

The Alexandria Chronicle

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Volusia: A farm and the people who lived there during the Civil War

by Amy Bertsch

In the spring of 2008, Dr. Pamela Cressey, City Archaeologist for the City of Alexandria, shared a photograph with me and asked if I could identify its owner and perhaps learn more about where and when it was taken. Alexandria Archaeology wanted permission to use it for the interpretation of Freedmen's Cemetery, the abandoned and recently reclaimed burial ground on South Washington Street where nearly 1,800 African Americans were interred. The photograph showed two women and seven children, all African Americans, posed amid buckets, an ironing board and iron, seemingly in the midst of doing the laundry. It had been taken at a place called Volusia, a farm off Duke Street near Holmes Run.

I was able to find a second pose of the same subjects in an auction catalog online. This photograph had a handwritten caption reading "Felix Richards Slaves." The first photograph was captioned "Slaves at Volusia near Alexandria." The same collector owned both images and when I contacted him, he sent me photocopies of other photos that he thought were likely taken at the same time and place and perhaps by the same photographer. In researching these photographs, I discovered a fascinating chapter in Alexandria's Civil War history that wove together the experiences of white property owners, Union troops and African Americans who transitioned from slavery to freedom.

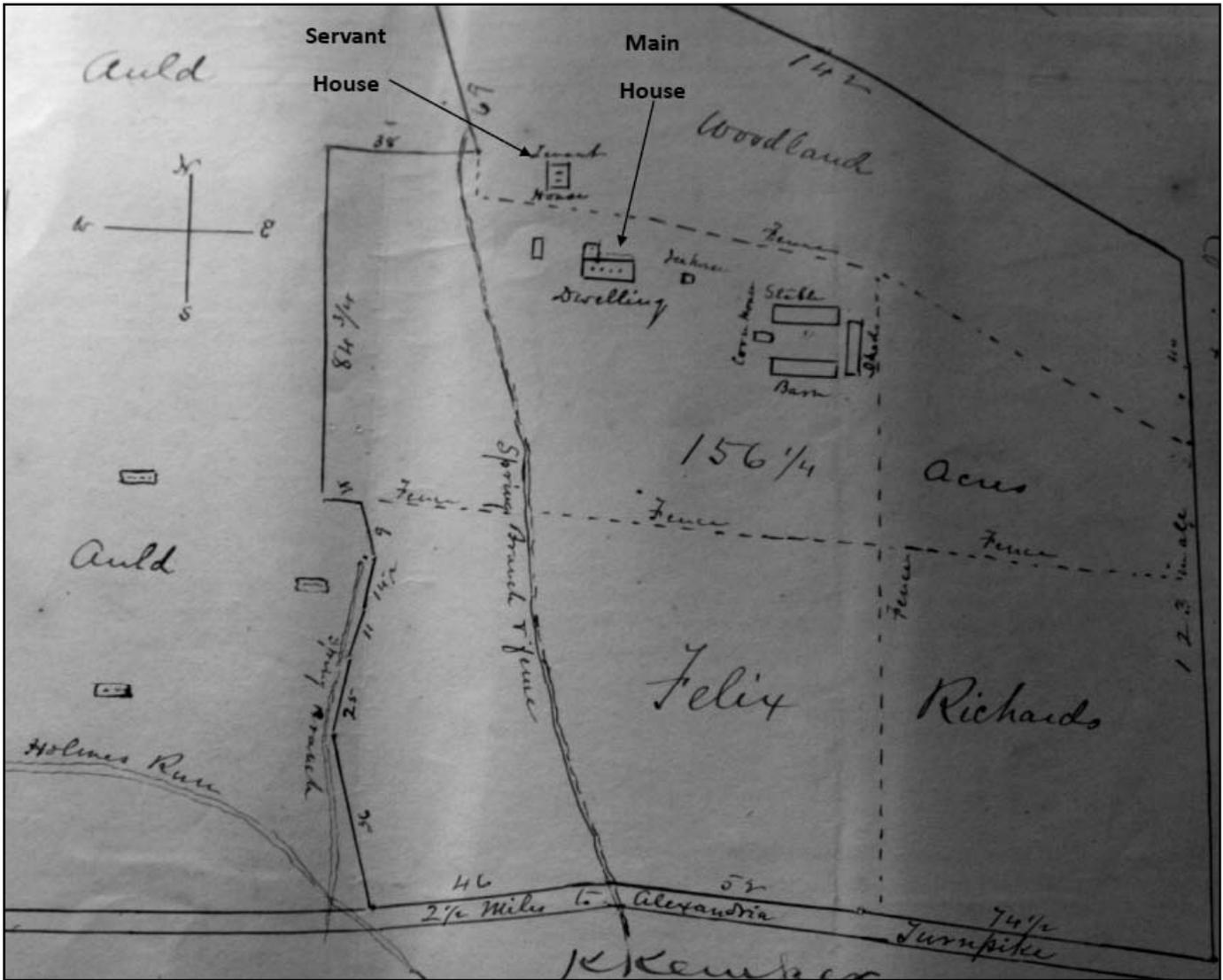
Volusia was a 155-acre working farm along the Little River Turnpike or Duke Street today (between Jordan Street and the Beatley Central Library), whose land sloped to the south with streams and springs.* More than once, in the 1850s, Volusia was offered for sale and newspaper advertisements provide enticing and detailed

