

Phase 0 Archaeological Study of Brandymore Castle, Arlington County, Virginia



by

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Abstract

Brandywine Castle is a rock formation and historic landmark located in Madison Manor Park in Arlington County, VA. Nearby the rocks are two apparent man-made features – a trench and embankment – of unknown origin. The creation of bike trails throughout the park, and possible widening and realignment of bike trails bordering the park, could damage the rocks and other historical resources contained in the park. The purpose of this study was to provide an initial assessment of the man-made features in the park to ensure Arlington County and NOVA Parks plans account for protection of any historical resources. This information was collected via site survey of the project area and research into human occupation of the area to identify possible uses for the trench and embankment.

Research shows that Native Americans created a nearby soapstone workshop and both Confederate and Union Army forces occupied the area during the Civil War. Following the war, property owners operated a farm and quarry, and later built a house directly in the project area. Comparison of site survey photos, measurements, and Arlington County GIS maps to documentation of Civil War defenses show some similarities, however, a military historian familiar with the site believes that the trench and embankment do not conform to military designs. While Confederate and Union Army forces constructed earthworks around the Seven Corners area, approximately one mile from the project area, no documents positively identify earthworks at Brandywine Castle. Additionally, the research did not identify any documentation sufficient to rule out any prior occupants as the party responsible for the trench or embankment.

Further research is recommended in the form of a Phase I Archaeological Survey of the entire Brandywine Castle location to determine the significance of the site and identify archaeological resources from all prior occupants.

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Introduction

Brandywine Castle is a rock formation located in Madison Manor Park in Arlington County, VA which is best known as a reference point for the boundaries of several 18th century land grants (Moxham, 1973). The park also includes two features, a trench and embankment, which appear to be man-made. Prior to establishment of the park historical occupation in the area included a Native American soapstone workshop, Civil War military outpost, farm, post-Civil War quarry, and residential development. Recently, park users created bike trails on the hill which could damage the rocks and any other historical resources onsite (Clark, 2020). The proposed NOVA Parks Washington & Old Dominion (W&OD) Trail widening project might also affect the park's historical resources. The purpose of this study was to provide an initial assessment of the man-made features in the park to ensure Arlington County and NOVA Parks plans account for protection of any historical resources.

Scope

The study consisted of a site survey of the trench and embankment, and research into human occupation of the area to identify possible uses for these features. The trench and embankment could relate to road, rail, trail, or utility construction. A limited amount of research was done to investigate these possibilities without identifying meaningful results. A more exhaustive search of the possible resources related to these uses was time-prohibitive and considered out of scope for this study.

The project area consists of the land surrounding Brandywine Castle, as shown in the red-dotted rectangle in Figure 1. Approximate locations for the trench and embankment are represented by the white line and red map marker, respectively.

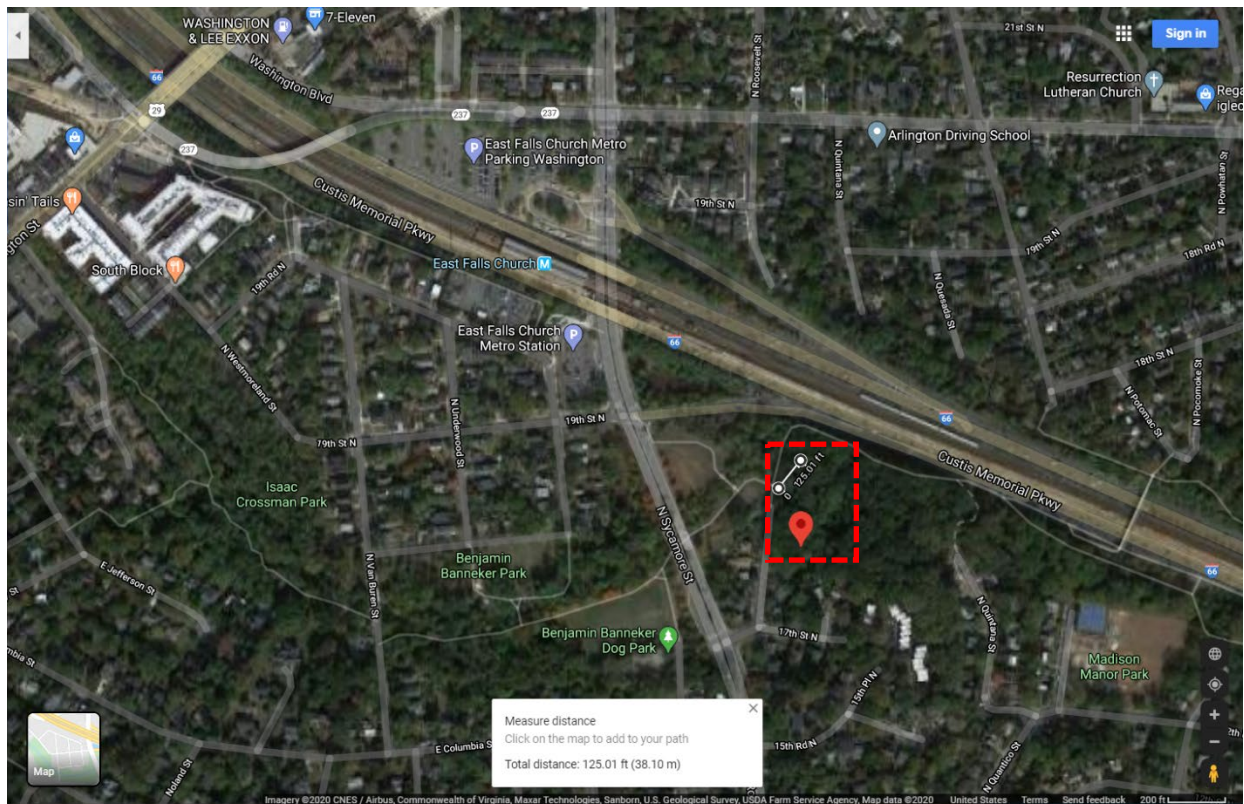


Figure 1. Map showing the project area in the red rectangle (Google Maps, n.d.)

The north side of the project site is adjacent to the W&OD Trail, which runs along the former path of the Alexandria, Loudoun, and Hampshire (AL&H) Railroad. Beyond the trail are Interstate-66 and metro tracks. The west side of the project area is bounded by a portion of the trail and Roosevelt Street. A residential neighborhood and parkland adjoin the south and east sides, respectively.

Figure 2 shows the project area in relation to Madison Manor Park.

