Update Fort Ward Archaeology
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City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria/Alexandria Archaeology
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The Alexandria Archaeology field crew completed the Stage IIA archaeological investigation of Fort Ward Park in July. This phase included the excavation of shovel test pits across the park and some larger, targeted test units to map the presence, dates and kinds of cultural resources in the park. The work also included the next step in identifying burial areas and graves, as well as limited metal detection. The first part of Stage IIB work associated with an interim drainage plan was completed earlier. A latter Stage IIB archaeology will be conducted after the development of a draft plan for the final drainage solution, and the plan changed to protect identified graves and resources.

Results of the Stage IIA investigation provide compelling evidence in Fort Ward Park for the presence and significance of unmarked graves, cemeteries, buried house foundations, and artifacts associated with members of "The Fort," an African American community enduring for nearly a century (post-Civil War to 1960s). Stage IIA work also produced evidence of Civil War materials in places beyond the known military features in the park. These Civil War artifacts were discovered through metal detection in limited areas, shovel test holes (particularly east of the fort) and larger test units. The parking lot north of the Museum offers the possibility that historic soil strata still are preserved and may contain evidence of the fort's barracks. The Stage IIA findings are being provided to the Fort Ward Stakeholder Advisory Group for development of a management plan for the park.

Cultural Resources

The crew excavated a total of 1,203 shovel test holes throughout the park. Slightly more than half of the test holes (n=636/53 percent) contained artifacts. Based on preliminary shovel test findings, 25 discrete archaeological areas can be identified within the park boundaries in addition to the Civil War Fort Ward and related features (Map 1). All of the 25 areas pertain to the community of African Americans that began residing at the Fort following the Civil War. The archaeologists followed up the shovel testing by excavating 61 hand-dug test units in an effort to collect additional information from each of the 25 areas. More than 10,000 artifacts are currently being washed, identified and entered into a data base at the Alexandria Archaeology Museum.

Archaeologists were able to identify building foundations at several of the 25 areas (Figure 1). As a group, perhaps one of the most notable features of many of the sites that comprised "The Fort" community is the permanence of some structures. Fort Families built solid homes, which were set deeply into the ground on masonry foundations. The foundations are a reminder that people at The Fort put down deep roots and intended to stay for generations. The numerous brick and concrete foundations encountered at The Fort is a testament to the enduring spirit of the families living at Fort Ward after the Civil War.

Figure 1. Examples of house foundations at Fort Ward.

In conjunction with the shovel testing survey, a metal detection survey of selected places outside the boundaries of the fort itself identified several concentrations of Civil War artifacts (Minié balls, lead shot, clothing buttons, personal items, and military hardware). One small area approximately 100 ft. in diameter contained a concentration of seven unfired bullets known as Williams cleaner bullets (Figure 2). No cleaner bullets were found elsewhere in the park. The cleaner bullets were intended to be fired periodically so as to remove residue from inside the gun barrel. However, many soldiers found them to be inaccurate and cleaned out their cartridge boxes and purposefully discarded them. This type of cleaner bullets did not get issued to soldiers until the latter stages of the war, meaning that this concentration of them could have only been deposited at this location in 1864 or 1865. Other items in the same area as the Williams cleaner bullets include uniform buttons, an officer's sword hanger, carved lead bullets, and a brass harmonica reed plate.

Figure 2. Examples of Williams cleaner bullets from Fort Ward.

There is also an interesting assemblage of Civil-War period artifacts recovered from shovel test holes east of the fort. Although it is not known who discarded the materials, a US belt plate, fragments of a historical flask and other liquor bottles give some evidence that resources associated with soldiers and/or civilians may still survive outside the central Civil War area of the park.

Limited examination of the parking lot north of the Museum documents the presence of historic soil strata which could contain archaeological resources associated with the Civil War barracks. Archaeologists punched a shovel test hole through the gravel parking lot and identified a layer of intact strata dating to the Civil War period at depth of approximately 2.0 ft. below grade. Additional investigation is needed before recommendations can be made for the parking lot.

Graves

City archaeologists and crew also investigated 19 mechanically-dug trenches and hand-dug units in Stage IIA to identify graves (Figure 3). The placement of the trenches expanded from the findings of the Stage I and partial Stage IIB work in which 23 graves (only three of which were marked by gravestones) were identified in three burial areas. The purpose of Stage IIA work was to identify more graves by expanding investigations within and beyond the three Phase I burial areas (Jackson Cemetery, Old Grave Yard, Adams Cemetery), as well as by continuing to explore locations for which oral history, documents and maps provided some clues that graves may have existed (Grave Investigation Areas) (Map 2). Funding from a National Park Service/Save America's Treasures grant also enabled archaeological investigation around the perimeters of two burial areas so that they could be demarcated without damaging graves.

