

City of Alexandria, Virginia

Douglass Cemetery Drainage and Preservation Updates



Lee Center
June 12, 2023

Douglass Cemetery Public Meeting

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
- Project Funding
- Other Preservation Initiatives and Next Steps
- 6:30 p.m. Adjourn for Site Visit to Douglass Cemetery



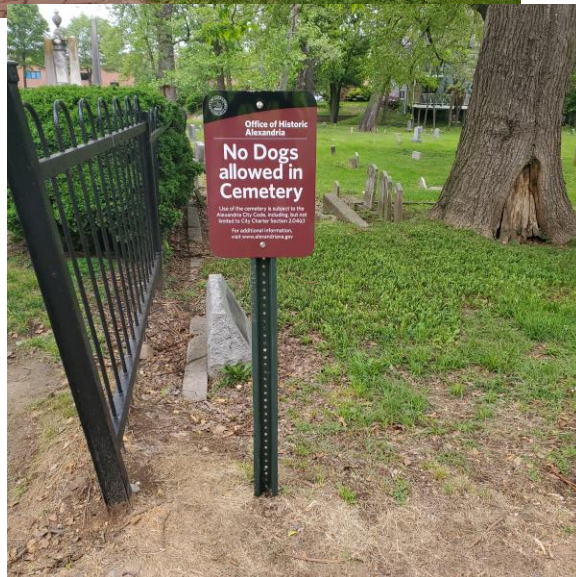
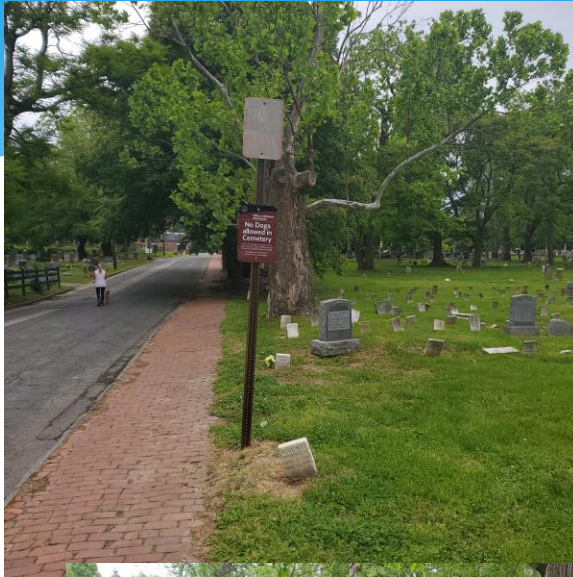
Douglass Cemetery Public Meeting



Introductions

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

Preservation Policies



Consistent with City Code ARTICLE C - Dogs and Other Animals, Sections 5-7-31; 5-7-32; and 5-7-33; dogs are prohibited from running at large unless within a designated off-leash Fenced Dog Park or Dog Exercise Area. For a complete list of designated dog off-leash areas visit www.alexandriava.gov/Dogs.