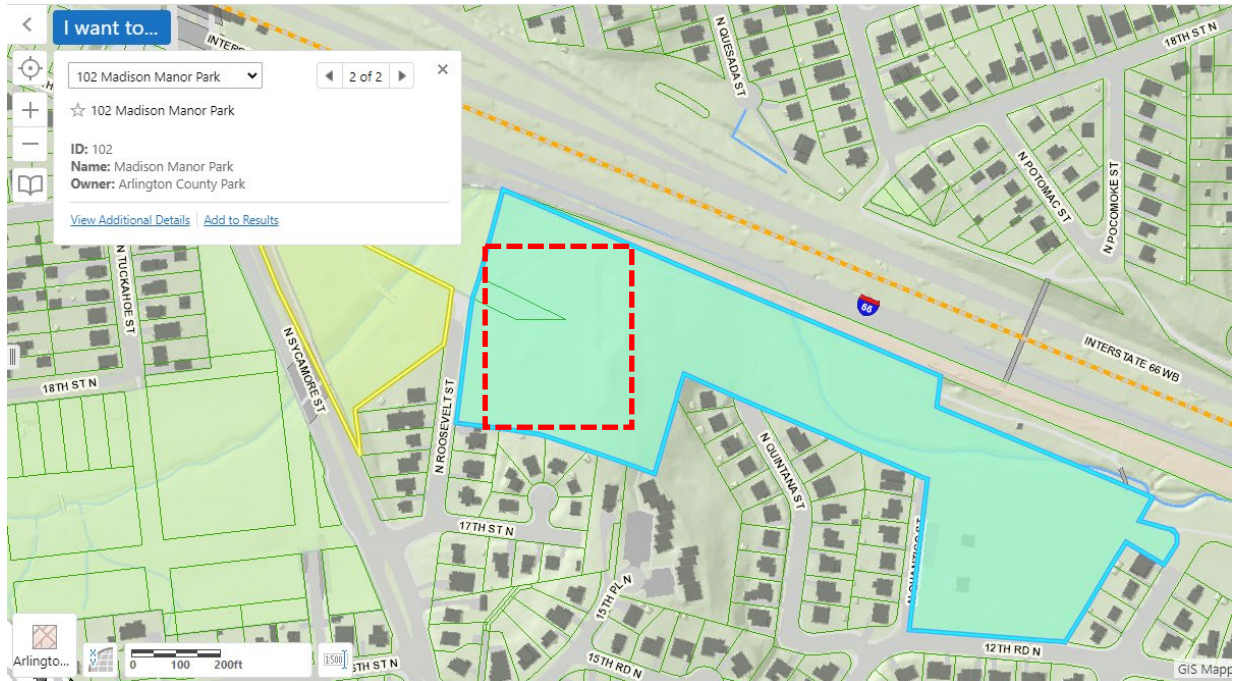


Figure 2. Map showing Madison Manor Park and project area in the red rectangle (Arlington County GIS Website, 2022)

Approach

Tasks included checking Arlington County’s site inventory for the presence of known archaeological sites, checking historic maps and other documentary sources for indications of historic occupation, and visually inspecting the proposed project area by pedestrian survey to document observable surface features.

Site Survey

Visual inspection of the project area consisted of pedestrian surveys conducted between September 2019 and April 2021. The GIS map in Figure 3 shows the key terrain features located in the project area.

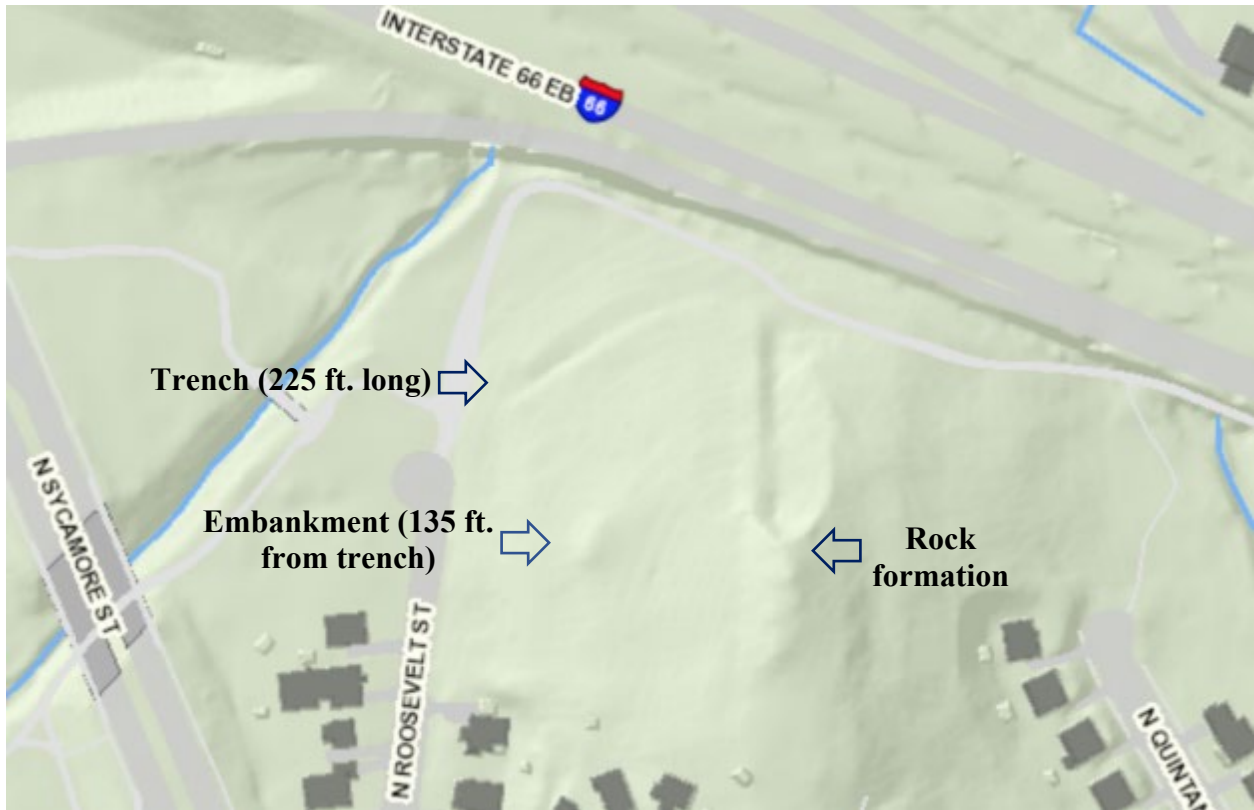


Figure 3. GIS map view of Brandywine Castle at Madison Manor Park, Arlington, VA. (Arlington County GIS Website, 2022)

