



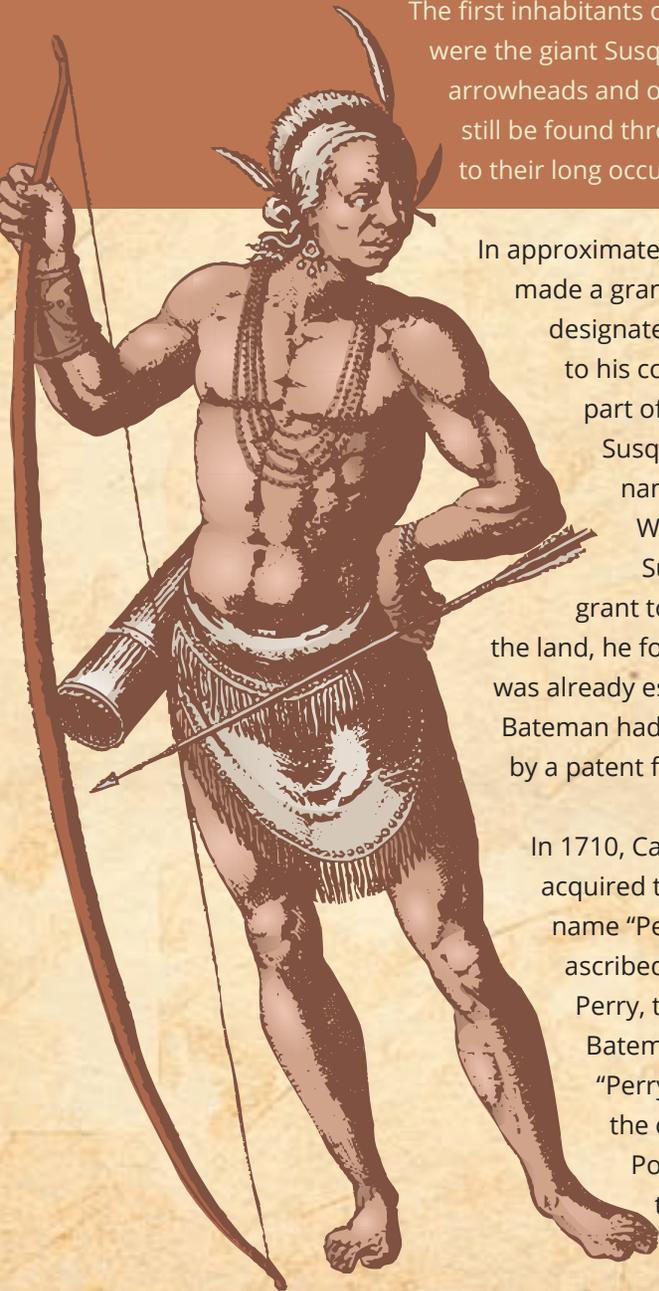
# **The History of the Perry Point Peninsula:**

**From Early Settlers to  
VA Health Care for Veterans**

VA Maryland Health Care System  
Perry Point VA Medical Center

# First Settlers

The first inhabitants of the Perry Point peninsula were the giant Susquehannock Indians. Many arrowheads and other relics of the tribe can still be found throughout the Point to attest to their long occupation of the area.



In approximately 1680, Lord Baltimore made a grant of 32,000 acres of land, designated as Susquehanna Manor, to his cousin George Talbot. A part of the grant included Susquehanna Point, the first name given to the peninsula. When Talbot was appointed Surveyor General of the grant to promote settlements on the land, he found that John Bateman was already established on the Point. Bateman had acquired the land in 1658 by a patent from Lord Baltimore.

In 1710, Captain Richard Perry acquired the land. Although the name "Perry Point" has been ascribed to Captain Richard Perry, the original grant to John Bateman refers to the tract as "Perry Point," thus proving that the change from "Susquehanna Point" occurred earlier than 1658.



Above is Captain John Smith's map of the Chesapeake region from 1612, which includes the Perry Point peninsula.

Between the times that John Bateman owned the property and when it was purchased by Captain Perry, the records do not show the names of the owners. Relatives of George Talbot resided for a time on the Point and may have owned it during this time period.