In Stage IIA, archaeologists identified 20 additional graves in the three burial areas and in a fourth newly discovered area. A total of 43 graves have been identified in Fort Ward Park after the Stage I, IIA and partial IIB investigations (Table 1). Funding remains for completion of Stage IIB archaeological work associated with the drainage project to control erosion.

In the **Jackson Cemetery** 16 additional graves were found during Stage IIA. A total of 20 graves have now been identified in this private burial ground owned by the Jackson family. The area over which graves occur is larger than that shown on early park maps. Additional excavations within the perimeter of the cemetery could identify additional graves. The cemetery is located at an eastern corner of the Jackson property and overlays the historic glace of the fort. This multiple-layer historic resource (cemetery and fort) offers a unique opportunity for discussion regarding proper preservation, demarcation, and interpretation treatments.

The Stage IIA archaeology of the **Old Grave Yard** was conducted with both mechanical trenches and hand-dug units. One additional grave was uncovered resulting in a total of 17 graves. Tree root preservation prevents much additional excavation in this burial area. A perimeter has been excavated around The Old Grave Yard in order to permit demarcation without damage to any graves. Appropriate demarcation and interpretive treatment of the Old

Grave Yard in association with the Oakland Baptist Cemetery (situated to the north) and further archaeology can be discussed in developing a management plan.

The Clara Adams headstone led to the Stage I excavation to identify her grave and one grave to the north, presumably husband Robert Adams. Stage IIA opened more area in the **Adams Cemetery** resulting in the discovery of two additional graves in line with the first two. The four graves straddle the corner of three property boundaries (Adams lot, School/Chapel/Young lot and Clark lot): The most southern grave is on the Adams/School/Chapel/Young lot line; the Clara Adams grave is on all nexus of all three lots; and the two northern graves are in the Clark property. If identification of all the graves and demarcation of the full extent of this burial area are goals, then more archaeological excavation is needed.

One new burial area was identified in the Stage IIA investigation. Preliminarily referred to as the **Clark Cemetery**, archaeologists discovered two graves in the possible location where Amanda Clark requested burial in her will (southeast corner of lot adjoining Adams property). This area was examined in Phase I without definite results, but was re-examined in Stage IIA. Additional archaeological excavation is needed, if preservation and interpretation goals include identifying more graves and delineating the perimeter of this burial area.

Figure 3. Mechanical trenching at the Jackson Cemetery.

Table 1. Identified Graves at Fort Ward Park after Stage IIA Investigation

	Graves	Burial Area To Date
Jackson Cemetery	20	75 ft. by 200 ft.
Old Graveyard	17	65 ft. by 125 ft.
Adams Cemetery:	4	25 ft. by 25 ft.
Clark Cemetery	2	20 ft. by 20 ft.
Total Identified Graves	**43**	

Elsewhere in the park archaeologists conducted monitored trenching and excavated units by hand in several additional locations with potential for containing graves (see Map 2). These areas include:

1. The McKnight/Good Samaritan lot fronting on Braddock Road—given the conveyance to an organization, could this have been a burial place?
2. The Amanda Clark (Research Lot 8) south of the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery—were graves present as noted by oral history and the 1945 USGS map?
3. The areas north and west of the Oakland Baptist Cemetery on both sides of the tributary ravine (Research Lots 7, 8A, 9A)—were graves placed in the western portion of the lot originally conveyed to the Oakland Baptist Church before transference to the City of Alexandria? –were graves present to the north of the cemetery as noted by descendants' memories?
4. The Craven (Research Lot 25A and B) immediately north of the fort—did a letter refer to burials here and are graves present?