descriptions of the property.

An 1850 ad, for example, in the *Alexandria Gazette* touted the "beautiful and healthy residence and farm" with "good land with sufficiency of wood, several fine springs and runs of water." The "house is a good substantial three story brick and beautifully located, enshrouded with aspens, locusts and majestic oaks."¹ Two years later another ad in the *Gazette* described the "advantages of this beautiful and very healthy location, in its proximity to mills, theological seminary chapel and other churches," with the main dwelling described as a "brick house with new frame addition embracing in all eight rooms above ground and three in the basement" with "necessary out-house recently erected" and land "can be readily made to produce as much as any land in the county" with "well-watered by never-failing streams."²

Volusia and other property – including enslaved people – had descended through generations of the Terrett family, which once owned a large tract of land in the West End.³ In the 1840s and 1850s, Volusia was owned by Ann Terrett Macrae, who was known as Nancy, and her husband Allan Macrae. They had six children, and one of them, Amelia, later married Felix Richards of Fauquier County.⁴ When Nancy Macrae died in 1858, she willed most of her property, including her slaves, to her children.⁵ She specified in her will that her slaves could have the choice of their home – either with her children or elsewhere – but they could not be sold outside of Fairfax County.

Her daughter Amelia Richards inherited some slaves, and Amelia and her husband Felix acquired the Volusia



Map of Richards Property. At the bottom is today's Duke Street. Holmes Run crosses Duke from the west and the Richards home is at the north end and the slave quarters beyond it, just at the beginning of the extensive woodlands area.

property. They were living there when the Civil War began in 1861. Unlike many other property owners in the area, the Richards were loyal to the Union, although most of their neighbors were not. For example, their neighbors to the north, the Cary and Fairfax families, lived at Vacluse, where Inova Alexandria Alexandria Hospital is today. They fled and served the Confederate cause.⁶

But the Richards remained at Volusia and remained loyal to the Union and their slaves, initially, stayed at the farm, too. Among the slaves who lived at Volusia was a woman named Julia Hughes. Julia, was born around 1805, married Jesse Hughes who was likely a free man, and had at least seven children. The children have been identified by name.⁷ Julia and most of her family members were also at Volusia when the war began.

Because of Alexandria's strategic location and the fact that its citizens were overwhelming pro-Confederacy, siding with the Southern cause, Union troops immediately occupied the town when Virginia seceded from the

Union in May of 1861. The Army set up camps and later forts around the town, including the hills around the Episcopal Seminary (north of of N. Quaker Lane Road).

Volusia was one of the places where troops were quartered. The property was almost continuously occupied during the war, beginning in May of 1861.⁸ Some soldiers stayed for three months and some also returned later for briefer stays.

Through research, we have learned a good deal about life at Volusia during the war and what happened to several of the people who lived there.