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

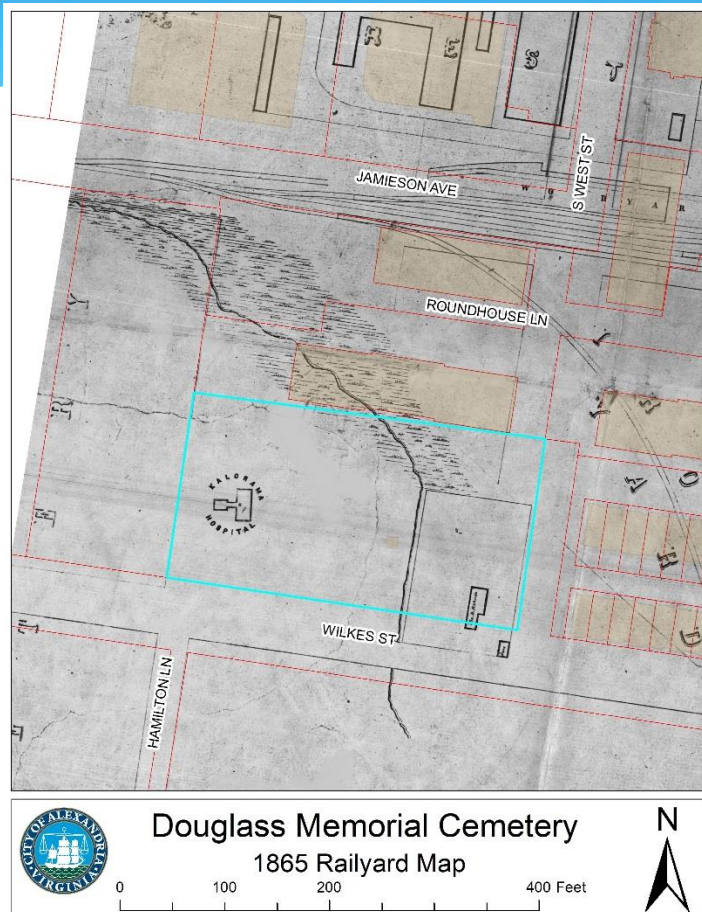
The Douglass cemetery, the new burying ground for colored people, which has been established here recently, was a day or two ago conveyed by the Washington owners to a board of trustees, consisting of Revs. Porter, Waring, Fields Cook and W. B. Dulaney and M. B. T. Murray, all colored, who will have 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



- Established in 1895 as a non-denominational, African American Cemetery, named in memory of Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)
- In use through 1975
- Over 2,200 people are buried in the cemetery making it the largest African American Cemetery in Alexandria
- Fewer than 700 grave markers are visible today
- Key historical sources include:
 - Douglass Cemetery Interment Record, 1896-1959
 - Virginia Death Certificates, 1912-present
 - Wesley Pippenger (1992 and 2005) *Tombstone Inscriptions* vol. 3 and 5
 - Oral Histories, past and in progress

Historic Douglass Cemetery



Historic cemetery boundaries shown in blue.

Before becoming a Cemetery, the parcel was:

- Originally part of Spring Garden Farm, ca. 1800
- Then owned by William Burton Richards, ca. 1841
- 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
- Note: the City is working to clear title to the cemetery. Last know owners believed to have been the Chauncey Family.

Historic Douglass Cemetery



Burials:

Total: 2,256

Headstones: 605 (including footstones and other markers)

First known burial: 1896

Last known burial: 1975

Douglass Cemetery Association established in 1895; inactive as a burial ground today.

City maintained property since 1976.

Historic cemetery boundaries shown in blue.

Earliest map of the cemetery.

Douglass Cemetery Conditions



April 2021



October 2021

- Primary condition: Periodic flooding and standing water
- Other preservation issues:
 - Gravestones generally in poor condition, in addition to unmarked burials
 - Tree roots have created uneven sidewalk surface
 - Gazebo needs repair
 - Ownership status
 - Other issues as identified by stakeholders

Previous Survey Work



- Recognizing preservation issues and the potential need for restoration work, Alexandria Archaeology received a grant to undertake a non-invasive, geophysical survey of Douglass Cemetery.
- Map shows modern aerial with historic cemetery boundaries. Note flooded area.



Previous Survey Work



- Remote sensing (and electrical conductivity) indicated the presence of anomalies in excess of 780 interpreted as marked and unmarked burials.
- Results can be used as a preservation tool, in association with ground truthing (which confirms the interpretations of geophysical data).

Previous Survey Work



Map of Douglass Cemetery Burial Plots (from Douglass Cemetery Interment Record)

- With support from the African American Cemeteries and Graves Fund, Wellman Conservation, LLC completed a condition assessment of gravestones. The report provides priorities for treatment that can be undertaken in the future by trained conservators and volunteers.

