

PUBLIC SUMMARY

“... The watch-fires of a hundred circling camps” Archaeological Investigations For Quaker Ridge Housing (44AX195) Alexandria, Virginia

At dawn on the morning of 19 November 1861, Julia Ward Howe in her room at Willard's Hotel, Washington, D.C., penned the above verse to the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. At the same time some eight miles away, in one of those “hundred circling camps,” New York militia soldiers viewed the same daybreak. In a camp just west of the intersection of Quaker Lane and the Little River Turnpike they started to go about their daily duties. Soon they moved on, leaving nothing but the detritus of military life and spent embers in their cooking hearths. For nearly 143 years their passing lay forgotten. This is the story of this camp, and how, through archeological investigation, we in the present commemorate the heritage of those who walked before us.

In the fall of 2004, archeologists from John Milner Associates, Inc. investigated a 2.5-acre project area on which Carr Homes is redeveloping. At present, it contains five residential lots (3517, 3525, 3535, 3541, and 3543) on Duke St., near the northwest intersection of Duke Street and Arene Court.

The project area is located on the north side of Duke Street just west of its intersection with Quaker Lane. In the past, Duke St. was the eastern end of the Little River Turnpike. During the Civil War, this road was one of the main east-to-west routes the Federal Army used in Northern Virginia.

Archeological investigations consisted of a Phase I identification survey. The goal of this survey was to determine the presence or absence of archeological resources within the project area. Phase I fieldwork entailed pedestrian survey, shovel testing and metal detection. One archeological site (44AX195) was identified. This site extended across the rear yards of 3517, 3525, 3535, 3541, and 3543 Duke Street and was present in the front yard of 3535 Duke Street. Additional archeological investigations were recommended because the site was considered potentially eligible to the National Register of Historic Places and had local significance to Alexandria, Virginia.



A present-day view of the project area.

Additional, supplemental archeological investigations were designed to maximize field recovery of information. Partially, this was due to a monetary cap placed on archeological expenditure for the project. The budgetary restraints reflect an agreement between the owner and the City of Alexandria.

The project area is west of the urban center of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Alexandria. It is located on a 68-acre parcel that was owned by Daniel French in 1743. North and east of the project area was the Carr/Simpson tract, part of which was sold in 1798 to offset debts of the owner, Josiah Watson, who had declared bankruptcy. The

property, known as Stump Hill, was subdivided into small lots sold at public auction. Two roads, one of them Quaker Lane, were put through the property. No evidence for a pre-Civil War occupation of the project area was found. In fact, examination of soils indicates that it was never plowed. Presumably, the project area was meadow or pasturage.

The Civil War years marked a change in the economic and social landscape of Alexandria. In addition to changes in urban character of the city, the Federal Army, vying for control of the region, left its mark.

In the wake of Abraham Lincoln's election, South Carolina seceded, thereby laying the foundation for armed conflict. After the fall of Fort Sumter and President Lincoln's call for Federal troops, a state convention was held in Richmond to decide what course Virginia would take. The secessionist faction won the debate, but a statewide referendum was scheduled for 23 May 1861. The state's citizens would vote to stay in the Union or ratify the convention's resolution for secession. Statewide, Virginians voted four to one in favor of secession. Virginia's choice was clear to the Federal government, and early on 24 May 1861, Federal troops crossed the Potomac River, secured the bridges, occupied Alexandria, and began fortifying the Arlington and Alexandria heights, which overlooked the capital.



Metal detecting.

After Bull Run the main elements of Federal Army were encamped in three separate locations, in the shadow of the defenses of Washington, to protect the main thoroughfares and railways leading to Alexandria and the Potomac River bridges. From these positions pickets, vedettes, foraging parties, and scouts periodically engaged the Confederates. The Confederate forces established their headquarters at Fairfax Courthouse, 15 miles (24.1 km) outside of Washington, D.C. From the White House, Confederate flags could be seen above the advance positions on Munson's and Miner's Hills, located just a few miles northwest of Alexandria.

Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the rebellion had resulted in military units reinforcing the vulnerable capital. Most of these units were state militias.

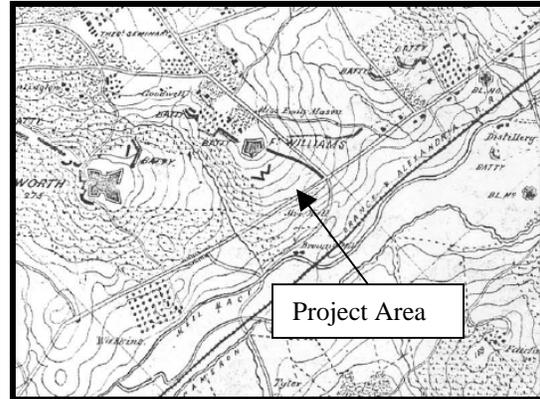
Prior to the Civil War the United States had a small Federal Army supplemented by a militia system. This army was primarily assigned to coastal defenses and the frontier, fighting Native Americans. The militia system was based on the concept of citizen-soldiers; volunteers who would come to the country's defense in time of war. It enjoyed a modicum of success, mainly because cash and land incentives attracted volunteers. President Lincoln's call for loyal governors to raise state troops resulted in many locally and privately formed militias becoming state recognized militias. The militia call up was derived from the 1792 Militia Act where each State was assigned a quota and men between 18 and 45 were perceived as having militia obligations (Weigley 1984:199). Usually, States recruited whole organizations such as political clubs, local groups, or ethnic organizations. The militia system was strong prior to the War and the Federal government was able to raise a large fighting force because organized volunteer