In 1728, Perry Point was owned by John Perry, George Perry, Anna Templer and Dorothy Barren. In 1729, Phillip Thomas became the owner of the property, leaving it by will to his son Samuel Thomas in 1763, who in turn willed it to his son Richard Thomas in 1784. It was during the Thomas family ownership of the Point that the Mansion House was constructed around 1750 from bricks brought over as ballast on ships from England. The Grist Mill, which was built around the same period as the Mansion House, indicates that there was a settlement of considerable size on the Point.

**In 1798, John Holmes' name appears on the records as the owner of Perry Point, followed by Littleton Gale in 1799 and George Gale on October 11, 1800.**

# 1800's



The Stump family pictured on the front porch of the Mansion House on July 4, 1892.

## Stump Family

### Ownership of Perry Point

On October 13, 1800, John Stump purchased Perry Point, which presumably included an estate of approximately 1,800 acres. It was during the residence of John Stump that the British came up the Chesapeake Bay in the War of 1812, burned Havre de Grace, and continued their destruction as far up as Lapidum, where they burned a grist mill owned by John Stump's cousin. They returned down the river and marched to Principio, where they burned the Iron Works. For some unknown reason, they spared the Mansion House and Grist Mill at Perry Point.



The Perry Point Mansion House – circa 1890's.

John Stump died in 1828, leaving Perry Point to his son John Stump II. In 1848, an agreement was drawn up between John Stump II and the promoters of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad (a branch of the Pennsylvania system) for the right-of-way through the Stump farm. Due to great difficulties in the construction process, the road was not completed until about 1854. The laying of the railroad added greatly to Perry Point's desirability and importance. Also, the strategic position of the Point, on the mouth of a navigable river, has largely influenced its history.

During the Civil War in 1861, the U.S. Government took over Perry Point for the first time, using it as a training station for cavalry mules. The officers in charge of the project used the Mansion House for their headquarters, sharing it for a time with the Stump family. When the situation became too strained for comfort, John Stump II moved his family to Harford County to live with his sister. Upon their return, they found the Mansion House badly abused and the farm sadly neglected, but many of the former slaves remained voluntarily as hired workers and the usual activities resumed.

In 1898, John Stump II died, leaving his estate to his ten children: Mary Smith, Judge Frederick Stump, Henrietta Mitchell, Anna Webster, John Stump, Katherine Magraw, Dr. George M. Stump, Elizabeth Boswell, Alicia Stump and Judge Arthur H. Stump.

