

Oteen Hospital: Then and Now

U.S. ARMY GENERAL HOSPITAL NO. 19

The VA hospital at Oteen originated in 1918, when the U.S. Army acquired approximately 400 acres of farmland seven miles east of Asheville for the development of General Hospital No. 19. The hospital specialized in the treatment of tuberculosis and other respiratory illness. Its patients and staff were active Army personnel in training for or recuperating from service in the First World War.



"Block plan of General Hospital No. 19, Azalea NC" from The Medical Department of the US Army in the World War (official History Services) Vol. V, Military Hospitals in the U.S.



Army hospital personnel circa 1920. Photo from the Massie Collection of Jesse Morris Photographs, courtesy of UNCA Ramsey Library.

"The hospital is located upon a plateau near the Swannanoa River and in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains...The hospital must not thought of as a single building of huge proportions, but rather as a town of about twenty-five hundred inhabitants and extending over a considerable territory. There are in all one hundred and four buildings..."

Quoted from Captain Benjamin Hays, Transactions of the Medical Society of the State of North Carolina, 66th Annual Meeting, April 15-17, 1919.

"Oteen train leaving for Denver, Colo." In addition to the perceived health benefits of Western North Carolina mountain climate, the close proximity of the railroad station at Azalea was a factor in locating the Army hospital east of Asheville. Photo from the Massie Collection of Jesse Morris Photographs, courtesy of UNCA Ramsey Library.



"Oteen band playing." Photo from the Massie Collection of Jesse Morris Photographs, courtesy of UNCA Ramsey Library.

OTEEN VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL



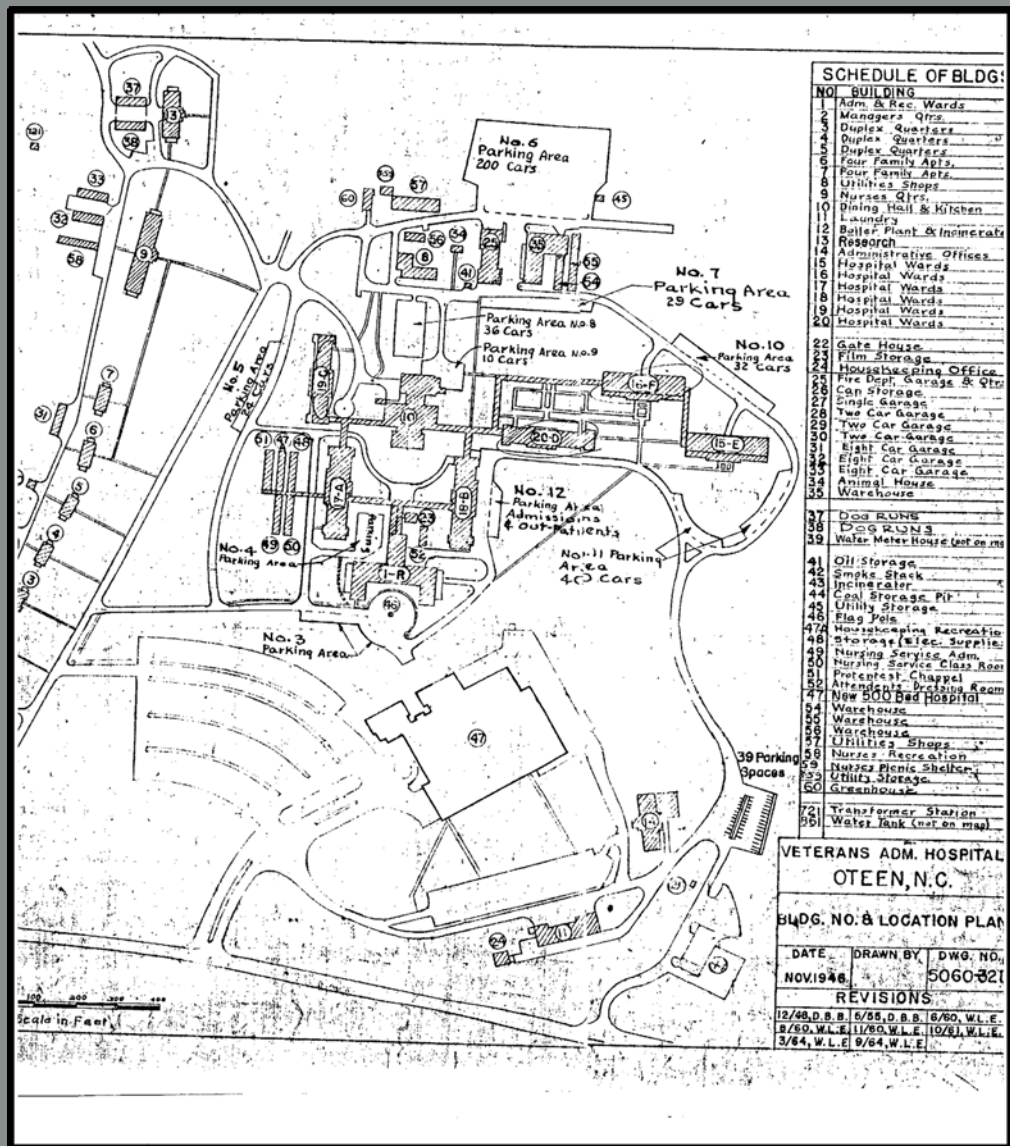
Oteen Veteran's Hospital Ward C, Ward A, and Administration Building (front left to right), circa 1940s. These buildings were among the first to be completed, constructed between 1926 and 1928. They line the east side of Riceville Road, and are still in use today as Evergreen Apartments and The Laurels of Summit Ridge. Postcard courtesy of Pack Library North Carolina Collection.

