

# OLD TOWN NORTH

## HISTORICAL SELF-GUIDED TOUR

November 10, 2015

0 250 500 1,000 Feet



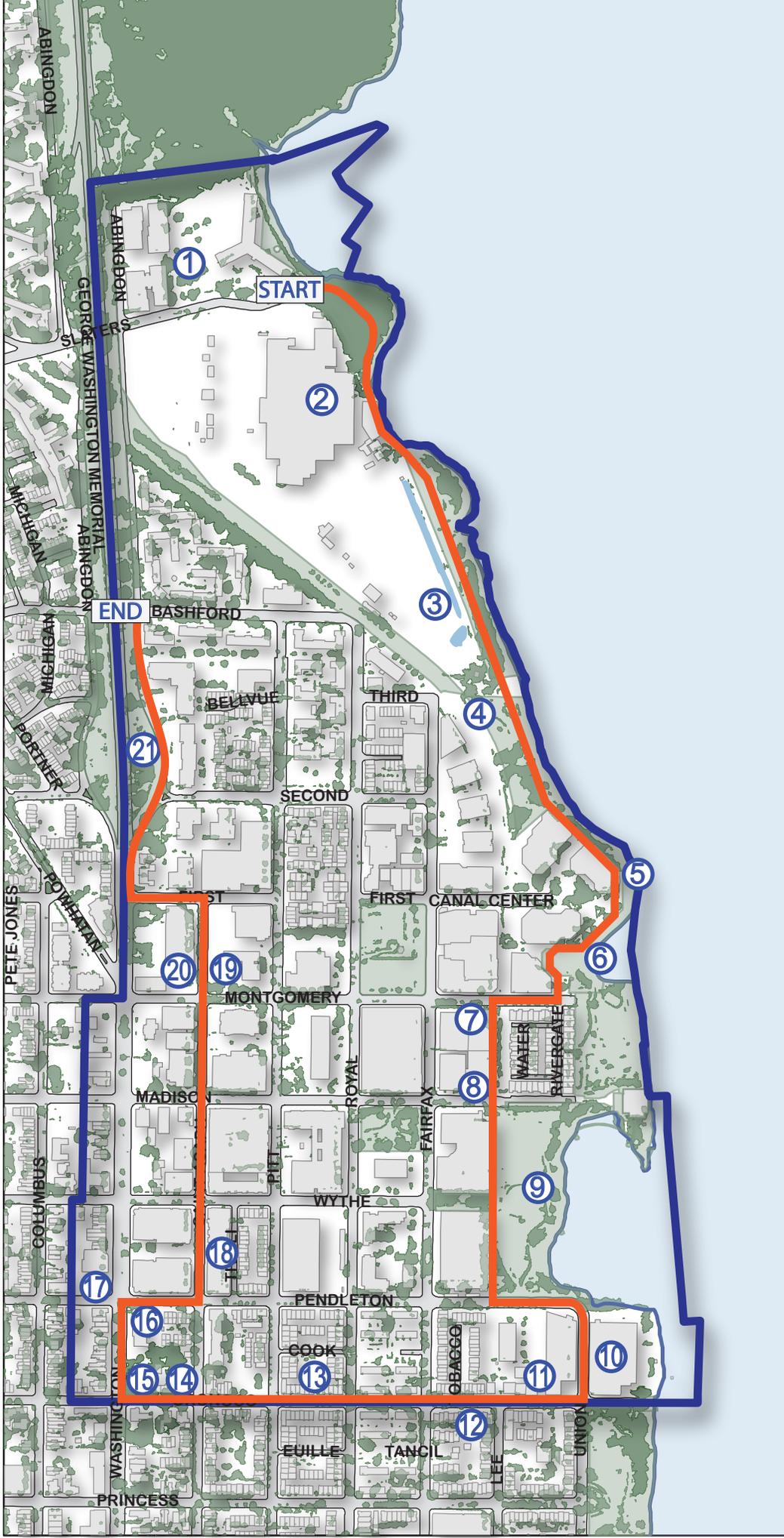
### LEGEND

 Route (2.5 mi)

