north wing of the Portsmouth Naval Hospital was completed and occupied, thus making the hospital "the first permanent structure to be built out of the Hospital Fund." Haviland finished with the project in 1832 although the building was not completely finished until later. As architect he had supervised every aspect of the project although Thomas Tolson supplied the freestone and granite, Isaac Phillips, of Baltimore, the bricks and Mr. Stranton, of Madison, Connecticut, the flagstone. Haviland's scheme for the hospital was apparently so ambitious that its trustees, worried about the expense, sent Charles Bulfinch to make a report on it. He replied that the "location of the hospital appears well calculated for health and to gratify the feelings of hardy seamen for whom it is raised; that the work is well executed and does credit to the science and skill of the architect, John Haviland, Esq..."

The Naval Hospital has had distinguished service serving those in need. In 1855 when Portsmouth lost one-fifth of its population in a dreadful Yellow Fever epidemic, over 500 civilians were treated at the hospital. In April, 1862, the Confederate government surrounded the building with earthworks and renamed it Fort Nelson. The next year it was occupied by Northern troops and re-established as a federal army hospital.

In 1866 the hospital grounds were laid out as a well-landscaped park. Eleven years later the hospital had deteriorated and needed extensive repairs and improvements, and in 1879 steam heat was added to replace the wood stoves. During the Spanish-American War the south wing was put into use, and the entire hospital continued in use through World War I. Between 1907-1909 the hospital was reconstructed and in 1909-1910 the new wings were added, both projects being conducted under the supervision of the
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


Holladay, Mildred M., "History of Portsmouth," in Emmerson, Some Fugitive Items of Portsmouth and Norfolk County History. typescript, 1930's.


10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 20 acres

11. FORM PREPARED BY

VIRGINIA HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION, Staff, James W. Moody, Jr., Director

ORGANIZATION

VIRGINIA HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION

STREET AND NUMBER:

Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond

STATE: Virginia

CODE: 51

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National [ ] State [X] Local [ ]

Name: James W. Moody, Jr., Director

Title: Va. Historic Landmarks Commission

Date: NOV 16 1971

CHIEF, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE: NOV 16 1971