

Public Summary

Documentary Study & Archaeological Evaluation of the Oakville Triangle Property, Alexandria, Virginia.

Introduction

R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc. (RCG&A) undertook a documentary study and an archaeological evaluation of the 13.7-ac Oakville Industrial Park in Alexandria, Virginia on behalf of Stonebridge. The study was conducted between December 2020 and February 2021 in support of the permitting process for the redevelopment of the property. The study focused on providing an overview of the historical development of the property, as well as a summary of the property's current conditions and archaeological resource potential. Based on these findings, archaeological fieldwork was conducted between January and March 2022.

Oakville Triangle

The Oakville Triangle redevelopment project is located in the northern portion of the City of Alexandria, Virginia. The property encompasses the Oakville Industrial Park, located on the western side of Richmond Highway (Route 1) between Fannon Street and Calvert Avenue (Figures 1 and 2). Mt. Jefferson Park, which follows the decommissioned railroad corridor of the Washington and Old Dominion Railway Company, borders the western side of the industrial park. The residential neighborhood of Potomac West (formerly St. Elmo) lies to the north of the industrial park and Potomac Yard, the former railroad switching yard of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad, lies to the east.

Oakville Triangle is situated within Archaeological Resource Area 3 (Del Ray/St. Elmo). This resource area is known for its planned subdivisions that were designed along the fast-developing transportation corridors linking Washington, D.C. to eastern and central Virginia. Alexandria Junction, one of many passenger stops along the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad, was located directly west of the project area. This rail corridor also provided freight service to Oakville Industrial Park along two spur lines added as part of the initial development of the industrial park.

Oakville Industrial Park currently includes six commercial/industrial structures built from 1946-1989. Redevelopment plans call for the replacement of these structures with newly constructed single and multifamily residential buildings,

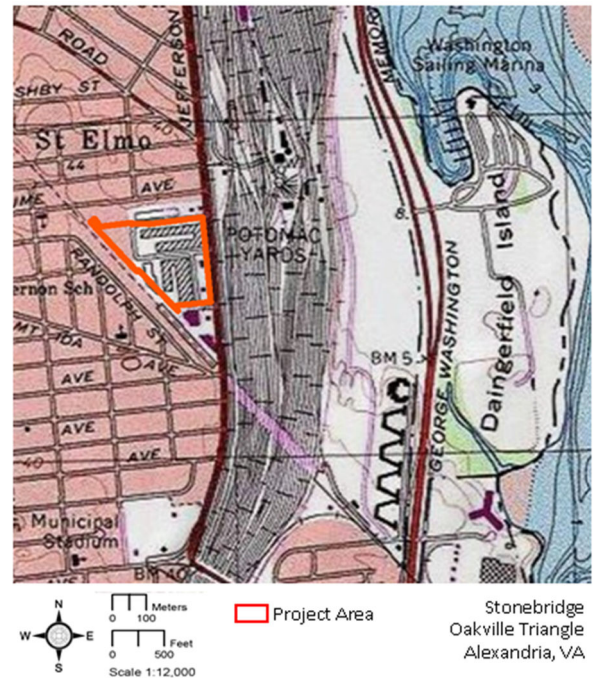


Figure 1. USGS (2013) 7.5' topographic map showing the location of the Oakville Triangle Project Area.

