The early history of Walter Reed General Hospital begins here with a few details to set the stage for the photographs in this volume. Limited by an initial appropriation of $100,000 for the land, which purchased a little over 43 acres known as the Cameron Tract, and $200,000 for the buildings, the nascent campus of 1909 contained only the main hospital building for administration, 65–80 beds for inpatient care (reports vary), and two double sets of sergeant’s quarters. During the first two years, support buildings were added to include a quartermaster storehouse and commissary, a stable, a wagon shed and garage, a barracks for the Hospital Corps (Building 7), and two sets of Captain’s quarters (currently the General Officer quarters). In 1911, the Army Nurse Corps Home (Building 12) for 20 nurses was completed. The original clinical facility of Building 1 was soon outgrown, and new additions were added. A separate building for an “isolation hospital” of 12 beds opened in 1913, a west addition to Building 1 was completed in 1914, and an east addition was completed in 1915.

World War I would, of course, change everything. The Post Return for April 1917, the month the United States entered the war, reported an active duty staff of 15 officers and 158 enlisted men, with 121 inpatients and an approximately 180-bed capacity. A total of 173 personnel for 121 patients may seem like excessive staffing, but, at the time, there were only a few civilian employees and active duty personnel who did almost all the work, including clinical care, maintenance of the facility and equipment, minor construction projects, feeding of all personnel, and maintaining the animals.

To care for the war wounded, construction of temporary buildings started on June 15, 1917, and, by the end of the year, the hospital had a capacity of 950 beds. An additional land purchase of a little more than 25 acres was made from several surrounding landowners and along with the original purchase of 43 acres brought the total reservation to 69 acres. By the end of 1918, the total bed capacity was 2,500 beds, and admissions for 1918 were the highest.
for the World War I period at 13,752. If the war was not enough, the great influenza pandemic swept the country and world in the fall of 1918, leading to over 2,000 admissions for influenza and more than 150 deaths at Walter Reed during a difficult 6-month period.

In addition to the wounded, war brought volunteers to the hospital to assist in their care and recovery. Edith Oliver Rea, a wealthy Pittsburgh philanthropist temporarily residing in Washington with her husband who came to assist with the war effort, became a benefactor to Walter Reed. Mrs. Rea was asked by the American Red Cross to be the Field Director at Walter Reed. She did so for 1 year, and then turned the title over to Miss Margaret Lower; but, she stayed on as the leader of the volunteers who, because of their soft pearl-gray uniforms, became known as the Red Cross Gray Ladies, a moniker that spread nationally and continues to this day.

The war generated the need for additional trained nurses, which led to the establishment at Walter Reed and other locations of the Army School of Nursing (ASN) in August 1918. Planned for three years of training, the ASN was the Army’s first adventure into training its own female nurses. Its charter class at Walter Reed swelled to over 400 students and is reputed to be the largest in American history; subsequent classes were significantly smaller. Although trained at government expense, there was no statutory service obligation and less than one-third of the graduates actually elected to enter active duty. The war ended in November 1918, but the ASN remained at Walter Reed until it was phased out in the early 1930s. The ASN was unusual for nursing schools of its day because the purpose of ASN was to train nurses, not to provide a pool of inexpensive skilled labor for its hospital.
This is the oldest known photograph of the main building. Building 1 opened for its first patients on May 1, 1909.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, AMM 484

Originally designed for 65–80 patients, the hospital was expanded to 2,500 beds for servicemembers from World War I.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, 65-12603
Aerial view of the campus is dated March 15, 1919. The annotated photograph identifies three nurses homes, the gatehouse, main entrance, Commander’s Quarters, and Wards 1 through 4. This view is looking toward present-day Georgia Avenue. The Sharpshooter’s Tree can be seen between nurses’ home 1 and the gatehouse. This chaotic picture was typical of the temporary expansion of the campus in World War I. Note the address is Takoma Park, D.C.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, WRAMC History Collection

In July of 1864 the Sharpshooter Tree was used by Confederate soldiers during the Battle of Fort Stevens. General Jubal Early commanded the Confederate Army’s II Corps in its advance on Washington. They used this tulip tree to position sharpshooters to take shots at Union soldiers stationed at Fort Stevens located half a mile to the south.

Source: Library of Congress
Artist's conception of the proposed Army Medical School and Army Medical Center dated 1919.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 2398