1918

# Construction of Ammonium Nitrate Plant & Village Area



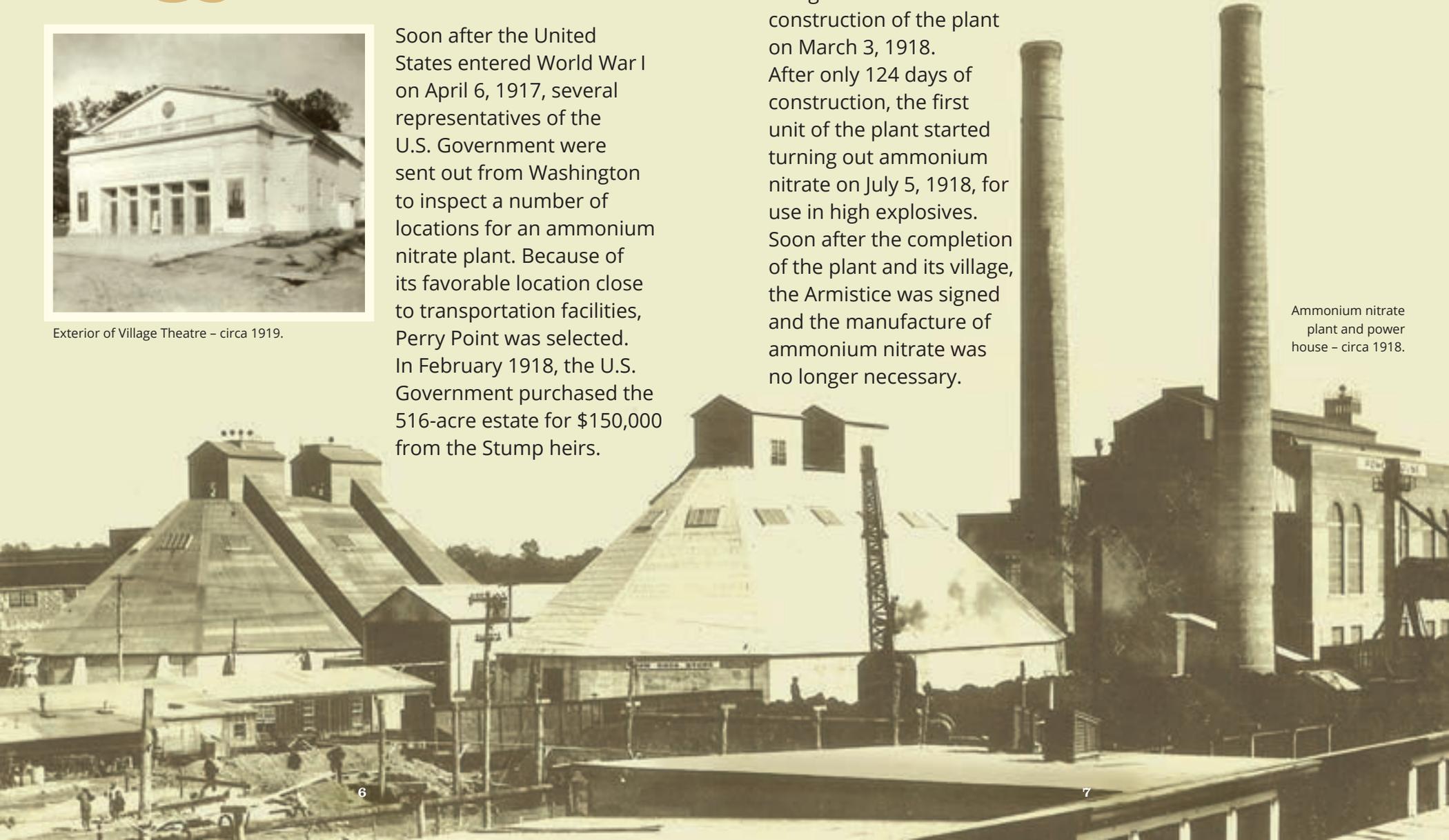
Exterior of Village Theatre - circa 1919.

Soon after the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917, several representatives of the U.S. Government were sent out from Washington to inspect a number of locations for an ammonium nitrate plant. Because of its favorable location close to transportation facilities, Perry Point was selected. In February 1918, the U.S. Government purchased the 516-acre estate for \$150,000 from the Stump heirs.

The U.S. Government leased the Point to the Atlas Powder Company, which constructed a large ammonium nitrate plant and a village area of more than 280 buildings for its employees that included homes, a movie theatre, library, clubhouse and shops. The ground was broken for the construction of the plant on March 3, 1918. After only 124 days of construction, the first unit of the plant started turning out ammonium nitrate on July 5, 1918, for use in high explosives. Soon after the completion of the plant and its village, the Armistice was signed and the manufacture of ammonium nitrate was no longer necessary.



Interior of Village Library - circa 1920.



Ammonium nitrate plant and power house - circa 1918.