 Old Town North SAP Boundary

### SITES

- ① Bellevue Plantation
- ② Dade Plantation
- ③ 19th Century Rural Dwellings
- ④ Alexandria Loudon & Hampshire Railroad/  
Washington & Ohio Railroad
- ⑤ Canal Wharves
- ⑥ Alexandria Canal
- ⑦ Old Dominion Glass Factory
- ⑧ Cross Canal/African American Neighborhood
- ⑨ Sunken Vessels in Oronoco Park & Bay  
Unidentified - 1836  
Emily Washington - 1910  
Plumie E. Smith - 1911
- ⑩ West's Point, Civil War Hay Warehouses/  
American Coal Company
- ⑪ Standard Oil Company
- ⑫ Rail Depot/ Ralph's Gutt
- ⑬ The Berg and Fishtown  
African American Neighborhood
- ⑭ Robert E. Lee Boyhood Home
- ⑮ Benjamin Hallowell School
- ⑯ Mount Vernon Cotton Mill
- ⑰ Civil War Stables and Parade Ground
- ⑱ Robert Portner Brewing Company and  
Alexandria and Washington Railroad
- ⑲ Chalybeate "Spa" Medicinal Spring/ Lime Kiln
- ⑳ Ice House
- ㉑ George Washington Memorial Parkway





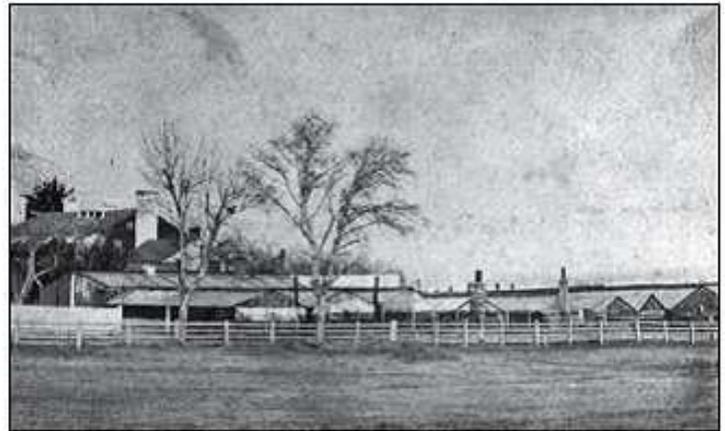
## Old Town North Historical Walking Tour

1. Start on Mt Vernon Trail by the Marina Towers. **Former site of the Bellevue Plantation (1).**
2. Head South on Mt. Vernon Trail passing by the Potomac River Generating Site. **Former site of the Dade Plantation (2).**
3. Continue South on Mt Vernon Trail passing by the site of former **19<sup>th</sup> Century Rural Dwellings (3)** and the abandoned tracks of the **Alexandria Loudon & Hampshire Railroad/ Washington & Ohio Railroad (4).**
4. Stay on Mt Vernon Trail going around Canal Center former site of the former site of the **Canal Wharves (5) and the Alexandria Canal (6).**
5. Turn right on Montgomery Street, then turn left on the Mt. Vernon trail passing by the former site of the **Old Dominion Glass Company (7)** and the former **Cross Canal/ African American Neighborhood (8).**
6. Continue south on Mt. Vernon Trail passing by the Oronoco Bay Park where remains of **Sunken Vessels were discovered (9).**
7. Turn left on Pendleton Street towards Union Street then turn right on Union Street passing Robinson Terminal North to **West's Point** where the **Early Tobacco Warehouses, Civil War Hay Warehouses/ American Coal Company (10)** and the **Standard Oil Company (11)** used to be housed.
8. Turn right on Oronoco Street heading west.
9. Continue on Oronoco Street passing by former sites of the **Rail Depot/ Ralph's Gutt (12), The Berg and Fishtown African American Neighborhood (13), the Boyhood Home of Robert E. Lee (14), and the Benjamin Hallowell School (15).**
10. Turn right on Washington Street towards Pendleton Street passing the former **Mount Vernon Cotton Factory (16)** and the site of **Civil War Stables and Parade Ground (17).**
11. Turn right on Pendleton Street towards St. Asaph Street passing by the former site of the **Robert Portner Brewing Company (18).**
12. Continue North on St. Asaph Street towards Montgomery Street passing by the **Chalybeate "Spa" Medicinal Spring (19) and the Ice House (20).**
13. Turn left on First Street towards Washington Street, then turn right on E Abingdon Drive by the **George Washington Memorial Parkway (21).**