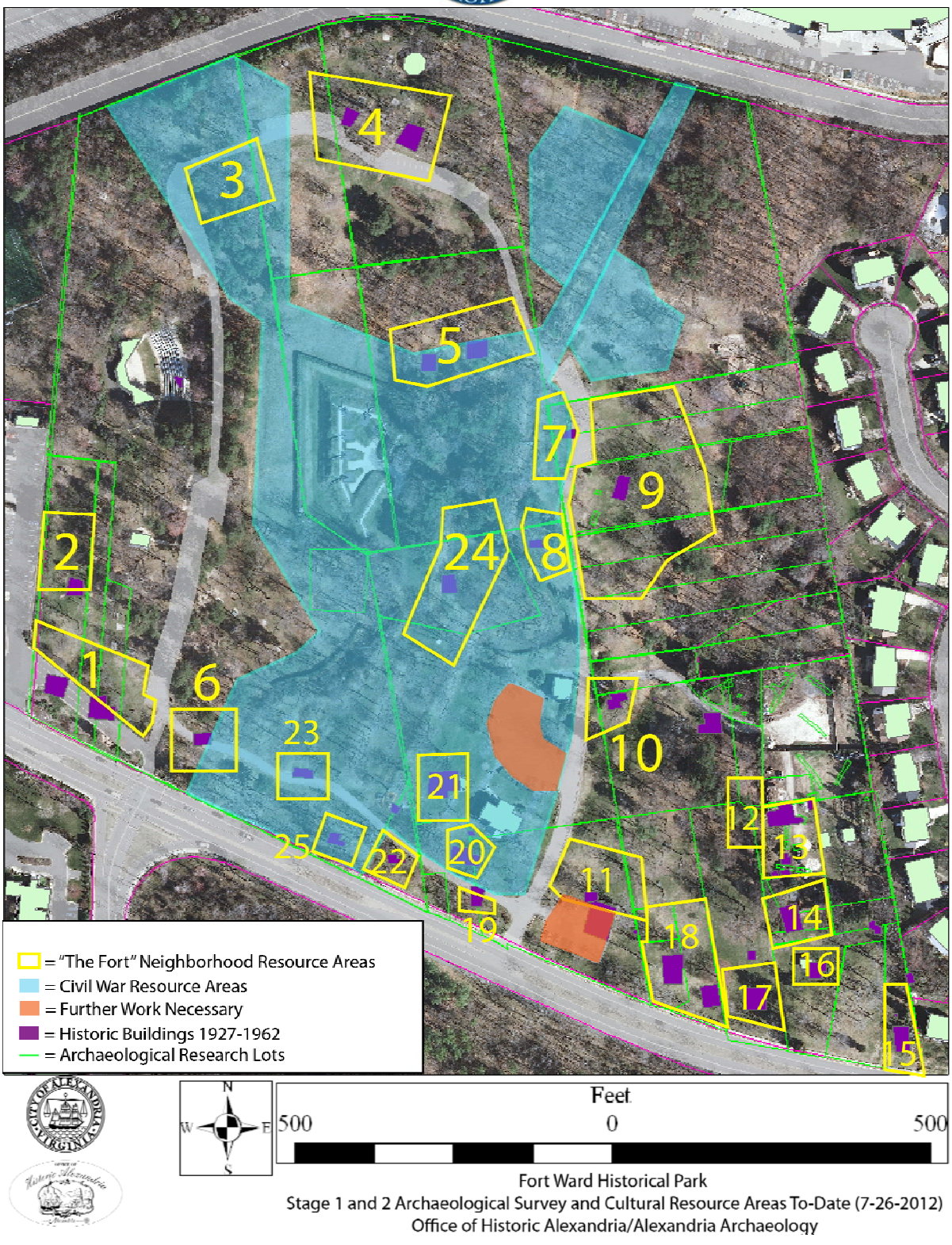
No evidence of graves was found in any of these four areas, but the possibility remains that graves could be present in untested places, which will continue to be marked on resource maps as Grave Investigation Areas.

The Stage IIA project is now entering into the analysis phase. A cadre of dedicated volunteers is cleaning, bagging, and sorting the artifacts collected from the shovel test holes and test units. Artifact information and location are placed into a data base for analysis.

