LEGEND

Route (2.5 mi)  
Old Town North SAP Boundary

SITES

1. Bellevue Plantation  
2. Dade Plantation  
3. 19th Century Rural Dwellings  
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).


3. Continue South on Mt Vernon Trail passing by the site of former 19th 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.

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. 19th Century Rural Dwellings

Source: Alexandria Library

Source: Environ 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.

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.
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.

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-20th 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.

![Image](source: Library of Congress)

11. Standard Oil Company

![1902 Sanborn Map](source: Library of Congress)
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.

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.

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.
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
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.

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.

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 shutted his lime kiln on Montgomery Street in 1886 when the canal was closed.

In celebration of the 200th 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.