

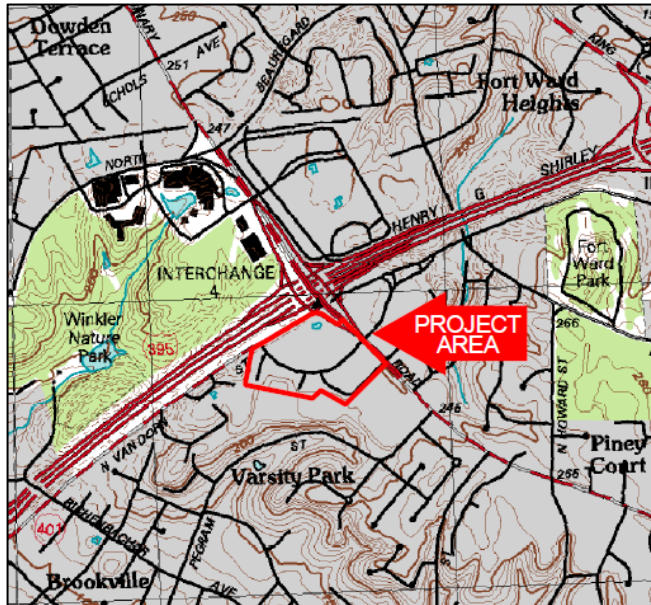
SEMINARY OVERLOOK PROPERTY, CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

DOCUMENTARY STUDY

Report Summary by Andrés Garzón-Oechsle

INTRODUCTION

An archival and documentary study was conducted in anticipation of the redevelopment of the ±22 acre Seminary Hill/Seminary Towers property, which is located directly south of the interchange of Interstate 395 with Seminary Road (Route 420), in the City of Alexandria, Virginia. Thunderbird Archeology, a division of Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc., conducted the study, following a Scope of Work approved by Alexandria Archaeology.



Location of Project Area

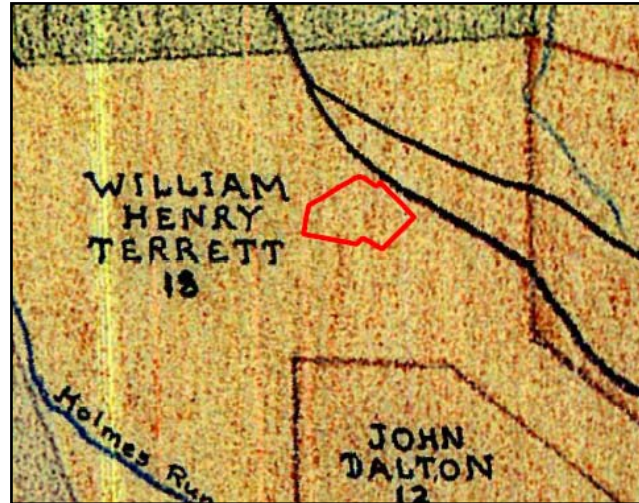
This property was historically part of Fairfax County until 1952, when the City of Alexandria annexed a large tract of land west of Quaker Lane, which included the study area. The property was originally contained within the large Terrett family estate, located south of Falls Church in the 18th and 19th centuries; this estate was subdivided in 1851. The study area was contained within Lot 1 of the subdivision; this was a ±142-acre parcel purchased by William B. Scarce, the proprietor of the Virginia House Tavern in Alexandria. Scarce sold the property to his brother-in-law, Henry Bontz and it remained in the Bontz family until the early 20th century. Ruth Barkley Warfield and her second husband retired Brigadier General Duncan

Kennedy Major, Jr. were the last individual owners of the property, but it is not clear if they resided therein. The study area remained primarily agricultural until the land was developed by Seminary Associates in the last half of the 20th century.

