

## DOCUMENTARY STUDY OF THE 1300 BLOCK OF DUKE STREET

### **Introduction**

Prior to re-development of the 1300 block of Duke Street, a documentary study of the property was undertaken to identify potential archaeological resources. Documentary research included examining primary sources such as deeds, tax records and censuses, as well as secondary sources such as published histories of Alexandria. A documentary study is essential in understanding the history of the residences and businesses that stood on properties within the city. Together with an assessment of current site conditions (what buildings now stand on a property and what level of ground disturbance has occurred), the documentary study is used to predict the presence or absence of archaeological deposits and whether the property merits further study through archaeological excavation.



Location of the 1300 Block of Duke Street.  
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The Fannon Oil Company property at 1300 Duke Street encompasses most of a city block and is bound to the north by Duke Street and to the east and west by Payne and West Streets. To the south, the Old Town Village residential development borders the property. The block is currently used as a petroleum fuel depot. Two buildings

were located on the property at the time of this study - a circa 1951 building with later additions that serves as the Fannon office and a circa 1953 former gas station.

### **Eighteenth Century**

The 1300 block of Duke Street property was once located outside of the town limits of Alexandria, as established in 1749. It was part of a tract that descended through the family of Phillip Alexander, one of three landowners upon whose property Alexandria had been established. In 1784, William Thornton Alexander, a descendant of Phillip, sold an 82-1/2 acre tract that contained the property under study. Prior to this sale, however, a four acre tract that lay within the larger tract had been leased to Abel Wise. According to a 1786 announcement in the *Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser*, Abel Wise had

...after much trouble and experience [. . .] fitted up and completed the SPRING GARDENS, a moderate walk from Alexandria, convenient for the reception of ladies and gentlemen, where they will meet with good attendance on the most reasonable terms, and where tea and other entertainments are provided on the shortest notice.

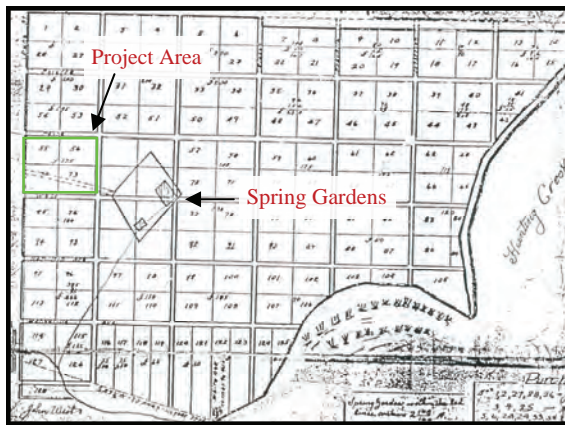
Alexander's sale of the 82-1/2 acre tract in 1784 specifically made an exception of the tract used by Wise for Spring Gardens. Abel Wise's Spring Gardens was not part of the property under study, although it was located nearby and the entire 82-1/2 acre tract was known as Spring Garden Farm by the 1790s.

The 82-1/2 acre tract was sold in 1784 to John Wise. The proprietor of several Alexandria taverns (including the one that was later known as Gadsby's), Wise apparently lived in a residence adjacent to one of his taverns at the time of his purchase and he would later have a new house

constructed on the west side of Washington Street (subsequently known as the Lloyd House). John Wise does not appear to have resided on the 82-1/2 acre tract; it was likely purchased from Alexander as a speculative investment.

In 1795, John and Elizabeth Wise leased the tract, with the exception of the four acres containing Spring Gardens, to Matthew F. Broune and Theodorus J. Hamilton. Under Broune and Hamilton, the tract was subdivided into 128 lots that were laid out by George Gilpin, a prominent citizen and surveyor who produced the first engraved map of Alexandria in 1798.

The following year, the entire tract was sold to Jesse Simms who mortgaged his stage line (running from Georgetown to Dumfries) to secure payment of the purchase price. The Spring Garden Farm tract was annexed to Alexandria in this year as well, becoming an official part of the city. A number of the lots that had been previously laid out were sold by Simms in 1796; four of these lots – numbers 55, 56, 73 and 74 – comprise the current Fannon Oil Company property in the 1300 block of Duke Street.