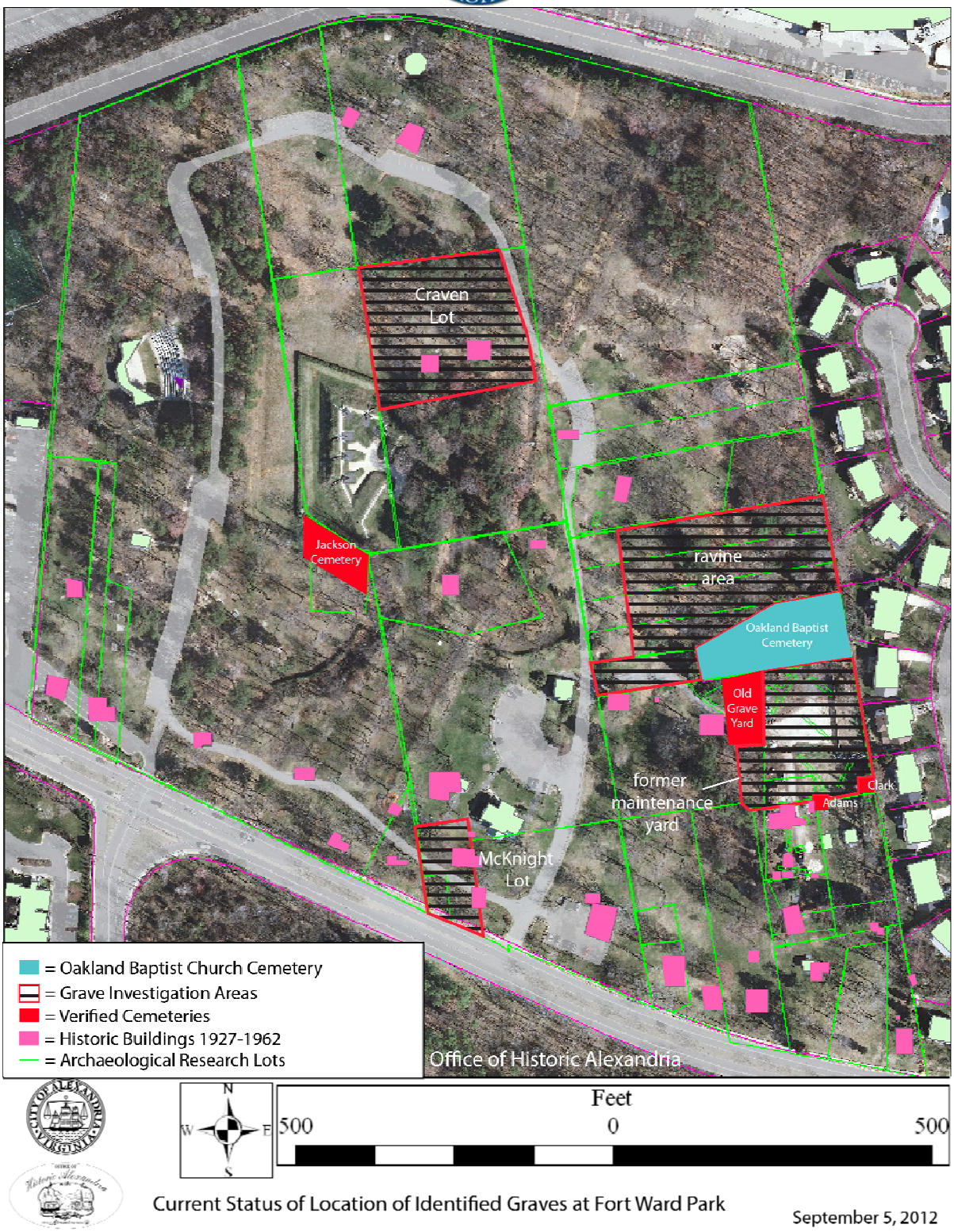
Information from the analysis will continue to be provided for developing a management plan for Fort Ward that will guide efforts, in part, for further preservation, investigations, research, interpretation and memorialization.

Although the summer weather was beyond uncomfortably hot, the field crew worked diligently and did a highly professional job of digging more than 1,200 shovel test holes in record time, as well as opening up more than 60 test units. Ben Russell supervised the day-to-day fieldwork and was assisted by Alicia Boyle, Rob Hancock, Alexandra Vancko, and Rosemary McCarthy. In these five people we were fortunate to have assembled one of the finest archaeological teams Garrett has had the honor to work with in his 25 year career. In addition to the field crew, Mike O'Donnell conducted the metal detecting survey and shared his voluminous knowledge of Civil War artifacts with us. Alexandria Archaeology summer interns Ally Collander (Christopher Newport University) and Chiara Tornabene (the University of Mary Washington) also lent a

hand in the field, learning firsthand the trials and pleasures of archaeology. Students enrolled in the Archaeology Summer Camp excavated at the Ashby House and increased the sample of artifacts recovered from this important home. Russell Taylor of RPCA provided his expertise in mechanically stripping 19 trenches. Department of Transportation and Environmental Services staff assisted in the effort: the survey team recorded all field findings and Allen Martin produced GIS maps.



Map 1. Archaeological resources map of Fort Ward Park.



Map 2. Locations of cemeteries at Fort Ward Park.