The Richards

Amelia Macrae married Felix Richards in 1851 and had no children. At the time the war started, she was in her 30s and he was in his 50s. Her sisters and their husbands lived nearby, but her brother George Hunter Terrett Macrae supported the Confederacy and joined the Sixth Virginia in April 1861.⁹ Amelia, like her husband,

opposed secession and according to her neighbor George Auld, was “not on good terms” with her brother George, and George “never visited them after he left.”¹⁰

As troops moved onto the farm and even into her home, Amelia remained. She entertained officers and fed them, and when some soldiers were ill, she helped care for them. She recalled, after the war had ended, that her house became the headquarters for high ranking officers including generals John Cook and Abram Duryee who worked in her parlor.¹¹

Felix Richards had worked as a claims agent before the war and suffered from ill health. His asthma caused him to wheeze and cough, and, according to General Oliver O. Howard, it was noticeable in his speech as he would sometimes “wheeze, laugh, cry, and stammer” when talking.¹²

Felix’s loyalty to the Union was recognized in several ways. In 1861 he used Union passes to go into Alexandria, crossing lines of defense, to procure essential goods. Another pass issued in 1862 allowed him to pass through all lines between reveille and retreat.¹³

Later, in the summer of 1863, Felix obtained a position with the Quartermaster Department in Alexandria and worked there for more than a year until he became too ill. He died in October 1864.¹⁴ Evidence of the Richards’ loyalty is not only supported by their own actions and words but by the orders of Union commanders who were committed to protecting Felix Richards and his property. The Provost Marshal of Alexandria in 1862 ordered men to protect his house, and in 1863 the Provost Marshal had sentinels from the 143rd New York Volunteers posted at Volusia.¹⁵

Further, troops leaving Volusia after extended stays and others who simply had too much to carry entrusted the Richards with their possessions. They left behind tents, clothing and even personal items, such as trunks and papers, believing their equipment and personal effects would be secure in the Richards’ custody.¹⁶

Union Troops

Dozens of regiments encamped at Volusia during the war. For the most part those who stayed longer had more to say about their time there. Books and regimental histories are especially helpful in understanding how Volusia was used during the first year of the war when activities there ranged from setting up camp and drilling troops to collecting and using the resources of Volusia.

General Edwin V. Sumner named the camp along the Little River Turnpike “Camp California” in tribute to his recent service in the west, where he had been the commander of the Department of the Pacific in San Francisco.¹⁷ At least some of Volusia’s grounds were considered part of Camp California, although a few let-

ters written by soldiers at Volusia used the names Camp Reliance and even Camp Richards, a likely reference to the property owners.¹⁸

In his autobiography, General Oliver O. Howard recalled his stay at Volusia: “My camp was on Mr. Richards’s farm. A charming grove of trees was behind the brigade, to the south of which were established my headquarters. The land had a light soil, was rolling and easily drained. Back of us, farther off in plain sight, on a height was the well-known Fairfax Seminary.”¹⁹

The charming grove of trees did not last long because one of Volusia’s most valuable resources was lumber. Wood was used to build shelters and forts and also for fuel. In addition, the army thought it necessary to clear the woods so that troops would have a view of the camps and possibly the approaching enemy.

Witness accounts indicate that at least 40 acres and as many as 55 acres of woodland were felled by the U.S. Army at Volusia.²⁰ The Fifth New Hampshire, later recalled by Howard as “expert woodmen,” and others harvested acres of trees which were mostly oak. Major Mark Wilkes Collet, who served under General Philip Kearny with the Third New Jersey, gave a written statement in 1863 that during the fall and winter of 1861-62, forty acres of woods had been cut down. Neighbors and Amelia Richards later recalled wood being hauled away by hand and by four-horse wagons, with as many as thirty wagons removing wood from Volusia. The farm’s location along the Little River Turnpike made it easy to transport timber to other camps.

But eventually Volusia ran out of fire wood and about 2,800 panels of fencing were taken, much of it by Kearny’s men in the first year of the war. Volusia had plank, post and rail, and worm fencing and all of it was used by the Army. Union troops provided the work force to dismantle and reuse the wood for outbuildings, including a stable, cornhouse, shed, dairy, hen house and carriage house. Some wood was used to build living quarters for officers at Volusia.

