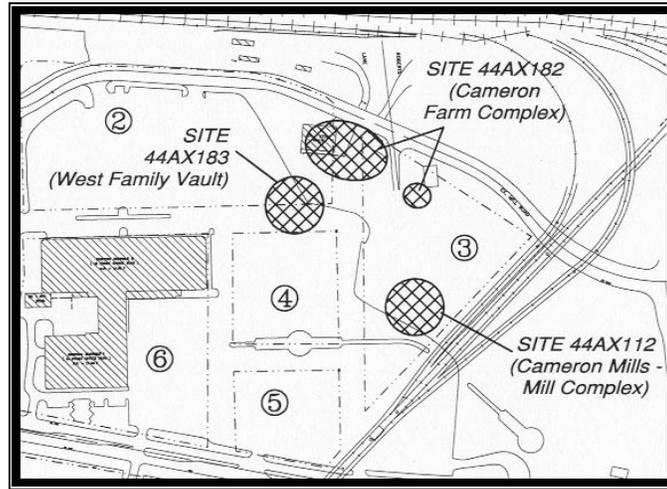


EXCAVATIONS AT THE WEST FAMILY CEMETERY (44AX183)



Plan View of the three sites on the Hoffman property

Any driver stuck in the frequent traffic backups on I-95/495 cannot help but notice how rapidly development is progressing along the Eisenhower Avenue corridor. The once nearly vacant Cameron Run stream valley now is crowded with dense pockets of townhouses, commercial and government office buildings, warehouses, and overnight accommodations for the traveling public. But not so long ago, the Cameron Run valley was a place of plantation houses, gristmills, agricultural fields, gardens, orchards, and—yes—even family cemeteries. It was the overlap of these two contrasting landscapes in December 1999 that brought about the excavation of the West Family Cemetery.

Project Background

Early in 1998, the Hoffman Management Company began to expand development on its property in the Eisenhower Avenue corridor. To comply with Alexandria's Archeological Protection Ordinance (1989), Hoffman retained a consulting firm to conduct archeological studies on the undeveloped blocks of its property. Working closely with Dr. Pamela Cressey and her staff at Alexandria

Archeology, these consultants completed several studies as Hoffman Management filed specific, block-by-block, site plans with the city. The archeological work was timed to coincide with specific development plans filed for each block of the property. The research objectives and the methods used in the field during each stage of the study were guided by the nature of development planned for the site, as well as the field conditions on site.

By the fall of 1999, archival research had documented the property's ownership history. Archeological field testing had revealed various components of buildings that once had stood on the property, including the main house, outbuildings, and secondary residences that were part of the 19th century Cameron Farm, and sections of the headrace that once had powered grist mills on the property.

As Hoffman Management began to prepare the site of the current AMC Cineplex in mid-1999, archeologists monitored earth-moving activities to make sure that no archeological remains were disturbed. Then, two days before Christmas 1999, as new water lines were being installed, the site monitor observed bricks

falling into the water line trench. Halting the backhoe and scraping down the sides of the utility trench., he exposed, for the first time in over two centuries, the burial vault of one of Alexandria's founding families.

The West Family of Alexandria

The West family's association with the City of Alexandria began at the end of the 17th century, when John West, a Stafford County planter, bought part of an early 627-acre land grant from John Simpson. West subsequently bequeathed this parcel to one of his grandsons, John, but John died prematurely, leaving left neither heirs nor will. John's brother Hugh took possession of the property, and later purchased the other half of the original 627-acre tract. These 627 acres included our project area.

City Archaeologist Dr. Pamela Cressey observed that "(t)he West family—Hugh West in particular—was a tremendously instrumental force in the establishment of Alexandria as a town." A prominent landowner, Hugh's properties housed the first tobacco inspection station and warehouse in Northern Virginia at the foot of what is now Oronoco Street, a property known today as "West's Point." His public career included service as one of Alexandria's original trustees and as a vestryman for Truro Parish.