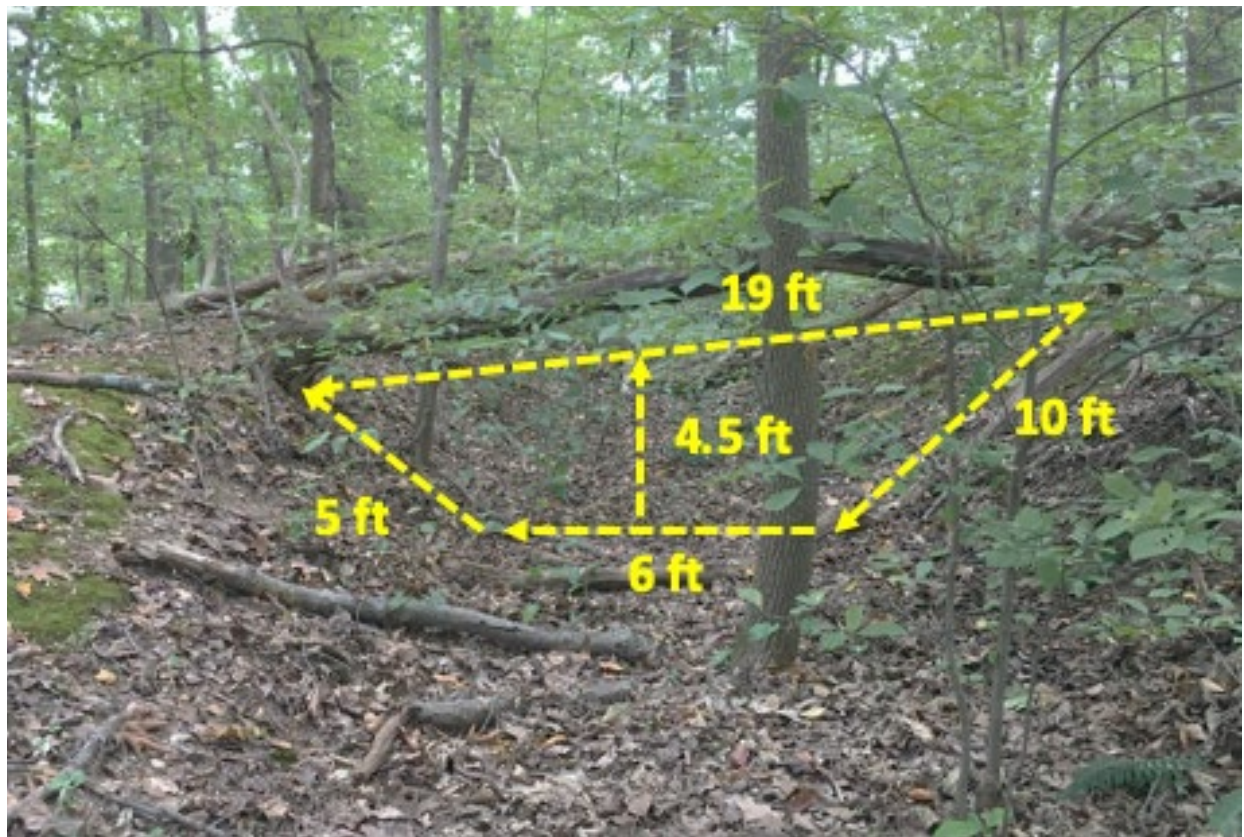
It was difficult to physically measure the length of the trench due to the substantial number of fallen branches and undergrowth in the trench. Following the surveys, the trench length was calculating using the Google Maps aerial view and measuring tool to arrive at a rough estimate of length of 225 feet.



The depth of the trench is not uniform along its entire length. The trench flattens out on each end, and a filled-in dirt trail crosses the trench near the middle as shown in Figure 5.



The estimated slope on each side of the trench at the deepest section is 45 degrees. Measurements of this section were taken with a tape measure. Figure 6 shows the measurements on top of a profile photo of the trench.



The embankment is approximately 135 feet from the top of the trench. The boundaries of this feature were difficult to distinguish, and no suitable measurements were taken.





Remnants of the house, shown in Figure 9, still exist at southern end of the project area near the embankment.



Figure 9: Remnants of the house at Brandywine Castle

Trails run throughout the park, including one that curves in front of the embankment where the house's driveway was previously located.



Ceramic sherds, glass fragments, bricks, and asphalt fragments cover the hillside, most of which is related to residential and recreational use. Figure 11 below shows fragments of a ceramic saucer found on the trail.



Research

Arlington County designated Brandywine Castle a local historic district on May 17, 1986 and designated the highest portion of the site a historic landmark. The landmark designation form submitted to the Arlington County Board for approval only references the location's importance as a locating point in 18th century land grants in its description of the site (Arlington Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board, 1986). The Phase XI Architectural Survey Report of Arlington County, Virginia completed in July 2009 recommended the Brandywine Castle site for a Phase I Archaeological Survey (Traceries, 2009) but no survey has been conducted to date. A recent column in the Falls Church News Press (Clark, 2020) is the only published material identified that specifically mentions the trench and embankment. A military historian with experience surveying Civil War defenses visited the site several times in 2008 and their input was collected via email.

Several resources were used to examine the land use history of the project area. Sources included, but were not limited to historic maps, historic aerial photographs, Civil War correspondence, newspapers, and local historical publications. Particularly useful for this project were the historical maps and correspondence from the Library of Congress as well as historic aerial photographs and maps from the Fairfax and Arlington County GIS websites. The following paragraphs summarize the results of the research.

Native American

Northern Virginia was first populated by Native Americans and evidence of a Native American soapstone workshop near the project area is described in the excerpt below from an 1889 symposium:

“At a point one mile below Falls Church, Virginia, on the old Febrey estate, I found a small but interesting soapstone workshop. It is located on a hillside overlooking Four-Mile Run and about one-fourth of a mile below a recently worked soapstone quarry. Large pieces of the unworked stone and fragments of unfinished vessels covered the ground, which occupies an area of not more than half an acre in extent. No perfect vessels were found, and the best specimen obtained was a small core worked out from the interior of a vessel in the process of its construction. Several quartz implements suited for working the stone were found mingled with the debris. The amount of material on the ground was comparatively small, when compared with that at the Rose Hill quarry, and probably it had been carried from the quarry above, where the recent operations have obliterated all traces of ancient mining, if any existed. Careful and repeated search in the neighborhood of this quarry only resulted in the discovery of a few pieces of unfinished vessels-enough, perhaps, to justify the conclusion that this quarry furnished the material used at the workshop.” (Proudfit, 1889)

The Febrey property referred to could be that of Henry, Nicholas, or John Febrey. As seen in the 1865 map in Figure 15 each of these Febreys owned land below Brandywine Castle in relation to its position along Four Mile Run. The “quarry above” may refer to Richard Gott's quarry at Brandywine Castle.