*The ground contained between Duke and Henry Street and Hunting Creek called Spring Garden Farm. . .  
George Gilpin, March 1806*

### **Early Nineteenth Century**

The lots passed through a number of owners during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lots 55 and 56, comprising a half square (or block), remained together throughout this period. Lots 73 and 74, however, were divided along a north-south line and the western and eastern halves of the two lots

comprised separate parcels during most of this period. By 1830, lots 55, 56 and the eastern halves of lots 73 and 74 were united under a single owner.

Rental dwellings (known as tenements) were standing on both of the 73/74 lots by 1810. These were occupied by a number of people until circa 1832 (the dwelling on the western lot) and circa 1844 (the dwelling on the eastern lot). A brickyard was established on lots 55 and 56 by 1812 under the ownership of Thomas Preston. Financial difficulties led to Preston’s default on a deed of trust for the property and the lots were held by a commissioner until being sold in 1829 to Richard Staunton, a brick maker and mason, who continued the brickyard business.

These three elements – two residences and a brickyard – remained on the lots through the early part of the nineteenth century. In 1832, the tenement on the western halves of lots 73 and 74 appears to have been removed, to be replaced by a second brickyard within the block; this brickyard was apparently gone by circa 1849.

In 1830, the brick maker Richard Staunton acquired the eastern halves of lots 73 and 74. At this time, Staunton was taxed for one half square worth \$1000 and one quarter square worth \$500. In 1844, Staunton sold his three-quarters of the block to John P. Emerson, who appears to have abandoned the brickyard situated on lots 55 and 56, constructing a large new house in its place. The property value increased from \$900 to \$2000 between 1846 and 1847. The tenement that formerly stood on the eastern halves of lots 73 and 74 disappears from the records during this time; Emerson may have removed it upon purchasing the property.

Establishment of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad during the early 1850s wrought significant changes in the neighborhood. The rail line ran through the city along Wolfe Street, which bounded the south side of the block and was closed as a street around this time.

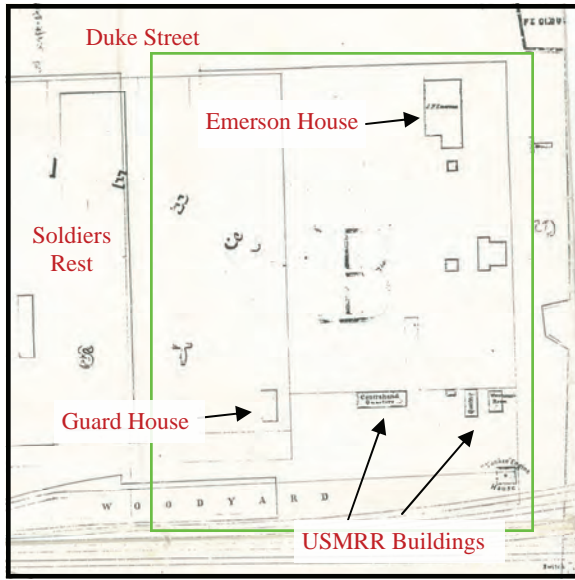
The railroad roundhouse, two blocks to the east, appears to have been constructed by at least 1851

and machine and engine shops were also constructed at this time.

**1861-1865**

During the Civil War, a significant portion of the block was utilized by the federal government. The western lot within the block, then owned by the Burke family, was incorporated within a rest

have been an open, grass-covered area.



Map of the U.S. Military Railroad at Alexandria, VA. Drawn at Office of Chief Engineer and Gen'l Sup't U.S. Military Railroads of Virginia. September 1865.

home for soldiers. Most of the buildings of "Soldiers Rest" were located within the block to the west, but at least one building, a guardhouse, was constructed within the southeast corner of Burke's lot. The remainder of the lot appears to



Soldiers Rest, Alexandria, Va. Unknown photographer.

The southern portion of John P. Emerson's three-quarter square, along the railroad, was also seized for use by the military railroad command. The Orange and Alexandria rail yard became the headquarters of the U.S. Military Railroad (USMRR). The USMRR was established after the passage of the Railways and Telegraph Act of January 31, 1862, which authorized federal control of all Northern and captured Southern railroads. Herman Haupt, commissioned as Director of Rail Operations for the military in 1862, organized the military railroads into the Construction and Transportation Corps. Haupt's Construction Corps was composed of "Contrabands," fugitive or escaped slaves who had fled behind Union lines. Under white officers and foremen, the men of the Construction Corps were responsible for construction of railroad bridges and tracks and also erected many of the buildings at depots and within the USMRR complex.