While the Richards supported the Union and accommodated officers and troops, Felix Richards had concerns that some wood was been taken without valid cause. In 1862, in an attempt to protect “standing and felled wood from being taken without proper authority,” General Howard directed that regiments under him provide an accounting of what had been used. He also arranged for the Quartermaster to purchase some of the wood, although there is no evidence that the Richards were compensated during the war.²¹

Other seized property taken by the troops included 15 tons of hay, 10 tons of oats in straw, 10 acres of corn, eight horses, five cattle, and poultry. In 1863, neighbors, appealing for assistance for the Richards from the federal government, not only documented the loss of this prop-

erty but also the loss of the eleven slaves valued at \$4,000 who had been “taken away” by the soldiers.

The soldiers encamped at Volusia with the Fifth New Hampshire were drilled regularly and trained in military tactics, usually two hours in a company drill, two hours in a brigade or battalion drill, and a dress parade at sunset. Colonel Edward E. Cross set up training for the officers and Lt. Col. Samuel G. Langley trained the lieutenants. Picket tours and daily expeditions were held throughout the winter, sometimes going to Edsall’s Hill or further out toward Springfield.²²

The Fifth New Hampshire had time for leisure and recreation, too. At Christmas, Colonel Cross purchased and set loose a greased pig for the soldiers’ entertainment. Soldiers participated in foot races and wrestling matches.²³ Letters and packages from home were greatly appreciated. Mail delivery was better than many expected and often those who received food shared their bounty, as did Lt. James Larkin. He shared the treats that his wife sent, such as strawberry preserves, pies, tobacco

note to his wife explaining that the dog was a gift for his daughter Belle.²⁵

Larkin had a special pastime that he pursued while encamped at Volusia – photography. Though I cannot prove it conclusively, it is likely that he took photos of the slaves at Volusia. In his journal, Larkin documented some of the days that he took photos, and, in January 1862, he noted that he took “18 pictures at fifty cents each” and then an additional \$35 worth of photos over two days, indicating he shot several dozen images.²⁶

Some of the other photos from the private collection (mentioned earlier) include subjects such as “Lt Col Langley’s quarters,” “Camp of Regulars at Volusia,” and “Men in Grove at Volusia,” which only Larkin would have been familiar with.

Slaves

The photographs of slaves at Volusia present us with an excellent opportunity to try and discover who these individuals were and what became of them after the war.



Perhaps a grown daughter of Julia Hughes stands at the ironing board with another grown daughter on the left and grandchildren nearby.

and whiskey.²⁴

While at Volusia, Larkin also found something special to send home to his family in New Hampshire. He found a stray dog he named Dixie. Dixie, he wrote, was “as smart as a cricket.” When a fellow soldier was sent home due to illness, Larking sent Dixie with him, along with a

Though witnesses provided the names of at least eleven slaves who were taken away, the names of other slaves who had been at Volusia around the same time are known.

Julia Hughes is the matriarch of the family that, we believe, is the subject of the photograph. She had at least

seven sons and daughters who lived beyond childhood. Two of them served with the U.S. Colored Infantry. David Hughes, who in 1851 had been wedded to another slave at Volusia, joined the Virginia Colored Guards in 1864.²⁷ His younger brother Wilson, who married in 1863, also joined the same unit which was later known as Unassigned Company A. While with Company A, Wilson became ill in September 1864, apparently stricken with malaria and was treated at L'Ouverture Hospital in Alexandria.²⁸ Both David and Wilson were discharged from the service in July 1865.

At least one of the slave children at Volusia did leave with the First New Jersey Brigade. A boy named Jesse became a servant to Robert Dunham with the Third New Jersey Volunteers. According to Mark Collet, who later became a colonel with the First New Jersey, Jesse was with them in the summer of 1862 when the Army of the Potomac encamped at Harrison's Landing. Jesse died there in July 1862, when he was about 15 years old.²⁹

The map shows the servants quarters were northwest of the main house, closer to or perhaps in the original

