



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



Project Name: *Alexandria Legacies – Fort Ward Oral History Project*

Title: *Interview with Joseph John Moraski*

Date of Interview: *July 16, 2009*

Location of Interview: *At Fort Ward Historical Park*

Interviewer: *Pamela Cressey, Second Interviewer, and Third Interviewer*

Transcriber: *Tess Christine Evans*

Abstract: *In the 1950s, Joseph John Moraski spent time playing in the area that is now Fort Ward Historical Park. He recalls the East Bastion structure, a small cemetery in the area, as well as a ravine where he and his brother found mini-balls, speculating it was once a shooting range for the soldiers.*

July 2010 - This transcript has been edited by the interviewee and may not reflect the original audio-recording exactly.

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Construction of the East Bastion	
P.C.:	This would have been the East Bastion and this is pretty well preserved. And [if] you know what you're looking for, you can really pick out certain features, like areas where the gun platforms were. You can kind of see them sloping up towards the...
Joseph John Moraski:	You can.
Second Interviewer:	So, this hasn't been changed? The reconstruction was not here?
Joseph John Moraski:	No. All of this is original, I believe.
P.C.:	All this area around here is original?
Joseph John Moraski:	You can see right here, this is that...[looking at map]
P.C.:	Exactly. This is the Northwest Passage.
Joseph John Moraski:	...and they would not have had big guns, probably. They had these Napoleon Twelve's that could shoot like a shotgun down here -and here- to keep people...
P.C.:	North and South, right?
Joseph John Moraski:	Well, it would keep people out of the [unclear] front.
P.C.:	Right.
Joseph John Moraski:	Just because you made it that far up the slope didn't mean you were out of trouble. [Laughter]
Big Gun	
P.C.:	Now, this is the big gun you were talking about, right?
Joseph John Moraski:	Yeah.
P.C.:	This is the hundred pound...
Joseph John Moraski:	Here's the end of the bomb proof. And, that's why I say this one should be way over there on the other side of the road, if that was the Parrot Rifle.
P.C.:	Braddock Road kind of clips this-- but the area where the Parrot was would be in Fort Ward Park today.
Joseph John Moraski:	And this was probably the shell filling-in magazine for the Parrot Rifle.
P.C.:	That's correct.
Bomb Proof	
Second Interviewer:	So this bomb proof -- As it extends out, is that it's full length today?
Joseph John Moraski:	Yeah, I think so.
P.C.:	Yes.
Joseph John Moraski:	Two hundred feet.
P.C.:	What we're seeing here on the opposite side of the park road are remains of the exterior Fort walls and areas that were clipped by Braddock Road.
Joseph John Moraski:	Yeah, that would be this in here [looking at map].
P.C.:	So this is all gone? But we have this, which is what we were seeing when we were standing on the west looking out.
Second Interviewer:	Exactly.
P.C.:	This is very eroded. You can still see the trace of the Bastion, but it's not quite as defined and well preserved as these areas.
The Gate	
Joseph John Moraski:	And this is the gate. That white gate is right there.
P.C.:	Right, so that white...