Soldiers Rest, Alexandria, Va. Unknown photographer.

A woodyard was established along the southern margin of Emerson’s property adjacent to the railroad tracks and at least three USMRR buildings, identified as “Contraband Quarters,” “Quarters” and “Watchman’s Room,” were constructed on the lot.

Emerson’s daughter, Isabel, kept a diary during the war and recorded some of the happenings in the vicinity of their home:

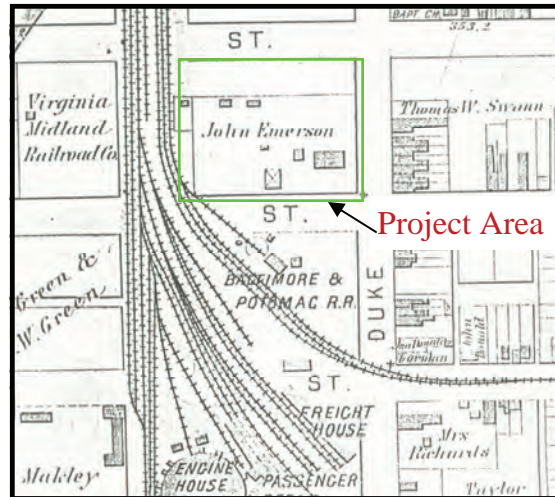
*May 26, 1861*— I jumped up and ran to a window just in time to see our Southern boys rushing by [ . . . ] Col. Ball’s cavalry was collected in front of their quarters opposite. By this time the rest of the family were up, and we were wondering what would happen next. In a few minutes, hundreds of yankee soldiers came marching down Duke Street as if in pursuit of our boys. They looked ferocious in their red uniforms and caps. Everything was in an uproar: women were shouting and crying over on the corner, some were running back towards the railroad, screaming ‘tear up the tracks, tear up the tracks’ [ . . . ] Father locked all the doors and made us go into the cellar, as a cannon had been placed in front of the railroad depot and we were within range as it was pointed down the road towards our retreating soldiers.

After the war, USMRR buildings were dismantled or sold and the property within the block reverted to the previous owners, John Emerson and the Burke family, but the railroad condemned the southern portion of Emerson’s lot in 1871.

**Late Nineteenth Century**

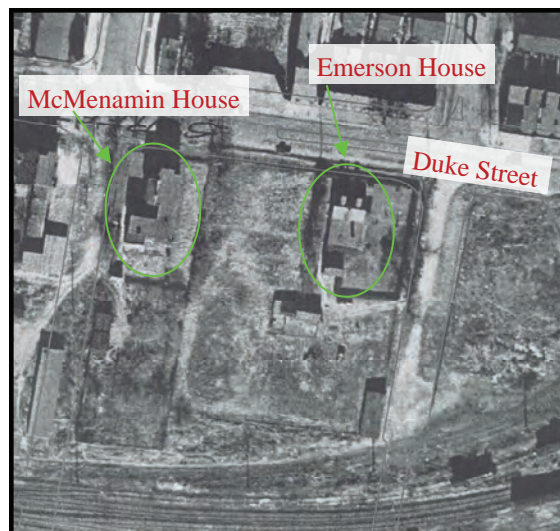
The Emerson family owned their home and the remaining part of their lot through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

John Emerson passed away in 1885 and was memorialized in the *Alexandria Gazette* of February 11th as “one of the oldest and most highly respected residents” of the city. His widow, Prudence, passed away in 1900 and her estate remained unsettled for several years.



Alexandria, Virginia. G.M. Hopkins, 1877

The remainder of the block, the western halves of lots 73 and 74, remained in the Burke family after the war. Silas Burke, who had passed away suddenly almost a decade before the war, had been a director of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad as well as an officer of the Fairfax County court. The Duke Street property continued to be owned by his widow Hannah until 1882 and appears to have been vacant during this entire period. Burke, and later his widow, maintained a residence at Burke’s Station in Fairfax County and likely never resided on the lot at Duke and West Streets. The lot was sold to Alice McMenamin in 1882.



