

City of Alexandria, Virginia

Douglass Cemetery Drainage  
and  
Preservation Updates



December 5, 2023  
Lee Center

## Meeting Agenda

- Introductions of City Project Staff
- Introductions and Recognition of Friends of Douglass Cemetery and the Social Responsibility Group
- Douglass Cemetery History Overview
- Current Cemetery Conditions
- Previous Survey Work
- Presentation of Plans to Mitigate Drainage and Design Updates
- Archaeological Testing
- Ownership Status Update
- Next Steps and Timeline
- Other Preservation Initiatives
- Project Funding
- Adjourn



# Introductions



- Office of Historic Alexandria
- Department of Project Implementation
- Transportation and Environmental Services
- Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities
- Descendant Advisory Group, Friends of Douglass Cemetery
- Social Responsibility Group

# Historic Douglass Cemetery

A force of workmen [is] employed in opening up the walks, grading the ground and grading an entrance at the new Douglass Memorial cemetery for colored people, on the western outskirts of the city. The owners of the property preparing to erect a monument in the center of the cemetery to the memory of Fred. Douglass.

*Alexandria Gazette*, October 18, 1895

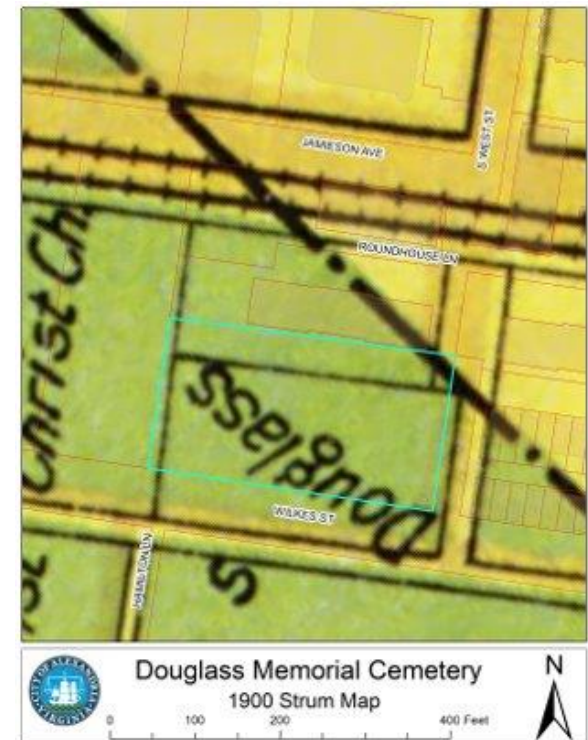
The Douglass cemetery, the new burying ground for colored people, which has been established here recently, was a day or two ago conveyed by the Washington owners to a board of trustees, consisting of Revs. Porter, Waring, Fields Cook and W. B. Dulaney and M. B. T. Murray, all colored, who will have control of the land in the future and who propose to make the cemetery a very handsome one. The trustees have organized by electing Rev. Porter president; Rev. Fields Cook, vice president, and M. B. T. Murray, secretary and treasurer.

*Alexandria Gazette*, February 26, 1896



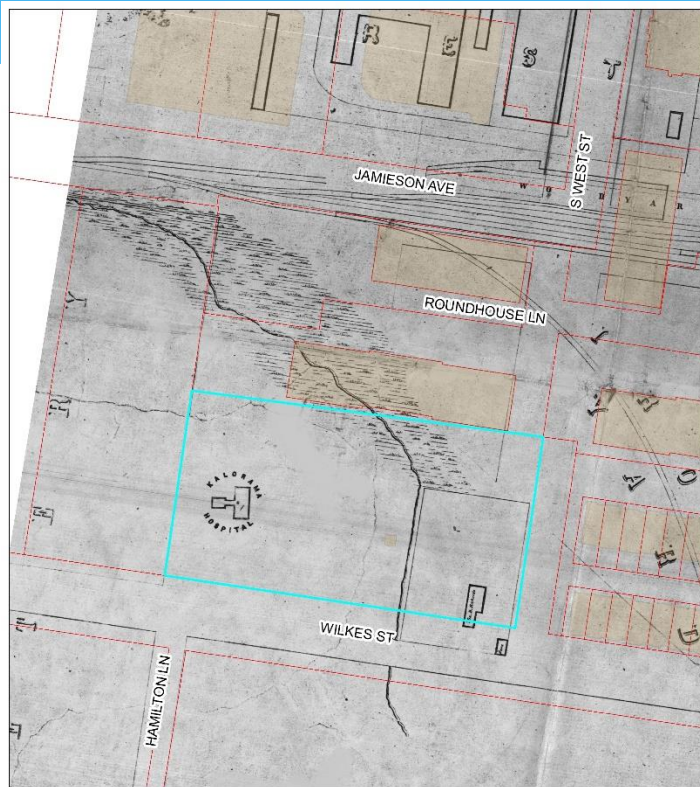
Cemetery boundaries shown in blue.  
Earliest map of the cemetery.