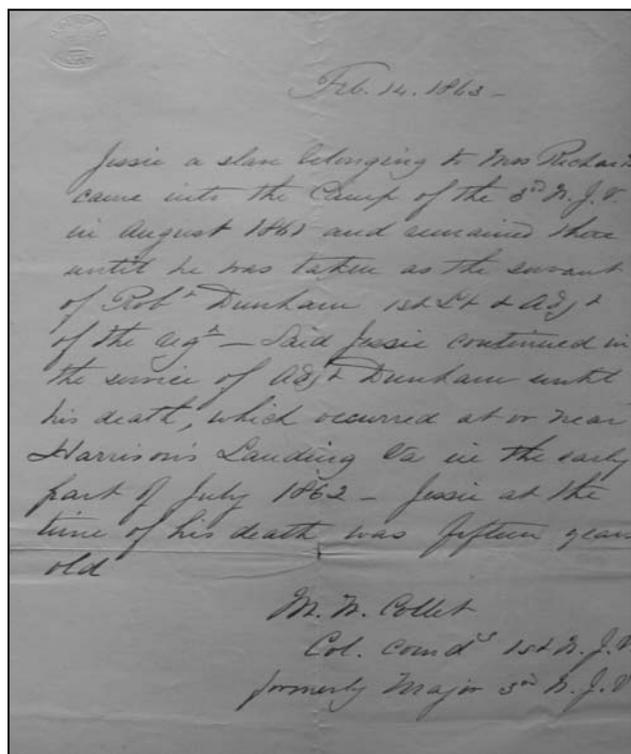
Amelia Richards to "please allow your servants to wash a few clothes for me."³¹

Though it is far from certain, it is possible that the women in the laundry photo were Lucinda and Kitty, Julia's daughters, who were then adults. If so, then one of the children might have been Lucinda's son William who was born in 1856 and would have been about 5 or 6 years old.³² It is also possible that one of the women was David's wife Frances and that some of children could have been theirs, as they had six children by the time the war began.³³

As for Julia herself, records from the Freedmen's Bureau indicate that early in the war she came into Alexandria from Fairfax County and was described as destitute.³⁴

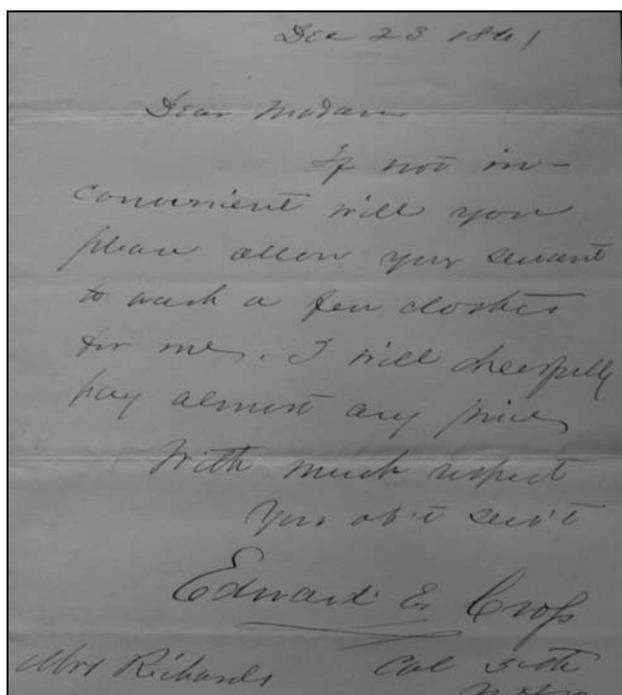
After the War

By the end of the war, Amelia Richards was a widow and nearly destitute herself. In the following years, she prepared a claim for damages, seeking compensation from the federal government for the use of her home, woodlands, crops, animals, fencing and other supplies. She had to document her losses, prove the losses were in support of the Union war effort and prove her loyalty to the Union. This was one of the hundreds of appeals, called "Southern Claims," made after the war. With nearly 200 pages of documentation, Amelia Richards sought \$15,000 in compensation but her claim was repeatedly denied, despite supporting letters, including one from General Howard describing her as "impoverished by the



Letter from Col. Mark W. Collet reporting the death of former Volusia slave Jessie at Harrison's Landing in the summer of 1862. Collet was killed three months after writing this letter. National Archives

woods.³⁰ Some of the slaves at Volusia likely performed their usual farming duties during the first year of the war. A letter from Colonel Cross to Amelia Richards is especially relevant considering that the women posing in the photograph are surrounded by laundry buckets, baskets and ironing. In the letter Colonel Cross appealed to



Letter from Col. Edward E. Cross asking that "servants" at Volusia "wash a few clothes" for him. National Archives

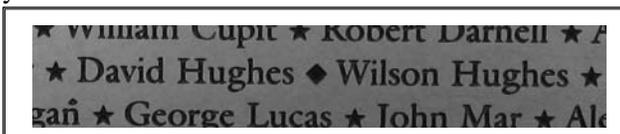
necessities of war.”³⁵

Lt. James Larkin survived the war, returned to New Hampshire and later became a postmaster. His journal and letters survive in the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord but the collection does not include any photographs known to be taken by him.