Proudfit also mentions a village site “on the farm of Isaac Crossmun, at Falls Church, Virginia.” Proudfit clarifies that his use of the term village site “is not to be understood as signifying a place formerly occupied by a compact group of dwellings, but rather one where their proximity to each other was interrupted by considerable spaces devoted to agricultural and other purposes.” (Proudfit, 1889). Assuming the site Proudfit surveyed is Brandywine Castle, if the trench was present at the time, he did not consider it to be related to a Native American quarry or village site.

Civil War

Residents in the area have found Civil War-era minie balls at the park and wondered if the trench and embankment also date to the Civil War (Clark, 2020). During the Civil War “much of the northern Virginia countryside was dotted with small picket posts, camps, and other strong points designed to offer an early warning net for the Defenses of Washington.” (Cooling, Owen, 2010) Maps and correspondence document the presence of troops and defensive structures from both the Union and Confederate Armies throughout the region.

Confederate Occupation

The Confederate Army established outposts at Mason's, Munson's, and Upton's Hills in August 1861. Virgil P. Corbett, a civilian who resided in the area in 1861, created the map in Figure 12. Corbett "went so close to the rebel works that he was discovered and chased by the rebels" (New York Times, 9/17/1861).



Figure 12. 1865 Civil War map showing the project area, in red (Corbett)

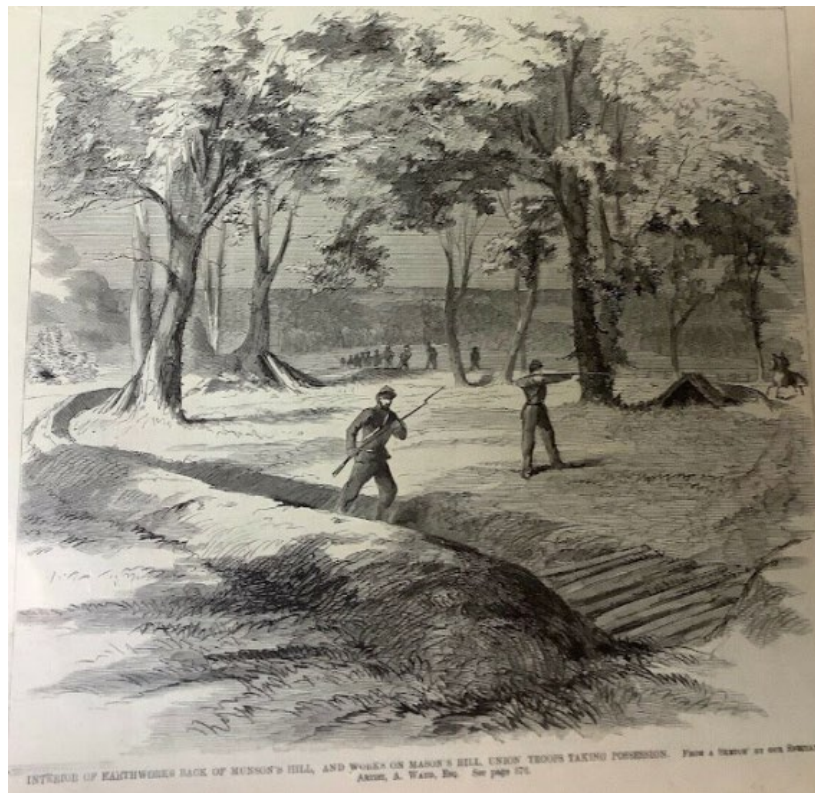
After Union soldiers occupied the positions in late September 1861 Northern newspaper correspondents provided detailed descriptions of Confederate works around the area.

"The "fort" on Munson's Hill I find to be perhaps 300 yards long, in the circuit of its parapet, the whole being nothing more than infantry breastworks, having, however, a rather formidable "Quaker" gun, in the shape of an ash log with a dab of black paint at the butt to represent the muzzle. Such other and more valuable guns as they may have had here, had been carefully removed by the Confeds when they withdrew their pickets previously. At the earthwork to the rear of Munson's Hill, the retreating Confederates had left six sections of stove pipe mounted in the six embrasures; and some rather formidable-looking (at a distance) earthworks upon Mason's Hill proved, on the occupation of that point by our troops, to be just about of the same bogus nature." (Evening Star, 9/30/1861)

The Confederate earthwork to the rear of Munson's Hill, located on Perkins' Hill near Seven Corners, is illustrated in Figure 13.



A Confederate rifle trench on Mason's Hill is illustrated in Figure 14.



Another Northern correspondent provided a description of encampments and earthworks at nearby Upton's Hill.

"The first signs of the encampments recently occupied by the rebels on the road from the Georgetown Aqueduct are found just this side of Ball's Cross Roads, consisting of rails set up and covered with straw, and of brush huts sheltered by thick overhanging cedar and pine. A few rods east of Upton's Hill there are quite a number of these rail huts, covered with corn fodder and rye straw, capable of accommodating about one regiment. A ridiculous specimen of Confederate earthworks, consisting of a little ridge of dirt, thrown up about two feet high, runs along the side of Upton's Hill—the only signs of rebel fortifications in that vicinity." (Evening Star, 10/4/1861)

A Confederate correspondent from the 18th Virginia Regiment specifically mentions picket duty at Brandywine Castle as well as an incident involving Confederate and Union artillery.

"A Trip on Picket – View of Washington.

Correspondence of the Richmond Dispatch

Near Fairfax Court-House,
Sept. 12, 1861

On Friday, the 5th of this month, our regiment was ordered to leave its encampment near Fairfax Court-House, and go up towards Washington on picket duty...

After stopping to rest several times and filling up our canteens with good cool water, we came in sight of Falls Church, distant about ten miles from our encampment. This is a neat village containing about twelve families and four churches, at one of which it is said that General Washington often attended service. The boundary line of the original District of Columbia runs just beyond Falls Church. After passing the line stones of this District, now called the County of Alexandria, we marched about three quarters of a mile and stretched our arms upon Brandywine Castle, near the Alexandria, Loudoun and Hampshire railroad...

While we were looking over at the enemy, and lying carelessly about our posts, some six or eight cannon balls came over our heads and took us by surprise. Col. Withers gallantly came to our assistance with the balance of the regiment and a display of artillery, as if for battle, whereupon they kept remarkably quiet the rest of the day." (Daily Dispatch, 9/17/1861)

A soldier from the 9th South Carolina Regiment also describes picket duty at Brandywine Castle.

"Virginia Correspondence

[For The Lancaster Ledger.]