- Established in 1895 as a non-denominational, African American Cemetery in memory of Frederick Douglass (1818-1895).
- In use through 1975 when it was closed.
- 2,256 documented burials
- Headstones: 605 (including footstones and other markers)
- First known burial: 1896
- Last known burial: 1975
- City maintained property since 1976





# Historic Douglass Cemetery



Douglass Memorial Cemetery  
1865 Railyard Map  
0 100 200 400 Feet

Historic Cemetery boundaries shown in blue.

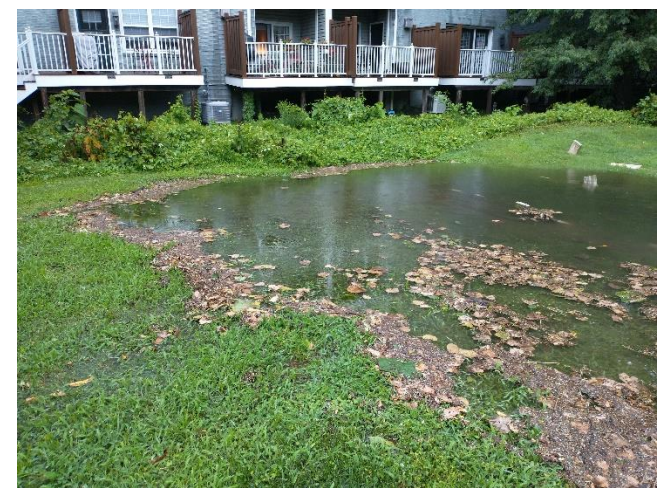
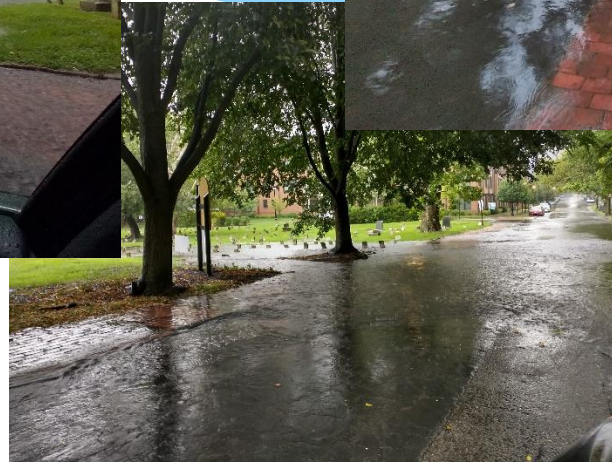
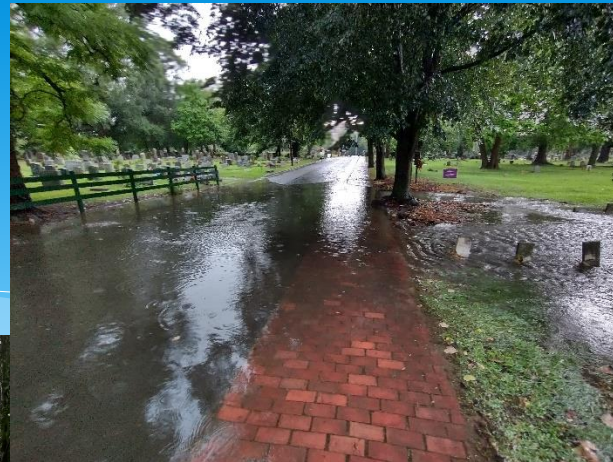
Before becoming a Cemetery, the parcel was:

- Originally part of Spring Garden Farm, ca. 1800
- Site of Kalorama Civil War Hospital, ca. 1865

Cemetery established in 1895

- By Rufus H. Porter, Henry H. Waring, Fields Cook, Freeman H. M. Murray, William B. Dulaney, Trustees of the Douglass Cemetery Association of the County of Fairfax, State of Virginia
- Annexed from Fairfax County to Alexandria in 1915
- Last know owners believed to have been the Chauncey Family.