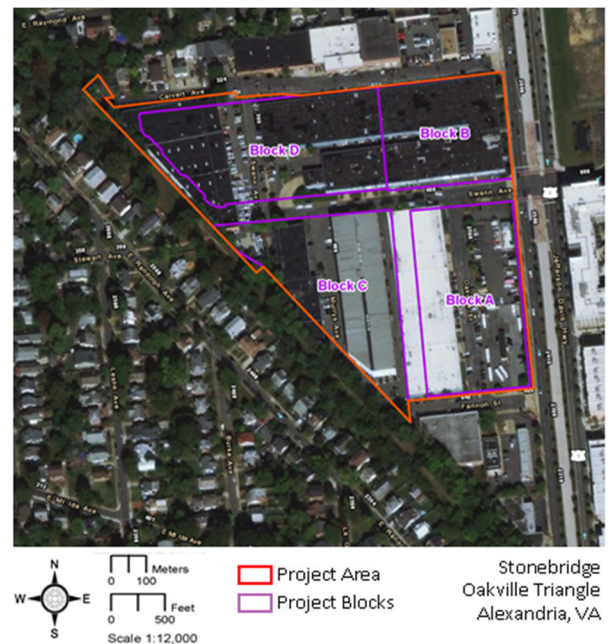


Figure 2. Aerial map showing the location of the Project Area within Oakville Industrial Park

flexible retail space, and a health complex for emergency and outpatient services. The redevelopment will be phased as four separate blocks (A-D). The project is subject to compliance with the City of Alexandria's Archeological Ordinance No. 3413 (1989), the City's Archeological Protection Code (Section 11-411, adopted June 24, 1992) and the City's Zoning Code (Section 2-151).

Oakville Farm

Oakville Triangle originally was part of the 6,000-acre Howson (or Howsing) patent. The patent was granted to Robert Howson on October 21, 1669 under Virginia's headrights system. Intended to encourage settlement, the headrights system granted 50-acres of land for each person who paid their way or who paid for another to travel to the colony. For bringing 120 people to the Virginia Colony, Howson was granted 6,000-acres lying along the "freshes of the Potomac River", between Great Hunting Creek and present-day Georgetown.

Robert Howson immediately conveyed the entire 6,000-acre tract to John Alexander in exchange for 6,000 pounds of tobacco and casks. Over time, Alexander subdivided the tract, passing some of the land to his heirs and selling other portions. The Town of Alexandria, laid out in 1749, included land that originally was part of the Howson patent (Figure 3). The portion of



Figure 3. James West's (1748) Plan of Alexandria showing the lands of Capt. Philip Alexander, Capt. John Alexander, and Mr. Hugh West (Library of Congress).

the Alexander property containing Oakville Triangle however was located north of the new town and would not be developed for another half-century.

By the early nineteenth century, Alexandria's transportation networks were expanding. Part of the land dedicated for the new Washington and Alexandria Turnpike crossed through property now owned by Charles Alexander. Charles supported this expansion, purchasing shares in the turnpike company and allowing the company to remove and use gravel from his land for the road construction. The turnpike was completed in 1810. That same year, Charles subdivided and sold several of his properties lying west of the new turnpike.

Samuel Harper purchased two adjoining 8-acre parcels from Charles Alexander for \$320 each. Both parcels were located along the newly established Washington and Alexandria Turnpike and were undeveloped. Harper would sell those parcels seven years later, in 1817, for \$6,000. Although it seems certain that Harper improved the property, there is no evidence that he ever resided on the property.

William and Frances Swann purchased the 16-acre parcel in 1817 and were likely the first occupants. Alexandria historian, Betty Smoot, states in her book *Days in Old Town* (1930) that William Swann built the house at Oakville and that the Swann's were the first to reside there. She described the house as a "rambling, picturesque old dwelling, with numerous outbuildings and some wonderful oak trees." By the 1820s this tract had become known as Oakville Farm.

William Swann was an established lawyer who was actively involved in the commercial and civic life of Alexandria. He served as a representative on the Common Council of Alexandria and later as Justice of the Peace and President of the Directors for the Franklin Bank of Alexandria. When William Swann died unexpectedly on October 15, 1820, at age 35, his estate passed to his wife Frances. Frances, the daughter of Charles Alexander, had already inherited a sizeable amount of land from her father and, after her brother's passing in 1834 would also inherit Preston, her father's estate.