PROPERTY HISTORY

William Henry Terrett (1707-1758) appears to have manifested the trend of settlement in this area by wealthy plantation owners with his construction of Oakland, the Terrett family plantation home, which was located roughly one-half mile south of the study area. By the time of his death, William Terrett's estate consisted of approximately 1810.5 acres. Land use on the Terrett estate is indicated by the listing of William H. Terrett's estate accounts submitted to the Fairfax County courts. The list includes livestock consisting of horses, cattle, pigs and sheep,

farming tools (plows, hoes, reap hooks), and one hogshead of tobacco. Although farming tools appear in the inventory, no other crops besides the tobacco are listed. Cobbler's tools, carpenter tools and a spinning wheel either indicate activities associated with a self-sufficient plantation dependent on slave labor and temporary hire, or else an exchange of their shoe making and carpentry work for other plantation necessities. The Terrett standard of living, and the wide range of imported merchandise available, is indicated in the extensive list of household goods and furniture.

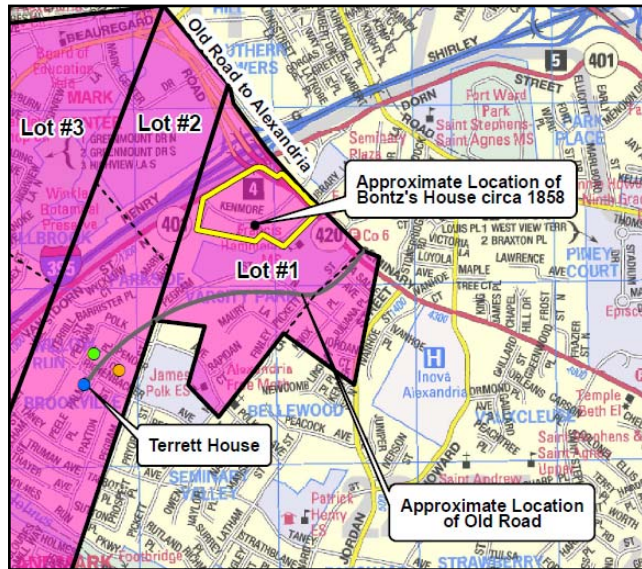


1760 Mitchell Map

William H. Terrett's estate accounts also show that the Terrett plantation was occupied by an overseer and slave quarters, with portions of his property leased. Edward Hufsey was listed as the overseer in 1758 and Thomas Williams in 1760. Land was leased to a John Summers, Frank Ballinger (1758-1760), Sarah Thomas (1758-1760), Benjamin Ladd (1759-1760), and Ann Ward (1758). Locations of these leases and the amount of acreage held by all tenants are not stated in the accounts.

The mid-18th century transition from an economy based on tobacco monoculture to the cultivation of wheat may have been linked to the early division of the Terrett plantation, now owned by the next generation, William Henry II, his wife Amelia Hunter and three children: George Hunter, John Hunter and Nancy (Douglas). The size of the Terrett estate was reduced by several land transactions during his lifetime, which provides context for the further estate subdivision. Several of the transactions appear in the general Fairfax County Deed Index, but are located in missing deed books. Land sales that we have information on include conveyances in 1793 of 185 acres to Baldwin and Catherine Dade and 133 ¼-acres to Ludwell Lee. Forty-four and one-half acres "on the west side of Holmes Run above the milldam" were also deeded to Robert Allison in 1796. The estate was inherited by his wife and children upon his death in 1826.

The study area was now owned by the third Terrett generation: George Hunter Terrett, and his wife Hannah Butler. Slavery remained vital on the Terrett plantation in the antebellum period and land use is indicated by the 1850 agricultural census, which lists wheat, corn and wool and hay were produced on Hannah B. Terrett's estate (270 improved acres and 448 forested acres). Her livestock included 20 cows, two oxen, and 15 sheep. Upon her husband's death, the ±1320 acre estate went into chancery and, in 1851, was subdivided into six lots.