1937 Aerial Photograph of Alexandria.

### ***Twentieth Century***

The estate of Prudence Emerson, which she had left to her children in five equal shares, was settled through a chancery court division. This led to the sale of the Duke Street property in 1905. The former Emerson property, consisting of the Spring Garden Farm lots numbered 55, 56 and the eastern halves of lots 73 and 74, passed through several owners until being purchased by Francis and Chester Fannon in 1953.

Thomas J. Fannon and Sons Oil Company had gained ownership of the 1200 block of Duke Street and began expanding into the 1300 block in the 1940s. In 1942, Francis and Chester Fannon had purchased the portion of the Emerson property that had been condemned by the railroad in 1871. The Emerson house was removed in 1953 and a gas station was constructed in that portion of the block.

The western lot remained the property of Alice McMenamin until 1917, when she sold the northern two-thirds of the lot to Marie Baber and the southern third to Goldie Baber, McMenamin's tenant. The northern portion was later sold back to Alice McMenamin. The southern portion of the lot was sold to Fannon by 1941 and the northern portion of the lot was sold to Lloyd Meeks. The lot was subdivided, with the former McMenamin residence (by that time an apartment building) remaining in the northern half of the lot; an auto repair shop was constructed in the southern half of the lot in 1951. The former McMenamin residence was demolished in the late 1950s and by 1964, the Fannons had purchased both of these lots. The auto repair building was incorporated into the current Fannon office.

### ***Potential Archaeological Resources***

A brickyard constructed in the eastern portion of the block, on lots 55 and 56, was in operation between circa 1812 and 1844. A second brickyard was apparently in operation between circa 1832 and 1849, in the western portion of lots 73 and 74. The brickyards would likely have consisted of one or more buildings, temporary or permanent brick kilns and open-air work areas. Features such as wells, clay pits and other features were likely present.

Circa 1846, the brickyard on lots 55 and 56 was closed and replaced by the residence of the Emerson family. This dwelling remained standing until 1953, when it was removed during the redevelopment of the block into a fuel oil depot. Maps of 1865 and 1877 depict outbuildings associated with the Emerson house and aerial photography from 1937 shows several outbuildings. It is likely that a well and privy (or privies) were also present.

During the Civil War, several buildings were constructed in the southern portion of the property. In the southwestern part of the block, on the western halves of lots 73 and 74, a guardhouse was constructed as part of Soldiers Rest. In the southeastern portion of the property, several buildings were constructed for the U.S. Military Railroad, including quarters for railroad workers, a watchman's building, and buildings associated with a woodyard. These buildings appear to have been constructed circa 1862 and were probably removed in 1865 or 1866.

In the early 1880s, a residence was constructed in the northwestern portion of the block, on the western halves of lots 73 and 74. This was the residence of the McMenamin family and remained on the property until it was demolished during development of the block as fuel oil depot during the late 1950s. Aerial photography from 1937 shows one or more outbuildings associated with the McMenamin house and it is likely that a well and privy (or privies) were also present.

