The Winkler Botanical Preserve is a 44 ½ acre park and environmental education center in western Alexandria. The preserve contains walking trails winding through a wooded landscape. A central feature of the landscape is the stream that runs through the northern half of the park, ending at a manmade pond in the center of the Preserve.

The Preserve property is a fragment of the 982-acre William Henry Terrett land grand issued in 1741. The property remained in the hands of direct descendants of William Henry Terrett until 1947, when it was acquired by the Winklers.

For the past 40 years, urban development has been encroaching on the property surrounding the Winkler Botanical Preserve. Increased paving of the stream watershed has meant that rainwater cannot absorb into the ground as it naturally would. Instead, the water drains to the lowest point, which is the stream running through the Preserve. The recent construction of the Mark Center campus immediately north of the preserve has made this problem worse. Now, when it rains, a large flow of water enters the stream. The fast-moving waters have begun to scour out the stream bed, cutting channels into the hard clay below it, creating a miniature canyon.

This damage can be slowed by a process called stream restoration, which involves taking steps to lower the velocity of water as it flows downstream, like adding stone and plants to stabilize stream banks or pools or ladders to remove the energy from stream flow.

In 1979, archeologists from the Regional Preservation Office in Alexandria were searching the terraces along Holmes Run and its tributaries for archeological sites. One of the streams that they looked along was the one that flows through the Preserve. The archeologists identified eight sites within the Preserve. Most of these were small hunting campsites but one site was larger than the rest, and four projectile points were found.

Today, in order to revitalize the stream that crosses the Winkler Botanical Preserve, heavy machinery requires access to the stream banks. Plans for the project would have included the use of the heavy equipment to bring in stone and other equipment, in areas that cross two of the sites that were recorded in 1979 (44AX6 and 44AX16). One of these was the larger site that yielded 4 projectile points that cover a long span of time (5500 to 1100 years ago). Because, this has a chance to damage the sites, the Office of Historic Alexandria requested that an
Phase I Archeological Survey – Popes Branch Stream Restoration and Sewer Line Rehabilitation
Appendix D: Public Summary

The Ottery Group

archeological survey take place. This survey was conducted by archeologists from The Ottery Group in June, 2011.

THE METHODS

The survey involved the excavation of Shovel Test Pits (STPs), holes about 1 foot across that are excavated to the natural subsoil, usually 1 ½ to 2 feet deep. The soil from the STPs is screened so that any artifacts that are present can be recovered. There were two goals of the survey.

- The first was to determine whether there were any archeological sites present along the edge of the stream. The stream restoration project would involve digging into the banks, which would destroy any sites in these areas. The STP survey would allow archeologists to know if there was anything significant there before it was too late. The STPs were dug at roughly 30 foot intervals along areas that were level enough to have been used as an archeological site. A total of 54 STPs were dug in this part of the survey.

- The second goal of the survey was to reestablish the boundaries of the two known sites that fell within the project area. A grid of STPs was dug to determine where the site was, and to attempt to determine the site function. The grid consisted of STPs excavated at 30 foot intervals around the mapped location of each site, expanding outwards in 30 foot increments until the edges were located. A total of 57 STPs were placed around site 44AX6 and 9 STPs were placed around the much smaller 44AX16.

THE FINDINGS

The only artifact that was found along the stream came from the ground surface on the side of a steep hill. A quartz scraper, a tool used to remove bark from sticks or meat from hides, had washed down the hill during a rainstorm. The artifact probably came from a hill on the neighboring Mark Center property. Tools like this don’t change over time and can’t be used to determine the age of a site. This is called a non-diagnostic tool.

No artifacts were found in the area around site 44AX16. The site was really small when originally recorded; only 10 x 25 feet and it was located entirely on the surface of a hiking trail. A lot of disturbance has occurred along that trail since the site was identified. A storm sewer was built across the trail in 1980. Later, the trail was improved, widened, and graveled. Landscaping was done on either side of the path. Any one or a combination of these could have destroyed the site. Or maybe it still remains intact beneath the walking trail. What the testing was able to determine was that the site did not extend beyond the boundaries that were originally set for the site.

The only place that anything was found was at site 44AX6. Artifacts were found in eight STPs out of the 57 that were dug. Seven of those were found within 30 feet of the existing walking path. Only one artifact was found outside of that range. The 15 artifacts that were found included remnants from the making of stone tools, and the base end of a chunky, thick bladed knife/spear known as a Bare Island point. That tool allows archeologists...
to date activity at the site to the tail end of the Late Archaic period (4500 B.C. to 1500 years ago). Two 3 x 3 foot test units were dug based on the locations of artifacts recovered during the STP phase of the project. These units found a total of 44 additional artifacts, none of which could be pinned to a particular date range. The artifacts are the leftover fragments from stone tool making and stones that were broken from use in campfires.

WHAT IT ALL TELLS US

The 2011 excavations at site 44AX6 did not yield a large amount of artifacts, only 59 in total. That was enough to tell us some basic things about the site, though. Of the 59 artifacts, all but one are likely local material pulled directly out of the stream bed 60 feet away from the site. The size and thickness of the flakes of stone from the site tell us that the stone pulled from the creek wasn’t being used to mass produce stone tools, nor was it a site where the main focus was on making tools out of stone brought from somewhere else. The low number of artifacts suggests that the site was used temporarily and that it was not occupied for large portions of the year. The Bare Island point provides a point in time to anchor the site to, but the other datable artifacts from the 1979 survey show that the site was used over a long period of time.

Sites with a short period of use over a long duration where tool making is not a focus of activity are usually regarded to be seasonal hunting camps. In the period predating the discovery of agriculture, Native American groups are generally thought to have traveled in extended family groups, following game migrations in a particular region. These seasonal migrations would lead the groups back to the same areas at certain stages of the year, where fish or deer were concentrated, or particular wild plants or herbs were in bloom. The main body of the group would stay in an area known as a base camp, while small bands would radiate out to collect resources or to hunt game for the entire group. It is likely that site 44AX6 was one of the sites that the small hunting bands would visit, bringing their kills back to the main group. The tool debris present at the site can be explained as the use of local stream cobbles to make tools for immediate use, such as skinning knives.