## SITE DESCRIPTIONS

### 1. Bellevue Plantation/ Slater's Lane

Bellevue Plantation stood for many years in the upper part of Old Town North, near the east end of Slater's Lane. In 1772, Robert Adam leased land from the Alexanders of Preston and established a plantation. William Hodgson purchased the lease in 1801 and moved his family there, establishing a dairy farm. In 1841, John Slater bought Bellevue and added greenhouses for his floral business. A storm destroyed the old house in 1912.



Source: Alexandria Library

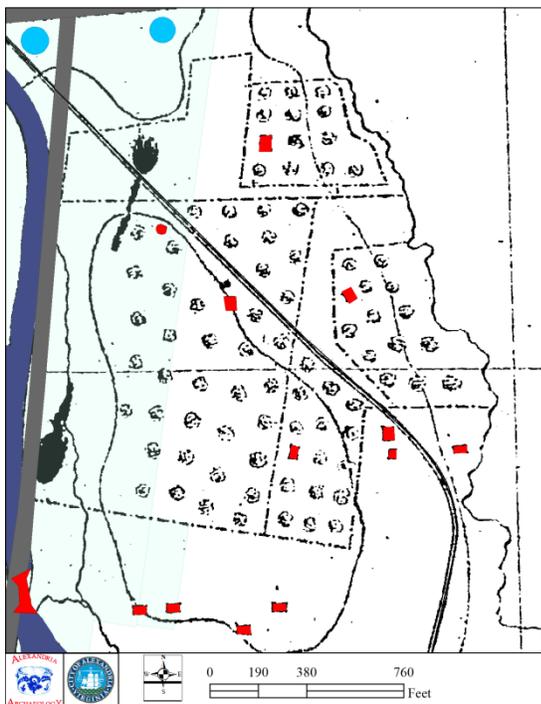
### Slater's Lane

Today's modern Slater's Lane follows the path of an earlier historic road that provided access to Bellevue plantation, and perhaps the Dade plantation as well. The road received its name from the Slater family, one of the owners of Bellevue in the nineteenth century.

### 2. Dade Plantation

By 1760, much of the land comprising Old Town North was owned by Townshend and Baldwin Dade. They each owned 400 acres, stretching from the Potomac River to a line running roughly along Cameron Mills Road. Townshend Dade, first rector of Christ Church (1765-1778), owned the northern 400 acres and eight slaves. Baldwin owned the southern 400 acres and six slaves. The Townshend Dade plantation is located on the property of the former Pepco Power Plant south of Slater's Lane.

### 3. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Rural Dwellings



Base Map Source: Environs of Washington, 1861, National Archives

#### 4. Alexandria, Loudoun & Hampshire RR/ W&O RR

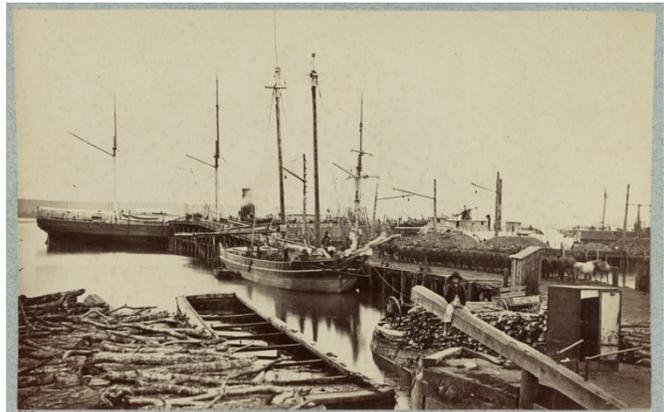
During the 1850s, the Alexandria, Loudoun, and Hampshire Railroad laid track on a right-of-way through this area, running north along Water Street (now Lee Street) before turning northwest around Second Street. It later became the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad. Industries thrived along the rail line as it enabled factories to receive raw materials and ship finished goods.