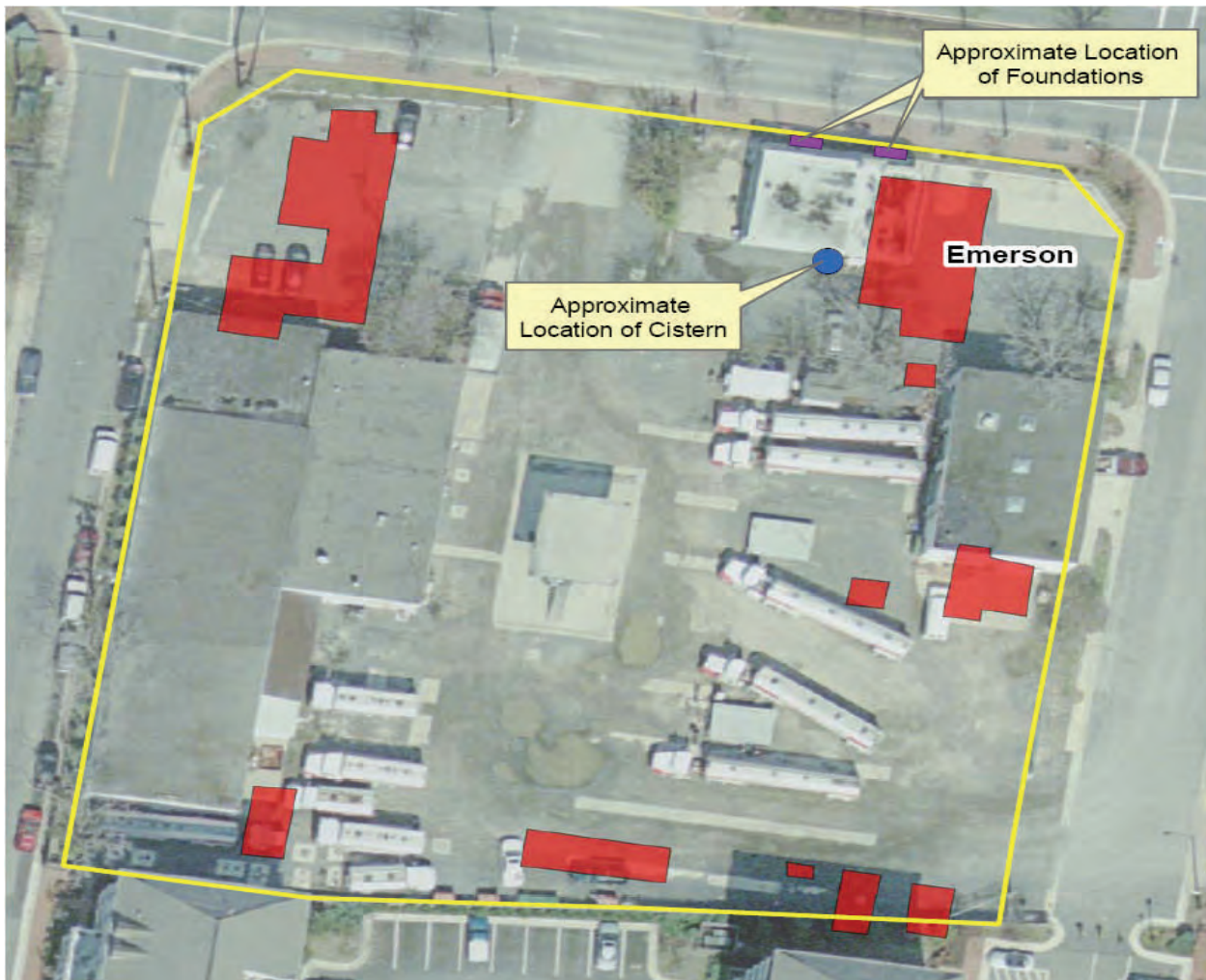
Although a number of potential archaeological resources were identified by this documentary study, significant ground disturbances occurred after the middle of the 20th century we believed to have removed most traces of former buildings or associated features. Monitoring of earth-moving activities, however, was recommended during future construction within the block.

### ***Construction Monitoring***

Archeological monitoring of construction was conducted within the property. The purpose of this monitoring was to identify any significant cultural resources that may have survived 20<sup>th</sup> century disturbance of the property.

Three brick features were located during the monitoring. Two of the features consisted of the remains of brick foundations thought to be associated with the John Emerson house constructed on the parcel in the 1840s. The Emerson house was demolished in 1953 during the construction of a service station which was present in this location until 2007. The foundations had been disturbed and partially destroyed prior to the monitoring.

The third brick feature exposed was a filtration cistern, which was similar in construction to other filtration cisterns that have previously been discovered and excavated in Alexandria. The feature was found to have been previously disturbed and contained mixed late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century fills. The feature had to be removed, and archeologists monitored the removal. During the removal artifacts were collected from the various fill layers and the feature was recorded.



- Historic Structures
- Approximate Location of Foundations
- Approximate Location of Cistern

*Historic Structures digitized from: 1877 "Alexandria, Virginia". G.M. Hopkins  
1865 "Map of U.S. Military Railroad Station at Alexandria, VA"*

### *Cistern Feature*

A brick lined water filtration cistern was uncovered, approximately 50 feet south of Duke Street and 80 feet west of Payne Street.

The cistern measured 10 feet 4 inches in diameter and was constructed of brick stretchers. The interior was lined with approximately one inch thick plaster and was divided just off center (with the smaller portion on the northern side) by a brick wall that ran the length of the cistern. The top of the cistern appeared to have been previously disturbed, but it was apparent from the inward curving walls that the top of the cistern was domed.