# Douglass Cemetery Conditions

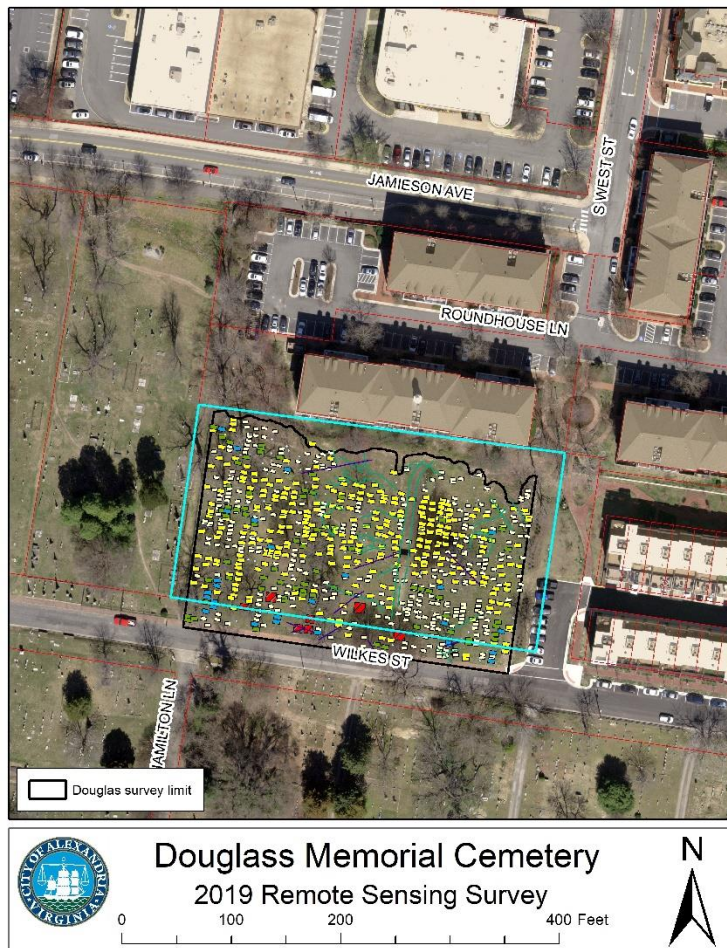


Storm event, July 2023.

- Primary condition: Periodic flooding and standing water
- Other preservation issues:
  - Gravestones generally in poor condition, in addition there are unmarked burials (Gravestone Condition Assessment, 2022)
  - Gazebo needs repair
  - Ownership status



# Previous Survey Work



- GPR survey map shows modern aerial with historic cemetery boundaries. Note flooded area.
- Remote sensing (and electrical conductivity) indicated the presence of over 780 anomalies interpreted as marked and unmarked burials.
- Results can be used as a preservation tool, in associated with ground truthing (confirming interpretations of geophysical data).

# Douglass Cemetery Drainage Analysis: Findings and Recommendations



Stormwater pipe runs N/S under walkway and gazebo



- Aging, clogged, and undersized stormwater pipe needs to be replaced
- Cleaning and regrading of swale to promote drainage and water run-off
- Installing a new drainage swale between the flood prone area and the existing drainage swale
- Filling the low areas and resetting headstones
- The design phase has started with Jacobs Engineering, which will result in more specific design solutions.



