



NAVY MEDICINE *FAST FACTS*

October 2025

+ NAVY MEDICINE IN PHILADELPHIA + **THE BIRTHPLACE OF NAVY MEDICINE**



Navy Medicine was born in the city of Philadelphia in 1775. For the next two centuries, Philadelphia would serve as an important setting for the story of Navy Medicine while serving as the home of foundational institutions like the Naval Hospital and the Navy Medical School.

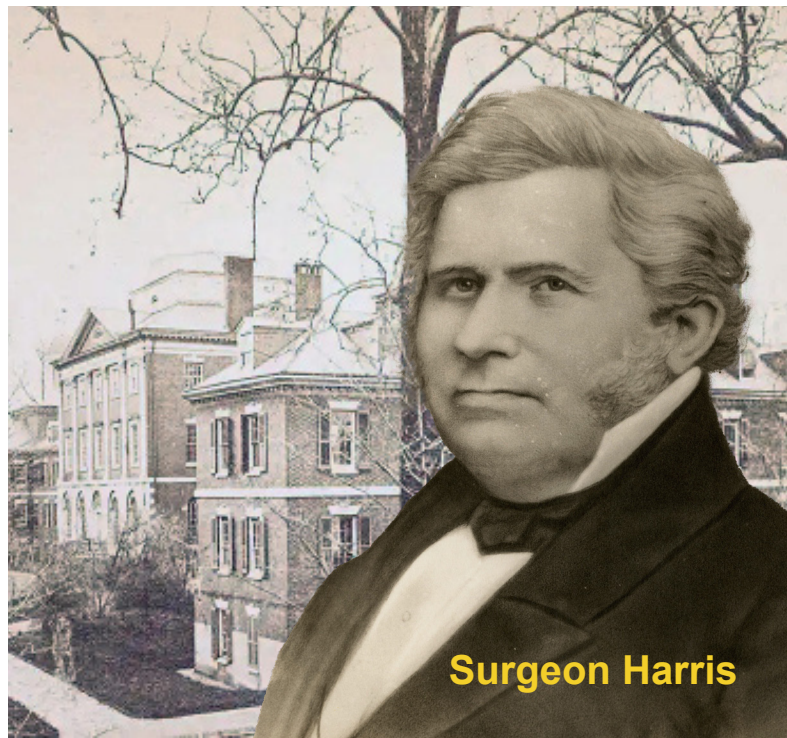


NAVY MEDICINE BEGINS ON THE DELAWARE RIVER

- Continental Navy is established in Philadelphia on **Oct. 13, 1775**.
- In November 1775, Drs. **Joseph Harrison** and **Henry Hendren Tillinghast** are appointed as surgeon and surgeon's mate, respectively, aboard the ship **Alfred**.
- They hold the distinction as the **first representatives of Navy Medicine**.

BIRTHPLACE OF THE NAVY MEDICAL SCHOOL

- In May 1823, Navy Surgeon Thomas Harris (1784-1861) **established a course of instruction in Philadelphia** to teach newly commissioned naval medical officers anatomy, operative surgery, and nautical medicine.
- Sometimes referred to as the "Navy Medical School," **Harris would lead this program for the next 20 years** before being selected to serve as the Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery in 1844.



Surgeon Harris



NAVY MEDICINE FAST FACTS



PHILADELPHIA'S POLAR EXPLORER

- After serving with the U.S. Marines in the Mexican War, Dr. **Elisha Kent Kane** (1820-1857) of Philadelphia made his mark as a **Navy physician** and an **arctic explorer**.
- In 1850 he sailed aboard the ship *Advance* in search of the lost Lord John Franklin expedition, which had never returned from its search for the Northwest Passage. Three years later Kane headed his own expedition, at which time he charted coasts of what is now called **Kane Basin** in northern Canada.
- Kane and his crew reached **80 degrees 10 minutes closer to the North Pole than any other explorer had achieved** at that point. After being stricken with scurvy and forced to abandon the *Advance*, Kane both ministered to the sick and led them to safety during an epic 83-day trek across the ice.
- Kane was honored by the U.S. Navy as the namesake of two ships, **USS Kane (DD 235)** and **USNS Kane (T-AGS-27)**.



Assistant Surgeon Kane

NAVAL HOSPITAL PHILADELPHIA

- As far back at the American Revolution, naval hospitals had existed in and around Philadelphia for the care of Sailors and Marines.
- Between 1801 and 1826, the Navy operated temporary medical facilities on the **Philadelphia Navy Yard**.
- From 1826 to 1834, the Naval Hospital Philadelphia was located at the **Pemberton Mansion** in the Grays Ferry neighborhood.
- In 1834, the **Naval Asylum** opened in Grays Ferry. The Asylum housed the Naval Hospital, the Naval Home, and the Navy School (forerunner of the U.S. Naval Academy).
- From 1917 to 1935, the naval hospital was located on the shipyard at League Island. During these years it was known as **Naval Hospital League Island**.
- In 1935, the naval hospital opened north of the shipyard. The new hospital was a state of the art high rise art deco structure.
- Beginning in World War II, Naval Hospital Philadelphia became the **premier medical facility for care of the blind and amputees**.
- The hospital closed in 1993. It was demolished in 2001.

Did you know?

In 1815, **Dr. William P.C. Barton**, a Navy surgeon, botanist, and future first chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED), published a compendium of plant life in Philadelphia, *Flora Philadelphiae Prodromus*.