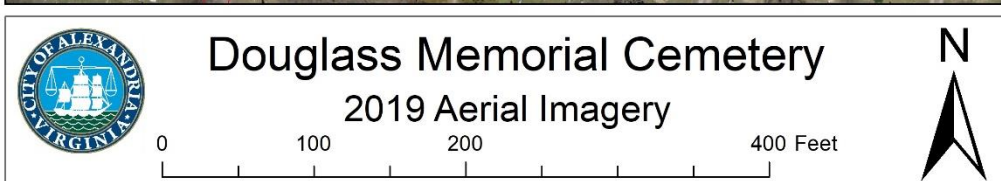
Douglass Cemetery Drainage Analysis: Findings and Recommendations



Stormwater pipe runs south to north under walkway and gazebo

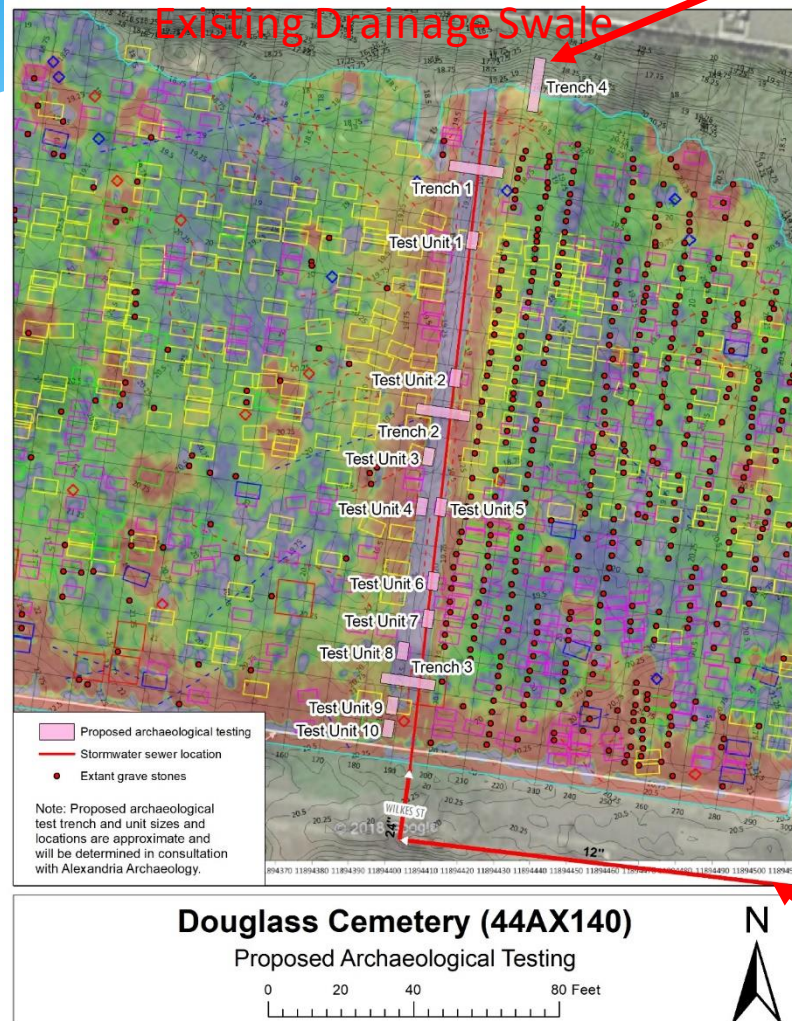


- Aging, clogged, and undersized stormwater pipe needs to be replaced
- Cleaning and regrading of swale to promote drainage and water run-off
- Installing a new drainage swale between the flood prone area and the existing drainage swale
- Filling the low area where the water pools



