Public Summary: Site 44AX0228

Dovetail Cultural Resource Group (Dovetail) conducted an archaeological survey of the property at 2811 King Street in the City of Alexandria, Virginia prior to proposed development of the parcel (Photo 1; Figure 1, p. 2). Documentary research identified Civil War camps in the vicinity of the parcel, and indicated the former presence of a late nineteenth- and twentieth-century dwelling. The documentary research led the Office of Historic Alexandria and Alexandria Archaeology to request the archaeological study of the land between the Ivy Hill Cemetery and the Woodbine retirement community.

Photo 1: View Northwest of the Project Area and King Street.

Documentary Research

During the antebellum period, the property passed through several hands before being purchased by a German immigrant, Frederick Hohenstein. Hohenstein, identified in census records as a farmer and gardener, never resided on the property. His second daughter, Regina, also known as Rachel, lived on the property during the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Rachel married an older Irish immigrant named Michael Garvey in St. Mary’s Catholic Church on June 14, 1860. The
couple is absent from both the population and agricultural census in 1860, suggesting that they may have initially left the area to build a life elsewhere.

Figure 1: Boundaries of the 2811 King Street Project Area (Esri 2015).
The Civil War brought military occupation by Union troops to Alexandria. The influx of troops led approximately two-thirds of the local population to flee the city. Troops camped in the project vicinity during the conflict. For example, a May 1861 map prepared by V. P. Corbett depicts the Leesburg Turnpike as it passes through Shooters Hill, Alexandria Heights, and Seminary Hill, but it also illustrates the a temporary camp of Zouaves, a regiment of the Union Army, in the general vicinity of the study parcel (Figure 2).

Regina and Michael Garvey obtained legal possession of the land after her father died in 1877. In his will, Frederick Hohenstein divided his property equally among his surviving children.
Each appears to have received approximately four acres (1.62 ha) of land, with Regina inheriting two separate lots. The smaller of these lots, containing roughly 1.4 acres (0.57 ha), is the parcel of now known as 2811 King Street. A circa 1900 map of Alexandria created for the Virginia Title Company depicts the lot inherited by Rachel and Michael Garvey (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Detail of Virginia Title Company’s “Map of Alexandria County, Virginia” with the Project Area Highlighted in Red.
Michael Garvey shares a headstone with his wife at St. Mary’s Catholic Church Cemetery in Alexandria. The gravestone indicates that he died in 1900. Since he and Regina Garvey were recorded in the population census of 1900 Census, it is believed that he passed sometime after the first of June that same year at the age of 81. The 1900 Census indicates that Michael Garvey never became an American citizen, despite having lived in this country since 1844.

After Michael Garvey’s death, Regina continued to live on the property, but many of her children, nieces, and nephews had moved off the property. Michael and Regina had ten children together that survived to adulthood, the youngest of which was Richard, born in 1885. Richard Bernard Garvey was 32 years old when he registered for the Draft during World War I (At that time, he worked as a Locomotive Engineer for the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad (RF&P) and lived with his wife, Agnes, in the newly developed suburb of Potomac in Alexandria County. Several years later, the 1920 Census reported Richard B. Garvey, a fireman for the RF&P, resided in his mother’s household with three children. The 74-year-old Regina’s residence was between a lot occupied by her nephew, Frederick W. Hohenstein, and the dwelling of a widowed African-American woman employed as the Sexton at Ivy Hill Cemetery, named Minnie Arnold. Minnie was the wife of Edward Taylor Arnold who worked as superintendent of the Ivy Hill Cemetery prior to his death in the summer of 1916.

Regina Garvey died intestate the following year at her home on King Street after a long illness. Her estate passed through probate court and resulted in a public auction on December 22, 1922. Richard B. and Agnes Garvey purchased the smaller lot at a price of roughly $2,037 an acre, owning this land until 1979. The house Richard and Agnes built on the property around 1926 was demolished during the 1980s.

Archaeological Survey

The archaeological survey suggested that the demolition of the circa-1926 Richard and Agnes Garvey House during the early 1980s and possibly other landscaping disturbed archaeological deposits associated with the Garvey family house or houses. In addition, a water line extended from King Street across the project area.

Shovel test pit (STP) and metal-detector survey at 2811 King Street identified buried cultural material throughout much of the project area (Figure 5, p. 7). The assemblage of 124 artifacts returned to the lab consisted primarily of domestic refuse, with ceramics and container glass forming nearly half of the assemblage (n=61). Architectural debris (n=32) and miscellaneous metal items (n=25) formed nearly all of the remaining artifacts.

Diagnostic artifacts reflected nineteenth- and twentieth-century occupations (Photo 2, p. 8). Unfortunately, few artifacts provided a relatively precise date range. One shard of glass from a P. J. Ritter company condiment bottle was marketed between 1919 and 1929, the label on a second clear glass fragment that read “May 29, 19”, and a 1955 Wheat Penny were deposited during the twentieth century, along with many items of metal, glass, and plastic. Eleven of the 18 ceramics were whiteware (1820–Present); decal-decorated polychrome motifs on one sherd date the artifact to the late-nineteenth- to early twentieth-century.
All artifacts were recovered from near-surface, temporally comingled contexts. Based on the recovery of all artifacts from near-surface contexts, the presence of modern materials in contexts with historic artifacts, and the absence of information that improves significantly upon that gleaned from documentary sources, additional archaeological work at site 44AX0228 does not appear likely to contribute important new information about the history of Alexandria or the larger region. Therefore, site 44AX0228 was recommended not eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion D.
Figure 5: Plan Map Showing STPs and Metal-Detector Hits with Potential Historic Artifacts (Esri 2015).
Photo 2: A Sample of Artifacts Recovered During the Archaeological Survey.