In 1924, the federal government transferred the hospital property to the newly formed Veterans Bureau, which later became the Veterans Administration. In 1926, the agency initiated an ambitious building campaign, tearing down the wood-framed army structures in order to construct a permanent campus to administer all aspects of veterans' healthcare.

The new campus was substantially complete by 1934, and included patient wards, diagnostic facilities, administrative buildings, and a wide array of support structures such as kitchen and dining hall, laundry, power plant and staff housing.



Main entry to the Oteen Veteran's Hospital complex from Tunnel Road, circa early 1960s. The Administration Building was completed in 1928 and was the focal point of the hospital complex before construction of the new hospital building in 1967. Postcard courtesy of Pack Library North Carolina Collection.



"The second major step in the process which is turning the United States Veterans hospital at Oteen into one of the nation's best and most beautiful permanent institutions will soon get under way... This latest group of buildings will undoubtedly change the aspect of the hospital. It will turn the entire unit into a handsome, well organized hospital of large proportions..." Asheville Times, ca. 1926.

This site plan depicts the Oteen VA Hospital campus in the late 1960s. The u-shaped 1928 Administration Building, at center, faces US 70/Tunnel road. Hospital wards, covered walkways, and service buildings are arrayed behind it. Residential buildings, including the former nurses' quarters now occupied by NCDRC, are lined along Riceville Road at left. The V.A. relocated most of its facilities into a modern hospital building in 1967; the new hospital building is below center.

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OTEEN V.A. RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

Identified as “Building 13” on Veterans Administration site maps, the building that houses NCDCCR’s Western Office was built in 1932 as a dormitory for African-American nurses employed by the Oteen V.A. Hospital.