#### 5. Canal Wharves

Located at the east end of First Street near the mouth of the Alexandria Canal, the wharves were a busy place in the heyday of the canal in the 1840s and 1850s. Ships offloaded coal on the wharves which was then transported the fuel to the many industries that had sprung up in this section of the city, including the Mount Vernon Cotton Factory. As railroads replaced canal transport in the 1860s and 1870s, activity at the coal wharves dwindled.



Source: Library of Congress



Source: Library of Congress



Source: Library of Congress



Source: Library of Congress

#### 6. Alexandria Canal

Under construction for 12 years, the Alexandria Canal opened to boat traffic in 1843 and was fully completed in 1845. Considered a boon for local commerce, the canal connected Alexandria with the C & O Canal in Georgetown. Approximately 50 to 60 ft. wide, and a mere 4.0 ft. deep, the mouth of the canal emptied in the Potomac River just to the north of Montgomery Street. A series of three locks lifted boats up a total of 38 ft. to a 190 ft. wide turning basin that spanned between North Pitt Street on the east and Washington Street on the west. Largely vacant prior to its construction, the canal spurred industrial growth in Old Town North. However, by the 1850s and 1860s a faster, more affordable railroad system supplanted most canals, including Alexandria's. By 1886 the Alexandria Canal Company declared bankruptcy and discontinued operation.



Source: Library of Congress

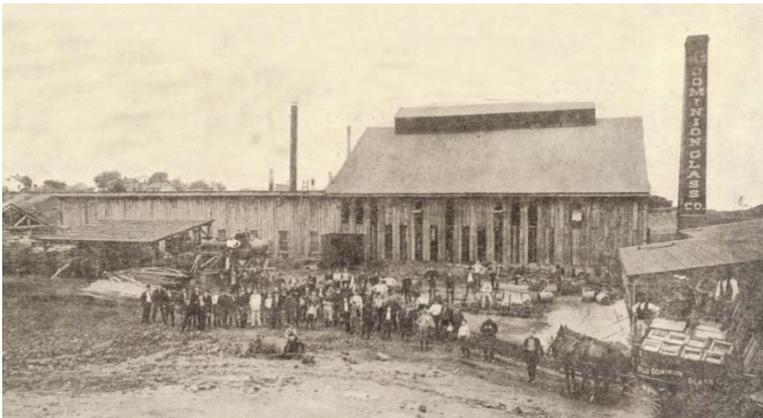


7.

Source: National Archives

### **Dominion Glass Works**

The Old Dominion Glass Works began operations in 1901, at its height employing several hundred workers, many African Americans from the surrounding Cross Canal neighborhood. The factory sprawled across four or five acres at the corner of North Fairfax and Montgomery streets. Fires plagued the business from the beginning, the first occurring just five months after opening. Year after year, fires caused varying amounts of damage, some causing the glass works to shut down for months at a time. During World War I the plant suffered from shortages of raw materials. In 1916 Virginia instituted a prohibition of the sale and manufacture of alcohol, further damaging the financial prospects of the bottle making industry. In 1920 a disgruntled worker set fire to the factory, causing a massive amount of damage. The business was never able to fully recover, and eventually closed for good in 1925.



Source: Library of Congress



Source: Library of Congress

### **8. Cross Canal**

During the Civil War era, African-Americans established a small, largely rural neighborhood in the vicinity of the Alexandria Canal. First located on the north side of the Alexandria Canal, to reach the community from Old Town proper one had to pass across the canal, thus lending the neighborhood its name, Cross Canal. Later as the neighborhood grew, it expanded to the south side of the canal as well. Residents of Cross Canal commonly found employment on the wharves or the nearby Dominion Glass Factory located on the 800 block of North Fairfax Street. None of the Cross Canal buildings survive; however, a plaque at North Fairfax and Montgomery streets commemorates the neighborhood.

