

# Preston Plantation & Cemetery

North Potomac Yard

City of Alexandria, Virginia

WSSI #21486.11

## Archeological Disturbance Assessment

May 2021

*Prepared for:*

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## INTRODUCTION

This letter report presents the results of an archeological disturbance assessment within the former location of the Preston Plantation and Cemetery, at North Potomac Yard in the City of Alexandria, Virginia (Figure 1). The work was conducted in accordance with a Resource Management Plan approved by Alexandria Archaeology and all relevant aspects of this investigation conformed with the City of Alexandria Archaeological Standards dated January 1996 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

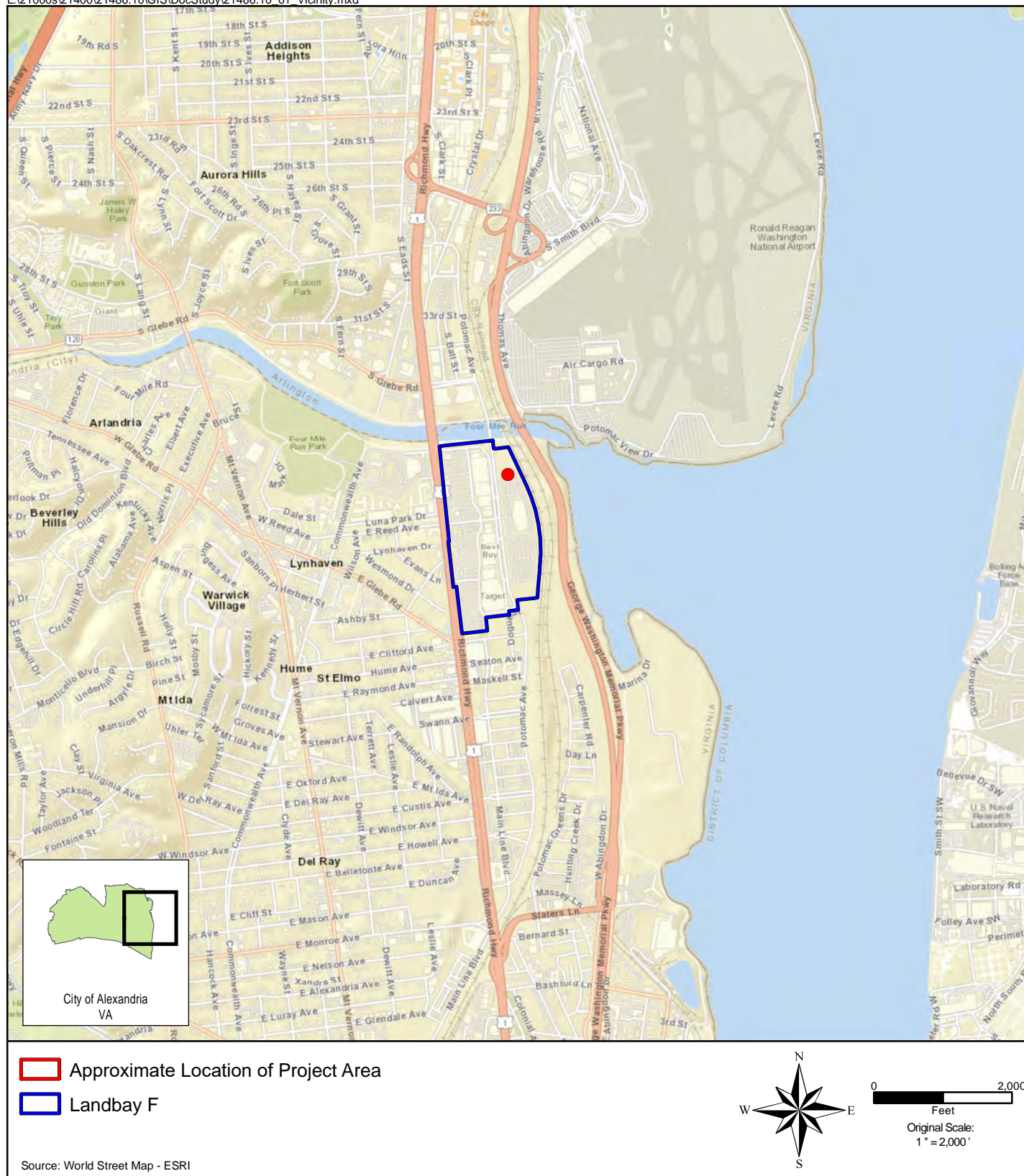
All archeological work was supervised by WSSI staff archeologists who meet or exceed the Secretary of Interior standards for Archeology and are Registered Professional Archaeologists. John P. Mullen M.A., RPA served as Principal Investigator for Archeology on this project. The fieldwork was conducted on April 14-15, 2021 by Archeologist Edward McMullen, M.A., RPA, with the assistance of Trevor Marable and Chad Mellio.

