



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### A Place for the Wounded in Civil War Alexandria

*Alexandria Times, October 30, 2014*

Image: Sickel Hospital, Andrew J. Russell. Photo, Library of Congress.

This week we conclude our series highlighting the images of Alexandria in the Civil War taken by the only official U.S. military photographer, Andrew J. Russell, whose charge was to produce a record of images of Union Army facilities and railroads in the region.

By the midpoint of the Civil War, the western reaches of early Alexandria's street grid were still sparsely settled with large open lots awaiting urban expansion.

The development of this area was restrained in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, first by a period of economic stagnation caused by Alexandria's inclusion in the District of Columbia, and later by Union occupation of the city during the conflict. In addition to

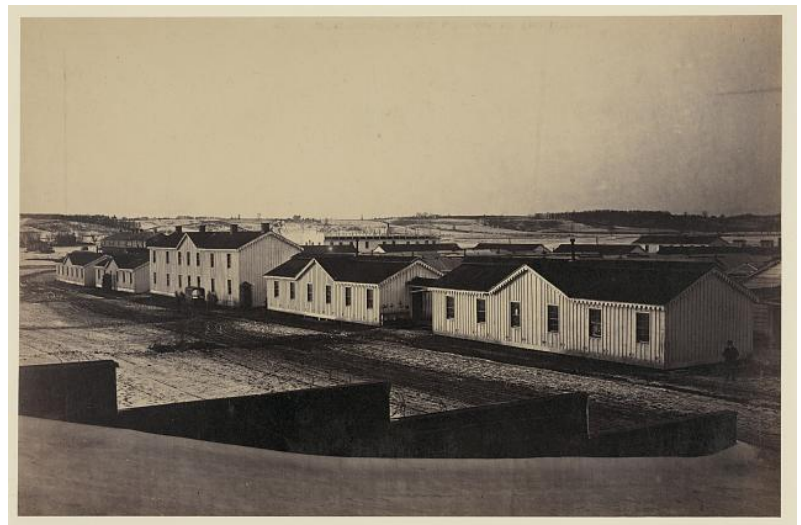
military camps, as the war progressed and the need for facilities to support soldiers' physically, medically and psychologically increased, military authorities seized on this area to support the Union cause.

From Wolfe to Pendleton streets and from West to Fayette streets, U.S. authorities constructed a number of large-scale facilities such as the Soldier's Rest recuperative structure, the massive Government Bakery complex and the [Sickel Branch Hospital](#), recorded in this photograph taken by Russell in the last year of the war.

The Sickel Branch Hospital was built in early 1863 and was a complex of one and two-story structures, built quickly in the then popular Carpenter Gothic style. It used board-and-batten wood siding often fabricated from the massive deforestation of Northern Virginia to improve view sheds and thwart Confederate attacks.

The complex was built by the Pennsylvania 33rd, 34th, 36th and 37th Reserves attached to the Second Brigade, 22nd Corp., and named for its commander, U.S. Gen. Horatio Gates Sickel.

A native of Bucks County, Pa., Sickel was descended from a Dutch family that had emigrated with William Penn. Born in 1817, he volunteered for the army at the outset of the war and served with distinction in multiple battles, including Seven Days, Mechanicsville, Second Bull Run and Fredericksburg. He succeeded George G. Meade to command the Pennsylvania Reserves, with guard duty at Alexandria.





## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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On January 5, 1865, Russell scrambled to the rooftop of a building adjacent to the Sickel Hospital buildings and recorded several images from behind the parapet. A light snowfall had dusted the site that morning, disturbed only by the passage of horse drawn ambulances passing on the unpaved roadways that wove through.

One such ambulance and a group of men, moving when the image was taken, can be seen just in front of the largest building to the left. The denuded landscape of what was then the eastern edge of Fairfax County is visible in the background.

Russell's service in Alexandria would conclude later that year, and soon after he was commercially employed by the Union Pacific Railroad and would go on to take spectacular images of the American West. On May 10, 1869, he took the famous photograph of the first transcontinental railroad at Promontory Point, Utah. Later that year, he returned to New York where he established his own photography design studio. He died at his home in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1902.

*"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.*

*These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.*