A rectangular shape, measuring 2 by 1.8 feet, was outlined by mortar and plaster on top of the northern half of the floor. This suggested the presence of a box which had likely been removed



*Floor of Cistern*

prior to the filling of the cistern with refuse and debris. The area within this rectangle appeared to have been recessed and likely contained a filtration box; mortar did not cover this area, providing some confirmation that a filtration box was present at one time. The mortar on the cistern floor in the northern half where the potential filtration box was located was stained dark gray. This was felt to be a possible indication of the color or type of filtration agent that was used; possibly charcoal. A dark reddened stain, which appeared almost blackened or burned, was observed in the



*Top of Cistern near dome portion*

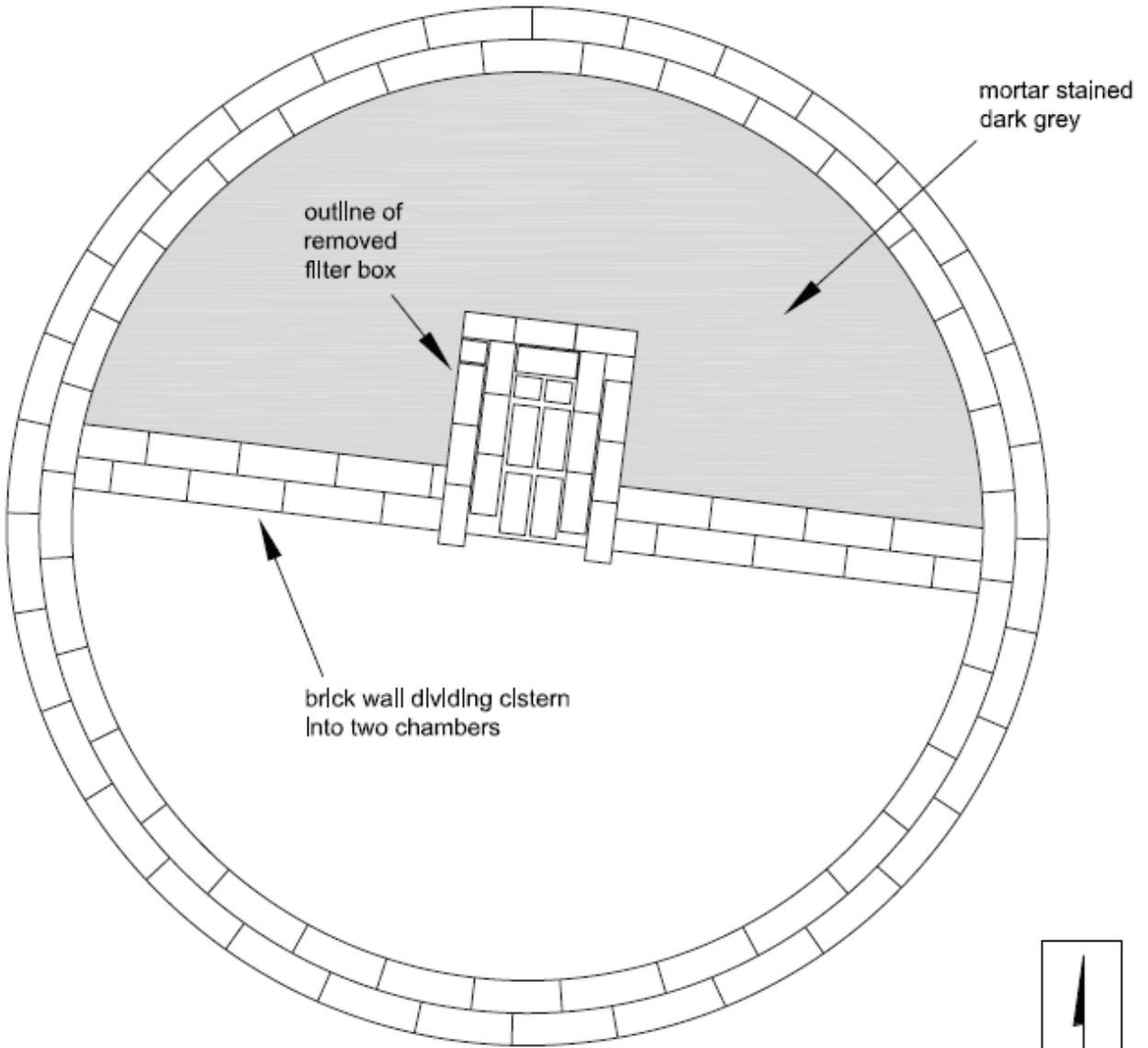
center portion of the former box location. In addition, the bricks within the hypothesized box location were laid in a different pattern than those observed outside.