Several generations of the Alexander family buried in Preston Cemetery were exhumed in 1922 (via steam shovel and hand-excavation) and reinterred at Pohick Church cemetery in Fairfax County, Virginia. After 1933, the land containing the former cemetery (and the Preston farm) was graded, resulting in a considerable lowering of the ground, which was confirmed by archeological investigations in 1996 prior to the construction of the Potomac Yard Shopping Center (Adams 1996).

### Previous Archeological Investigations

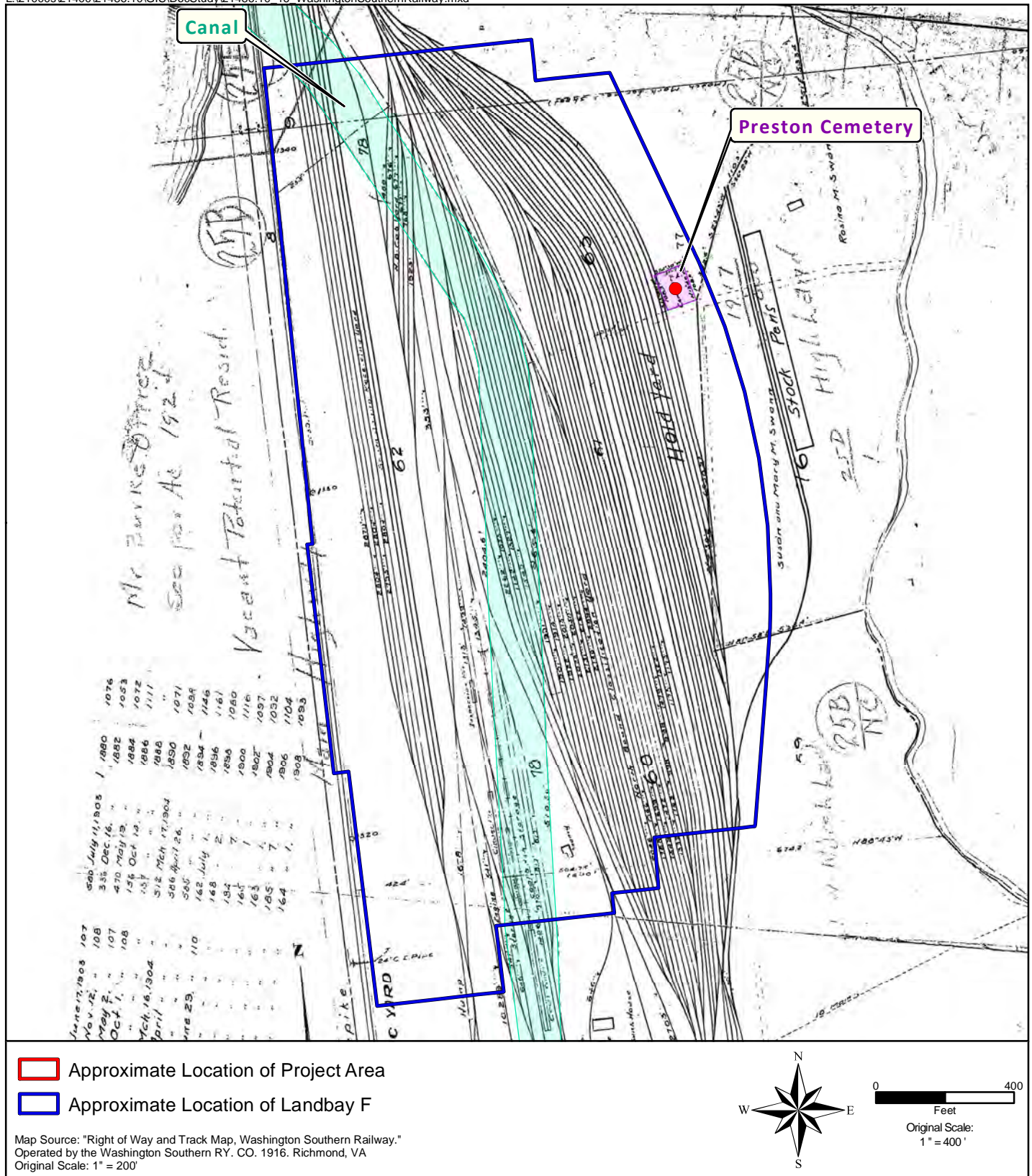
International Archaeological Consultants (IAC) conducted archeological investigations in 1996 at the former location of the Preston Plantation, Preston Cemetery, and along a portion of the Alexandria Canal prior to the construction of the Potomac Yard Shopping Center (Adams 1996). Six backhoe trenches were mechanically excavated; extensive disturbance was documented, and no cultural features were located.