## 9. Sunken Vessels

The remains of a vessel that sank in 1836 may be beneath fill deposited in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to create Oronoco Park. The *Emily Washington* was pinned to the bottom beneath four feet of water in 1910 and the *Plumie E. Smith* was dynamited in the bay in 1911

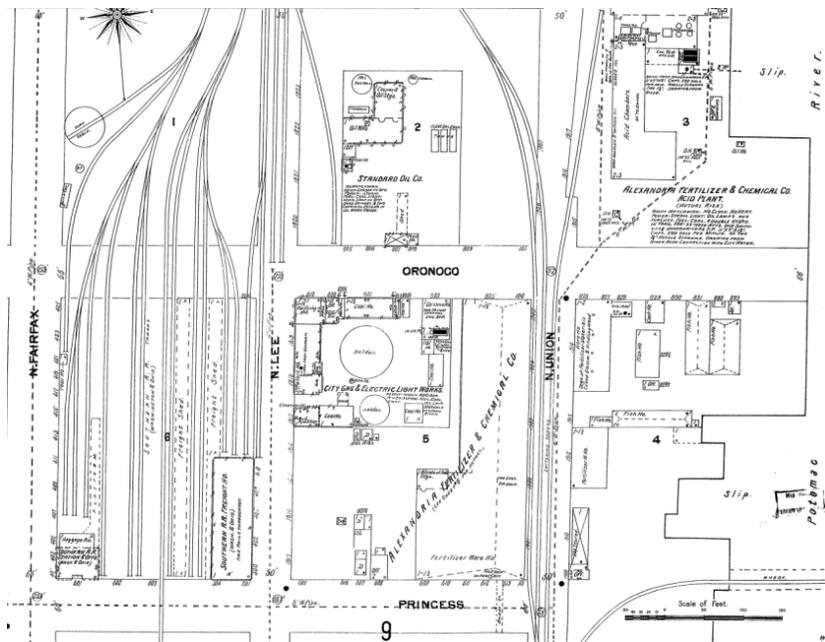
## 10. West's Point, Civil War Hay Warehouses and American Coal Company

In 1732, a tobacco trading port was established at West's Point, the foot of Oronoco Street, just south of Old Town North. The town of Alexandria was established in 1749 along a cove stretching from West's Point south to Point Lumley at the foot of Duke Street. In 1755, General Braddock's army disembarked at a new wharf at West's Point to fight the French and Indian War. During the Civil War, the Union Army occupied the City of Alexandria and controlled the waterfront area for defensive purposes. They constructed hay storage warehouses at West's Point.



Source: Library of Congress

## 11. Standard Oil Company



1902 Sanborn Map

## 12. Rail Depot/ Ralph's Gutt

The depot for the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad was located one block south of Old Town North between Fairfax and Lee Streets, however, some facilities like an engine house and a turntable were located on the north side of Oronoco Street, formally placing them inside the Old Town North boundaries.



Source: Library of Congress

## Ralph's Gutt and Native Americans

For thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans, Native Americans roamed the hills and dales of what eventually became the City of Alexandria. Aside from the Potomac River shoreline, the most useful place in the Old Town North area for Native Americans was Ralph's Gutt, a small stream located north of Oronoco Street. Bands of foraging Indians sought out the plant and animal resources that flourished in marshy creeks like Ralph's Gutt. By the early seventeenth century the closest known village was at Namoraughquend on the Potomac River (now the location of Reagan National Airport) some 2 miles to the north.

## 13. The Berg and Fishtown

African Americans escaping slavery established the Berg during the Civil War in Union occupied Alexandria. Oral history with longtime resident Henry Johnson yielded the derivation of the neighborhood's name. He reported that the term refers to Petersburg, Virginia, from where many freedmen escaped. The neighborhood is referred to in the film "Remember the Titans", about the 1971 T.C. Williams High School football team.

Fishtown was a seasonal area that sprang up every spring by the fish wharves, beginning in 1856. Many of the buildings appeared to have been strictly seasonal, being erected as the fishing season began and dismantled again at the end of the season. African Americans were employed as hands on the dock or as fish cleaners of shad and herring.

## 14. Lee Boyhood Home

Located at 607 Oronoco Street, John Potts, Jr. built this Federal-style town house in 1795, and soon thereafter sold it to Colonel William Fitzhugh, a friend of George Washington. In November 1799 Washington dined with the Fitzhughs at this home, marking his final visit to Alexandria before his death the following month. In 1812, "Light Horse" Harry Lee, his wife Ann Hill Carter Lee and their five young children, including a five year old Robert E. Lee, rented the home at 607 Oronoco Street. Harry Lee died while abroad in 1818 and Ann Lee continued to reside at the town house until 1825,

vacating at the same time that Robert E. Lee left for military school at West Point. French General Lafayette paid a visit to Ann Lee at the Oronoco Street house in 1824 during his triumphant tour of America.



