

A Civil War Hospital

The Old Town Village Site

The Union Army occupied Alexandria from the first days of the Civil War to the last. Alexandria became an important center for care of the wounded and sick. By the end of the war, there were more than 30 military hospitals in the city, with about 6,500 beds.

Churches, homes, the city's largest hotel, and other buildings were taken over for use as medical facilities. A Quaker meetinghouse, a girls' seminary, a home belonging to the family of Robert E. Lee – all accommodated wounded and ill patients. Elsewhere, hospital complexes extending over city blocks were built based on plans drawn up by the Quartermaster-General in Washington.

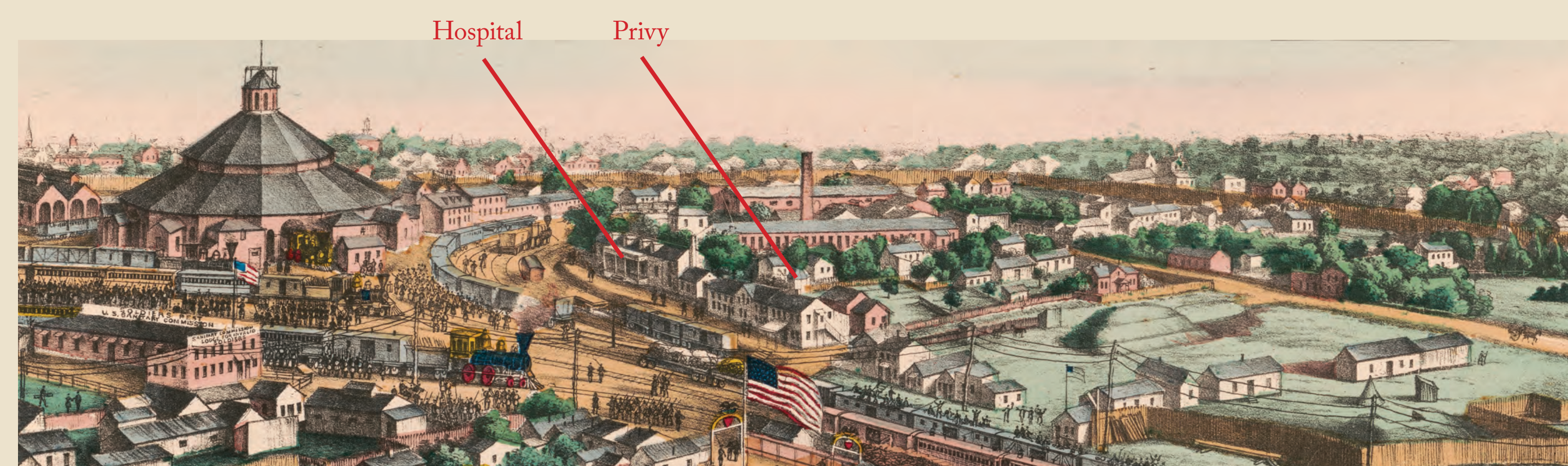
Surgeons, nurses, orderlies, cooks, and ambulance drivers came to Alexandria to tend to the patients. Relief workers, volunteers, and worried family members flocked to the hospitals as well.

Little evidence remains of these hospitals. The purpose-built hospitals were dismantled and many of the confiscated buildings were torn down or substantially changed. What can archaeology tell us about Alexandria's Civil War hospitals?