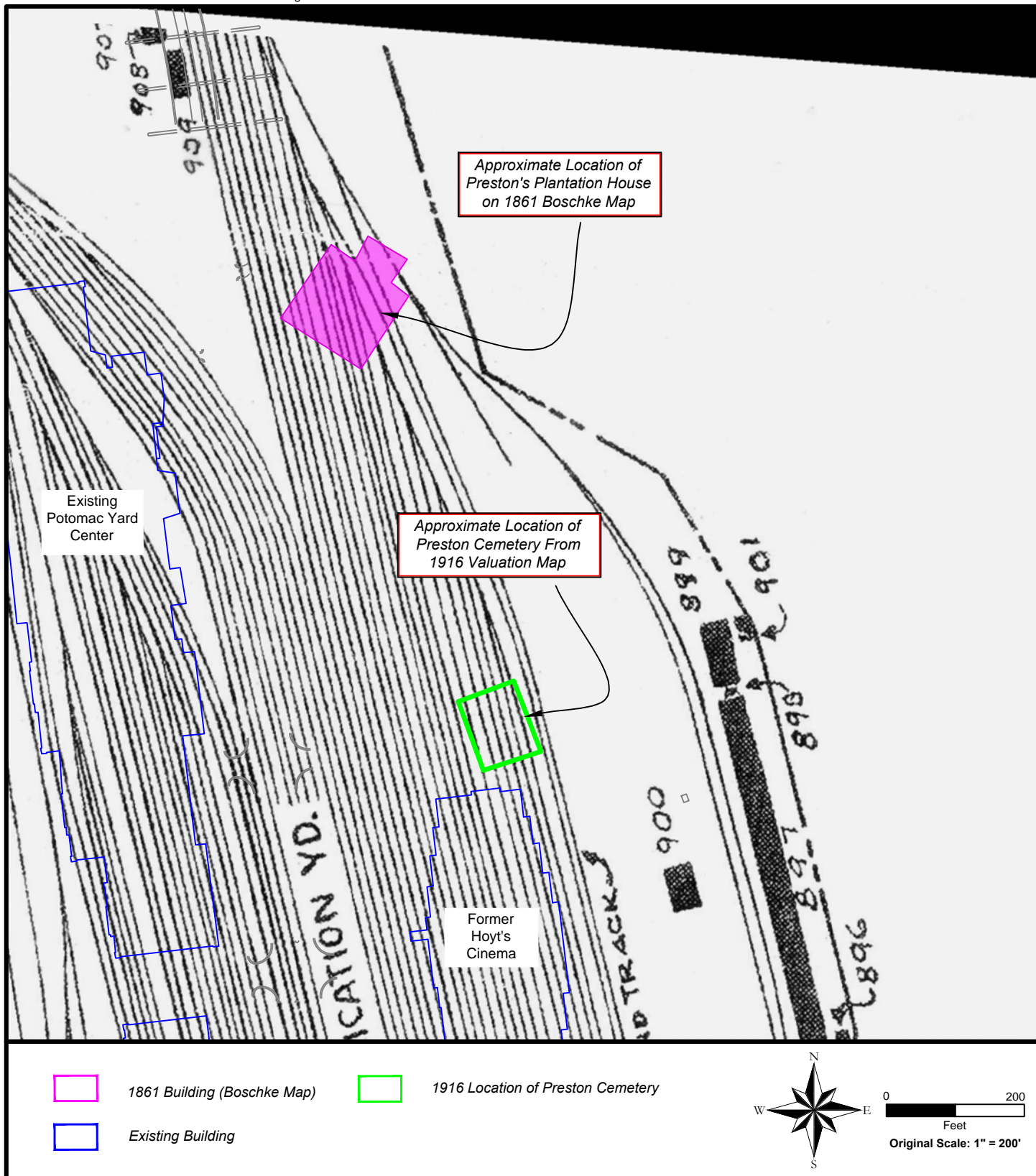
Two test trenches (Trenches 3 and 4) were excavated in the location of the plantation and revealed that as much as 23 feet of original soil had been removed from this area. Adams concluded that any features on the much higher topographic relief had been obliterated. The test trench profiles near the reported location of the Preston cemetery (Trenches 2, 5-6) showed fills consisting of gravel and cinder ballast overlying clay horizons. No evidence of grave shafts, other cultural features, or buried historic ground surfaces (pre-1906) were found. According to a 1922 account of the Preston cemetery relocation, the graves were found between 8-12 feet below the surface at that time. A 1916 railroad map shows the cemetery next to the tracks, but by 1953/1973, the tracks covered this entire area (Figures 2-3).