companies were already in existence. As early as December 1861, the Federal government was taking control of the militia system by replacing state officials and assuming responsibility for recruiting. As the war dragged on the number of volunteers declined reducing the viability of the militia system. Additionally, the officer corps changed from one in which officers were appointees to a system that emphasized success in battle. By the summer of 1862, not enough troops could be raised through the militia system and the Federal government instituted a partial military draft on states not meeting their enlistment quota. A nation wide draft was instituted in 1863.

The camp of one of the New York Militia regiments guarding the Little River Turnpike approach to Alexandria was found in the project area.

Now known as archeological site 44AX195, the camp was probably laid following the official manner in which regimental camps should be laid out as presented in the 1861 *Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States*. However, since only a portion of the camp survives the layout is not clear. No specific camp layout could be discerned from the artifact distribution or the features.

The camp consisted of a hospital and camp areas. The hospital tent, containing a Crimean Oven, was located on the east side of the camp approximately 500 ft. west of Quaker Lane and 200 ft. north of Little River Turnpike.



Two hundred and fifty ft. west of the hospital tent was a row of five hearths. These hearths were probably a kitchen area. The location of these hearths may reflect adherence to military regulations. The five hearths are not evenly spaced, but if the hearths are located at the end of where the soldiers camped, then they may represent the end of company streets. Alternatively, the hearth locations may reflect non-adherence to the formal regulations by early-war militia troops. If the hearths are on the ends of company streets, the streets probably extended to the west.

The area west of the hearths contains an artifact scatter that hints of organization, but what this organization signifies is not apparent. This area was almost certainly the camp of the enlisted men. While the distribution of ammunition types and melted lead could reflect company organization within a regimental camp, this is in no way certain. Two small hearths in this area may be individual fireplaces used mainly for heating of tents within the enlisted men's camp area.

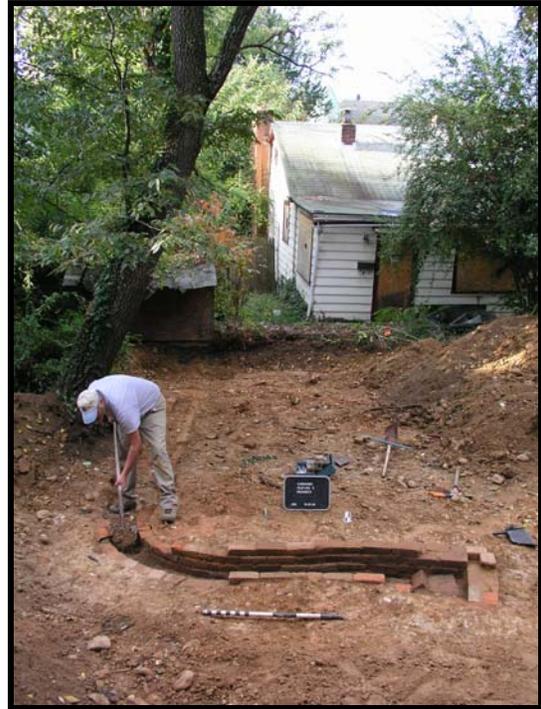


Hearth excavation.

Three types of hearths were encountered. Two were small fires built in shallow pits and were used for heating or with cooking methods that required direct heat. These are located in an area that the soldiers occupied. In the possible kitchen area, the five hearths displayed two distinct styles. Three hearths contain shallow fire pits and associated concentrations of charcoal which may reflect different cooking methods within the hearths. The third type of hearth was a more complex variation of the second type. These hearths contained fire pits with an adjacent linear depression which held coals. Evidence for diversified cooking techniques (direct heat and coals) showed that cooks used different methods in preparing food and that the soldiers had some variety in their meals. The soldiers may have used boiling, broiling, frying, baking, and roasting techniques in the preparation of their meals.

The hospital area included a remnant of a Crimean Oven. This Oven is a radiant heat system used to heat tents. The radiant system was simple: a heating source was

located on one side of the tent, the flue for the heating source was buried just below ground level and a tent placed over it. As the hot air flowed through the flue, the adjacent ground was heated. Variations of this system, sometimes referred to as “California stoves” were used for hospitals and even within soldier’s winter huts.



Excavation of the Crimean Oven.

