The two parcels at 1323 Wilkes Street and 421 South Payne Street, Alexandria, Virginia have been proposed for redevelopment. The parcels consist of a mid-twentieth century warehouse and two-story office building with no vegetated open space area. The proposed redevelopment of these parcels will include the construction of 22 townhouses, with associated parking and landscaping improvements. Alexandria Archaeology reviewed the proposed project and determined that because the existing warehouse complex was built with a slab foundation, there is potential for archaeological deposits under the extant foundations. They concluded that the parcels may have the potential to contain significant archaeological deposits associated with the nearby Civil War U.S. Military Railroad Yard (no longer extant).

This photograph was likely taken in the early part of 1863. The city block along Wilkes Street between Fayette and Payne Streets appears to be in the midst of transformation for use by the railroad complex. The stockade, fort, and associated magazine had not yet been constructed.

JMA (a CCRG Company) prepared a documentary study of the two contiguous parcels in September 2014. The study included background research on the prehistory and history of the project area and its vicinity. Based on its findings, Alexandria Archaeology determined that there was potential for archaeological deposits associated with the stockade that protected the Civil
War U.S. Military Railroad Yard. JMA then performed an archaeological evaluation within the warehouse to determine whether remains of the stockade are present below the concrete slab foundation. This was done in lieu of performing archaeological monitoring during demolition of the warehouse. The evaluation consisted of the mechanical excavation of one exploratory trench at the targeted location of the stockade.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the project area was part of the Spring Gardens entertainment complex, but the buildings associated with this complex appear to have been located west of the project area. An 1863 illustration of the city shows the project area as sparsely developed and with the grid of streets not extending to the area. The U.S. Military Railroad station was located immediately to the east and north. In mid-1863, a stockade protecting the railroad complex was built diagonally through the project area, with a small fort, Fort Haupt, just north of the project area. By mid-1865, the U.S. Military Railroad station complex included an "iron yard" with railroad spur which was located in the project area. After the Civil War, the property returned to civilian use, with an 1877 map showing two houses along Wilkes Street in the western side of the project area, and another dwelling built at the intersection of Wilkes and South Payne Streets in the 1880s. This last house would remain standing through the 1980s, while the western portion of the project area was converted to commercial uses by the 1950s with the construction of a warehouse. The warehouse has expanded to fill most of the project area.

Fieldwork for the archaeological evaluation included the mechanical excavation of one east-west oriented 37-by-4-foot (ft) trench at the targeted location of the stockade near the northeast corner of the warehouse. Stratigraphy encountered within the trench below the concrete building slab and gravel subbase consisted of a mid-twentieth century fill deposit over sandy C horizons or subsoil. This indicates that the ground surface had been altered at this location and the A horizon had been removed. No evidence or remains of the stockade was identified.
After the Civil War, the stockade became an inconvenience to Alexandria citizens living within its confines. It’s possible that the stockade was entirely dismantled when it was sold at public auction in the summer of 1865. It’s also possible that if remains had persisted after the war that they were destroyed during the construction of the warehouse. It’s also worth noting that the former Webb House and stable that was at 421 S. Payne Street both covered the same area within the property as the stockade and it is possible that their construction would have impacted any remains.

An 1864 lithograph shows the project area vicinity after the establishment of Fort Haupt including the stockade, the powder magazine, the railroad complex, and Soldier’s Rest Army Hospital shown in the foreground.

Although no evidence of the stockade was identified in Trench 1, stockade remnants could be located elsewhere within the eastern portion of the project area west of Payne Street, at a distance of 70 ft or less from the edge of the street. Much of this area is currently under a two-story office building. JMA recommends that if remnants of the stockade are found during demolition/construction activities associated with the proposed redevelopment that work should be immediately halted and Alexandria Archaeology be notified.