Second Interviewer:	Now, that's the original site?
Joseph John Moraski:	And you see the vertical poles or posts. That probably is built to the original height of the Fort. If you could imagine the ground level being high enough so that it reaches the top of that.
Second Interviewer:	Right, that's a good point.
P.C.:	The four walls would have been just about as high as the top archway to the gate.
SI:	Yeah, that's really different.
P.C.:	You're seeing our...
Second Interviewer:	The reality.
P.C.:	...the completion of our most recent renovation project.
Joseph John Moraski:	I read the sign that said you were redoing it.
P.C.:	The rebuilding of the Fort gate - It had gotten really, really deteriorated and we're real happy with the work.
Second Interviewer:	So, the walls were the top of the arch?
Joseph John Moraski:	No.
P.C.:	Just about the top of the arch.
Joseph John Moraski:	You see the white vertical...
Second Interviewer:	Yep.
Joseph John Moraski:	The dirt would be right up against this.
P.C.:	Yep.
Joseph John Moraski:	And not the top of the arch of the gate.
P.C.:	I'm just talking about height-wise.
Second Interviewer:	Yeah, that gives it a totally different look to it, doesn't it?
Joseph John Moraski:	Yeah.
P.C.:	That's fascinating. [Tape paused]
Joseph John Moraski:	...probably ten or twelve, something like that.
P.C.:	When did you graduate from Hammond?
Joseph John Moraski:	Nineteen sixty-four.
Third Interviewer:	This is the overlook, and your house was up here somewhere?
Joseph John Moraski:	Nineteen twenty-four -- this is the overlook and it was right about there.
Third Interviewer:	And this is the ravine you're talking about?
Joseph John Moraski:	Yeah.
Marlboro House	
Third Interviewer:	And Marlboro House was here and the barn was here. Was there a fence or gate somewhere around in here?
Joseph John Moraski:	If you could show me the line where there was right in the wood side-the line between field and forest -- There was a gate. He had a gate and there was a kind of a pathway where it looked like it might [have] been a carriage road or something that went down this way.
Third Interviewer:	This is the house, which was this.
Joseph John Moraski:	It isn't far from the house...I would guess up in this area somewhere.
Third Interviewer:	There are some anomalies right here -- directly east, which looks like it may -- I'm guessing here, from what I'm seeing -- It may have been some sort of a formalized front garden.
P.C.:	This is the Ruffner House?
Third Interviewer:	This is the Ruffner Marlboro House.

Joseph John Moraski:	These graves were definitely in the forest and they were on the forest side of the gate.
P.C.:	So they would've been behind the house?
Third Interviewer:	...in the ravine, or near the edge of the ravine...
Joseph John Moraski:	On this side of the ravine?
P.C.:	On the west side?
Joseph John Moraski:	You could go up the ravine, and right about where the ravine stopped...
Third Interviewer:	The head of the ravine?
Joseph John Moraski:	... Yeah, the gate was over here.
Third Interviewer:	...was north of the ravine?
Joseph John Moraski:	Uh-huh.
Third Interviewer:	So, it was on this kind of plateau?
Joseph John Moraski:	Yeah, that's what I think.
Graves	
P.C.:	And then the graves were up on the plateau?
Joseph John Moraski:	Right about in here, I would guess.
Third Interviewer:	That's sort of at the head of the plateau.
Joseph John Moraski:	Yeah, because the ravine ended right about where the forest and field was. The field was on this side.
Third Interviewer:	Right it does.
P.C.:	You can see.
Third Interviewer:	The ravine is right here.
P.C.:	So this would be up in this area right there, right?
Third Interviewer:	Yeah, that is now clearly under the development and was extensively [unclear] in order to level it up.
P.C.:	Right. So when you were looking at the graves, were there little stones, just depressions?
Joseph John Moraski:	No, just what appeared to be wooden headstones. They weren't stone. They were like wood, and they were encapsulated in what looked like was galvanized metal -- tin you might call it. And so, this was tacked around and then they probably bend it and they tack that and they bend it around and tack that, so it would be...
P.C.:	Sort of a sheathing around the wood to kind of protect it.
Joseph John Moraski:	Exactly. And as I recall, the wood was pretty much falling out of most of them and the metal was rusty, so they were pretty old.
P.C.:	Just in your mind's eye, were there lots?
Joseph John Moraski:	I think there was half a dozen.
P.C.:	Half a dozen. Kind of clumped together?
Joseph John Moraski:	They looked to me like rows and they looked like graves. We wouldn't have called them graves if they didn't look like graves, so.
P.C.:	For a kid it would have to be pretty obvious, so maybe there was some depression in front of the headstone.
Joseph John Moraski:	I remember the markings.
P.C.:	It was clearly cemetery to you, is how you read it.
Joseph John Moraski:	It was pretty much tangled up, lots of vines and small trees. That kind of thing.
P.C.:	That's what it looks like on the aerial, and that's earlier than you, that's a

