

Togus, Down in Maine: The First National Veterans Home

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The first National Veterans Home at Togus, in Chelsea, Maine, is shown here as it was completed in 1869. The print is a wood engraving made from a photograph by John S. Hendee as reproduced in James W. North's book, The History of Augusta, published in 1870. North described the facilities and the history of The National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers at Togus in his book. (TLS) Throughout the text, certain images are followed with these photograph credits: T.L. Smith (TLS); the Maine Historical Preservation Commission (MHPC); Mathew Brady from the Library of Congress Collection (MBLCC); the U.S. Army Military History Institute (AMHI); Bedford Hayes (BH); the 1878 Annual Report of the Board of Managers (ARBM); the Togus Library (TL); the Boston Public Library Rare Book Collection (BPL); Elmore Morgan (EM); O.R. Cummings (ORC); Robert McDonald (RM); J. Emmons Lancaster (JEL); Maine Historical Society #449 (MHS); Barbara Ballard (BB); Marjorie Brown (MB); Georgia Wiesendanger (GW); Klemen S. Burdzel (KSB); Margaret Stoddard (MS); Roberta A. Cass (RAC); and the *Kennebec Journal* (KJ). **Togus, Down in Maine:** The First National Veterans Home Timothy L. Smith Copyright © 1998 by Timothy L. Smith 9781439633755 Published by Arcadia Publishing Charleston SC, Chicago IL, Portsmouth NH, San Francisco CA Printed in the United States of America Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2005936488 For all general information contact Arcadia Publishing at: Telephone 843-853-2070 Fax 843-853-0044 E-mail sales@arcadiapublishing.com For customer service and orders: Toll-Free 1-888-313-2665 Visit us on the Internet at www.arcadiapublishing.com

Dedicated to James E. Smith of the 19th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment, my great-grandfather, a disabled Civil War veteran who was a resident of the National Home at Togus. *We came to the graves of those who have fallen in battle, We come from the city, the mountains and glen; For those who have fought 'mid the cannon's loud rattle, The children are coming, the women and men. We scatter the garlands where comrades are sleeping 'Tis thus that the nation remembers her brave; Our hearts true to Freedom, like sentinels keeping Their watch o'er the place where they rest in the grave. We know that no music of ours can awaken The braves that once fought for our country so dear, But we think of the days when the nation was shaken By the tramp of the heroes now slumbering here. The cause that they served will grow stronger and stronger, For Liberty yet must have greater renown; And grow in her strength, until time is no longer, Then live through eternity, wearing her crown. They sleep, but the Nation they valiantly guarded Now rests from the struggle, both peaceful and free, These garlands will show how their names are regarded, While they rest in their graves till the last reveille.* This memorial hymn was sung on Memorial Day, June 17, 1870, at Togus. It is attributed to the Reverend Moses Kelly, the chaplain at the National Home. **Table of Contents**

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Introduction The history of the Togus Veterans Administration Center is one of providing medical services and care to America's disabled veterans since the end of the Civil War. From the time of Jamestown in Virginia and the Pilgrims at Plymouth in Massachusetts, the people of this country have always ensured that those who took up arms for the protection of their fellow citizens would not be forgotten when the battles ended. Men went