Douglass Cemetery Drainage Analysis: Findings and Recommendations

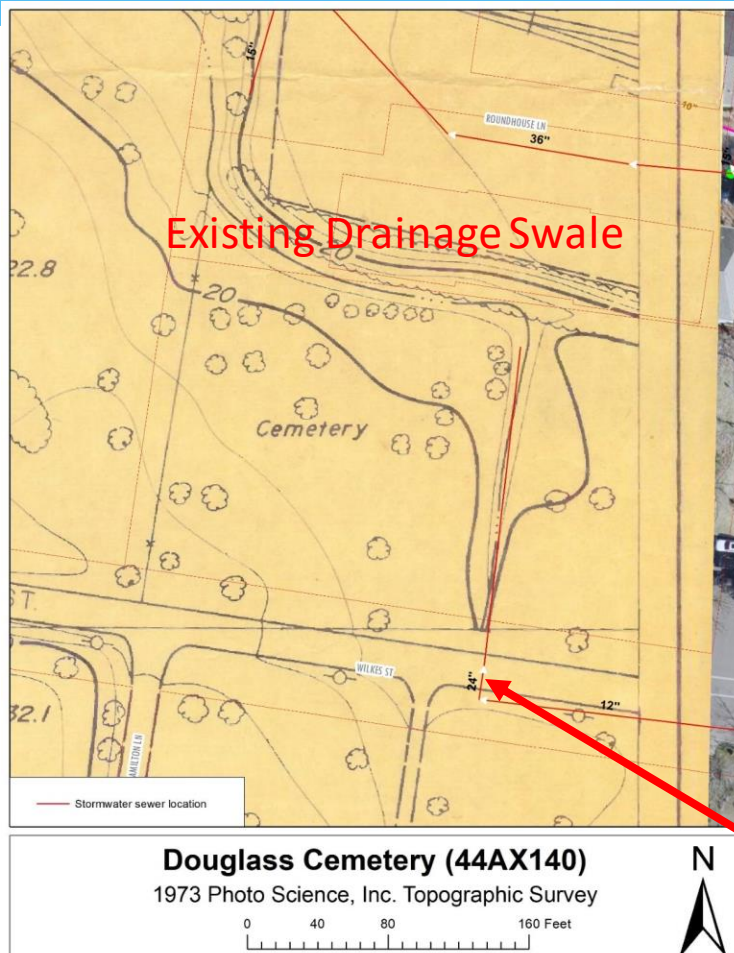
New Drainage Swale



- Due to the sensitivity of the site, archaeological testing and/or monitoring will occur in any area of ground disturbance
- Test units 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 the Department of Historic Resources will be obtained before any work occurs and work will be coordinated closely with the Friends of Douglass Cemetery and the Social Responsibility Group

Stormwater pipe runs south to north under walkway and gazebo

Douglass Cemetery Drainage Analysis: Findings and Recommendations



- Aerial photographs and infrastructure maps suggest that a small stream and open stormwater drainage once ran through Douglass Cemetery from south to north.
- It appears to have been an open ditch rather than a covered pipe at least until 1973, after which time a stormwater pipe may have been installed.

Stormwater pipe running south to north

Douglass Cemetery Drainage Analysis: Findings and Recommendations



- In order to fill in the low spot where the water pools, headstones will need to be removed and reset.
- Additional headstones may need to be removed and reset as well with guidance from a conservator to prevent damage during construction.
- Red polygon indicates areas where gravestone removal and resetting may occur.
- Many of these stones need to be reset anyway given their condition.

Project Funding



- FY2023 City funding for drainage survey
- CIP Funding through FY2025 of \$2.6 million
 - Includes VDHR funding \$500,000 to repair stormwater
- Annual cemetery funding from VDHR to OHA, divided between five cemeteries \$9,715