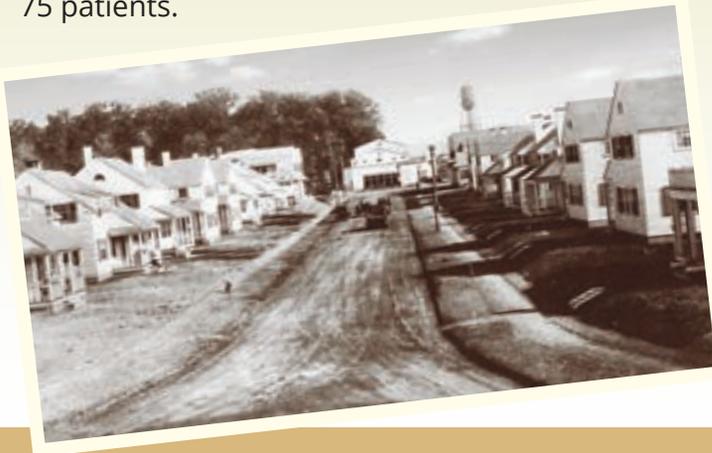
# 1919

## U.S. Public Health Service Established at Perry Point

By Act of Congress, Perry Point was turned over to the U.S. Public Health Service on March 3, 1919, for the hospitalization of War Risk beneficiaries and as one of the first storage depots for surplus hospital supplies for the Army. The first hospital building, a two-story structure located in the village, was converted to accommodate 75 patients.



U.S. Public Health Service hospital ward – circa 1920.



View from the Clubhouse to the Theatre in the Village – circa 1919.

## U.S. Veterans Bureau Established at Perry Point

The U.S. Veterans Bureau took over Perry Point on May 1, 1922. That year the first permanent buildings, the five circle wards, were constructed (Buildings 1H, 2H, 3H, 4H and 5H). After the Veterans Bureau took over the station, a division of property was made, with 80 percent going to the Bureau and 20 percent to a small Public Health Supply Depot that

## When the U.S. Public Health Service opened at Perry Point,

the facility functioned as a general hospital that provided care for patients with various disabilities. In 1920, when the U.S. Public Health Hospital in Cape May, New Jersey, closed, the patients were transferred to Perry Point and four more of the buildings in the village were converted for hospital use. It was at this time that Perry Point became a hospital that focused on neuropsychiatric care.



U.S. Public Health Service nurses – circa 1920.



U.S. Public Health Service at Perry Point – circa 1920.



U.S. Public Health Service bus, April 26, 1920.

was retained at Perry Point. In 1923, the patient population at Perry Point grew substantially after several other hospital facilities closed and transferred their patients and staff to the facility. All activities on the campus were divided into four departments: Hospitalization, Supplies, Utilities and Rehabilitation.

# 1923

## Perry Point Adopts Name Change to “Federal Park”

In 1923, officials at Perry Point decided to adopt the name “Federal Park” to indicate government ownership and operation. Representatives of the Stump family and other leading families in Cecil County petitioned the authorities in Washington, DC, to restore the original name of the campus due to its historic significance.

On June 30, 1924, the U.S. Government agreed to the change and “Federal Park” ceased to be and “Perry Point” came into its own again.



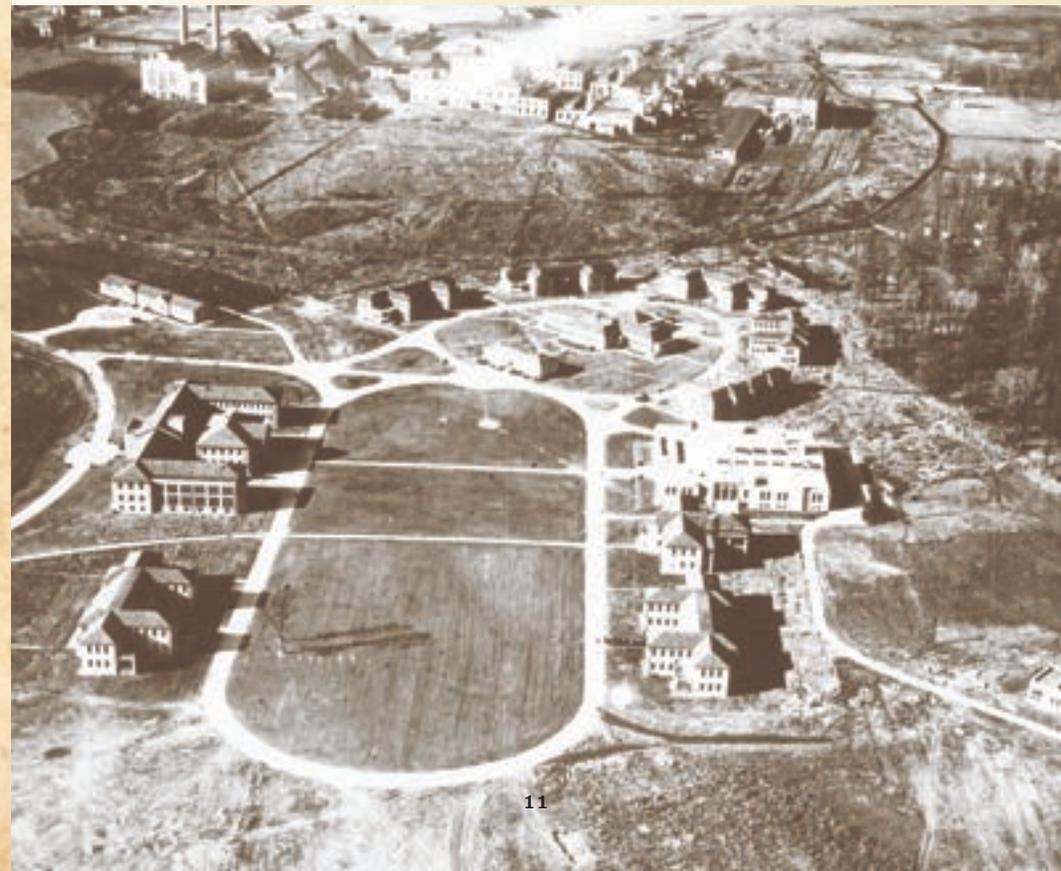
Cover of  
The Federal Park  
News from Thursday,  
January 31, 1924.