	1949 aerial, but it's still probably very similar to what you would have been seeing in the [19]50s.
Joseph John Moraski:	I can tell you another thing that I thought was interesting. Like I said, I went to Hammond High School. If I had to walk home, if I missed the bus, or was at football practice or something, I'd go across the street where the fire department is now...
P.C.:	Yes.
Joseph John Moraski:	...okay but it wasn't there. You go across the street, up to the woods and you go through that woods and you'd come to another ravine, go down and then you'd come across --there was a kind of a bottom to it with maybe a creek, I don't remember, but there was a bottom and it went up to the road here. I remember the road didn't go all the way through. The road used to--if you went down the road--you'd see an old folk's home on the left, right where the corner is. The road goes like this, making a turn, and the old folk's home had a fake cannon in the yard. We all thought that was cool.
Third Interviewer:	I think the name of it was Fort Ward. That was the name of the old folk's home.
P.C.:	The retirement home. So was that on Seminary?
Third Interviewer:	No, it was on North Tower.
Artifacts	
Joseph John Moraski:	Then, on the other side of the street was the school. So if you went down past the school, past the old folk's home, the road pretty much ended. It made a left turn. Then it looked like a private road going up to some houses where some people lived. Where it made the trail -- on the private road -- you could still go out into the ravine and that's where you would come out, if you walked from school. Like I was telling you--the place was full of old mini balls and various kinds, too. You could find them. They were white, and if you walked along and you saw the white, you could pick them up. They were fired and they were all different kinds. We decided --me and my brother-- decided that that must have been a formal or informal shooting range where the guys from the Fort would shoot their guns. You got to have some place to shoot the old black powder guns, even if you load it, you have to shoot it to unload it.
P.C.:	There was just so many.
Joseph John Moraski:	Yeah, and they were all different kinds...if you have them, they must have come from some kind of range. That's what we thought. I've never driven down here and tried to figure out exactly where that was, compared to what there is now.
P.C.:	That would be interesting to do.
Joseph John Moraski:	Yeah.
P.C.:	Because Howard wasn't there. Well, it had to be part of if was there is the senior home was there.
Joseph John Moraski:	It was kind of a crappy road that went down and not very far, and then it ended and an even smaller road made a left and went up to that house where those folks lived.
P.C.:	We have other aerials that would show that area. We could scan it and send it to you or something.

Joseph John Moraski:	There was a load of balls there. You know, mini balls and regular balls and small stuff. All kinds of things. Even found a cleaner round [one] there one time with the back thing on it.
P.C.:	You were very adventurous kids weren't you?
Joseph John Moraski:	Oh yeah. And another one. You know, right out here, there's a sign that talks about the bomb proofs.
P.C.:	You have your sign out there?
Joseph John Moraski:	No. I don't know exactly when that was put in, but I believe that that's the one that I'm going to tell you about. Me and my dad, who walked over there, and my sister Joanie. He used to like to walk up here, so we would visit him-- and we walked around and that sign had just been put in and there was some loose dirt around it and there was a mini ball in the dirt. I knew my sister wouldn't believe me if I said, "Hey look here what I found!" I got her over and I said, "Now look, I didn't put that there." She picked it up and for all I know she still has it.
P.C.:	She still has it...[Laughter]
Joseph John Moraski:	Maybe, I don't know. Then my brother turned over a whole lot of stuff to the museum here and they gave it all back in the [19]70s and the late [19]70s and early [19]80s.
P.C.:	What was there?
Joseph John Moraski:	Just stuff that we found here, bullets and...
P.C.:	And what was the name?
Joseph John Moraski:	Moraski. M-O-R-A-S-K-I.
P.C.:	What's your brother's first name?
Joseph John Moraski:	Richard. Now he lives in Portsmouth, Virginia. Him and his friend used to come out here and try to find things also.
Second Interviewer:	I recognize that name from early loan records here.
P.C.:	Really?
Second Interviewer:	Yeah. I think it was loan. We can look before you leave today, but I think it was one of those things where I absolutely recall that name in doing record keeping here.
Joseph John Moraski:	Yeah I'm pretty sure they gave everything back to him, not that he really cared, but he found a lot of things over here in this area that's to the right where this kind of, after you pass the graves are out there. There was an old house close to the Fort. I can show you. There was an old house that was kind of falling apart, nobody --I never saw anybody living there-- but we'd come out and peer into the windows and everything and look at it every once in a while.
P.C.:	Sounds like a great play ground for some adventurous guys.
Joseph John Moraski:	If you want to walk out there...
P.C.:	Yeah, let's walk out, and if you don't mind, if we could get a ...[Tape Ends]