The floor of the feature was reached at approximately 12 feet below the street level without finding intact 19<sup>th</sup> century fill horizons. The artifacts examined from the floor of the cistern indicated that the cistern was filled no earlier than the very late 19<sup>th</sup> century and probably during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

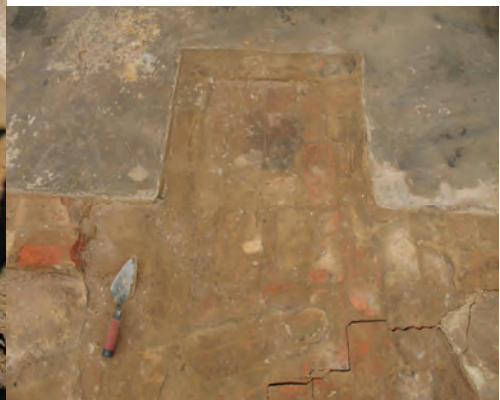
According to Dr. Steven Shephard, of Alexandria Archaeology, this cistern was similar in construction to other filtration cisterns that have previously been discovered and excavated in Alexandria.

One cistern was excavated in 1977 from the backyard of Robert H. Miller, who was a leading Quaker merchant and the first president of the Alexandria Water Company:

“The round plaster-lined cistern was six and a half feet deep with an inside diameter of eight and one half feet. The outer wall was constructed of header laid bricks bonded with whitish gray sandy mortar. The floor was two brick courses thick, with a layer of mortar covering the



*Planview of the floor of the Cistern*





inside surface. A brick partition wall divided the interior, forming two chambers – one containing one third of the interior volume, and the other the remaining two thirds. Attached to the lower portion of this wall were two additional brick walls, forming a brick vault on each side of the partition wall. These interiors of the two vaults were connected by means of a hole in the floor of the partition wall. Each vault was filled with well-defined alternating layers of gravel, charcoal and sand. These layers acted as a filter, the water in the larger chamber flowing down through one filter vault, through the partition wall, then percolating up the other filter to the small chamber from which the cleansed water could be drawn [Shephard 1989].”

In November of 2002, another water filtration cistern was discovered at 909 Cameron Street, in the backyard of a private residence. The construction, size, and temporal range of the artifacts within the Cameron Street cistern fill were similar to the one on the Duke Street property.

Based on research on water filtration systems conducted in 1980 by Melissa McLoud, the cistern at 909 Cameron Street was able to be dated. It is possible the cistern found at 1300 Duke Street was very similar to the one discovered at 909 Cameron Street.

This would place the construction date after 1836 and before 1852. Historical research indicates that, between 1832-1844, Richard Staunton owned the portion of the property where the cistern was located. Richard Staunton is described in the 1834 City Directory as a brick layer and is taxed \$1000 for a brickyard in 1836. Between 1840-1844, Mr. Staunton is taxed for a brickyard, house, and lot. It is possible the water cistern was built sometime during the period from 1836-1844 to service the house and brickyard (Bryant 2007).

In 1844, the property was sold to John Emerson who owned it until 1884. Between 1846 and 1847, Mr. Emerson built a large dwelling over the brickyard and it is equally possible that the cistern was

constructed by Mr. Emerson at the same time he built the dwelling. In 1900, Prudence Emerson, John Emerson’s widow, left the estate in 1/5 equal portions to their children and grandchildren. A Chancery Court record indicates that the property was sold to Edward Hughes in 1905 and, by 1919, the property was sold to Mary Annie Williamson. At some point during the Hughes or Williamson ownership, the cistern appears to have been cleaned out and used as a repository for refuse (Bryant 2007).

### ***Summary and Recommendations***

No further archeological work is recommended for these features or within the project area. Alexandria Archaeology concurred with these recommendations.