INDUSTRIALIZATION OF THE STRAND

During the 19th century, numerous entrepreneurs gradually improved the lots and expanded the warehouses and wharves associated with the 200 block of the Strand. Josiah Davis owned many properties along Alexandria's waterfront and bought property at present-day 211 Strand Street specifically to open a plaster mill in 1822, which he operated until 1875, except during the Civil War. His warehouse contained a steam engine, a boiler, and machinery for grinding plaster. He was also involved in ship chandlery, the procurement of supplies for ships and their crews, and the lumber business.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF A WORKING SEAPORT

By the latter decades of the 19th century Alexandria’s waterfront was becoming increasingly industrialized. Archaeological excavations uncovered evidence of some of these burgeoning industries on the property. For example, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showed four warehouses on the property in 1885, but by 1896, Warehouse A had been demolished and was used by DeWilton Aitcheson for his coal yard. Annie Moore continued to operate her husband's business after he died in 1894. Warehouse D continued to be used for pattern storage, but Warehouse C was converted into a blacksmith shop. The warehouse foundations uncovered during archaeological excavations also defined the two alleys that historically ran between Warehouses A and B and between B and C. Historic alleyways would have given waterfront access to merchants occupying buildings across the entire property.

THE 1897 FIRE

In 1897, a fire destroyed most of the 200 block of the Strand. It began in the engine room of Herbert Bryant's bone mill, located on the east side of Strand Street, present-day Point Lumley Park. Only one building east of Union Street survived the blaze.

“It was first supposed that the fire could be confined to the mill, which is of brick...before it could hardly be realized, the devouring element had crossed the Strand via the tramway connecting the mill with the frame warehouse on the west...in a short time the entire square was a roaring furnace...Herbert Bryant says there is no doubt in his mind that the fire was of incendiary origin.” – Alexandria Gazette 3 June 1897

After the fire, DeWilton Aitcheson bought some of the newly empty lots primarily on the north side of the block to add open space to his business, the D.W. Aitcheson Coal & Wood Yard (also known as Aitcheson Fuel Co.). He cleared much of the destroyed warehouses and built a new office, new warehouses, and a railroad switch. Further improvements to the property included the addition of a stable in 1902 and a tannery in 1907. After Aitcheson's death in 1925, the property passed to Mary Williamson who owned and maintained the property and business until her death in 1962. She left the business to Beverly D. Turner, who added a gas pump for cars and air conditioning services until Aitcheson Fuel Co. finally closed in 1978.

NOTICE!

COAL !!!

We have received notice from the wholesale coal merchant of an increase of 20% per ton on coal.

WE WILL NOT ADVANCE

the price to our customers. We have a large stock of this best grade on hand—CLEAN, 2240 pounds to the ton GUARANTEED.

DeWilton Aitcheson.

OFFICE: Duke and Fairfax streets

PHONE 94

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