Photograph of detachment of medical personnel that opened Walter Reed Hospital on May 1, 1909. Seated in the front are (left to right) Capt. Walter Huggins, acting Quartermaster; Maj. Thomas L. Rhodes, adjutant and surgeon; Col. William Arthur, commanding officer; Capt. William Pipes, Capt. Percival L. Jones.
Source: Signal Corps
This 1918 map (top) of the grounds of the hospital shows the increase in temporary buildings required to serve the returning veterans. Note the greenhouses on the east side of Georgia Avenue. The reverse of the map (bottom) encourages the patients to be active. As the poster says, “something to do” may be things in leather, decorative bookbinding, drawing, block printing, stenciling, metal work, beadwork, or twine work.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, WRAMC History Collection
Artist's conception of the Nurses Quarters and Training School dated February 14, 1919. The Army School of Nursing at Walter Reed opened in 1918. Delano Hall was later built to house the nurses.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 3146
This 1918 artist’s conception is a plan for the Army Medical School. The Army Medical School moved to the hospital campus in 1923 from its location in downtown Washington. A building to house the school was built to the west on a direct line with Building 1. The architecture was compatible with the permanent buildings, the exterior being of brick with limestone trimmings. The main entrance to the south wing lead into a large central lobby. When completed a decade later, the building would consist of two long wings connected by a central portion that housed a large auditorium.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, WRAMC History Collection, Reeve 2211
▲ Red Cross House and Post Exchange.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, NCP 15008

▼ Red Cross volunteers.
Source: Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Directorate of Public Works Archives
The Walter Reed Army General Hospital is located on Georgia Avenue, near Takoma Park, and is on the ground where the battle with General Early’s army was fought during the Civil War. It honors the name of Maj. Walter Reed, Medical Corps, U.S.A., whose life ended on November 23, 1902. (Postcard)
Source: Pierce Collection
Radio communication played a major role in connecting the wounded veterans with the world outside the hospital grounds. In February 1919, the Telegraphy School, with assistance from the Signal Corps, installed two complete sets of wireless instruments. This apparatus consisted of a long-wave receiving set for handling the high-powered overseas stations, and a commercial wave set for recording signals sent out by ship and shore stations. The set could also tune as low as 100 meters, thus enabling the operator to handle the amateurs on the waves of 200 meters. By June 1920, it was considered one of the most up-to-date radio stations of its size on the East Coast. The Come-Back, June 26, 1920. Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, WRAMC History Collection
The Come-Back, published from December 4, 1918 to September 17, 1926 strengthened the morale of the soldiers and soldier-patients of the hospital. It was one of approximately 50 newspapers published at military hospitals around the country. The Come-Back was sold on the streets of Washington and sales to the community were encouraged. To cover the cost of production, advertising space was sold to local businessmen, and the paper itself cost five cents. Because of the audience, general news was covered in addition to news of happenings at the hospital. Initially four pages, within a year it was 12 pages, and its circulation doubled and then tripled. The paper became an effective crusader for soldiers successfully fighting for reduced rates on rail travel.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, WRAMC History Collection

This rickshaw wheelchair combination was perfect for negotiating paths around the hospital grounds. The Come-Back, Vol. 1, May 21, 1919.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, WRAMC History Collection
Pneumonia ward in 1919. There were more than 150 patient deaths due to the influenza pandemic in the fall and winter of 1918–1919.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 604-2

Here, a camera is recording an operation. The motion picture camera became a critical part of the teaching mission of the hospital.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 562
▲ Observation Ward.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 602

► Mess Hall Ward, Ward Y for patients.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 743
Foot gymnastics for soldiers from Army camps, Walter Reed Hospital. 
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 279

Amputees at Walter Reed General Hospital whose stumps were massaged daily and made ready for prosthetics. 
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 273

Massaging residual limbs of soldiers preparatory to prosthetic fitting. 
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 278
Horticultural therapy involves the use of gardening, landscaping, flower arranging, nature crafts, and related activities. The purpose is to boost the patient’s self-esteem, develop a sense of accomplishment, and overcome stress. In addition to the therapy, the greenhouses produced plants and holiday flowers used for programs and activities at the hospital.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 276

When a second greenhouse was needed, there was no funding available. Used and about to be discarded, glass X-ray plates were cleaned, set into frames, and reused as window panes in construction of the new greenhouse. The two original greenhouses and a third donated by the U.S. Park Service in 1943 were demolished in 1998.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 275

Soldier-patients working in the garden at Walter Reed Hospital, Reconstruction Division.

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 469
Hammer with hand mold for wounded hand. Used by Pvt. John Aver (37th Division, U.S. Infantry), World War I. Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 1789

Sign painting class provided re-education of the wounded. Walter Reed Hospital, Reconstruction Division. Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 2011
Making jewelry provided re-education opportunities for wounded soldiers.
Source National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 2022

Pvt. Ralph Grimm, who became an expert Silversmith in the Walter Reed occupational therapy shop. (Original caption)
Source: Pierce Collection

A silver ashtray made by a patient undergoing therapy at Walter Reed. Stamped on the bottom is “Walter Reed General Hospital”
Source: Pierce Collection, Douglas Wise - photographer
Wounded soldier learning to type.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 285

Patient working at his old trade as a draughtsman.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 277

Injured soldiers learning to knit.
Walter Reed General Hospital, Reconstruction Division.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, Reeve 305
The new swimming pool, donated by Mrs. Rea, was used for physical therapy and soldier recreation. *The Come-Back*, July 9, 1919.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, WRAMC History Collection
Patient rehabilitation. Playing baseball.
Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine, AFIP, WRAMC History Collection