Several of the officers who had encamped at Volusia did not survive. Colonel Edward E. Cross was killed in July 1863 at Gettysburg. Colonel Mark W. Collet was killed in May 1863 at the Battle of Salem Church during the Chancellorsville campaign. General Philip Kearny was killed at the Battle of Chantilly in September 1862 in western Fairfax County, just days after being defeated at Second Battle of Bull Run. General Oliver O. Howard became the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, serving from 1865 to 1874. Howard University is named for him.

Amelia Richards died in 1910 in Washington, D.C. at the Louise Home, a home established by William Corcoran “for the support and maintenance of a limited number of gentlewomen, who have been reduced by misfortune.”³⁶ Five years after her death and 50 years after the war ended, the U.S. Congress approved her claim and awarded the estate of Felix Richards just over \$5,300, one of the largest awards for a claim from Fairfax County or Alexandria.³⁷

Wilson Hughes suffered from chronic ill health after the war and died in Alexandria in 1883.³⁸ His older brother David died in Washington, D.C., the following year.³⁹



The names of David Hughes and his younger brother Wilson who served in the U. S. Colored Infantry are engraved on the African American Civil War Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Julia Hughes was living with her son Levin in Alexandria in 1870 and four years later was reunited with a daughter who was living in Akron, Ohio.⁴⁰ The daughter, according to family history, had either been sold or escaped during slavery. According to news accounts, Julia and her daughter, Louisa, had not seen each other in nearly 40 years. Julia lived with Louisa in Akron and then moved to Washington and lived with Levin before returning to Akron at the end of the 19th century. She died there in 1902 and is buried in an unmarked grave.⁴¹

Volusia was sold several times before it was purchased in the late 1940s for development. Construction of the 2,100-unit Shirley-Duke apartments and an adjacent shopping center was completed just as the City of Alexandria annexed it and the rest of the West End in 1952.⁴⁰ The development later became Foxchase.

End Notes

- 1Property sale notice, *Alexandria Gazette*, 15 June 1850, p. 3.
- 2Property sale notice, *Alexandria Gazette*, 14 April 1852, p.3.
- 3Fairfax County, Va., Will Book O-1:136-138.
- 4 Marriage announcement, *Alexandria Gazette*, 29 Apr 1851, p 2.
- 5Fairfax County, Va., Will Book Z:85.
- 6Harrison, Mrs. Burton (Constance Cary Harrison), *Recollections Grave and Gay* (Charles Scribner’s Son: New York, 1911).
- 7U.S. Census, 1870: Alexandria City, Va., Fourth Ward, p. 32; Fairfax County, Va., Deed Book I:3; Slave Manumissions in Alexandria Land Records, 1790-1863, compiled by Timothy J. Dennee, <http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/manumissions.shtml>, accessed 23 March 2008,
- 8Richards, Amelia A.H., Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- 9White, Josh, “Manassas Graves Vandalized, Tomb of Confederate Veteran Unearthed,” *The Washington Post*, 4 November 2000, p.V4.; National Park Service Civil War Soldiers and Sailors system, record of George H.T. Macrae, <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/soldiers.cfm>, accessed 20 January 2011.
- 10Auld, George, Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- 11Richards, Amelia A.H., Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- 12Howard, Oliver Otis, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General, United States Army* (The Barker & Taylor Company: New York 1907), pp. 185-6.
- 13Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- 10Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives; Death notice, *Alexandria Gazette*, 29 Oct 1864, p. 2.
- 15 Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- 16Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- 17Howard, Oliver Otis, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General, United States Army* (The Barker & Taylor Company: New York 1907), p. 185.
- 18Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.
- 19Howard, Oliver Otis, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General, United States Army* (The Barker & Taylor Company: New York 1907), p. 185.
- 20Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives; Howard, Oliver Otis, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General, United States Army* (The Barker & Taylor Company: New

York 1907), p. 185.

