The West End

The area around Duke Street between Hooff’s Run and the base of Shuter’s Hill was once known as "West End." Originally subdivided and sold by John and Thomas West in the 1780s, West End became a thriving community well positioned for commerce along the Centerville Turnpike, later Little River Turnpike (now Duke Street). The City of Alexandria annexed West End in 1915, and eventually its distinctive name was lost. With subsequent annexations, the "West End" name has moved to the current western portion of Alexandria.

By 1815, a variety of tradesmen had established their homes and businesses at West End, the junction of two turnpikes, Little River and Leesburg (King Street), and the navigable Hooff’s Run. Butchers, tanners, millers, carriage makers, tavernkeepers, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, soap and candle makers chose West End for availability of large land parcels outside the town limits and proximity to customers traveling on the thoroughfares. Within the next 100 years, West End residents also engaged in slave dealing, glassmaking, brewing beer, selling dry goods and food, providing water, as well as growing flowers in commercial scale greenhouses.

Commercial Activities at West End

West End extended from Hooff’s Run to the water course and was depicted in the background of the 1864 birdseye view of the town. A map of Alexandria, C.H. Bogert, 1876, by Benchmark Map and Publishing Co., Alexandria Gazette, September 20, 1876.

While some families continued to live in West End for generations, there was a great deal of turnover among residents. Charles Jones advertised, “...he has once again commenced business at WEST END Drake Street...” COOKMAKING... having a number of slaves working in the different branches, and all kinds of materials for carrying on his business Extensively.” Yet, Jones left the next year and rented his buildings to James Sheehy for his Soap and Candle Manufactury. Sheehy advertised that he kept “...in five thousand weight of hairy lard...” (hogs head).

Credit: Alexandria Council, 2/27/19/8, 12/28/1916.

Several archaeological investigations have been conducted in advance of new construction in West End. Archaeologists have discovered the remnants of homes which once lined Duke Street, the West End Brewery, the Virginia Glass Company, Cameron Mills, and the burial vault of the West family, for which West End was named. Some of these sites are protected underground. The 60-foot long cellar for cooling beer survives under Duke Street between Dulaney and Diagonal streets, and portions of the bottle factory’s gas furnaces and flues are under the John Carlyle Street circle.

The brick structure at 1707 Duke is the last remaining West End building. Constructed as a home in 1819, it is remembered as the “Brui Slave Jail” where African Americans were brought before transport to southern markets for resale.

Alexandria Heritage Trail

In one of the few views of West End, a large building can be seen in this 1864 photograph taken from Shutter’s Hill looking east. Samuel Calis’s tavern, known as the Inners Hotel, catered to those who drove the cattle to the nearby yards for slaughter. Cattle sales, elections and political meetings regularly occurred there.

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