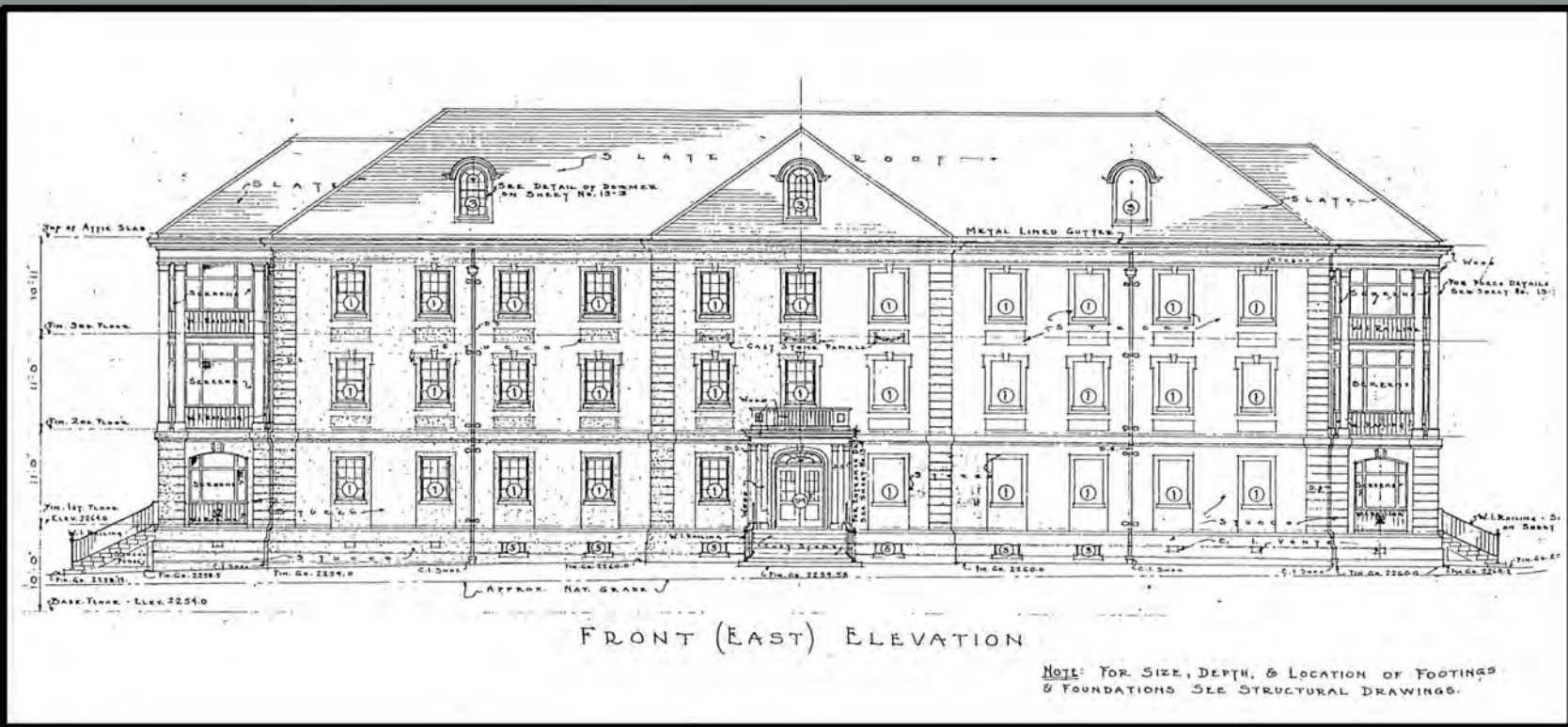
NCDCCR Western Office, formerly V.A. Building 13, built in 1932 as a dormitory for African-American nurses employed by the V.A. hospital.



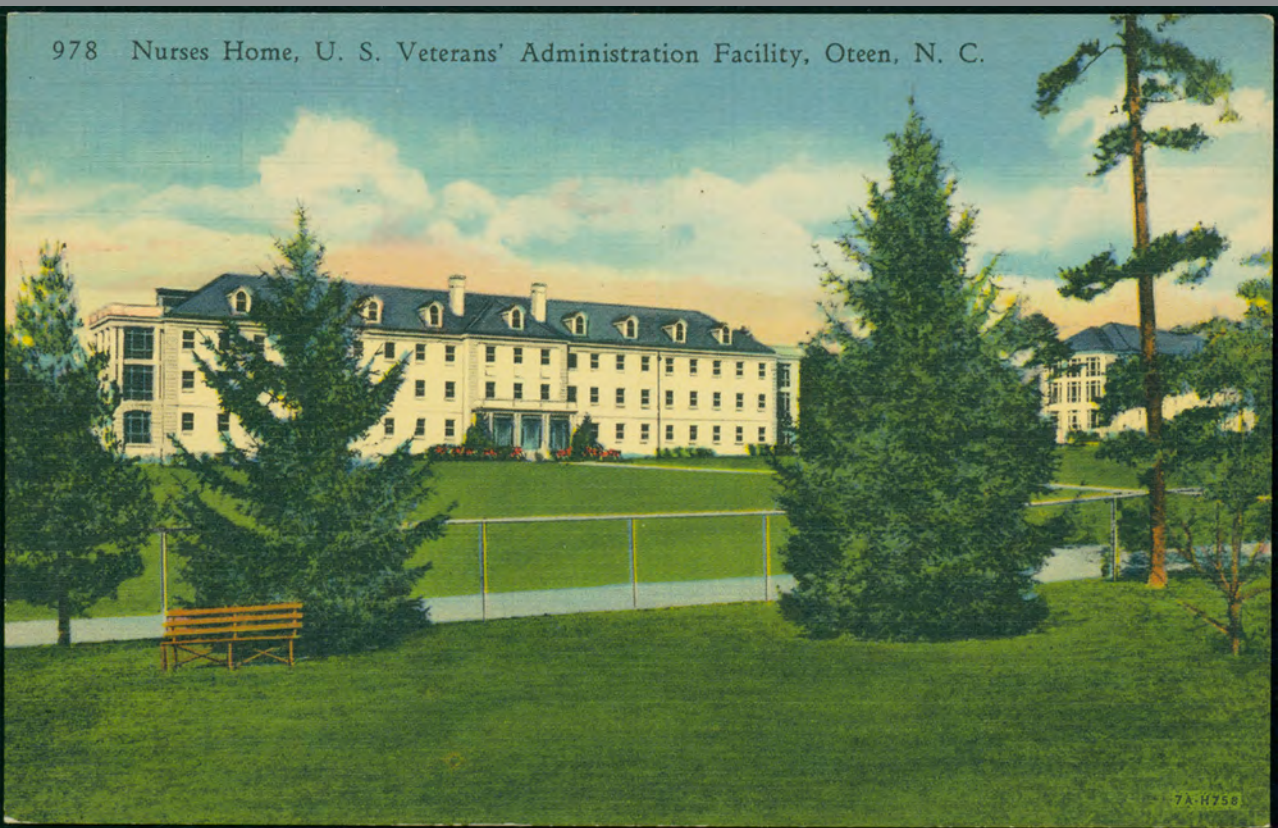
The Oteen V.A. hospital drew medical personnel and support staff far afield from Asheville, necessitating on-campus housing for doctors, nurses, orderlies, and other various staff. The larger nurses’ dormitory next door to the NCDCCR building, V.A. Building 9, was constructed in 1930. The two nurses’ dormitories and seven wood-frame duplexes and apartment houses aligned on the west side of Riceville Road, constructed between 1927 and 1930, comprised the main residential component of the hospital complex.