Source: Library of Congress

### 15. Benjamin Hallowell School

At 609 Oronoco Street, educator Benjamin Hallowell opened his first boarding school in 1824. He began with four students, one of whom was his next door neighbor, Robert E. Lee, who studied under Hallowell's tutelage for four months before entering West Point Academy to launch his military career. Hallowell moved his school in 1826 two blocks to the south on Washington Street, and continued to expand the number of pupils. Within a decade he had as many as 80 students boarding at his school, as well as several dozen local students attending classes. Hallowell helped establish the Alexandria Lyceum Society in 1834 and served as its first president.

### 16. Mount Vernon Cotton Factory

In 1847, a consortium of prominent Alexandria businessmen began construction on the Mount Vernon Cotton Factory on the 500 block of North Washington Street. The enterprise consisted of a four-story factory, a "picking" house, an engine room, an office, a fire-proof "waste" house, and a boiler room with a 76-ft. smokestack. The Cotton Factory was part of an industrial boom that occurred in the decade before the Civil War, in part prompted by the opening of the Alexandria Canal in the mid-1840s. During the Civil War the factory served as the largest military prison in Alexandria. After the war the complex remained vacant for several decades until the Portner Brewing Company purchased it in 1902 to use as a bottling facility. Virginia prohibited the sale and manufacturing of alcohol in 1916, prompting Portner's to cease operation in 1916. The building was transformed into a spark plug factory in the 1920s, and by the 1930s transformed again into the Belle Haven Apartments.

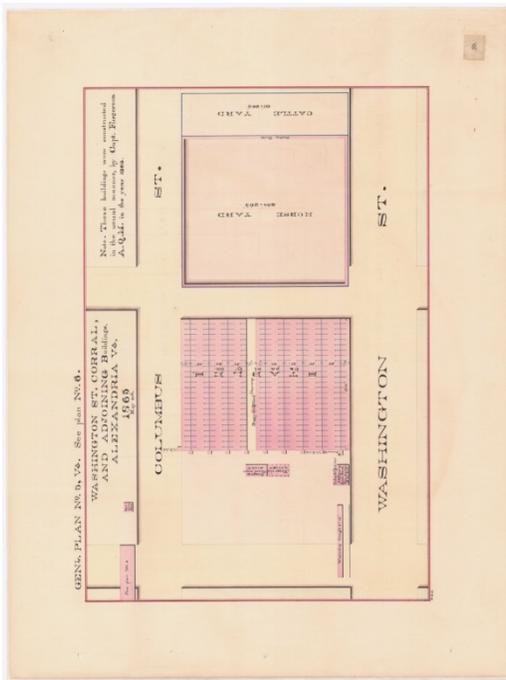


Source: The International Association of the chiefs of Police (IACP)



Source: Library of Congress

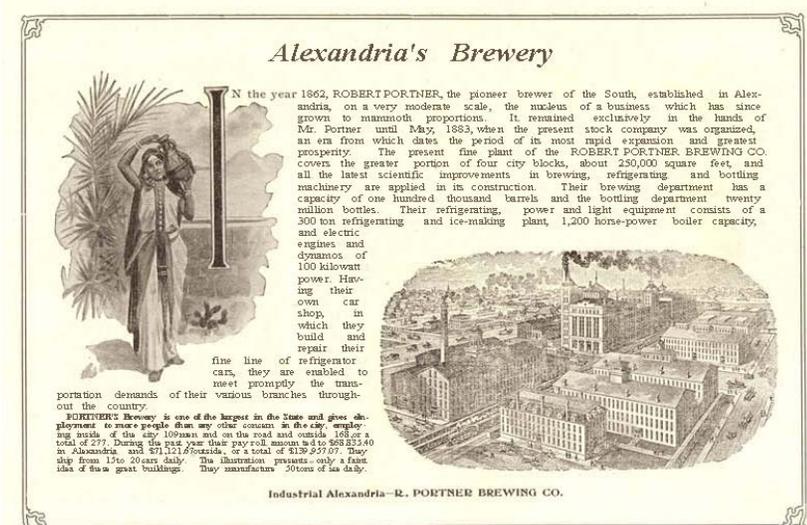
## 17. Civil War Stables and Parade Ground