Thomas William Swann acquired Oakville in 1850 from his mother and his siblings. Thomas and his wife Helen

resided at Oakville from the 1850s until the 1871, when Thomas Swann and his family moved to Mount Auburn. That same year, Swann advertised the house at Oakville for rent, describing it as an “eight-room house, with fifteen acres of land and stables.” Thomas Swann devised the property to his daughter, Susan Calvert in his 1895 will. The residence fell into disrepair and was burned down during Calvert’s ownership.

The residence at Oakville was occupied for less than a century, likely due to its location within the transportation corridors that rapidly developed around it. The Alexandria Canal linking the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal to Alexandria’s Potomac River wharves would be completed in 1838 and would parallel the turnpike (Figures 4 and 5). Begun in 1855 as the Alexandria, Loudoun and Hampshire Railroad, this freight and passenger line would follow the western edge of Swann’s property. By 1861, the Washington & Alexandria Railroad had laid tracks on the west side of the turnpike. The next year, the United States Military Railroad seized control the country’s railroads. The United States Military Railroad built a semi-circular connecting spur across Swann’s land. The Washington & Ohio Railroad would later lease the spur from Swann, replacing the track removed by at the end of the Civil War and erecting a fence along the line (Figure 6). The lease would remain in effect until 1902.

With the turn of the century came the rapid growth of Alexandria’s suburbs and the further expansion of the region’s transportation networks. Designed as the main switching yard for the northern section of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad line, Potomac Yard was completed in 1907. The yard was located directly opposite Calvert’s Oakville property (Figure 7). West of Calvert’s property, the former Alexandria, Loudoun and Hampshire Railroad, now under the ownership of the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad Company, provided freight and passenger service with a stop at Alexandria Junction, located opposite Oakville.

From Farm to Suburb

It was during this period of rapid suburban expansion that Susan Calvert had Oakville surveyed and platted into avenues and residential lots. The survey was con-

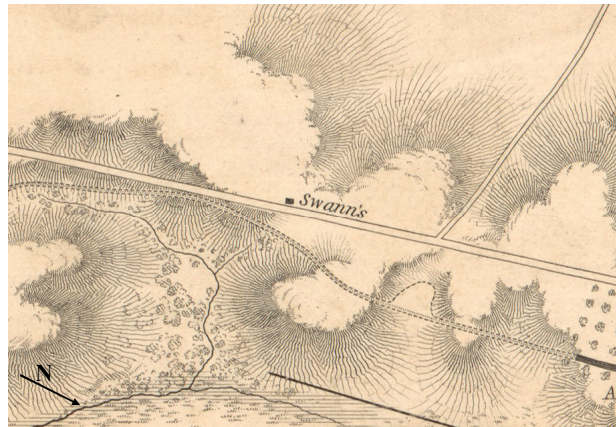


Figure 4. Detail from Stone et al. (1838) *Chart of the Head of Navigation of the Potomac River* showing the location of Swann’s residence (Library of Congress)

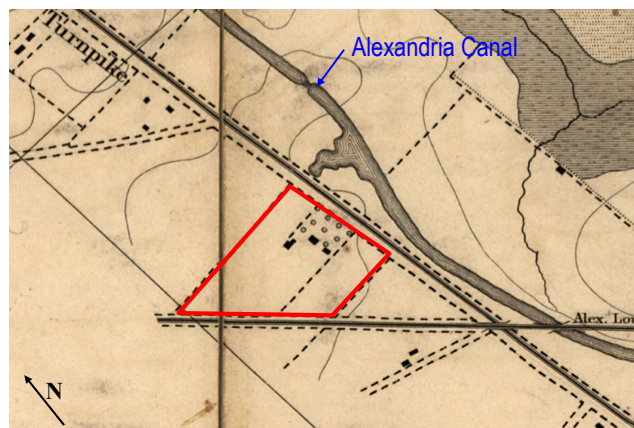


Figure 5. Detail from Boschke et al. (1861) *Topographical map of the District of Columbia* showing Oakville (Library of Congress)