When Hugh West died in 1754, he left his son, John "all that property on which I now live," but stipulated that his wife, Sybil (Harrison) West could continue to live in the family home. John West, who passed away in 1776, continued his father's tradition of public service. As assistant surveyor for Fairfax County, he helped to lay out the town of Alexandria in 1749 (with the aid of a young George Washington), and served as delegate to the House of Burgesses, Justice of the Peace and sheriff of Fairfax County, member of the Fairfax Committee of Safety during the Revolution, and Clerk of the Truro Parish Vestry between 1756 and 1764. Like his father, John bequeathed his 627-acre

property to his eldest son, Thomas West, but specified that his grandmother could continue to live on the ancestral plantation.

Captain Thomas West was a Revolutionary War veteran who served during the Pennsylvania and New Jersey campaigns of 1777 and 1778. After the war, his financial fortunes began to deteriorate. Beginning in the 1780s, he mortgaged some of his properties to cover his debts. He also sold property to a variety of individuals, including the milling partnership of William Bird, John Stump and John Ricketts. Two of these deeds mentioned, for the first and only time, that there was a "vault" on West's property. One deed specified that a proposed millrace had to be built at least twenty feet from Thomas West's "vault;" the other "reserved" from the sale a 20 x 20 ft parcel around the vault.

PUBLIC SALE OF LANDS.
By virtue of a decree of the Court of the United States for the fifth circuit Virginia district, in the suit of Hepburn and Dundas against Thomas West, in chancery—will be sold on the premises to the highest bidder, at Public Auction, for ready money, on Monday the 20th of August next, at 12 o'clock A.M. if fair, if not, the next fair day at the same hour,
A TRACT OF LAND,
situate on Hunting Creek, in the County of Fairfax and Commonwealth of Virginia, within one mile of the town of Alexandria, and near to the Cameron Mills, whereon major Thomas West now resides, supposed to contain from fifty to eighty acres.
Also,
on the same day will be offered for sale, *The residue of said Thos. West's Land,* lying on the northwest line of the patent of Carr and Simpson, adjacent to the tract before mentioned, not disposed of by the said Thomas West at the time certain mortgages were made by him to Hepburn and Dundas.
Richard M. Scott, }
F. Peyton, } **Comrs.**
Amos Alexander, }
July 12, 1781.

Sale notice for Thomas West's Cameron Farm

By 1805, West's debts to other creditors forced the sale of his Cameron Farm property at public auction. The location of the Wests' plantation was gradually forgotten, as its site was used consecutively for farming, as the site of a trailer court, and finally for commercial development. Indeed, by 1999, Thomas West's "vault" and the individuals interred within and around it were the only tangible reminders of the important family that once controlled so much property and were so influential in the history of the City of Alexandria.

Archeology at the West Family Cemetery

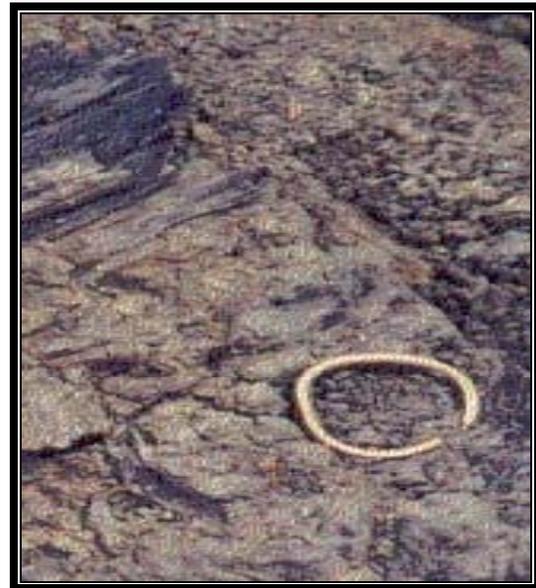
In April 2000, after preliminary testing had verified that the vault did contain human remains, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources issued a burial excavation permit for the vault and for a large area surrounding it, as required by Virginia law. This permit specified how the remains were to be removed, and required skeletal analysis to determine, where possible, the age, sex, stature, pathology, and cause of death of each individual. Drs. Clifford and Donna Boyd, professors at Radford University in Virginia, were retained to perform the analysis.