# 1924-1926

## Perry Point Expands to Meet Growing Needs of Patient Population

The cornerstone for the large Diagnostic Building (Building 9H) was laid on September 28, 1924, and during this year a Continued Treatment Building (Building 15H) and Tuberculosis Building (Building 18H) were also constructed. On May 25, 1925, Buildings 6H, 7, 8 and 9H were completed, as was the spacious Recreation Building (former Building 10H), containing a gymnasium, swimming pool, bowling alleys and assembly hall. The new Mess & Kitchen (Building 17H) was finished in November 1926 at a cost of approximately \$200,000 to accommodate 1,000 patients.

Aerial photo showing the five circle wards (1H, 2H, 3H, 4H & 5H), the Diagnostic Building (9H), the Mess and Kitchen (17H), and the Continued Treatment Building (15H).



# Establishment of the Veterans Administration

The Veterans Administration actually came into being in 1930 when President Herbert Hoover signed an Executive Order establishing the agency.

On October 4, 1931, the 146-bed Convalescent Building (Building 19H), costing \$250,000, was dedicated. The Attendants Quarters (Building 80H) was completed in 1932 and offered 70 individual bedrooms.

The Nursing Home (Building 82H) was erected on the shoreline of the Chesapeake Bay in 1932, with a magnificent view of the water and Aberdeen Proving Ground in the distance.

Pictured is the Medicine & Surgery Building (23H), which was constructed in 1942.



The Perry Point Fire Department - circa 1930.

In the years that followed, the following additional hospital and administrative buildings were constructed throughout the campus to meet the needs of Perry Point's growing patient population:

**1935** – Buildings 13H & 14H (Continued Treatment)

**1937** – Building 97 (Gate House/Guard Shack)

**1940** – Building 20H (Occupational Therapy Shop)

**1942** – Building 22H (Female Patient Building)

**1942** – Building 23H (Medicine & Surgery)

**1946** – Building 101 (Laundry)

**1946** – Building 24H (Rehabilitation Building)

**1947** – Building 25H (Acute Building)

**1960** – Building 27H (Clothing Room)

**1969** – Building 314A (Theatre)

**1969** – Building 314B (Gymnasium)

**1969** – Building 314C (Chapel)

**1969** – Building 315 (Boiler Plant)

**1980** – Building 321 (Refrigeration Plant)

**1985** – Building 26 (Firehouse Renovations/Addition)

**1988** – Building 360 (New Laundry)

## The Creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs

The VA was elevated to a cabinet-level executive department by President Ronald Reagan in October 1988. The change took effect March 15, 1989. President George H. W. Bush hailed the creation of the new Department saying, "There is only one place for the Veterans of America, in the Cabinet Room, at the table with the President of the United States." The Veterans Administration was then renamed the Department of Veterans Affairs, and continued to be known as VA.