Figure 6. Detail from Hopkins (1879) *Atlas of Fifteen Miles around Washington* showing the Oakville as the residence of Thomas Swann (Library of Congress)



Figure 7. Detail from Keefer's (ca. 1916-1917) photograph of *Potomac Yard, Alexandria, Va.* showing the view north toward Washington, D.C. The houses on the far left of the photograph were located along the turnpike road. Some of these houses may have stood within the Oakville tract (Library of Congress)

ducted in 1904, but Calvert “vacated” the plan in 1916 without selling any lots. Immediately after nullifying the subdivision plans, Calvert sold several parcels along the western edge of her property, adjoined the new subdivision of St. Elmo. Calvert also maintained several rental properties along the turnpike road, which later would be known as Richmond Highway.

Helen Calvert inherited Oakville from her mother in 1919. She continued to develop the property as a residential neighborhood and by 1921, several new houses had been built along Swann Avenue and Richmond Highway. Italian immigrants Antonio Pennazoli and Daviddi Giammitorio, who had purchased lots from Susan Calvert in 1916, became part of a small Italian-American community that worked for the region's many railroad companies and the industries that supported them.

The direction of Oakville's development changed in 1944 when Helen Calvert sold the property. Under the agreement, Calvert retained rights to income from her rental properties. She appears to have relinquished those rights by 1945, when the property was resold to the Oakville Industrial Corporation. The tract was rezoned as an industrial property and since 1946, a variety of manufacturing, processing, and commercial businesses have occupied the Oakville Tract (Figure 9).

Archaeological Potential and Recommendations

Two potential areas of archaeological research interest were present within the Oakville Triangle Project Area: Oakville Farm (ca. 1817-1871); and Block 652 (1916-



Figure 8. Detail from aerial photograph (1977) showing Potomac Yard (left) and Oakville Industrial Park (outlined in red) (Fairfax County, Virginia GIS).



Figure 9. Postcard showing Swan Restaurant, built in 1950. The restaurant most recently operated as Tino's Pizza, an Italian American restaurant. A storage facility replaced the restaurant sometime before 1989 (Boston Public Library).

1960s). Oakville Farm historically was located in the western central portion of the redevelopment area, near the intersection of Oakville Street and Swann Avenue. This area encompasses the historic house lot of Oakville Farm and its two outbuildings, depicted on historic maps as lying south of the main dwelling. The period of significance relates to the occupation of the farm by the Swann family, who resided at Oakville from 1817-1871. After that period, the farm was occupied by tenants or was left vacant.

Block 652 is located in the northwestern corner of the redevelopment area. This area includes the lots purchased by Antonio Pennazoli and Daviddi Giamitorrio in 1916. Both men were Italian Immigrants who worked for the railroad. Pennazoli had immigrated to America in 1904 and worked as a pipefitter, and Giamitorrio had come to America in 1906 and was employed as a rail car mechanic. They were part of a small enclave of Italian families living at Oakville and St. Elmo who worked for the railroad. These families exemplified a pattern of Italian immigration noted elsewhere in Alexandria during the turn of the century.

A review of available historic documents and data on current conditions, however, indicated that the project area had suffered significant subsurface disturbance from historic development activities. Geotechnical soil borings revealed a truncated landscape composed of natural alluvial substrata overlain by modern surface layers. Deep pockets of fill material were identified in the map-projected location of the Oakville Farm dwelling and outbuildings, which are projected to be located near the intersection of present-day Swann Avenue and Oakville Street.

Documentary Study Recommendations

Early and mid-twentieth century grading of the property in preparation for residential and later industrial development was extensive. Geotechnical studies indicate all natural and cultural surface layers were removed and have been replaced by the current landscaping. Due to the depth to which the cutting was carried, it is unlikely any structural remains, previous roadways, or other predicted landscape features associated with Oakville Farm or the dwellings in Block 652 remain intact.