into battle knowing that if they were killed or disabled, their families and their needs would be provided for by friends and neighbors of the community. During the Civil War the northern leaders realized that community services for veterans would be overwhelmed by the number of soldiers suffering from wounds, sickness, and disease. Many debates ensued before Congress acted to charter a Board of Managers to open three National Homes to provide uniform care for every Union veteran. The former Togus Spring Hotel in Chelsea, Maine, near Augusta, was being advertised for sale in the *Boston Transcript* during the spring of 1866. The critical need to open a "home" with all due speed probably was the impetus for the Board of Managers to send Gen. Edward W. Hinks to Augusta to view the hotel, out buildings, and land situated at Togus Spring. Within two months of Hinks' visit, the land and buildings were purchased for \$50,000. The Maine Legislature ceded the land to the federal government and Hinks made immediate plans for the installation of a heating system and modern lighting so that the first veterans could be admitted in November of 1866. The photographs used in this book have been divided into four chapters that represent different eras at Togus. A sense of what life was like at Togus for the veterans is presented in these photographs, a sense that could not be described by the written word alone. The Eastern Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers at Togus, Maine, set a goal from its inception to help make the home as self-sufficient as possible and to provide a place for the healing of the spirit as well as the body. All officers, staff, and care providers had to be disabled veterans, as mandated by law. Extra pay for work at many different jobs and trades allowed veterans to save enough money to return to their homes and families temporarily, if not permanently. Schooling was encouraged, with classrooms and teachers provided. Religious services were provided by Protestant and Catholic clergy from the surrounding communities every Sunday. A farm was started to help with provisions and provide a sense of self-worth. Concerts and entertainment were a daily part of the homes' routine with visitors encouraged to spend the day and mingle with the members. By the mid-1880s, Togus was becoming accepted as part of the community of the surrounding villages and cities. Togus veterans received passes to visit the surrounding areas and added to the local economy. The economic impact on businesses providing supplies and services increased yearly. At the turn of the century Togus became a destination for family excursions. Improvements to roads from Gardiner and Augusta made it easier for visitors and veterans to travel between the communities. The Kennebec Central Railroad opened in 1890 and in 1900 the Augusta Electric Railway commenced operations. Mainers were on the go and 30,000 to 40,000 visitors descended onto Togus to view theatrical entertainment, musical concerts, picnics and parades, and walked to the "deer park." The large farm was also popular with many city visitors from the early 1900s and until the United States entered into World War I in 1917. Time had taken a toll on many veterans and as the years passed, admission to Togus increased. As family and friends passed on or moved away, the disabled found it harder to sustain their independence. Conditions at Togus were always crowded and many veterans came only as a last resort. Membership peaked in 1904 at over 2,700 veterans and steadily declined as the Union's soldiers died. Many changes were introduced in the way care was provided for disabled veterans after the Great War of 1917-18. A veteran's bureau was established to handle disability compensation, insurance for servicemen and veterans, family allotment programs for those in the armed services, and vocational rehabilitation for the disabled. At this time, Togus was regulated to hospital services and an "old soldiers home." The number of Civil War veterans continued to decrease dramatically. By 1929 there were about 119 Civil War veterans, 467 Spanish-American veterans, and about 541 World War I veteran residents at Togus. Memorial Day observances, concerts, and baseball were the only occasions that drew a large crowd of visitors during the 1920s. The 1920 U.S. census was the first census to conclude that more Americans were living in urban areas than in rural parts of the country. The dramatic increase of the automobile and continued improvements in Maine's highways offered people a wider range of choices in selecting destinations for visiting and entertainment. The increased popularity of movies and the radio provided a new source of entertainment for the family. The Kennebec Central Railroad was closed in June 1929 and the Augusta Electric Railway line followed a few years later. The start of the Great Depression was about to begin. In July 1930, the Veterans Administration was created by an

executive order signed by Pres. Herbert Hoover under laws recently passed by Congress. Congressman John Nelson of Augusta, Maine, began a successful campaign to pass a bill to build a new fireproof 250-bed hospital. A power plant with a 145-foot chimney and a utility building all made of reinforced concrete with brick facing were added to the original bill by amendment. Construction was started in May 1932 and completed the following year. Togus played a small part in helping to ease the severity of the Great Depression in the Augusta and other area communities by employing 320 full-time employees. In 1939 it had a yearly payroll of \$475,000. Between 1932 and 1960, over 60 wood buildings and sheds were demolished and replaced with a modern complex of brick-face buildings that provided Togus with the basics to continue its mission in post-World War II America. The mission had changed from home to hospital and rehabilitation of our veterans. With the end of WW II in 1945, virtually every person's life was affected. Similar to reactions after the Civil War, many individuals and organizations were created to help provide adjustments to this country's returning disabled veterans. Individuals who retired from Togus over the years returned to volunteer their services wherever needed. The forgotten war heroes from the Korean Conflict added to the population at Togus in the mid-1950s and beyond. The historical significance of Togus to our nation's armed service veterans has largely remained unnoticed and it is my desire that this book of photographs will both entertain and inform the readers about a time and place that no longer exists as it once did a long time ago. —Timothy L. Smith