Brandy-more Castle Hill, Sep. 19.

From the caption, it might be inferred that our camp and quarters have been located in some place of celebrity, with every convenience, comfort, and strength, strongly fortified, and "all that." Such was true of Castles in olden times – such might be supposed true of this, but beyond the name it is not so. It is true, that it is a hill, with rocks just as nature arranged them, with a running stream at the foot. It is among the many romantic hills included in the original grant of Land to Lord Fairfax. In subsequent conveyances, the name has been preserved. The present inhabitants may tax every ingenuity in vain to discover a fitness, an appropriateness between the place and the name – Brandy-more Castle Hill. Those who named it no doubt saw the aptness, the becomingness of the appellation, but the reason has not been left on record and the light of nature now does not enable me to discover it; however, it is immaterial.

The present occupants are the members of the 9th Regiment. We found no Castle, house, or other shelter or covering upon it, and we will leave it in the same situation. It is about seven miles from Alexandria on the Rail Road from that city to Leesburgh – about six miles in an air line to Washington – nearly two miles east of Falls Church – about two mile north of Munson's Hill and one mile from Upton Hill, and about the same or probably a little further from Hall's." (Lancaster Ledger, 10/9/1861)

While the Confederate forces and defensive works were not significant in strength the research illustrates the proximity of Confederate earthworks to the project area. Trenches like those constructed at Mason's and Upton's are smaller in scale than the Brandywine Castle trench but the earthworks at Perkins' Hill are comparable to the Brandywine Castle embankment.

Union Occupation

Following the Confederate withdrawal, the Union army advanced and set up large camps throughout the region, including at Upton's, Minor's, and Hall's Hills. Union troops constructed Forts Ramsay, Buffalo, Taylor, and Munson in the Seven Corners area as shown in Figure 15.



Figure 15. 1865 Civil War map showing the project area in the red rectangle (Barnard)

A soldier from the 21st New York Regiment describes the earthworks in the area in a letter written October 19, 1861.

“On Upton’s Hill a strong fortification has been erected, mounting about a dozen guns, which will sweep the country in about every direction, being on the highest point of grounds there is in the vicinity. Besides the fort there are two batteries with embrasures for six guns on other portions of the hill, that will sweep the railroad track and the valley through which it runs.

About a half mile west of the Fort on Upton’s Hill, is the fortification upon which our regiment, assisted by detachments from the 23^d and 35th New York Regiments, have been at work. It was commenced two weeks ago yesterday morning, and is now nearly finished. The trenches and parapet may be said to be finished and the stockade nearly so. It has embrasures for seven guns. Its general shape is that of a semi-circle, the parapet describing the half-circle and the parapet the diameter. Its guns will sweep in every direction save in an easterly one.” (Buffalo Daily Courier, 10/24/1861)

A soldier in the 23rd New York Regiment wrote a similar description of works in the area on October 23, 1861.

“This and the Twenty-First regiment have finished their labors on two small pentagonal earth works a short distance in front, which will mount seven guns each, and the cannon are also mounted in the fort at Upton’s House, so we consider our digging duties finished in this immediate neighborhood. We have also erected

two field breastworks here for the use of the light battery at our left elbow in case they might be needed for the protection of the cannoniers.” (Elmira Weekly Advertiser, 11/2/1861)

Although the descriptions are similar, they do not offer enough detail to locate the field batteries. Besides his reference to Fort Ramsay on Upton’s, the 21st NY soldier writes of a semi-circular fort which appears to describe Fort Buffalo. It is not clear if the two batteries refer only to Fort Taylor, which would have covered the railroad and valley, or if there is an additional battery not shown on the map. The reference is probably not to the works at Perkins’ and Munson’s Hills as neither would cover the tracks and valley through which it runs.

The Brandywine Castle trench is roughly similar in scale to the design for rifle trenches around forts in the defenses of Washington, shown in Figure 16. The depth and width of the Brandywine Castle trench are 4.5 ft. and 6 ft. respectively, although the front slope of the Brandywine Castle trench is not as steep.

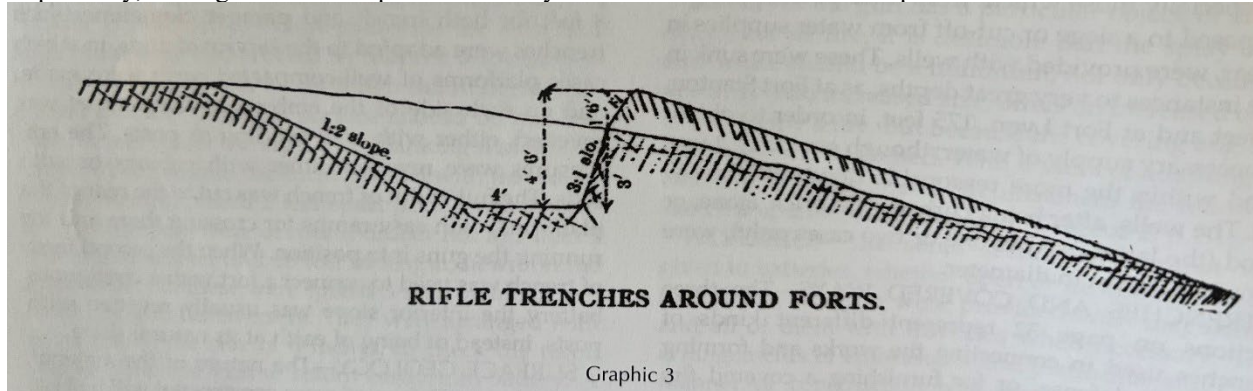


Figure 16. Design of rifle trenches around forts (Cooling, Owen, 2010)

A 2001 archaeological survey of Battery Heights in Alexandria, VA studied the remains of an unmanned battery and rifle trench. Figure 17 is an excerpt of the survey’s site map which shows the trench and battery. The placement of a trench in front of an embankment is similar to the Brandywine Castle site, although the Battery Heights trench is 30-40 ft. from the battery which is much closer than the distance between the Brandywine Castle trench and embankment.