## Perry Point Building for the 21st Century



The Clinical Addition (Building 361), which houses Primary Care, Pharmacy and Radiology, opened in 1992.

On October 30, 1989, ground was broken for a new clinical addition at Perry Point that was constructed to provide primary care and specialty outpatient services. The new outpatient care facility, which is attached to Building 23H, was designed and constructed to better meet the needs of Veterans by offering the latest medical technology, expanded clinical space and comfortable waiting areas and exam rooms.

In October 1995, the Perry Point VA Medical Center integrated under a single management structure with the Baltimore and Fort Howard VA Medical Centers and the Baltimore VA Rehabilitation & Extended Care Center to form the VA Maryland Health Care System.

On May 1, 2000, a new inpatient mental health care building was dedicated at Perry Point. The new facility (Building 364) was built to offer specialized treatment programs, rehabilitation services and enhanced patient privacy for Veterans in a comfortable, state-of-the-art setting. The mental health facility was Perry Point's first new inpatient building constructed in over 50 years.

In June 20, 2000, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs approved the plans to change the mission of the Fort Howard VA Medical Center. The mission change was requested to address the numerous structural deficiencies within the facility's main hospital building, as well as the continuing shift nationally from inpatient to outpatient care. The plans for the approved mission change included shifting inpatient programs and administrative functions from Fort Howard



Photo of the Fort Howard VA Medical Center, which closed in 2002. Many inpatient beds at Fort Howard were transferred to the Perry Point VA Medical Center.

to other VA Maryland Health Care System facilities. The first phase of the mission change was completed in September 2002, with the relocation of Fort Howard's inpatient programs and administrative functions to the Baltimore VA Rehabilitation & Extended Care Center and the Perry Point VA Medical Center.

To better serve the needs of outpatients requiring mental health care services, a new 5,600 square foot Partial Hospitalization Program replacement building was constructed at Perry Point and dedicated on September 20, 2004.

This new facility, which is attached to the outpatient mental health clinic (Building 80H), was built to provide a structured treatment program to assist Veteran patients transition back into the community and to prevent future hospitalization. The new facility is a replacement for the old Day Treatment Center (Building 10H), which was originally constructed in 1924.

Today, the Perry Point VA Medical Center has been serving the health care needs of U.S. Veterans for more than 95 years. There are currently over 85 buildings dispersed throughout the 365-acre campus, with several of the buildings constructed by the Atlas Powder Company still in active use.

Aerial photo of the Perry Point VA Medical Center from November 2005.



## History of the Mansion House and Grist Mill

In 1729, Philip Thomas became the owner of Perry Point, leaving it by will to his son Samuel Thomas in 1763, who in turn willed it to his son Richard Thomas in 1784. The Thomas family occupancy of the property is especially interesting as it was during their ownership that the Mansion House and Grist Mill were both erected around 1750.

The Mansion was built from bricks brought over as ballasts on ships from England. The Georgian-type architecture conforms to that period of history. The central structure of two stories and an attic was built with a rectangular design so that later additions could be added and appear as part of the original plan, which was a wise provision as evidenced by the addition of the back porch and kitchen in later years. Similar to other manor houses of the time, the Mansion House was built with two fronts – the one called “the drive front” and the other called “the garden front.” The approach was by a driveway, around a circle that probably had a sundial to indicate the time of day. The private front commanded a superb view of the Chesapeake Bay and overlooked a formal garden.

The Mansion House in early days was a place of importance because towns were few and far between. Manor houses served as a social center because there were few public gathering places and visiting was the only way to see one’s neighbors. When relatives and friends paid a visit in Colonial times, they remained for several days or weeks in the home of the host. A breakfast did not consist of half a grapefruit, cereal, toast and coffee, but instead included fried chicken, fried sweet potatoes, biscuits and brewed tea from London. For dinner, pewter plates were piled with half a canvasback, a whole shad and vegetables.