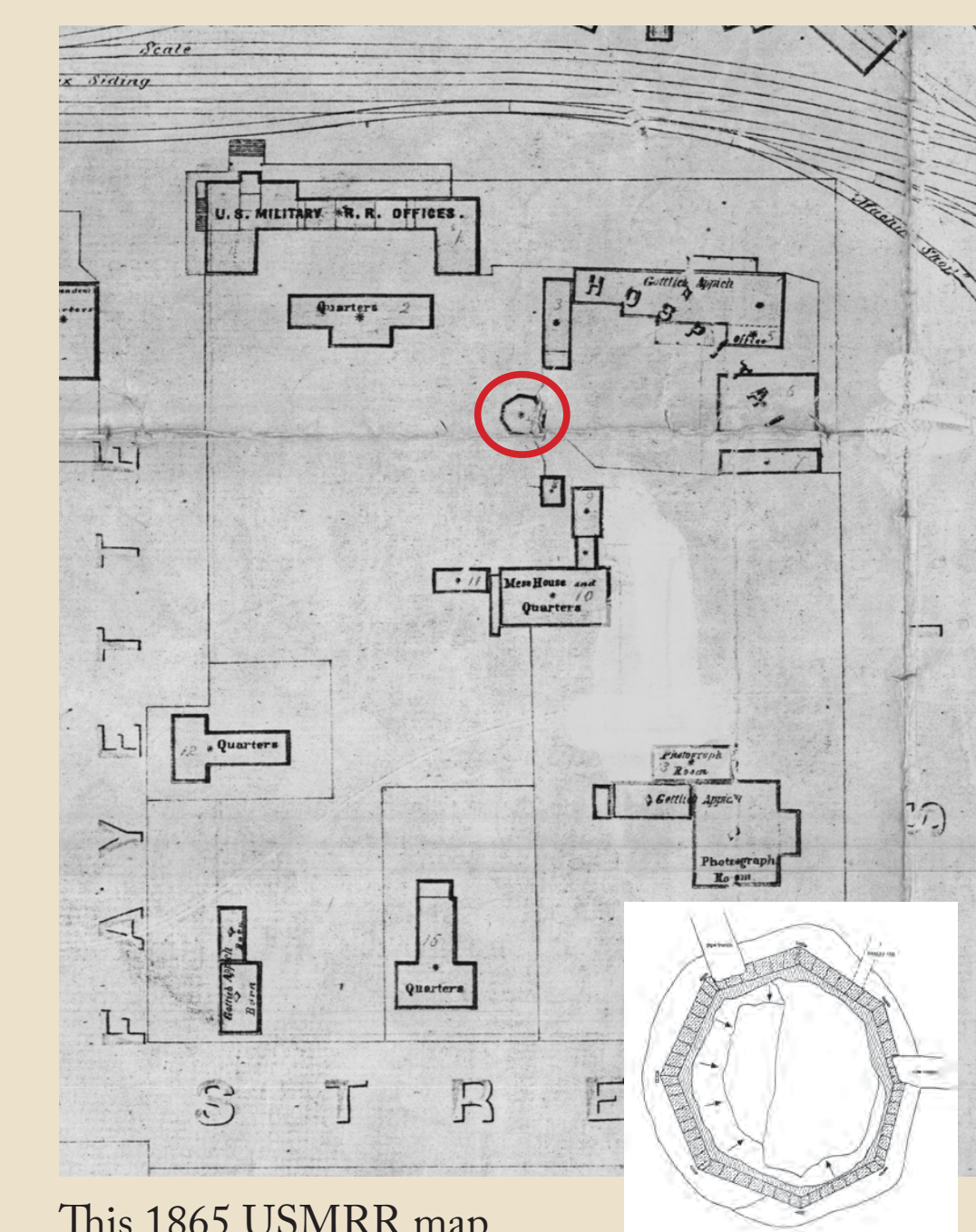
View of the roundhouse and depot. The white house at left is Gottlieb Appich House/Hospital. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The study of the U. S. Military Railroad Headquarters, 44AX105, was conducted in 1996–1997 by Thunderbird Archeological Associates, Inc. for Eakin Youngentob Associates (EYA), developers of the Old Town Village Complex, with guidance from Alexandria Archaeology, as required by the Alexandria Archaeology Code.