Re-Constructed 1867 Plat Map

Land use within the study area changed very little following the sale of Lot 1 of the Terrett estate to William Scarce in 1852, remaining agricultural (either cultivated for crops or as pasture and wood lots) into the 20th century. It appears that Scarce was the first to build a dwelling on the parcel, although he likely never resided on the property. Tax records indicate a the presence of buildings assessed at \$1000 value in 1857 when Scarce sold the property to Henry Bontz, who named the farm “Fairview” and resided there until his death in 1892. His wife and heirs most likely continued to reside on and operate the farm until 1913, when it was sold to Victor Donaldson, a local storekeeper.

Donaldson continued farm until 1926, when it was sold to Dr. Walter A. Warfield and his wife Ruth Barkley. Warfield was the city physician of Alexandria and resided within the city; he almost certainly leased the property to a local farmer. Ruth Barkley Warfield retained the property after her husband’s death and, in 1940, added her new husband, Brigadier General Duncan Kennedy Major, Jr. to the property title. It appears that following General Major’s retirement in 1940, the original farmstead was razed and a large new house was constructed on the property within which the Majors likely resided; a 1954 aerial photograph clearly shows that the property was no longer used for agricultural purposes.



1954 Aerial Photograph

The Majors’ conversion of the property from agricultural to residential use reflects a trend in the region that began with the increased ease of commuting into Washington, D.C. from outlying communities like Alexandria and Falls Church in the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to transportation improvements. This trend accelerated following the Second World War, after which the formerly rural vicinity of the study area was developed with considerable rapidity. The widowed Ruth Barkley Majors sold the property to Seminary Holding Corp in 1953, ending the private ownership of the property and opening the land to development.

Following the local trend in Northern Virginia that began in the 1940s and 1950s, Seminary Associates began construction of the garden style apartments at Seminary Hill and the two high-rises at Seminary Towers in the early 1960s. In 1960, construction of garden style apartments in the city equaled the number of single family homes built in the 1960s, and had surpassed the number of high rise units constructed in the 1970s (City of Alexandria, 1975:15).

ARCHEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

The probability for locating prehistoric sites generally depends on the variables of topography, proximity to water, and internal drainage. Sites are more likely on well-drained landforms of low relief in close proximity to water. The study area is situated on what was originally a broad upland ridge top drained to the south and west by a tributary stream in a notable ravine or deep swale towards Holmes Run, which in turn empties to the Potomac River. Based on the environmental setting and the proximity of prehistoric camp sites recorded in the vicinity, the study area has a moderate to high probability for containing prehistoric archeological sites. These sites would likely consist of small temporary camp sites seasonally utilized during hunting or the exploitation of other local resources.

The documentary evidence presented above provided information about the land use and, therefore, the potential for historic archeological resources in the study area. A review of 19th century historic maps and other documentary evidence revealed that Henry Bontz's farmstead, known as Fairview, stood within the study area from circa 1856 until circa 1940. The archeological signature from Bontz's dwelling and possibly of the larger outbuildings such as the barn would most likely include stone foundations, as well as scattered artifacts associated with the occupation of the farm.

The extent to which the natural topography of the study area was altered during the development of the property indicates the degree of disturbance in possible archeological sites. Although the study area has a moderate to high probability for prehistoric resources, temporary camp sites do not frequently include deep subsurface features, and plowing and other agricultural land use lessens the potential for locating intact resources.

Likewise, the study area has high potential for historic resources and although it is possible that remnants of the stone foundations may have been preserved beneath the concrete slab foundations. Our experience at archeological sites in some parts of Alexandria has revealed historic foundations and other cultural materials preserved beneath overlying mid-20th century concrete slab foundations; however, the research potential of these remnant features beyond their physical location has been minimal, as they had been disturbed by footers, utility lines and other infrastructure.

In our opinion, construction of the circa 1940 single family dwelling and the subsequent construction of the Seminary Hills and Tower apartments have significantly disturbed any intact prehistoric or historic archeological resources that have research potential; therefore no archeological work was recommend for the property.