Perry Point has had many distinguished visitors over the years. It is alleged that on one occasion, the owner of the Mansion House was honored to have General Washington as an overnight guest since Rodgers Tavern was



Photo – circa 1910.

overcrowded. It is also alleged that General Lafayette was a personal friend of one of the owners of Perry Point and made frequent visits to the Mansion House. It is said that he planted one of the beech trees on the grounds.

On October 13, 1800, John Stump purchased Perry Point, which included the Mansion House, the Grist Mill and an estate of approximately 1,800 acres. In 1861, the Union Government took over Perry Point temporarily as a training station for mules during the Civil War. The officers in charge used the Mansion House as their headquarters, sharing it for a time with the Stump family. When the situation became too strained for comfort, John Stump II moved his family to Harford County to live with his sister. Upon their return, they found the Mansion House badly abused and the farm sadly neglected. The original stairway in the Mansion was destroyed. It is alleged that the Union troops burned the stairway for firewood. After the war, many of the family’s former slaves stayed on voluntarily to rebuild the property.

## The Mansion House

The present stairway was erected shortly after the Civil War and its counterpart may be seen in Williamsburg, Virginia. The handrail is made of cherry and the newel post was made from an old walnut tree that grew on the estate. The stair treads are made of Maryland pine with inlaid diamonds of maple.

The floors in the old section of the house are the original wide planks of bull pine and are doweled with maple pegs. The archway in the hall is made of cherry, which was painted in order to preserve it. The dining room was enlarged during the late 1800's. The iron plate in the back of the fireplace bears the date 1771, and was forged at the Principio Iron Works. The corner cabinet is made of aged pine.

The warming room, which is adjacent to the dining room, has the original pine mantel and window panels. Ovens on either side of the fireplace, which are now enclosed with aged pine, were used to keep the food warm until served. The kitchen, as in similar houses of the period, was not originally connected to the house, except by a covered passage. The exterior of the Mansion House is made of brick with a coating of plaster with pebble dashing.

While there were probably numerous other buildings on the grounds of the Mansion House, including a separate kitchen, barn and servants quarters, the only one that remains is the spring house.

Once used for cool storage for dairy products and meat, the spring house was eventually converted to store garden tools. The original soapstone flooring was removed and placed in the formal garden on the property.



Photo - July 4, 1892

## The Grist Mill

The Grist Mill, which was built around the same period as the Mansion House circa 1750, indicates that there was a settlement of considerable size on the Point. The mill had a large waterwheel that was powered by a local stream to turn the grinding equipment to make flour. The mill, which was built using cut stone masonry into a river bank, is two stories high on the land side and three stories high on the riverside. There are doors in the center section of each floor on the riverside of the building that were used to hoist unmilled grain, receive machinery and supplies, and deliver finished meal to flat-bottomed boats and carts. The rafters and beams in the Grist Mill are hand-hewn and pegged, with joists fitting firmly into the large 9" x 12" beams.



Besides their farming operation and the Grist Mill that was also used as a granary, the Stumps engaged in the lucrative fishing industry with the river at their door. Drawing nets hundreds of feet long with a capstan on the shore below the Mansion House, the Stumps sold tremendous catches of fish to markets in Norfolk, Virginia, and York, Pennsylvania, to be salted. They also cut and hauled ice from the river for the icehouses and iceboxes of the neighboring farms and townspeople.

As with all older homes and structures, the Mansion House and Grist Mill required constant care and upkeep. Major renovations occurred in the Mansion House in the 1940's, the 1970's and again between 2014 and 2016 to maintain the physical integrity of the building, enhance the esthetics of the interior and exterior, and to add modern enhancements. The Grist Mill was also renovated in the 1940's and again between 2014 and 2016 to preserve the structure and to finally convert it into a museum.

In 1975, the historic significance of the Mansion House and Grist Mill was recognized when the two structures were placed on the prestigious National Register of Historic Places by the U.S. Department of the Interior. These two buildings are the oldest known structures in the entire VA system.