Because old family cemeteries often include unmarked graves, the first task was to determine whether any additional graves were present in the area near the vault. To accomplish this task, a backhoe with a smooth blade was used to strip away the asphalt parking surfaces that had sealed the cemetery site for over three decades. As the surface was peeled away, the full dimensions of the vault--and seven more grave shafts--were exposed. After gently troweling the surface of the vault and each grave shaft to define their exact shape, the archeological team began to remove the modern fill that filled both the exterior grave shafts and the upper portions of the brick vault.

The remains in the graves and the vault were in varying states of preservation. The

individual burials were most severely damaged; nearly two centuries of repeated wetting and drying had reduced most of the bones and the coffins to little more than powder. Grading and utilities installation for the post World War II trailer court had removed all but approximately 1 ½ ft of the original grave shafts. Therefore, before these remains were removed, they were extensively photographed and drawn to scale. Of the seven burials, only four were sufficiently well preserved to permit analysts to determine anything about their physical attributes. The four burials that could be analyzed included two adult males, one adult female, and one small child.

Although the bones within the vault generally were better preserved, the way that they were arranged presented an osteological jigsaw puzzle. The same grading that had removed almost all of the graves outside the vault also had collapsed the roof of the vault itself. As a result, the pine coffins and human remains within had been scattered, broken, and mixed together with the collapsed bricks from the roof.



Gold hoop earring on remains of the coffin base

Despite the confusion, skeletal analysts were able to “match” enough of these bones and teeth to ascertain that at least seven individuals had been buried within: two adult males, three adult females, one child aged 5 ½ - 7 years old, and a newborn infant. All had apparently been wrapped in shrouds and enclosed in modest hexagonal pine coffins. One item of personal adornment--a gold hoop earring-- was recovered on the bottom of the coffin of one of the young women.

Interpretation

Who were the individuals that had been buried in the West Family Cemetery? Although no identifying markers were found in the fill of the burial chamber, documentary sources provided answers in at least two cases. Obituaries in the *Alexandria Gazette* noted that both Sybil West (Hugh’s wife) and Colonel George West, one of her children, had been interred in the “family vault” outside of Alexandria. Clues to the possible identity of another adult female and the infant were found in a biography of Alexandria merchant John Carlyle. His second wife, Sybil, was the daughter of Hugh and Sybil West. She died of consumption in 1769 after giving birth to a daughter, who also did not survive. The other adults and the small child could represent any number of other West Family members.

The identities of the seven persons buried in the individual graves outside of the West Family vault remain a mystery, although the archeological evidence provides some clues. First, it is probable that these individuals were not members of the immediate West family, since all of these graves lay outside of the 20 x 20 ft perimeter designated in one of Thomas West’s land sales. Secondly, at least three individuals—a male, a female and the small child--probably were a family group, since

all of them were buried in a separate row, with the infant in the middle.

Finally, one archeological find raises the possibility that the adult male of that family group may have been African-American.



Quartz crystal recovered from adult male burial, West Family cemetery

As his remains were excavated, a small clear quartz crystal was discovered beneath his left shoulder blade. Crystals such as these have been found at other African-American related sites in the region—including the Carroll House in Annapolis and the slave quarters at Monticello. Perhaps this man was a trusted West family servant; we will never know for sure.

These fourteen souls finally are at rest once more. In October, they were reburied in the graveyard of Pohick Church, home church of Truro Parish, whose interests this family served so admirably during their lifetimes.

Prepared by R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc. on behalf of Hoffman Management, Inc. and the City of Alexandria, Virginia

“The Parishes being of Great Extent. . .many dead Corpses cannot be conveyed to the Church to be buried so that it is customary to bury in Gardens or Orchards, where whole Families lye interred together.” --Reverend Hugh Jones (1724)