Little alteration was made to the Oteen V.A. Hospital campus until 1967, when the V.A. constructed a modern hospital building in front of the 1928 Administration building. As hospital beds and treatment facilities were located in the new hospital facility and staff no longer required on-campus housing, the V.A. gradually transferred ownership of many of the 1920s and 1930s buildings into private hands.

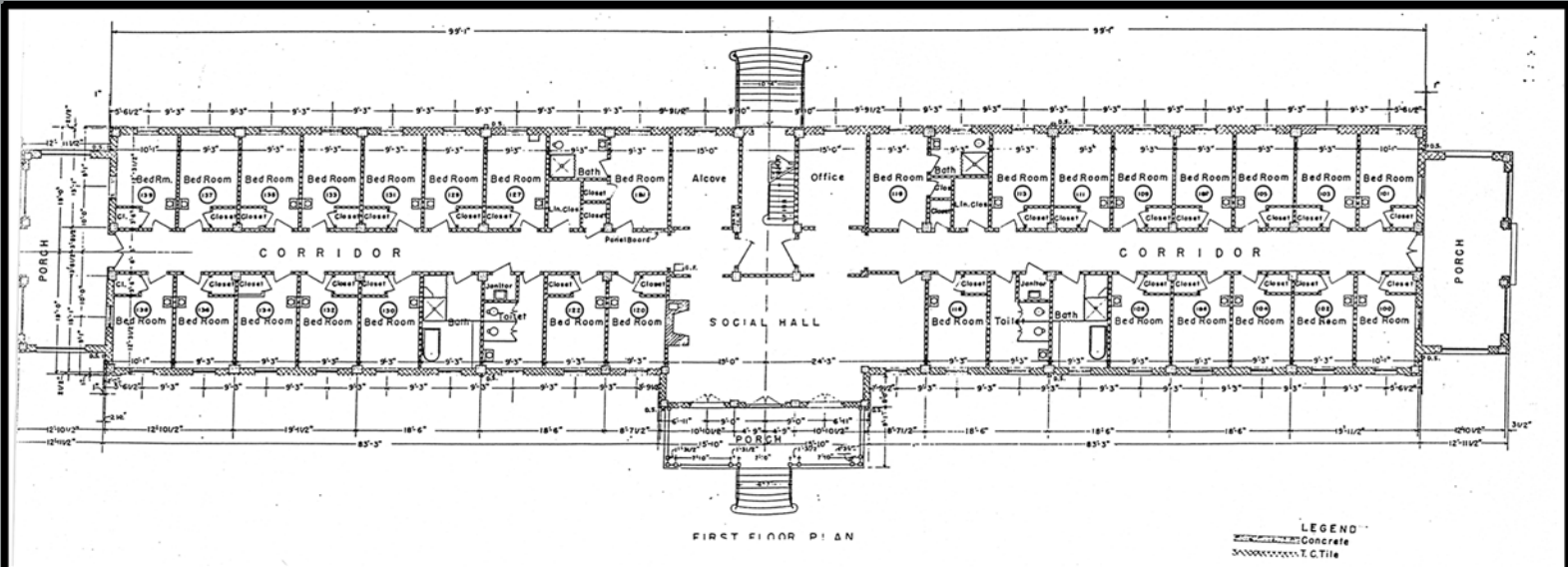
Apartments now occupy the former Administration Building and Wards A and B. The Laurels of Summit Ridge, an assisted living facility, occupies former Ward C, the fire station, and garage. Wards D and F, as well as all of the covered and open-air walkways that once linked the wards, have been demolished.