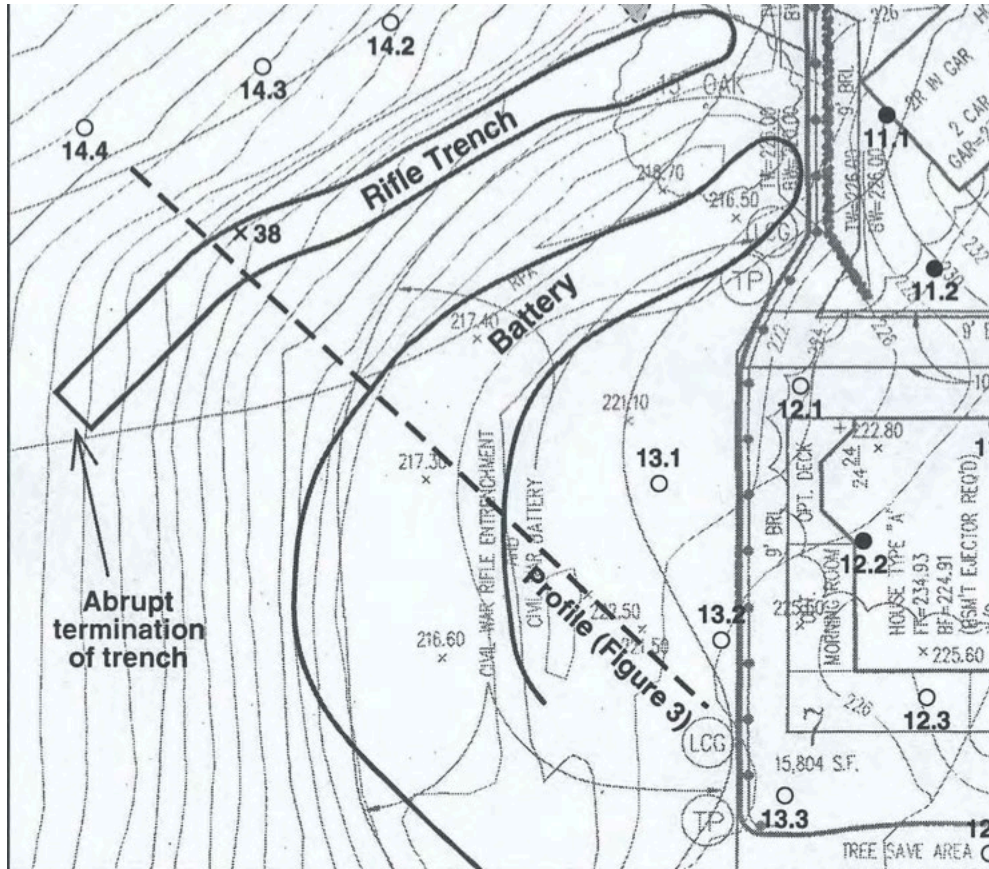


Figure 17. Location of earthworks on Battery Heights, Alexandria, VA (John Milner Associates, Inc, 2001.)

The profile drawing of Battery Heights in Figure 18 shows how the trench is located on lower ground in front of the battery.

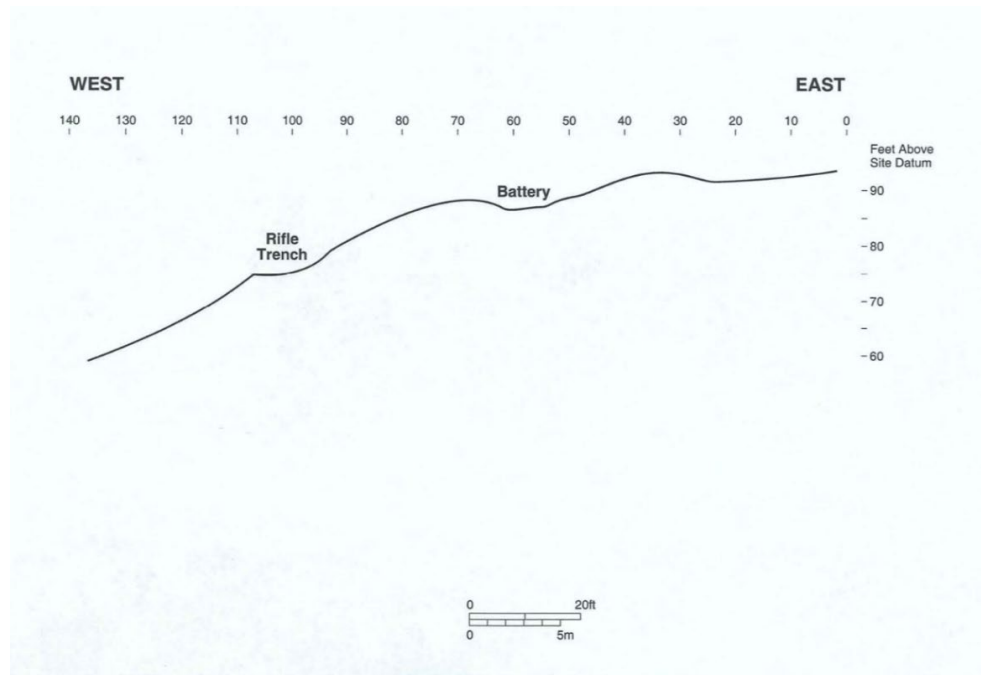


Figure 18. Profile of Earthworks on Battery Heights, Alexandria, VA (John Milner Associates, Inc, 2001.)

The Brandywine Castle trench is also located on lower ground in front of the embankment. A side-by-side comparison of the Brandywine Castle features to those at Battery Heights demonstrates the similarities between the two locations.

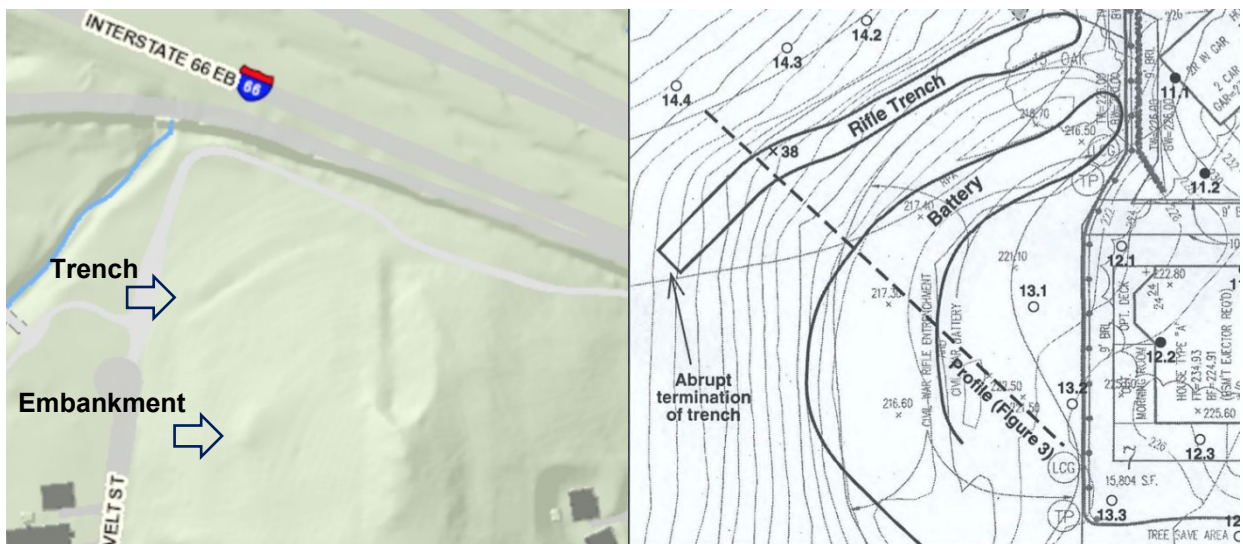


Figure 19. Comparison of Brandywine Trench and Embankment to Battery Heights.