**Figure 1: Vicinity Map**







**Figure 3: 1953 Map Showing Railyard Covering Preston Plantation and Cemetery**



## **FIELD METHODOLOGY**

Using a backhoe equipped with a flat-bladed, smooth bucket, two machine trenches were excavated in order to document the soils. The trenches measured approximately 4-5 feet in width and were excavated to an approximately 5-8 feet in depth. At least one soil strata column profile was drawn for every trench. The work was documented with notes and photographs. Trenches were backfilled after recordation before the next trench was opened.

## **RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

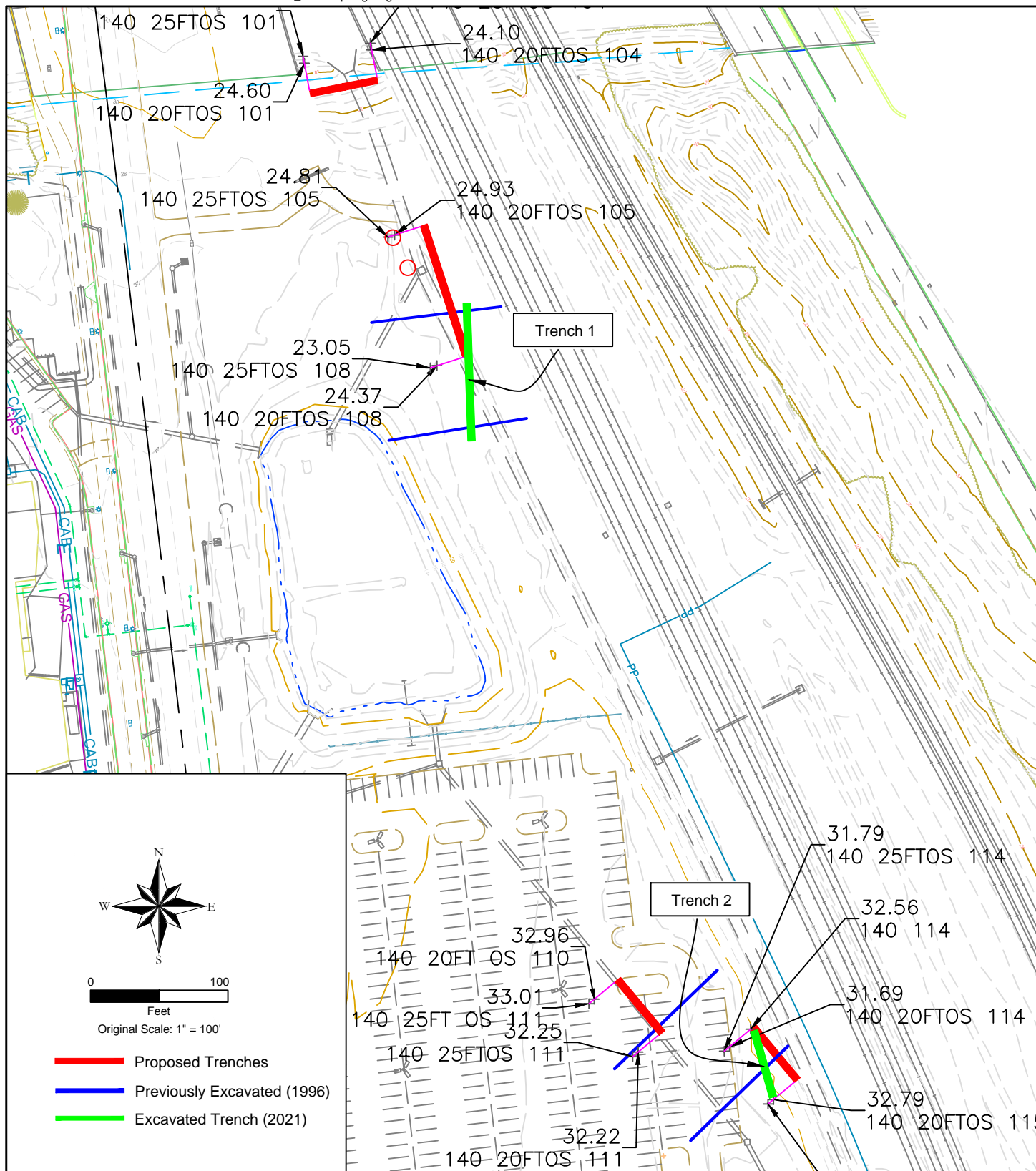
The goal of the investigation was to document disturbance in this area of North Potomac Yard, and if possible, locate evidence of disturbance resulting from the exhumation of the cemetery in 1922, the subsequent construction of the railyard, and finally the archeology work conducted in 1996. Therefore, three of the four proposed trenches were designed to be excavated over the 1996 archeological trenches (Figure 4).

In 1995, christopher consultants ltd. surveyed and mapped the locations of the original trenches. Using this mapped information, the four corners of each currently proposed trench was staked out by WSSI surveyors and marked with offset wooden stakes, flagging tape, and spray paint on the existing pavement (see Figure 4). Two trenches were positioned at the former location of the Preston farm and two at the former location of the Preston cemetery. However, field conditions dictated several necessary changes. The northernmost trench was in proximity to a CSX easement and within a heavily vegetated area and could not be excavated for these reasons. Additionally, one of the two planned trenches at the cemetery location was located on recently acquired Virginia Tech property and would require additional permits to proceed with excavation. With Alexandria Archaeology's approval, work proceeded on the remaining two trenches.

