

**JAMES BLAND DEVELOPMENT PROPERTY  
ARCHEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF BLOCK 5  
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA**

**WSSI #21548.09**

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**Introduction**

The north end of the City of Alexandria is currently being redeveloped on a large scale, with new mixed residential/commercial developments now replacing entire city blocks. Documentary research and archeological investigations were conducted in anticipation of the redevelopment of the block bounded by Montgomery, N. Alfred, Madison, and N. Patrick Streets. The work was conducted by Thunderbird Archeology, a division of Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc.



*Location of Project Area*

area is located within the historic African American neighborhood known as the Hump, and based on trends in later property history, it is likely that many residents of the project area during this period were African Americans.

To a lesser extent, the north end of the city has also historically been a mixed industrial and residential area. Residential development within the project area started in the third quarter of 19th century and continued in to the early 20th century.

During the colonial period, the lands may have been utilized for the cultivation of tobacco or other crops or as pasture; however, archival records provided little detailed information. By the third quarter of 19th century however, records show residential development in the vicinity of the project area. Approximately 20 dwellings are present across the five city blocks by 1877. As the project

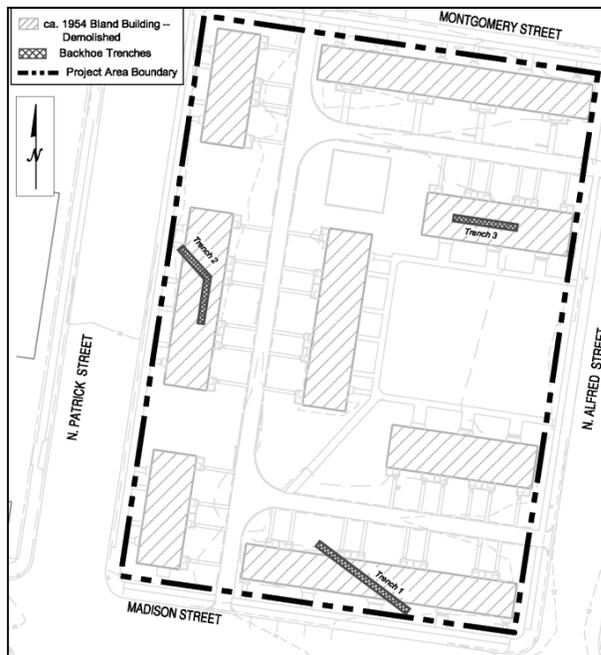
In the latter part of the 1930s and 1940s, a greater public awareness of substandard housing (often called slums) and of the need for public housing had arisen. A number of public housing projects, which were generally segregated, were constructed in the City of Alexandria. Some of them include the "whites" only John Roberts Homes as well as the George Parker Homes and the Samuel Madden Homes for African Americans. In 1941, the original houses within the project area were condemned, and in 1954 the James Bland homes were constructed within the project area over the foundations of these aforementioned condemned and destroyed properties.



*Condemned Housing: 800 Block of Madison Street*

### Archeological Investigations

Archeological investigations were conducted within the project area in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) as well as with the City of Alexandria zoning ordinance. The work included a Phase I investigation in 2009, followed by archeological monitoring of the demolition of the 1950's era buildings and the removal of their concrete foundation footers; the excavation of mechanical trenches within the footprints of three of the former James Bland buildings within Block 5 was also conducted. One archeological site, 44AX0217, was identified as a result of archeological monitoring of the project area; the alphanumeric designation indicates this site is the 217th archeological site (0217) recorded in the City of Alexandria (AX) in the Commonwealth of Virginia (44).



*Location of Archeological Trenches within Block 5*

Site 44AX0217 represents tangible evidence of the occupation of this city block prior to the 1954 construction of the James Bland Homes public housing development; the site was comprised of one remnant brick foundation that was exposed in the southwest corner of the city block.

The brick foundation was located 25 feet west of N. Patrick Street and ran perpendicular to Madison Street. The foundation remnant was approximately seven feet in length and was 8.4 inches in width. The builder's trench on either side of the foundation was filled with concrete/cement with large pebbles. Only one course of bricks remained and was resting on subsoil. The foundation did not extend further to the east or west and apparently had been disturbed by previous excavation. No other foundations or additional archeological features were found in association with the foundation.



*Brick Foundation*

**Documentary Research into the Occupants/Owners of Block 5 and Site 44AX0217**

A photograph from the Alexandria Library special collections shows dwellings along the 800 block of N. Patrick Street. The photograph was likely taken sometime after 1949, as an aerial image from that year does not show the buildings on the corner of Patrick and Madison in the foreground. The 817-839 N. Patrick Street building is shown to contain twelve two-story, townhouse style units. The foundation is not visible, but the six sets of front steps appear to be poured concrete.



*800 Block of N. Patrick Street, View to Northeast (Kate Waller Barrett Branch Library Photo Collections)*

By 1941, a one-story dwelling and associated rear outbuilding had been constructed at 917 Madison Street; as depicted in historic photographs, the dwelling at 917 Madison Street was a one-story front end gabled roof.

Site 44AX0217, the remnant brick foundation identified during archeological monitoring

of the block, corresponded with the mapped location of a structure on the corner of N. Patrick and Madison Streets, more specifically at 801 N. Patrick Street. The permit to construct the building at 801 N. Patrick St. was dated August 31, 1948 and described a one-story cinderblock building that measured 24 by 32 feet. The building rested on a brick foundation and had a flat tin roof. The permit indicated that the building was to be used as a barber shop; however, it is shown as Cason's Delicatessen in the above photograph.

The original permit for 803 N. Patrick St. was not located; however, a total of \$400 in improvements was planned for the dwelling in 1943, and included repairs to the asbestos shingling, windows and doors, walls, and chimney. H.P. Thomas is listed as the owner of the house, which is shown as a gable-front frame dwelling with a pitched roof.

According to the documentary research, at the turn of the 20th century, approximately 70% of the occupants within the neighborhood surrounding the project area were African American (based on the 1899-1900 city directories) and most individuals were engaged as laborers. A review of the 1930 and 1940 census shows that all of the block residents were African American and were working in service-oriented jobs. Most of the men were employed as laborers, while female residents typically worked as maids or cooks. One individual was employed as a salesman for the Mutual Ice Company. None of the residents owned their houses within this city block.

### **Conclusions**

Site 44AX0217 was a foundation remnant that was related to a mapped structure and was not associated with any artifacts. The site encompasses one brick foundation remnant and measured approximately 5 by 10 feet. The circa 1948 foundation remnant had little research value and was not considered to be significant. Furthermore, because of the extensive disturbance surrounding the site, there was little remaining potential to yield additional significant archeological information about the occupants of this block. Site 44AX0217 was therefore not considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and no additional archeological work at the site or within the project area was recommended; Alexandria Archaeology indicated that no additional archeological work was required beyond the documentation completed during the monitoring phase.