Abstract

Construction of The Thornton, a planned residential apartment building located at 1199 S. Washington Street in Alexandria, Virginia, exposed portions of three early twentieth century kiln structures associated with the former Alexandria Brick Company (44AX0233). Archeological documentation of the exposed structures was undertaken between July 27, 2016 and September 22, 2016 by R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates, Inc., on behalf of Foulger-Pratt Development, LLC. The archeological work included documentation of exposed cultural features and archeological monitoring of mechanically-excavated exploratory trenches placed near the exposed kiln structures; monitoring work was performed on an on-call basis during the above-cited dates.

All archeological investigations were conducted in consultation with the Office of Historic Alexandria/Alexandria Archaeology (Alexandria Archaeology) and Foulger-Pratt Development, LLC, and followed updates to the Scope of Work for a Documentary Study and Archaeological Testing (dated December 16, 2008) prepared by Alexandria Archaeology for the project. All aspects of the investigation complied with applicable federal, state, and local standards. Research methods employed during archeological monitoring work were approved by Alexandria Archaeology and followed guidelines for archeological investigations put forth in the City of Alexandria’s Archaeological Standards (Alexandria Archaeology 1996) and the Secretary of Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation (USDI NPS 1983).

Archeological features associated with the Alexandria Brick Company were exposed in the southwestern quadrant of the Hunting Terrace redevelopment area. Redevelopment efforts for the parcel included the removal of all existing buildings and infrastructure, and construction of a new multi-story residential complex with below-grade parking facilities. A previous Phase IA background study and archeological assessment indicated a high potential for intact archeological deposits or features associated with the former brick-manufacturing company (Williams and Sanders 2013). The brick-making business had been established on the property by 1884 and continued to operate under various names until 1919, when fire destroyed the engine house and drying sheds. The property lay unused until 1943, when the Hunting Terrace Apartments was built.

The Alexandria Brick Company produced machine and hand-made bricks until 1919, when the facility was again destroyed by fire. The abandoned kiln complex appears to have been partially dismantled when the Hunting Terrace Apartments was built. The complex originally consisted of five pairs of freestanding, coal-fired, updraft kilns; one of which were examined in detail for this project. Archeological monitoring during redevelopment, combined with documentation of previously exposed kiln structures, provided information on the layout of brick kilns used by the Alexandria Brick Company during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Project engineers were able to alter their plans in order to avoid impacting portions of the brick kiln complex which now are preserved in place.