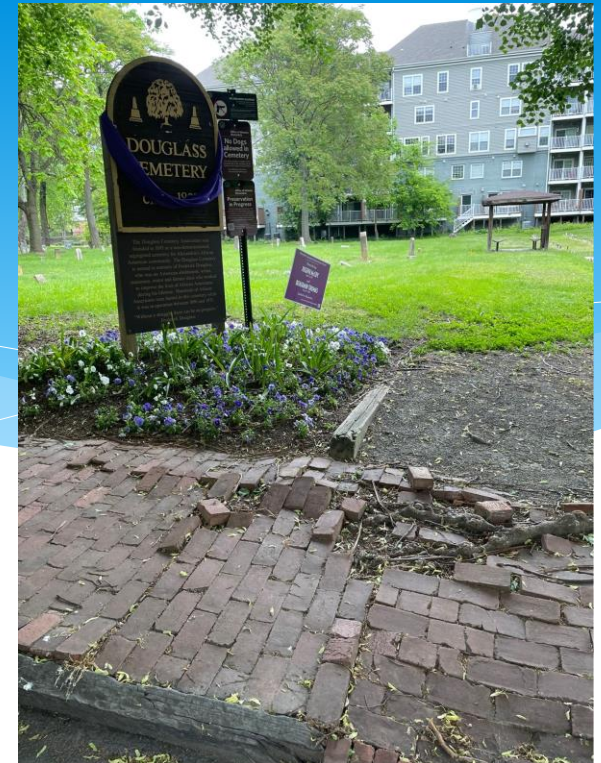
Drainage Project Next Steps



- City staff is negotiating fees with the consultant team for the archaeological excavations, regrading and permit work.
- Once the fee negotiation is finalized and contract is signed, excavation work will start.
- The City is working to clear title to the cemetery.
- OHA will provide a monitoring strategy/plan to help monitor the excavation work.
- If no burials are found, consultant team will complete the remaining work. Construction is expected to start once permits are granted.

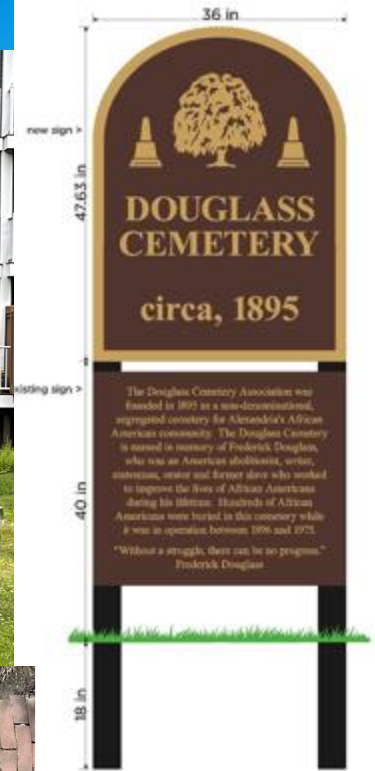
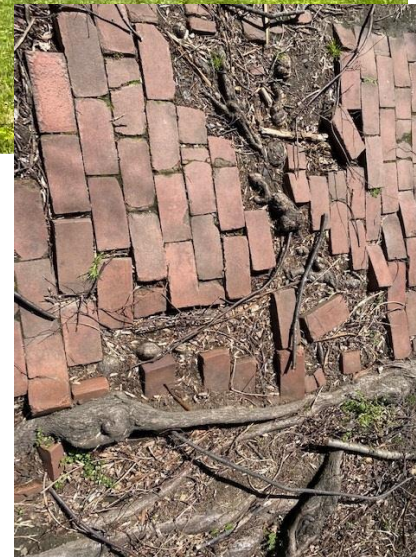
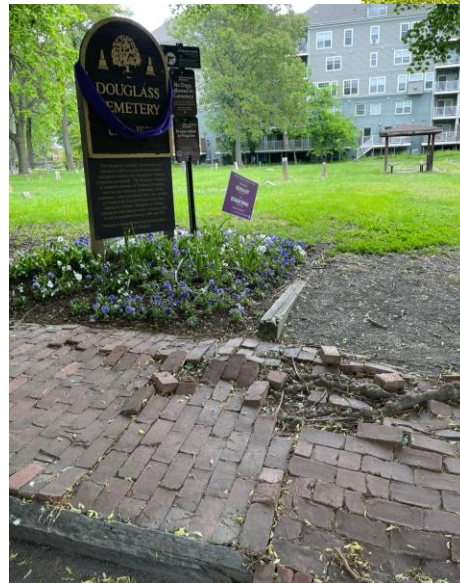
Preservation Next Steps

- RPCA Cemetery Clean Up, June 16th, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Join the Friends of Douglass Cemetery and the Social Responsibility Group for Juneteenth at Douglass Cemetery, June 17th, 10:00 a.m.
- Continued Internships with Howard University students on the history, preservation, and oral history of Douglass Cemetery.
 - Individual biographies
- Regular meetings with descendants and Friends of Douglass Cemetery.
- Development of a GIS-based preservation tool.
- Oral Histories through a 2023 grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.



Preservation Next Steps

- Removal of two dead trees on the west side of the cemetery.
- Prior to Juneteenth, installation of new signage and stabilize and re-stain gazebo.
- Working to address uneven sidewalk.



Stay up to date!



Visit the Project Web Page

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

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