Source: Quartermaster Maps, National Archives

## 18. Robert Portner Brewery

In 1868 Robert Portner built a brewery on the west side of the 600 block of N. St. Asaph Street, spanning four City blocks from Pendleton Street to beyond Wythe Street. Five stories tall, and outfitted with 36 large fermenting casks, Portner's business quickly grew into one of the largest breweries in the area. At its height, Portner's was reputed to be the largest brewery in the South and noted for its "latest scientific improvements in brewing, refrigerating, and bottling machinery." With the advent of a state prohibition on alcohol sale and manufacture in 1916, Portner's brewery abruptly ceased operations. By 1919 the plant was abandoned, and eventually the entire facility was razed in the early 1930s.



Source: Wedderburn's Souvenir Virginia Tercentennial

## 18. Alexandria & Washington RR

The Alexandria and Washington Railroad was built during the 1850s and connected Alexandria to the southern end of the Long Bridge at the City of Washington. Its tracks ran along St. Asaph Street, taking a turn towards Second Street to the northwest after crossing Madison Street.

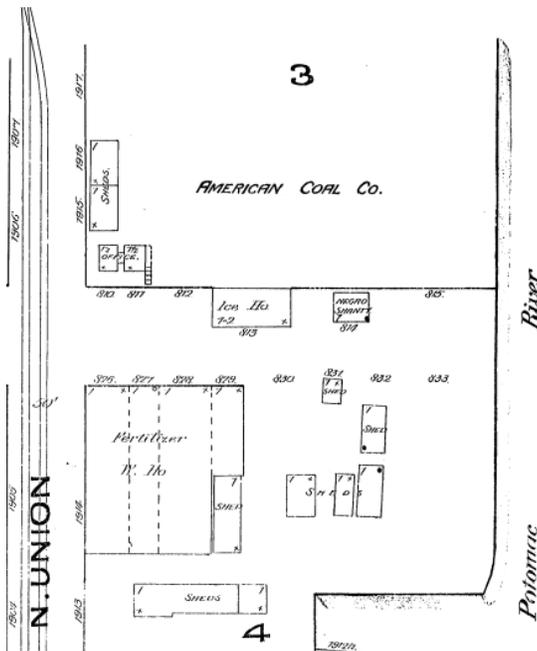
## 19. The Chalybeate “Spa” Medicinal Spring/ Emanuel Francis’ Lime Kiln

In the nineteenth century Alexandria had its own mineral spring located at the head of Ralph’s Gutt. Known as a “chalybeate” spring, meaning its water containing iron minerals, the spa spring was at its most popular in the 1830s and 1840s when groups of Alexandrians would gather to “partake” of its waters. As Old Town North grew more industrialized in the post-Civil War years, the attraction of the spa declined, until eventually the City formally closed it in 1933.

### Lime Kiln

In 1868, on land he rented from the Alexandria Canal Company, Emanuel Francis built a lime kiln immediately west of the Spa Spring. Francis chose the spot in part as a convenience to his customers who could unload limestone from canal boats directly into the kiln. Lime kilns of this sort, fueled by coal, reduced limestone to a granular lime product that was used for making mortar, plaster, cement, and whitewash, for tanning hides, neutralizing acidic soils, and for fertilizing agricultural fields. The kilns themselves generally were unpleasant affairs, generating continuous amounts of smoke and heat. Francis shuttered his lime kiln on Montgomery Street in 1886 when the canal was closed.

## 20. Ice House



1885 Sanborn Map

## 21. Washington Street, G.W. Parkway

In celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of George Washington, the Department of the Interior planned a more direct route from the District of Columbia to Mount Vernon. Construction of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway began in 1928, offering “recreational motoring” through scenic and historical areas. The highway was incorporated as a portion of the George Washington Memorial Parkway and becomes Washington Street through part of Old Town North.