²¹Howard, Oliver O., 23 January 1862, Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.

²²Child, William, *A history of the Fifth New Hampshire Volunteers in the American Civil War 1861-1865* (R.W. Musgrove: Bristol, N.H 1893), pp. 30-42.

²³Child, William, *A history of the Fifth New Hampshire Volunteers in the American Civil War 1861-1865* (R.W. Musgrove: Bristol, N.H 1893), pp. 30-42; Larkin, James E., letter to wife Jenny Larkin, 5 January 1862, New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H.

²⁴Pride, Mike and Mark Travis, *My Brave Boys: To War with Colonel Cross and the Fighting Fifth* (University Press of New England: Lebanon, N.H. 2001), p. 60.

²⁵Pride, Mike and Mark Travis, *My Brave Boys: To War with Colonel Cross and the Fighting Fifth* (University Press of New England: Lebanon, N.H. 2001), pp. 60 and 66.

²⁶Larkin, James E., diary entries, 21 through 23 Jan 1862, New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H.

²⁷Civil War Pension Application #485519, Record Group 15, National Archives.

²⁸Civil War Pension Application #426256, Certificate #297032, Record Group 15, National Archives.

²⁹Collet, Mark, 14 February 1863, Congressional Jurisdiction File. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.

³⁰Congressional Jurisdiction File. #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.

³¹Cross, Edward E., 23 December 1861, Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.

³²African-Americans Births in Fairfax County, 1853-1859, transcribed by Suzannah Foster, <http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/fairfaxbirths.pdf>, accessed 30 March 2008.

³³Civil War Pension Application #485519, Record Group 15, National Archives.

³⁴Miscellaneous Personal Data on Alexandria African Americans, 1862-1868, compiled by Tim Dennee, 2008, <http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/personaldata.pdf>, accessed 20 January 2011.

³⁵Howard, Oliver O., 14 May 1874, Congressional Jurisdiction File #10296, Court of Claims, Record Group 123, National Archives.

³⁶Death notices, *The Washington Post*, 6 May 1910, p. 3.

³⁷“Will Get War Claims,” *The Washington Post*, 5 March 1915, p 3.

³⁸Civil War Pension Application #426256, Certificate #297032, Record Group 15, National Archives.

³⁹Civil War Pension Application #485519, Record Group 15, National Archives.

⁴⁰U.S. Census, 1870: Alexandria City, Va., Fourth Ward, p. 32; “A Story of Separation,” *Akron Daily Beacon*, 12 June

1874, p. 3.

⁴¹“Died at the Age of 109 Years, Mrs. Julia Hughes a Typical Southern ‘Mammy’ Died Saturday Night,” *Akron Daily Democrat*, 6 March 1902, p. 1.

⁴²Harness, Conrad P. , “2106 Unit Project 8 Miles From D.C.,” *The Washington Post*, 5 March 1950, p F-1.

*Ads for Volusia give the acreage as 155 acres as does a plat recorded with one of the deeds. The map on page 2, however, uses 156-1/4 acres. We believe the 155-acres is correct.

Amy Bertsch has worked for the City of Alexandria since 1996 and joined the Office of Historic Alexandria in 2007. In 2006 she researched and compiled *Alexandria Police Department*, a photo history of Alexandria’s police force. Among her other research projects are documenting a family of stoneware potters from Loudoun County and detailing the lives and deaths of fallen police officers, including Alexandria Sergeant Elton B. Hummer whose murder remains unsolved. Bertsch is a graduate of West Virginia University and is currently studying historic preservation at Northern Virginia Community College.

Editor: Linda Greenberg

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In this issue of *The Alexandria Chronicle* "**Volusia: A farm and the people who lived there during the Civil War**," by Amy Bertsch, provides a moving glimpse of the lives of the farm's owners, the Richards, the slaves that lived there, the Hughes family, and the Union officers and soldiers who camped there during the Civil War. The Richards, unlike most residents of Alexandria, were Union-sympathizers.

Volusia the Richards' farm is where today's Foxchase Shopping Center and Foxchase Apartments are located.

In the next issue of *The Alexandria Chronicle*, spring 2011, Diane Riker tells the exciting story of the near-deportation of Alexandria citizens during the Civil War.