The feature is similar to a Crimean Oven encountered at 44AX193, located approximately 600 ft. north of 44AX195. The Crimean Oven at 44AX193 consisted of a 50-ft.-long brick-lined trench (flue) attached to a 4-by-11-ft. brick box that held the heating source and, presumably fuel. Both features follow the north/south slope of the hill side on which they are situated, with the heat source on the down slope side of the feature.

At 44AX195 the surviving section of the oven included an approximately 29 ft. long section of flue and 2-by-2.5-ft. brick chimney base. The remainder of the flue and

the heating source was destroyed when the residence at 3517 Duke St. was built.



Chimney base of the Crimean Oven.

A large number of military artifacts were collected. Ammunition from the site includes buck and ball, minié balls, and assorted pistol bullets. This indicates that the most common small arms were smooth bore musket(s), and model 1855/1861 rifle-muskets, Enfield rifle-muskets, or more likely a combination of the three. Additionally, ammunition for at least two types of revolvers (possible Army Colts and Smith and Wesson) can be inferred from the artifacts.

Clothing artifacts included buttons, shoulder scale fragments, Kepi buckles, cap insignia, a gaiter button, suspender clip fragments, hem weights, and shoe nails.



Initially, states assumed the responsibility of outfitting militia troops. Consequently, early

in the war there was variation in uniforms. One manifestation of the militia system was the use of specific state insignia on uniforms and accoutrements. New York buttons have an Eagle sitting on a New York Military shield surrounded by an arc of 13 stars above the word "Excelsior." The New York military shield shows the state coat of arms (a river and mountains in front of a rising sun) on the left and the United States flag on the right hand side. This shield design symbolically shows the dual allegiance of the states militia (Tice 1997:371). Some New York regiments had their regimental number included on the face of their buttons. Unfortunately, we were not lucky enough to find any such buttons.



The Civil War soldier carried a variety of accoutrements as part of their general gear. Accoutrements are items of a soldier's gear which are not clothing or weapons (e.g., packs, rifle belts, cartridge boxes, etc.). Investigations recovered numerous knapsack parts, a canteen spout fragment, bayonet scabbard tips, and a cap/cartridge box finial.



The knapsack parts belong to a standard issue canvas pack used between 1853 and 1872. This knapsack included metal buckles, studs, hooks, and triangular fittings. Enlisted men found the knapsacks of limited use and often discarded them preferring to store items in blanket rolls.



The model 1853 knapsack was a 13.5-inch (in.) tall-by-14-in. wide frameless bag made from heavy fabric covered in gutta percha. The shoulder straps were made of leather. The most abundant knapsack related artifacts are hooks. These hooks were movable pieces that were on the shoulder straps, and were designed to fasten the straps to a belt allowing for a more comfortable fit. Since these hooks were merely pushed through a hole in the leather and not permanently attached they were easily lost. The buckles and triangular fittings were

used to adjust and secure the shoulder straps. Other types of accoutrement hooks were attached to the base of the knapsack and allowed other items to be hung from the bag. The rivets found at 44AX195 most likely are from the leather portions of the knapsack, possibly where the straps attached to each other.

An interesting decorated pipe bowl was found in a small hearth. The decoration on the pipe bowl is a bare-breasted woman with a bird wrapped around her. The pipe depicts Leda and the swan, a story from Greek mythology. However, to the soldiers it may have had a different symbolic meaning. To them the pipe may have represented Lady Liberty carrying an eagle. It was common for soldiers to carry and display these types of symbols as expressions of their patriotism, as part of their group identity, and to reinforce the ideals they were fighting for. At 44AX195, this pipe may reflect the feeling of patriotism that pervaded the early war militia units.



Figural pipe bowl

In summary, who were the New York militia troops who left traces of their time encamped in Alexandria? It is likely that the camp, because of the adjacent Crimean Oven was occupied by troops from Eight

Brigade commanded by General Sedgwick which was part of General Heintzelman's Division. The recovery of New York insignia indicates that the camp was occupied by New York Militia regiments. The only two possibilities within the Eighth Brigade are the 38th or 40th New York Regiments; but it is known that the 40th New York was camped elsewhere. The 38th New York Regiment Infantry, also known as the 2nd Regiment Scott Life Guard, probably occupied the camp.

For all that was learned of their camp, what they had, how they were organized, and of their patriotism, what they were thinking as the sun rose on that November morning in 1861, remains an enduring mystery.

JMA staff who worked on the project included Bryan Corle, Kerri Holland, Charles Goode, Lynn Jones, and Joseph Balicki. JMA wishes to thank Carr Homes for their support of the project and assistance in its completion. Wally Owen from Fort Ward Park graciously shared his research and extensive knowledge of the Civil War. Alexandria Archeology staff, Steve Shepherd and Fran Bromberg, provided needed support, oversight, and enthusiasm. Finally, a great deal of credit for the success of this project goes to Mike O'Donnell, local historian, relic hunter, author, and publisher, for his patience and mentoring on all aspects of the Civil War.