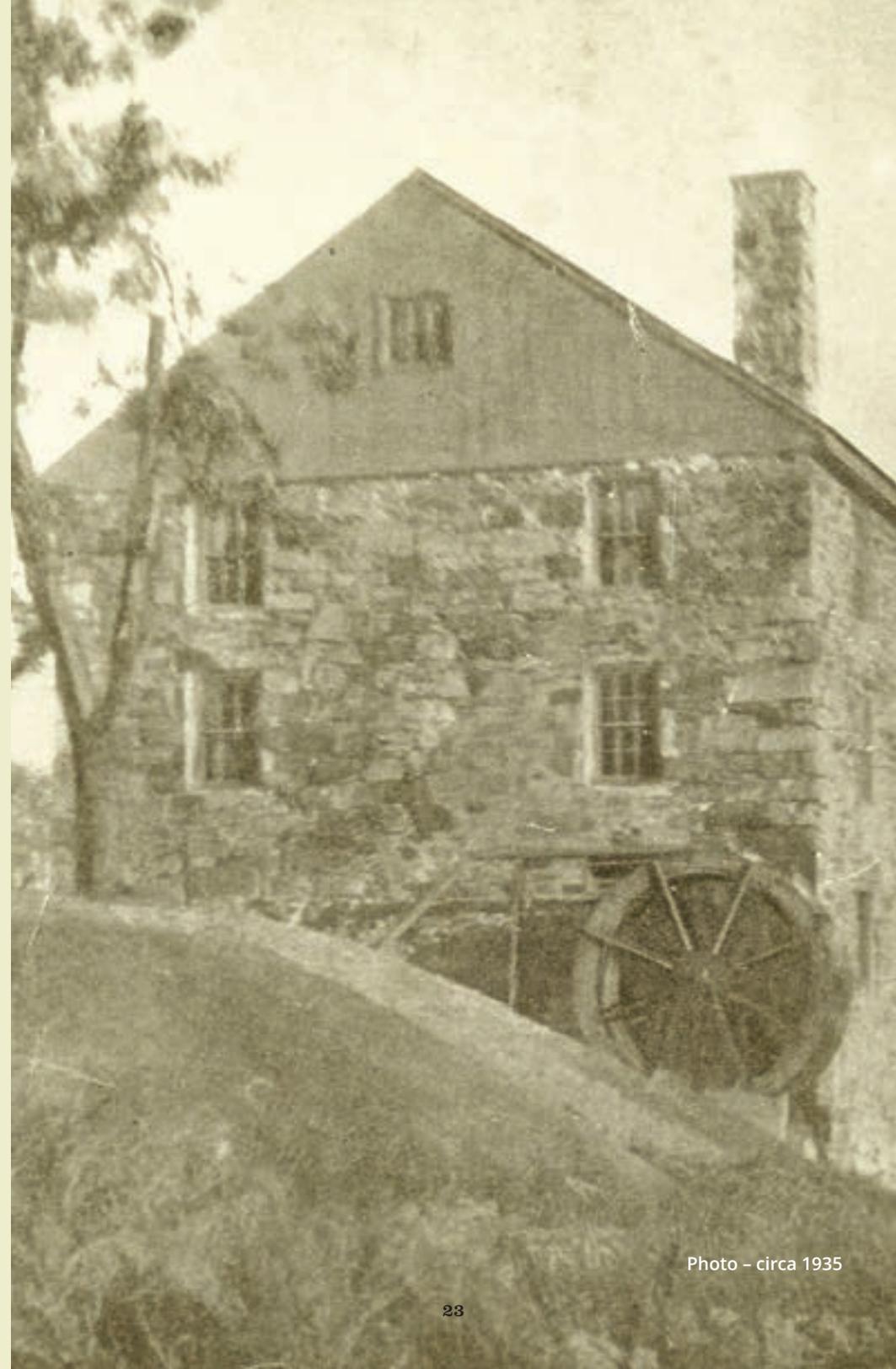


Photo – circa 1935

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Perry Point Veterans Museum Email:  
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Perry Point Veterans Museum Website:  
[www.maryland.va.gov/veteransmuseum.asp](http://www.maryland.va.gov/veteransmuseum.asp)

VA Maryland Health Care System Website:  
[www.maryland.va.gov](http://www.maryland.va.gov)

**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Maryland Health Care System