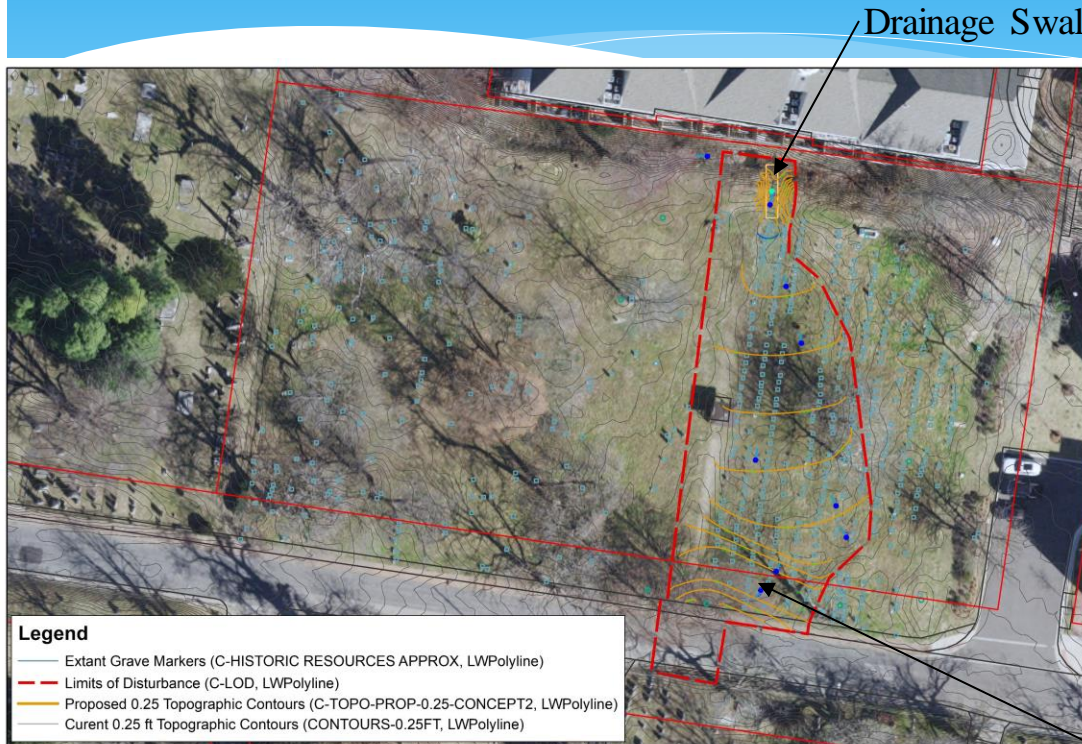
Douglass Memorial Cemetery  
2019 Aerial Imagery

0 100 200 400 Feet





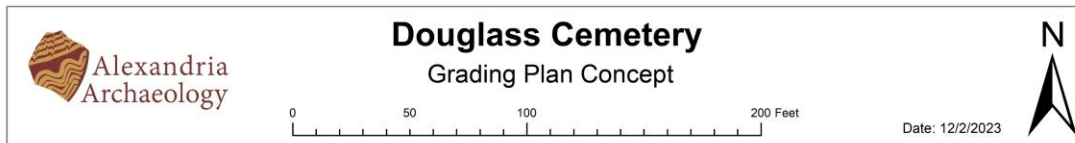
# Douglass Cemetery Stormwater Improvements Design Updates