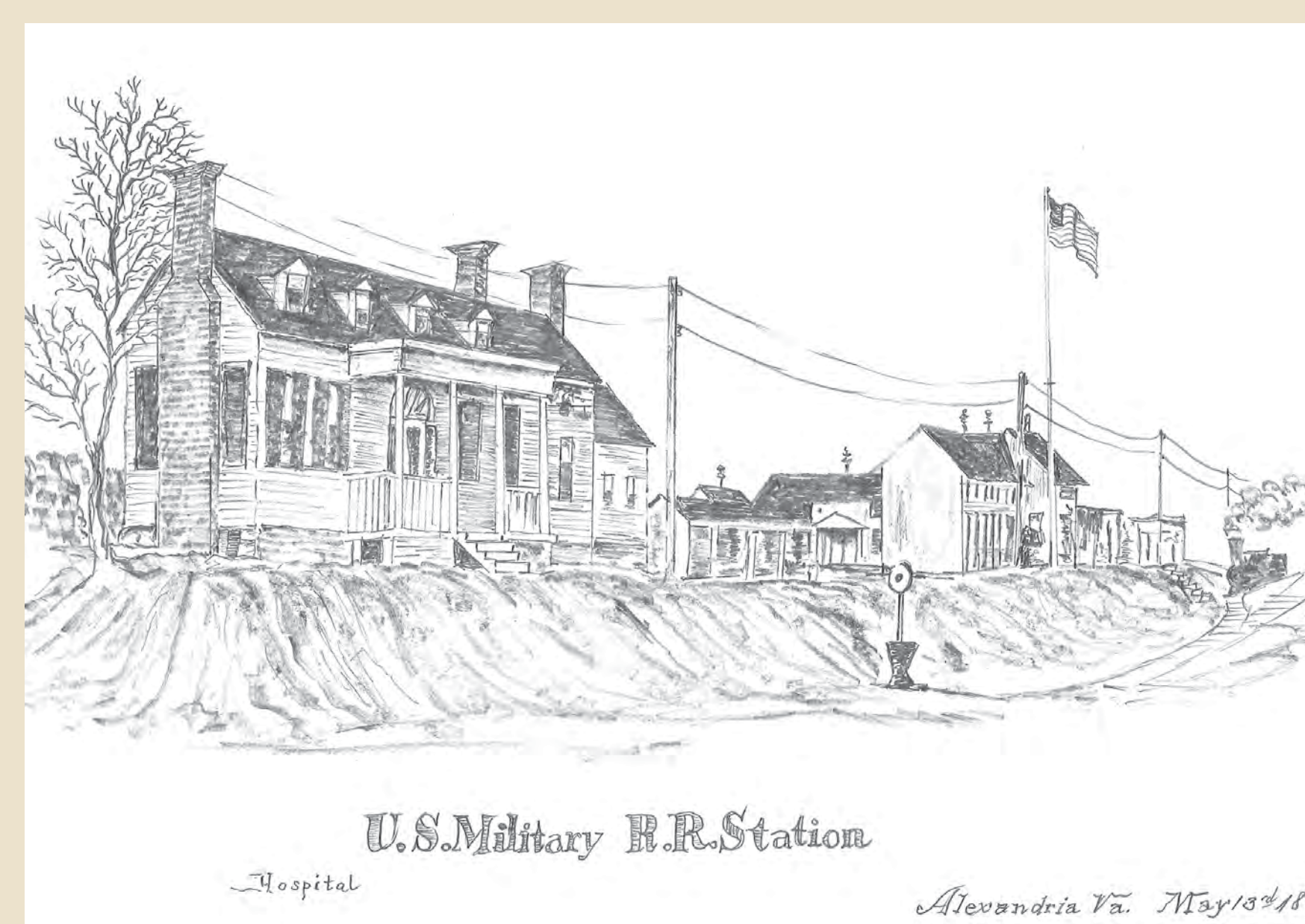
Detail from *Soldier's Rest* by Charles Magnus. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

In 1997, just before the excavation of the Lee Street Site, another Civil War privy was found at the U.S. Military Railroad (USMRR) Headquarters at the corner of Duke and Henry Streets. The Orange & Alexandria Railroad Offices and rail yards were developed into the headquarters of the USMRR by the Construction Corps, which was composed largely of “Contrabands,” a term used for African Americans who had escaped slavery. The Construction Corps enlarged the roundhouse and added a conical roof and cupola, and built quarters, mess halls, a powder magazine, and a stockade around the perimeter.



This 1865 USMRR map shows the Union Army privy (circled in red) in relation to the Gottlieb Appich House/Hospital. Inset: an archaeological drawing of the privy.

Gottlieb Appich, a German immigrant and Alexandria confectioner, owned a home near the roundhouse. By 1865 the Union Army turned it into a hospital. In the back yard, the military built a 15-foot deep octagonal wood-lined privy. The waterlogged environment allowed for remarkable preservation of human hair, cloth, newspaper fragments, and even roundworm and whipworm parasites that infected the human digestive tract. Earlier levels contained Civil War artifacts, but the privy continued to be used long after the war and still appeared on insurance maps as late as 1891.



Sketch of the Gottlieb Appich House/Hospital; adapted from a May 13, 1863 drawing by William Merrick in the New York Public Library.