Bibliographical Note In 1966, Allen W. Squires made a successful effort to compile a history of Togus called *History of Togus: First Hundred Years*. Much of the data for the book was found by searching the microfilm editions of the *Kennebec Journal* and the annual reports submitted to Congress by the Board of Managers for the homes. The best sources are those yearly reports, which are printed in the miscellaneous documents of the House of Representatives for each Congress. The social history of Togus can be found in three descriptive guides to Togus. The first is *History and Description of the Eastern Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers Near Augusta ME*, written by W.S. Whitman, a Civil War veteran and resident of Togus in 1879. Whitman's 78-page guide includes statistics gathered from early annual reports to the Board of Managers. In 1886, Henry O. Spalding, a resident of Togus, published an 18-page guide entitled *A Sketch of the Eastern Branch Home DVS Togus, Maine*. Daniel W. Robinson wrote a brief, comprehensive, 60-page description of how the home was managed, entitled *Robinson's Descriptive Guide to the Eastern Branch, N.H.D.V.S., Togus, Maine*, which was published in 1894. These three books are indispensable to understanding the early years at Togus. Three other pamphlets that present an alternative view of Togus are worth pursuing. A 14-page pamphlet, by an unknown author, entitled *Another Hot Shot Against the Corruption and Tyranny of Luther Stephenson, Governor of the National Home at Togus from 1883–1897*, published in Boston in 1897, makes several serious charges against Governor Stephenson. A pamphlet entitled *Pension Reform as Viewed at the N.H.D.V.S.*, published about 1890 by W.G. Haskell, describes the effects of amendments to existing pension laws on the Togus pensioners. In 1895, a pamphlet published by the *Togus Syndicate* entitled *Attention, Comrades! Plain Facts in Relation to the Management of the Solders' Home, Togus Maine*, alleges cruelty and mistreatment of some veterans, along with misappropriation of funds from the Commissary Department. An investigation of the National Home for D.V.S. in 1884 by a House of Representatives committee offers a balanced look at Togus and other National Homes. The best recent study of the early history of all the National Homes is *Creating a National Home Building the Veteran's Welfare State 1860–1900*, by Patrick J. Kelly, published by Harvard Press in 1997. Between 1895 to 1915, at least five booklets with photographs or photographs and drawings of the buildings and people at Togus were published. In the order of their publication dates they are as follows: *View of the Eastern Branch National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, Togus Maine, ca. 1896*; *National Home D.V.S Togus Maine ca. 1904*; *Eastern Branch National Home D.V.S. Togus Maine ca. 1906*; *Eastern Branch National Home D.V.S. Togus Maine ca. 1908*; and *Souvenir Veins of National Soldiers Home Maine, ca. 1915*. In 1997, the author wrote a research paper on the history of Togus entitled *Togus: Down in Maine: The Creation of the First National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866–1869* and a copy was deposited at the Togus Veteran Administration Center library. The 25-page paper was thoroughly researched and included a comprehensive bibliography. Finally, Donald Beattie, a retired history professor residing in

Winthrop, Maine, is currently researching the history of Togus and he hopes to have a thorough history of Togus ready for publication within two years. **One Creating the Nation's First Veterans Home 1866-1883** *These four veterans sun themselves on the south side of the veterans home complex in the spring of 1872. The brick building on the left contained a machine shop on the first floor and a shoe shop and tailor's shop on the second floor. (MHPC) The first known overview of the National Soldiers Home was drawn by John B. Bachelder in 1872. The activities shown illustrate what a visitor to Togus might encounter while touring the buildings and grounds. At the far left is the brick cow barn. In the middle of the farm buildings is the farmhouse of the original settlers of this area. In the center of the lithograph stand the four barracks set in a quadrangle. To the right of the barracks is the amusement hall and to the far right the deputy governor's residence. Bachelder was an early photographer and artist from New Hampshire who drew many bird's-eye views of New England towns and cities during the 1850s. (TLS) Benjamin F. Butler was the moving force and president of the Board of Managers who created the first National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers at Togus, Maine, in 1866. Butler was born in Deerfield, New Hampshire, and moved to Lowell, Massachusetts, with his widowed mother in his youth. Butler graduated from Colby College in 1838 and was a lawyer and representative in the Massachusetts Legislature, prior to enlisting in the Union army and attaining the rank of general. (MBLCC)*

Togus, located 4.5 miles east of Augusta, Maine, was formerly part of the town of Chelsea. After the Civil War, Congress enacted laws and established a system of facilities that collectively became known as "National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers." The critical need to establish an eastern branch of the National Home led to the selection of the former Togus Spring Hotel, which after some remodeling, opened for Union Civil War veterans in November 1866. Gathered from cherished family albums, collectors of Togus artifacts, libraries, and archives, *Togus, Down in Maine: The First National Veterans Home* represents the first published history of the area, and most of the photographs have not been viewed by the public. The images of Civil War veterans are of particular interest, along with views of buildings, barracks, and hospitals from 1866 to the 1930s. From 1932 to 1960, over 60 buildings were demolished, and new buildings with reinforced concrete and brick facings were built.

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