### **Trench 1**

Trench 1 was located within a fenced stormwater pond facility at the northern end of the former movie theater parking lot (Figure 5). A groundwater monitoring well had recently been excavated near the northern end of the proposed trench (Figure 6); therefore, the trench was repositioned further to the south to avoid disturbing the well, and so that it would now intersect both of the 1996 trenches (see Figure 4).

Trench 1 measured 100 feet in length and was excavated to a depth of 5-8 feet below the surface. The soil profile exhibited four fill horizons overlying subsoil, which was reached at approximately five feet below surface (Figures 7-8). No artifacts or cultural features were observed within the trench.



**Figure 4: Location of Trenches 1 and 2 and Proposed Trenches**





**Figure 5: Overview of Trench 1 Area, Facing North**



**Figure 6: Groundwater Wells, Looking North**





**Figure 7: East Profile of Trench 1**

### Trench 1 East Profile

- Fill overburden/topsoil: 0.0-0.7 feet below surface – [10YR 4/3] brown sand sandy loam
- Fill 1: 0.7-1.3 feet below surface – [10YR 5/8] yellowish brown sand with 20% gravel
- Fill 2: 1.3-2.5 feet below surface – [10YR 2/1] black silty clay loam with 20% gravel
- Fill 3: 2.5-5.0 feet below surface – [10YR 6/4] light yellowish brown with sandy clay
- B1 Horizon: 5.5-6.6 feet below surface – [10YR 5/6] yellowish brown mottled with [10YR 5/1] gray sandy clay
- B2 Horizon: 6.6-8.0 feet below surface – [10YR 5/8] yellowish brown clay



**Figure 8: East Profile of Trench 1**



## Trench 2

Trench 2 was located within the grassy slope between the former movie theater parking lot and the CSX railroad tracks (Figure 9 and see Figure 4). Trench 2 measured approximately 50 feet in length, 4-5 feet in width, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 9.0 feet below surface (Figures 10 and 11). The trench was placed to document the disturbance within the former Preston cemetery. Because of the limited exaction space, the trench was not stepped back to allow safe evaluation of the soils; WSSI staff archeologists did not enter the trench.

The soil profile consisted of five fill horizons overlying subsoil, which was reached at approximately 7.5 to 9 feet below surface (Figure 12 and see Figure 11). No artifacts or cultural features were observed within the trench.

### Trench 2 East Profile

Fill overburden/topsoil: 0.0-1.0 feet below surface – [10YR 4/3] brown sand sandy loam

Fill 1: 1.0-2.9 feet below surface – [10YR 5/6] yellowish brown sandy clay with 20% gravel