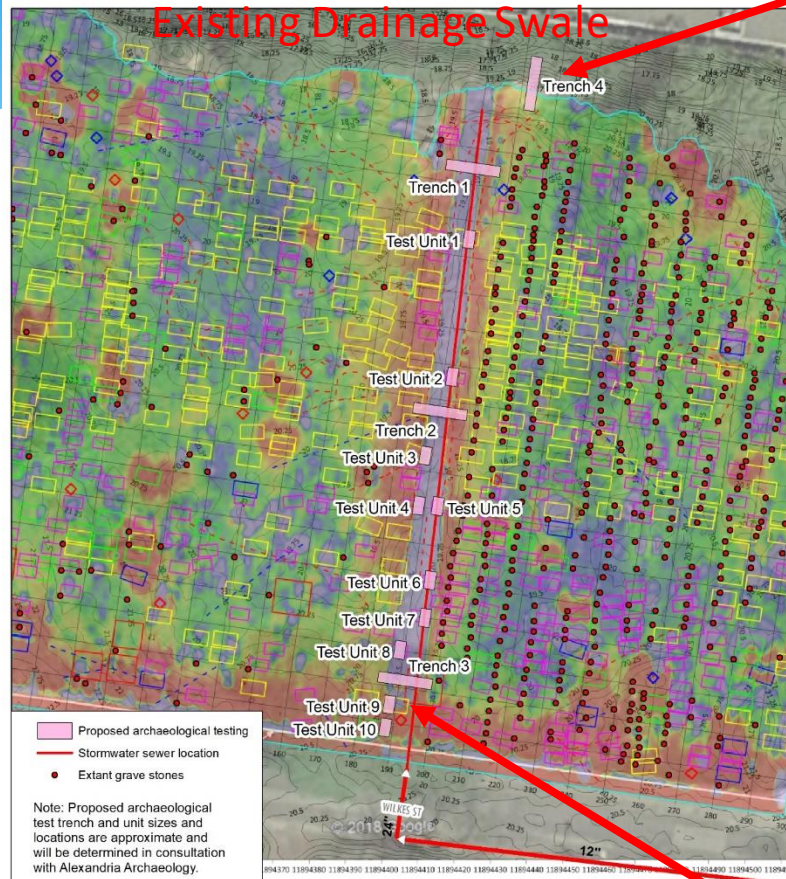
- The Limit of Disturbance (LOD) is +/- 0.3 acres
- +/- 230 grave markers may need to be removed, restored and reset within the LOD
- Fill the low areas and create a drainage swale to direct water to the existing swale
- Create a highpoint or berm to prevent Wilkes St. stormwater overflow to the cemetery

Drainage Swale

Highpoint

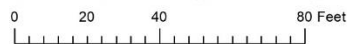


# Archaeological Testing



## Douglass Cemetery (44AX140)

### Proposed Archaeological Testing



New Drainage Swale

- Due to the sensitivity of the site, archaeological testing and/or monitoring will occur in any area of ground disturbance.
- Trenches will be placed to ground-truth geophysical anomalies.
- Archaeological test trenches will be excavated to ensure no burial feature would be impacted by replacing the pipe and that the pipe trench is clear.
- Anticipatory burial permit from Department of Historic Resources will be obtained before any work occurs and work will be coordinated closely with the Friends of Douglass Cemetery.

# Ownership Status Update



City Attorney's Office has been working to claim title to Douglass Cemetery:

- It was initially assumed that the City needed to obtain completely clear title before proceeding with the archaeological testing and the proposed stormwater improvements.
- Given the complex nature of the historic cemetery, the City Attorney enlisted outside legal council with expertise in land issues to assist.
- Attorneys investigated options including quitclaim, adverse possession, and obtaining the cemetery through eminent domain as authorized by state law for abandoned cemeteries.
- It was determined that any share of undivided ownership interest will allow the City to initiate archaeological testing and stormwater upgrades.
- The City received a quitclaim deed for one-quarter undivided interest from an owner. The City accepted this quitclaim at deed at the November 28 City Council Legislative meeting, transferring partial but undivided ownership of the cemetery to the City, allowing work to proceed.



## Immediate Next Steps



1. Submit Anticipatory Burial Permit to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources who oversees cemetery and burial related issues in the Commonwealth
  - Reviewed and consulted with descendants before submitting
2. VA Department of Historic Resources issues burial permit, anticipated in December
  - Archaeological testing begins, anticipated late January
3. Drafting Grading Plans – consultant is working on the grading plans concurrently with the burial permit and archaeological testing preparation

# Projected Timeline



	2023 Dec	2024 Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	2025 Late Spring
Archaeology	Burial Permit	Archaeological Testing									
Stormwater Design	Grading Plans				Permit Approval						
Bid Package					Bid Documents						
Bidding and Construction							Bidding and Procurement			Construction	
Cemetery Restoration											

# Preservation Updates



## Descendant Advisory Group Formed

- Consulting on cemetery preservation issues
- Developing scope of work for Community History Project in partnership with Historic Alexandria
  - Collection and Preservation of Oral History
  - Defining Public Engagement and Permanence

Internship Program with Historic Alexandria and Friends of Douglass Cemetery



# Project Funding



- CIP Funding through FY2025 of \$2.6 million
  - Includes Virginia Department of Historic Resources funding \$500,000 to repair stormwater
- Annual cemetery funding from Virginia Department of Historic Resources, divided between five cemeteries \$9,715

## For More Information



### Visit the Project Page

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic-sites/douglass-memorial-cemetery>



### Contact Project Staff

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