Front elevation drawing of NCDCCR Western Office, formerly V.A. Building 13. Like the Administration Building and hospital wards constructed at Oteen in the 1920s and 1930s, the building displays the Georgian-Revival style. This style is characterized by balance and symmetry, and was inspired by ancient Roman architecture. The slate shingles, front door portico, band course (horizontal band between lower and upper floors,) quoins (detailing at corners), and pedimented dormer windows are all characteristic of American interpretations of the Georgian style.



V.A. Buildings 9 and 13, nurses’ quarters completed in 1930 and 1932 (left to right).



Ground floor plan of V.A. Building 9. This was the larger of two nurses’ dormitories constructed on the Oteen campus. Both of the nurses’ dormitories featured wide corridors lined with dormitory rooms, each with a single bed, closet, and sink. Occupants shared bath and toilet rooms located on each hall, as well as screened porches at the end of the hall on each floor. The dormitories were built during the era of segregation; the larger dormitory housed white nurses, and the smaller housed African-American nurses.

NCDCCR REHABILITATION OF BUILDING 13

In 1971, the V.A. transferred ownership of the former nurses’ quarters to Western Carolina University. NCDCCR’s Western Office opened in September of 1978, leasing space within the building from WCU. NCDCCR staff investigated the history and architecture of the V.A. hospital complex, and much of the historic campus was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in June, 1984 as the Oteen Veterans Administration Hospital Historic District. NCDCCR acquired the Building 13 property in 1997. Rehabilitation of the building for state agency use was completed in February, 2011.



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WESTERN OFFICE - DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES



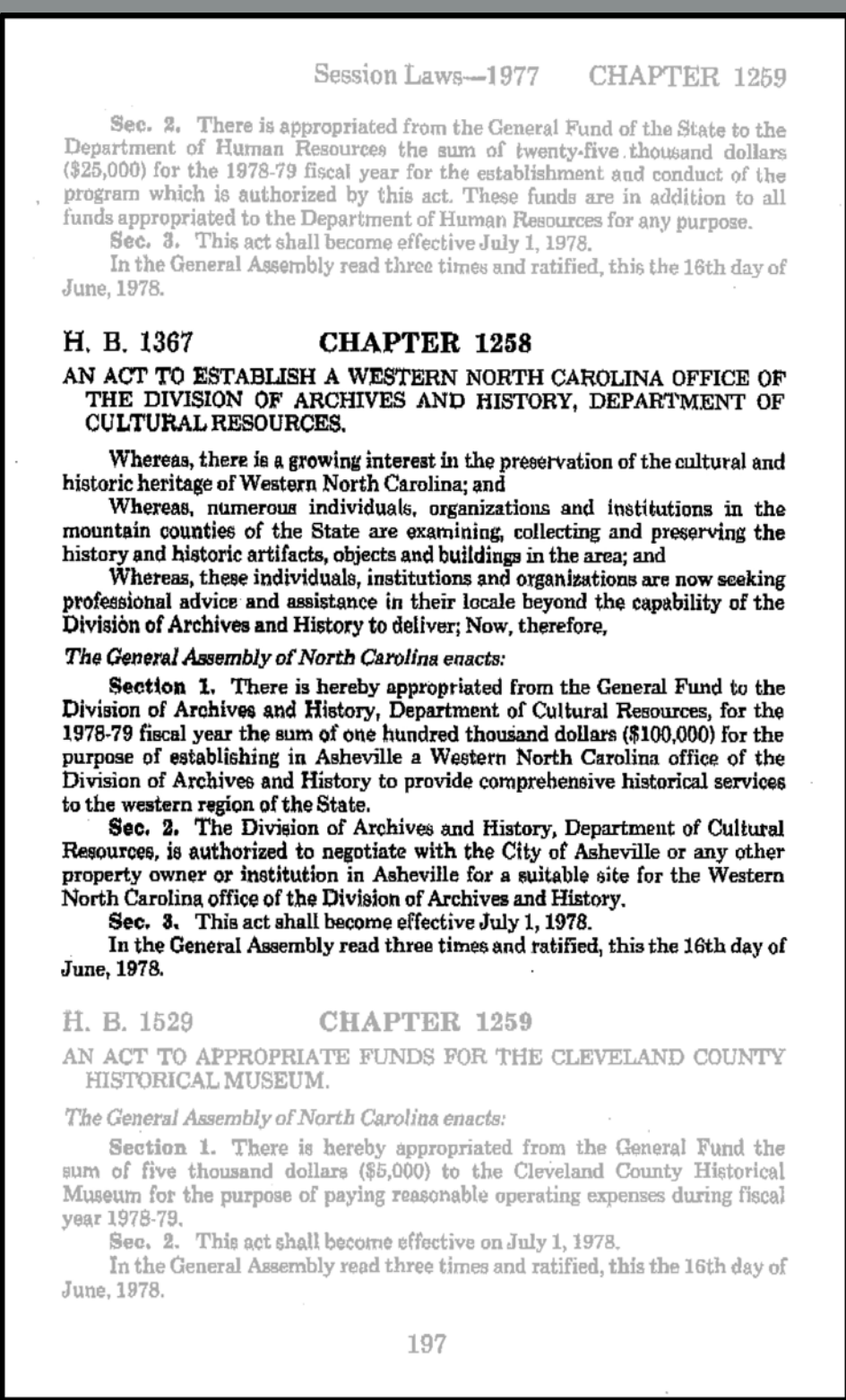
Original staff members Michael Southern, Diane Jones, Ron Holland, Nick Lanier, Percy Hines (L to R)

Three sites were considered for the Western Office in Asheville – Pack Memorial Library, Smith-McDowell House and the Oteen Center which at the time was operated by Western Carolina University. Eventually the Oteen Center was selected and on September 4, 1978 the Western Office officially opened for business. It would remain in Oteen until 1991 when it moved to a small office building in the south Asheville community of Skyland.

Following years of growing demand and local grassroots support, House Bill 1367 was passed in 1977 establishing a Western North Carolina office of the then Division of Archives and History. To be located in Asheville, the new office was to provide “comprehensive historical services to the western region of the State.”



Secretary Sara Hodgkins, Dr. Larry Tice, Ron Holland, Dr. Harley Jolley (L to R) at the official opening in 1978.



House Bill 1367



Prehistoric artifacts found in Buncombe County.



Western Office, Biltmore Village

In September 1993 the Western Office moved for a third time to the former Clarence Barker Memorial Hospital building located in Biltmore Village. Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, this building was the home of the Western Office for 18 years until its recent move back to the Oteen Center in early 2011.

Today the Western Office continues to provide a wide range of cultural resource management services to local governments, state and federal agencies, historical organizations, and private citizens. Staff working for the State Historic Preservation Office, Office of State Archeology, and State Archives coordinates activities meant to identify, protect, and enhance historic buildings, landscapes, sites, and records so residents and visitors alike may better understand and appreciate western North Carolina’s rich history.



Hubbard Barn, Wilkes County



Meeting with local historical museums, Oteen Center



Cemetery Preservation Workshop, Hendersonville, NC

N.C. DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural Resources at a Glance

The North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources was formed in 1971 to serve North Carolina's citizens across the state in an outreach to broaden minds and spirits, preserve history and culture, and to recognize and promote our cultural resources as an essential element of North Carolina's economic and social well-being. It was the first state organization in the nation to include all agencies for arts and culture under one umbrella.

Cultural Resources serves more than 19 million people annually through three major areas: The Arts, The State Library of North Carolina and Archives and History.



OUR VISION

To be the leader in using the state's cultural resources to build the social, cultural, and economic future of North Carolina.



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