Fill 2: 2.9-3.9 feet below surface – [10YR 2/1] black compacted gravel

Fill 3: 3.9-4.9 feet below surface – [7.5YR 5/6] strong brown sandy clay

Fill 4: 4.9-5.9 feet below surface – [10YR 2/1] black compacted gravel

B2 Horizon: 5.9-8.0 feet below surface – [7.5YR 4/6] strong brown clay



**Figure 9: Location of Trench 2, Facing North**



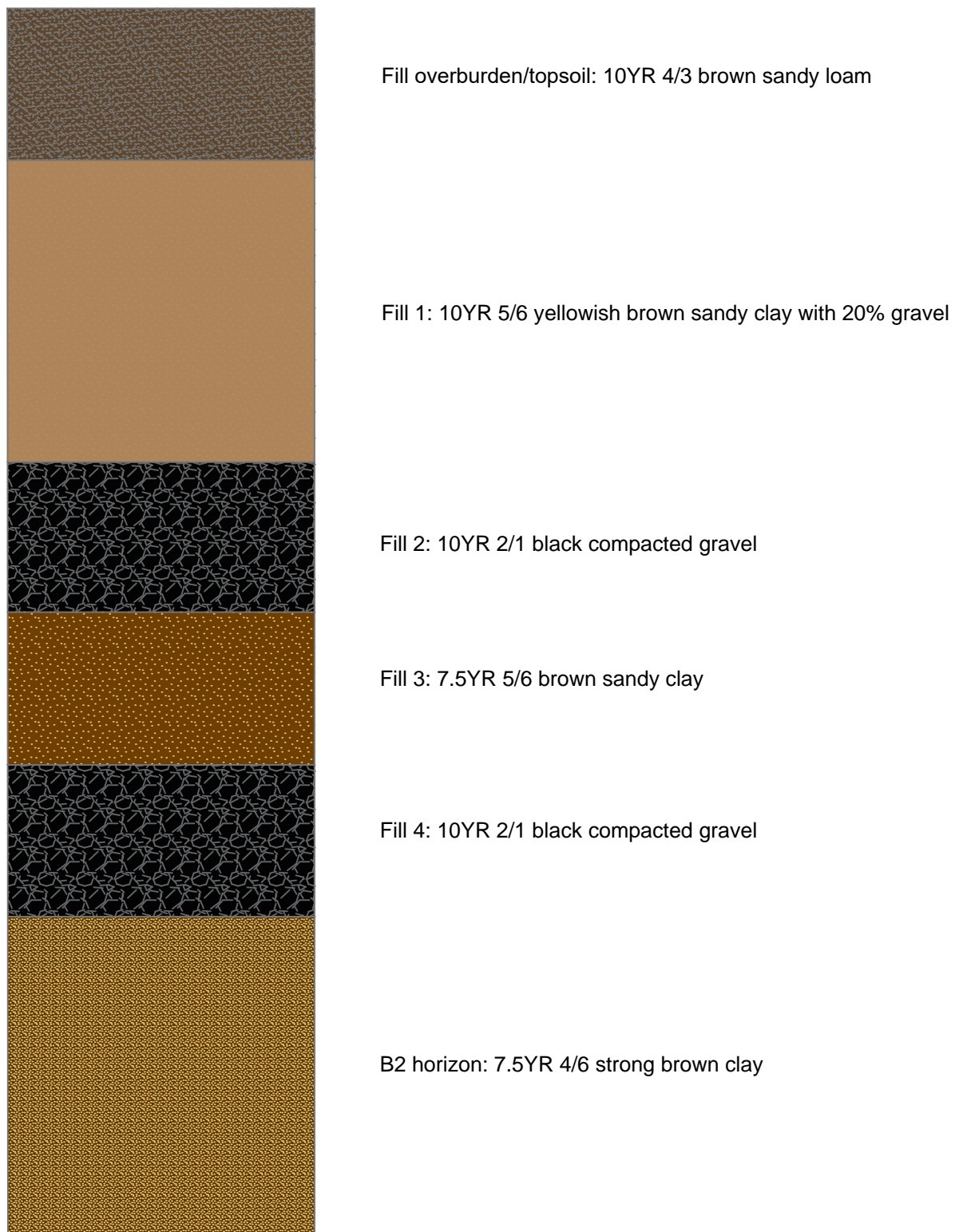


**Figure 10: Excavation of Trench 2, Facing South**



**Figure 11: East Profile of Trench 2**





**Figure 12: East Profile of Trench 2**



## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In accordance with an approved Research Management Plan, WSSI conducted an archeological disturbance assessment within two areas with the Potomac Yard North redevelopment property. No intact archeological features or concentrations of artifacts were observed during excavation. The two trenches reached sterile subsoil between 5 feet and 9 feet below ground surface. WSSI observed disturbed and mixed fill soils throughout the excavation soil column. No archeological materials were collected, and no cultural resources were identified.

No additional archeological work is needed.

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## REFERENCES CITED

U.S. General Services Administration

2020 *Archaeological Monitoring Plan 726 Jackson Place Entry Alterations And Rear Addition Project.*

U.S. General Services Administration, The National Capital Planning Commission and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office

2020 *Memorandum of Agreement Among the U. S. General Services Administration, The National Capital Planning Commission and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office Regarding Security Upgrades At 726 Jackson Place, N.W., The New Executive Office Building (NEOB) and 708, 712, 716, 718, 722, 730, 734 Jackson Place, N.W., Washington, D.C.*