Figure 10. Overlay showing the projected locations of the Oakville Farm lot (purple) and Block 652 (blue) (City of Alexandria GIS, Imagery, 1995)

However, since the depth of historic construction activity is unknown, and it is possible that deeper features may remain intact, limited archeological test trenching prior to subsurface excavation was warranted to verify the extent of disturbances. Test trenching was not recommended in areas where extensive underground disturbances or hazards have been documented. Archeological monitoring during hazard mitigation was recommended for portions of the Oakville Farm lot projected to include the main dwelling and the two outbuildings or accessory dwellings. If archaeological monitoring is not possible due to the potential hazards, then standard protocols pertaining to the discovery of archaeological resources during construction in the City of Alexandria should be followed. Those protocols include: immediately stop work in the area where potential archaeological resources have been identified; and contact Alexandria Archaeology.

Archaeological Evaluation Results

Three trenches were placed in the map-projected locations of structures associated with the nineteenth and early twentieth century operations of Oakville Farm. Areas of contaminated soils were visually monitored during their removal. Anticipated resources included foundation remains and deposits associated with the main dwelling and two outbuildings located south of the main dwelling. These formed archaeological Site 44AX262.

Stratigraphic sequences exposed during the evaluation showed extensive subsurface disturbance across the project area due to redevelopment of the property during the early-mid twentieth centuries. During this shift from a farm to residential and finally to its use as an industrial park the property was graded and filled, which disturbed the soil strata. Archaeologically this was represented by a soil profile that consisted of fill material/disturbed soil overlying subsoil.

Seven archaeological features were identified during the evaluation. Two plow or grading scars, two concrete footings associated with Oakville Triangle Industrial Park Building #2, a posthole with a wooden post, a probable post removal hole, and an area of shallow soil disturbance that was ultimately determined to be natural. A plastic drainage pipe associated with an adjacent building in the Oakville Triangle Industrial Park also were identified. These features do not appear to be associated with Oakville Farm. The evaluation revealed that the buildings associated with Oakville Farm were demolished during the early twentieth century residential redevelopment of the property. Later grading associated with the ca. 1949 construction of Oakville Industrial Park.

Due to severe disturbance in the project area, no intact archaeological deposits or anticipated features related to Oakville Farm were identified during the archaeological evaluation. Current development of the Project Area will include removal of all overburden soil to the required construction grad (1.5 - 7.6 m [5 - 25 ft]) below surface. Therefore, no further archaeological investigation is recommended for the Oakville Triangle Project Area (Site 44AX262).

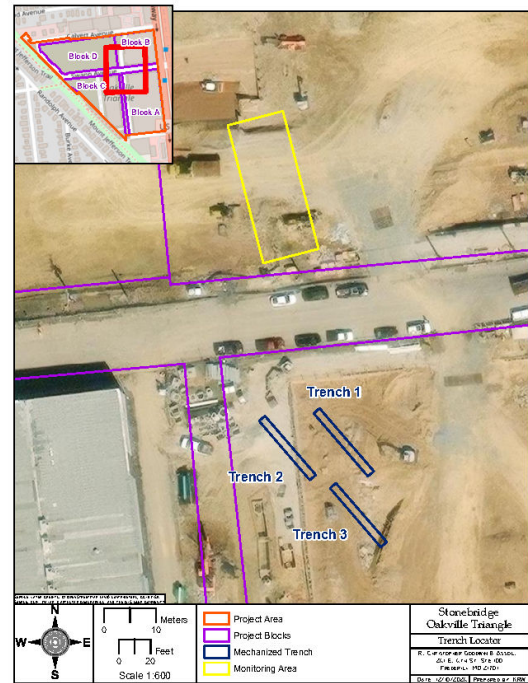


Figure 11. Aerial photograph showing the locations of archaeological evaluation trenches.



Figure 12. Soil profile from Trench 3 showing stratified deposits of fill material overlying subsoil.