While there are similarities between the Brandywine Castle site and Civil War earthworks the differences in the slope and positioning cannot be overlooked. A military historian examined both the trench and embankment during visits to the site in 2008. They determined that the trench does not confirm to a military layout. In addition, the embankment is not oriented in a military manner and depressions in the embankment appear to be more consistent with tree root wads or post-war activities.

Farm

Documentation of farm use on the property dates to the mid-19th century. Major Richard Gott built a hunting lodge on the site prior to the Civil War.

“While living in D.C., Major Gott built a hunting lodge near Falls Church on land his wife had inherited from her father, William Gordon—other sisters and brothers had inherited land near the now Army-Navy Country Club and on Arlington Ridge Road— the Slaymakers and Heiners. This lodge became his home after the War Between the States” (Gott, p.24)

“After the surrender, Dr. Gott returned to Falls Church, where he began general practice. His father, who had served throughout the war in the Confederacy also returned to his home, Buena Vista, formerly his hunting lodge, to begin farming. Major Gott soon turned the farm over to his son, Dr. Gott.” (Gott, p. 26)

More recent research suggests Gott built a new home at the site after the war.

“The oldest, extant house in the neighborhood was constructed by the Gott family at what is now 1301 North Roosevelt Street (000-4211-0097). Known as Buena Vista, the house was constructed ca. 1867-1868 for Richard Gott, a veteran of the Civil War. The 130-acre property served as the trucking farm of Dr. Louis Edward Gott, a surgeon for the Confederate army.” (Tracerics, p. 46)

The 1878 map in Figure 20 shows the proximity of the Gott home to the project site.

Farmers commonly use irrigation and drainage ditches but the location of the trench in between bends of Four Mile Run and adjoining rocky terrain indicate that it is unlikely this trench was used as such.

Quarry

Richard Gott published an advertisement for a quarry along the AL&H Railroad in the February 19, 1866, Evening Star, shown in Figure 22.

FOLIATED OR LAMELLA STONE.—
I have, from external appearances and also from specimens taken out of a “cut” on the Alexandria, Loudoun and Hampshire, Railroad, a very valuable quarry of the above quality of STONE.
Judges have pronounced the “specimens” equal to the best quality of Building and Curb Stone; being of a dark blue color, very firm and smooth.
Builders and others are invited to examine this Stone, and if found of the requisite quality, liberal terms can be made for opening and working the quarry.
Apply on the Farm in the occupancy of Mr. Samuel Shreve, eight miles out on the Alexandria, Loudoun and Hampshire Railroad.
RICHARD GOTT,
fe 15—eo2w Fall's Church, Fairfax co., Va.

Figure 22: Advertisement for the Gott Quarry (Evening Star, 1866)

In the 1970s Robert Moxham observed evidence of a quarry at Brandymore Castle, finding that “the north side of the hill has been quarried to a small extent but the craggy masses at the summit are essentially undisturbed.” (Moxham, p. 9).

Figure 23 is a portion of the GIS Map view centered on the rocks at Brandymore which shows a long depression running along a straight line.



Figure 23. GIS map view of the rock formation at Brandymore Castle (Arlington County GIS Website, 2022)

Photos were taken of the rocks during the site survey but trees and undergrowth at the site made it difficult to confirm if the depression is the quarry site. Given the proximity to the likely quarry site, it is possible that quarry

operators dug the trench, but the site survey did not identify any superficial evidence to support or refute a relationship.

Residential

No house is present in the project area on Civil War maps or the 1878 map. Figure 24, a 1936 map of the area, shows a house at Brandymore Castle as shown in the red-dotted circle.



Figure 24. Aerial View of House within the project area (Sanborn, 1936)

The house, driveway, and possible garden area can be seen in aerial photos dating back to the 1930s, as shown in Figure 25. The red-dotted oval shows the approximate location of the trench.

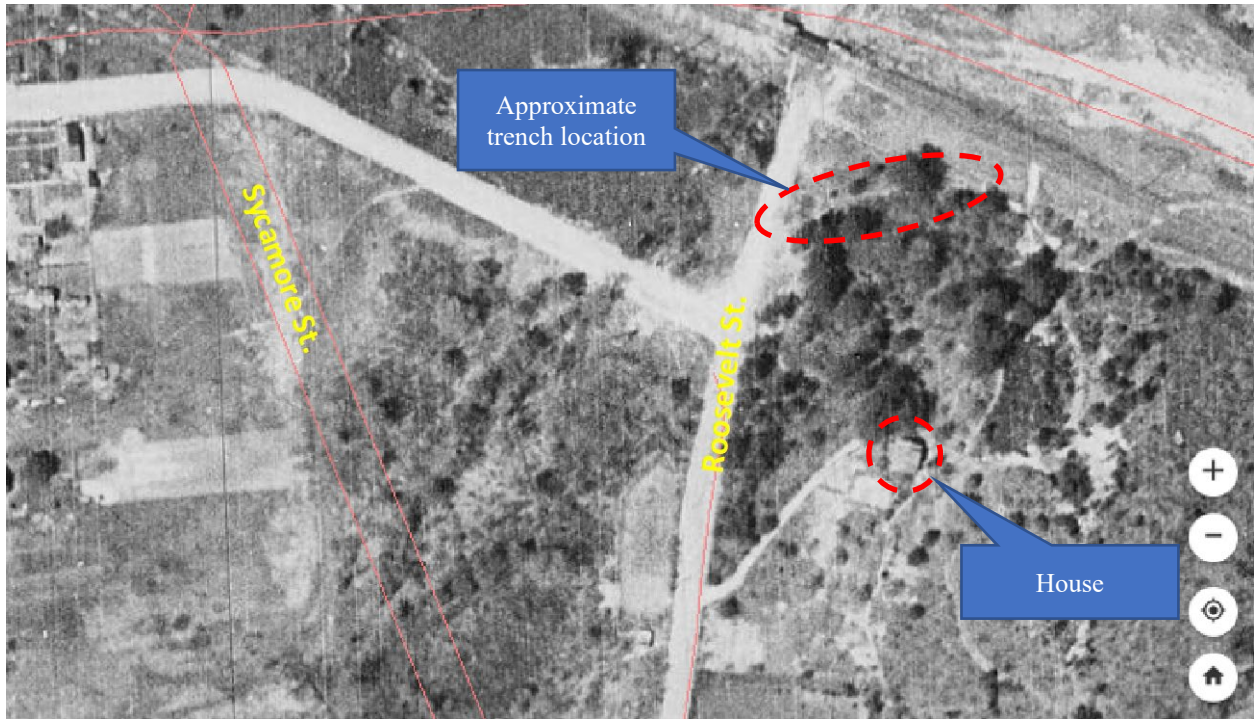


Figure 25. Aerial view of house within the project area (Fairfax GIS, 1937)

Arlington County demolished the house sometime after acquiring the property for parkland in the 1960s. The 1972 aerial photo in Figure 26 shows the area after demolition.

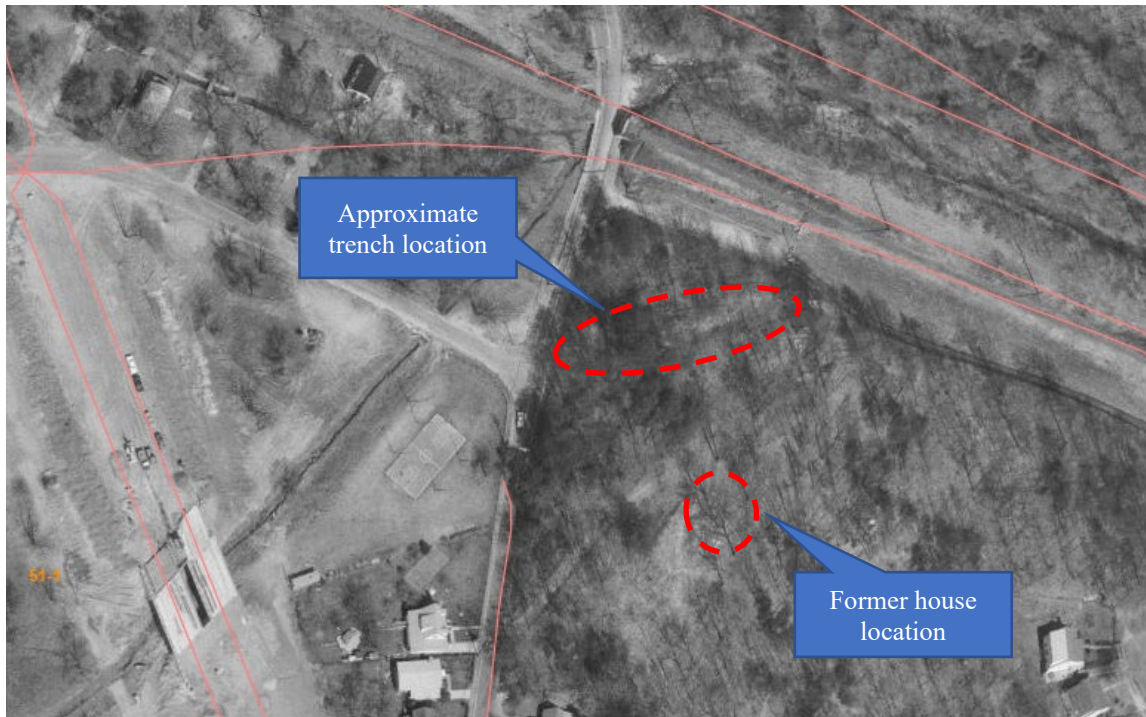


Figure 26 Aerial view of project area after demolition of the house, (Fairfax GIS, 1972)

Park visitors can still see remnants of the house in the southern end of the project area near the embankment. Neighborhood residents have learned that the location was also used as a dumping ground, which, combined with nearly five decades of recreational use, explain the large volume of debris found throughout the park.

Summary

The trench and embankment at Brandymore Castle bear some resemblance to Civil War earthworks but there is no documentation that positively identifies earthworks at the project site. Numerous Confederate works are noted elsewhere in the area and soldiers' correspondence provides documentation that Confederate units camped at Brandymore Castle. A battery on the hill could have provided defense against Union forces advancing up the road now known as Roosevelt Street.

If the features are Civil War-related, then Union Army construction of earthworks at the site appears to be more plausible. The arrangement of the trench and embankment features at Brandymore Castle are similar to Union earthworks documented on Battery Heights in Alexandria. The project area is located between Seven Corners and Minor's Hill, being approximately one mile from both. Given the north-west orientation of the trench and location of the embankment on the western side of the hill a battery at Brandymore Castle would have provided defense between Seven Corners and Minor's Hill against Confederate forces advancing along the railroad.

A military historian who visited the site several times believes the similarities are coincidental. While documentation shows Civil War activity at the site, there are no records of fortifications, or more than temporary occupation and the trench and embankment do not conform to a military layout.

Documentation reviewed during this study does not provide enough detail to rule out Native American, farm, quarry, and residential users of the area as creators of the trench and embankment. The proximity of the trench to the embankment could also be a coincidence and different users could be responsible for each. Grading for the house construction could be responsible for the embankment while the trench, being adjacent to roads, rails, and trails for decades, was created as part of one of those construction projects. There is considerably more documentation on these topics which is focused on the Northern Virginia area. Another study will provide the opportunity to review more sources to identify possible uses not considered in this study.

Recommendations

Arlington County should expedite the completion of a Phase I Archeological Survey, so the information is available before approving any changes to the park. Brandymore Castle was already recommended for a Phase I survey in 2009, and the information gathered during this study reinforces the need to conduct a follow-on survey. While this site survey and research suggest the trench and embankment could be Civil War earthworks, a 2008 survey determined it is more likely that the features were added in the 20th century, and there are countless other possibilities which cannot be ruled out. Measurements should be taken with precision instruments and physical evidence should be collected through metal-detecting and shovel tests. Analysis of artifacts and soil found through sub-surface excavation will enable researchers to determine the creator and purpose of the earthworks with a greater degree of confidence.

A Phase I study will also provide the opportunity to examine the entire Brandymore Castle area for presence of artifacts from all prior occupants. Surveys at Rock Creek Park (Louis Berger Group, 2008) and Barkhamsted's Peoples State Forest (Hartford Courant, 2015) demonstrate the value in re-examining previously studied Native American sites. Archaeologists will have access to modern techniques not available to prior researchers, which may bring new discoveries to light.

References

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