THE LOWER SPOUT RUN VALLEY AND PALISADES: A CASE FOR ARCHEOLOGICAL STUDY AND SITE PRESERVATION

By
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The following report presents the findings from part-time and sporadic research ongoing since July 1982. Because of severe time constraints and my fascination with structural remains, site arrangement, and maps, much of the more time-consuming document searching has not yet been completed.

The impetus for this informal study was simple curiosity about an old house in my childhood neighborhood. The study’s results have been: (1) the serendipitous discovery of a probable three-structure economic enterprise along the lower Spout Run in the very early nineteenth century, and (2) my return to full-time academic work in pursuit of advanced degrees in ekistics, the anthropological study of household architecture, economics and composition. My work along the lower Spout Run has come to a point where the physical remains must be carefully examined through systematic archeological testing and analysis, to determine what actually went on here and more urgently, to take advantage of evidence now existing, but whose future preservation is in doubt. I am hopeful that these preliminary studies and hypotheses will stimulate supportive recognition of a small chapter of Arlington’s history which, although unassuming and not well-documented, is fascinating and of noteworthy antiquity. In this regard, I respectfully acknowledge Eleanor Lee Templeman’s outstanding work in researching these sites, and Sara Collins’ apparently limitless reservoir of sources, leads and personal encouragement. Nor can I ignore the impact on this research of Bessie Dawson Bailey who, from the wide porch of her old stone house, sent my brother and me, as little boys, scurrying all over her yard in search of Civil War relics — I hope she is pleased to see that, thirty years later, I’m still poking around her house.

Area of Research

Although initially focused on the Dawson-Bailey house itself, consequent study of this house has expanded the research area to include most of North Highlands (in which the Dawson-Bailey house is located), the eastern area of Woodmont, and the Spout Run valley lying between the two neighborhoods. Today these areas are separated by the Spout Run valley and the parkway that follows it, but they were originally one neighborhood centered on a sequence of bridges crossing Spout Run at the same point (connecting the now-dead end segments of North Uhle Street on each side of Spout Run Parkway). Probably the earliest bridge was built around 1800. The last, known locally as Doubleday Bridge, collapsed in 1970 and has not been replaced.

The focal point of the early neighborhood was a mill on the north bank of Spout Run’s effluence into the Potomac River, reached by a river dock and by a road from Wilson Boulevard (lying directly under the first block of North Rhodes Street north of Wilson Boulevard,1 in Colonial Village) which crossed Spout Run over the above-
mentioned early bridge. Two early hilltop structures seem likely to have been associated with the mill, one south of Spout Run (on or near the site of today’s Dawson-Bailey house) and the other north of Spout Run in the eastern Woodmont area (on or near the site of today’s Doubleday Mansion). A mill race ran along the north slope of Spout Run valley, carrying the stream’s waters from a point near the Lyon Village Shopping Center (Lee Highway and Spout Run Parkway) to a flume (at the northeast corner of the bridge carrying George Washington Parkway over Spout Run Parkway), carved out of the palisade above the mill, at which point the channel joined with a second race from Windy Run. Each of these sites is discussed in the following sections of this article. Today’s neighborhoods are approached as follows:

NORTH HIGHLANDS:

from Lee Highway, north on North Veitch St., over Route I-66 to Nazarene Church, left on North Taft St.; Dawson-Bailey house is on right at dead end of North Taft.

EASTERN WOODMONT:

from Lorcom Lane, north on North Fillmore St. one block and right onto 24th St. North, to the dead end at the Doubleday Mansion.

The mill site and its race and flume are not accessible by car, though their general locations are visible from George Washington and Spout Run parkways. Only the agile and adventurous should attempt to see them close up.

The Doubleday Mansion site is visible at the end of 24th St. North, but is not open to the public. Of the three Civil War fort sites included in the research area (Forts Strong, Bennett and Smith), only Fort Smith’s remains survive, on the Hendry estate at 2411 24th Street North. The only historic structure in the research area offering public accessibility is the Dawson-Bailey house, on Arlington County property at 2133 North Taft Street.

The Dawson-Bailey House

This stone house, now part of the Dawson Terrace Recreation Center, was the home of the Dawson family from 1859 (when Thomas Dawson bought and enlarged an earlier building on the site) until 1955, when Dawson’s daughter Bessie died there at the age of 93. Shortly after her death, Arlington County purchased the property from her heirs and added the modern recreation facility at the back of the house. During the 96 years of Dawson occupation, the house apparently underwent several structural alterations, rendering it difficult today to determine the restructuring sequences without serious architectural and archeological analyses.

The general style of the building is not typical for this area, but is suggestive of a style common to western Maryland and Pennsylvania from the early eighteenth century through the mid-nineteenth century. Characteristic features of the "western Pennsylvania stone" style found in the Dawson-Bailey house are several: walls of random-sized fieldstone about eighteen inches thick, stone corner quoins, paneled door and window reveals, and random-width pine flooring. Yet the house’s former "Virginia T" plan and balanced end-chimneys are typical of eighteenth and nineteenth century Virginia tidewater style. To further confound the pedigree of this
Photograph of Bessie Dawson Bailey at far left, on her front porch with Jewell relatives, in the 1920s. Richard Evans, the child in the picture, kindly provided the picture.
building, the brick voussoir pediments of windows and doors are Georgian-Federal in style, and the brick chimney copings Victorian.

Three sources attest to the existence of a small stone house on the site prior to Thomas Dawson's 1859 purchase of the property: the Lewis Carberry survey map of 1835-36, a 1946 interview with Bessie Dawson Bailey by The Sun, and a 1958 letter to Mrs. Templeman from Marjorie Chemasow Gould, Thomas Dawson's granddaughter and Bessie Dawson Bailey's niece. The Carberry map shows a structure in the same position as today's house, on Lot #13, the eighty-five acre tract purchased from the Bank of the United States by Dawson twenty-three years later. Mrs. Bailey indicated in the Sun article that "the original stone house had one room downstairs with a lean-to built to the rear for a kitchen, and a small room upstairs." Mrs. Gould wrote that "my grandfather . . . bought the house . . . in 1859. At that time, there were eighty-five acres and a small stone house, two rooms, one above the other. It is part of the house as it is today, at the west end. He added the rest of the stone house in 1859," Mrs. Gould further noted that a "tile part in the back" was built in 1920 to replace an earlier frame addition. This rear extension was of approximately the same dimensions as the house itself (as indicated both in an undated aerial photograph of the neighborhood ca. 1949, and on a detailed County plat of the neighborhood in 1952).

It thus appears that Thomas Dawson bought a small stone house in 1859, and in the same year expanded it to the east in mirror-image while replicating on the new section the original stylistic features, reworked or added the west chimney to match his new east chimney — then modern in style, and added a frame wing to the north. The traditional Virginia features of the house — balanced end-chimneys and T-plan — are therefore the creation of Thomas Dawson in 1859. The original "western Pennsylvania stone"-cum-federal features of the west end must antedate Dawson by at least a quarter of a century (when the Bank of the United States took over the property in the bankruptcy of John Mason in 1833 — I am risking the assumption that the Bank made no effort to develop these properties, as it broke them up for sale only two years after acquisition). The pre-Dawson structure would then have been standing during at least part of the John Mason ownership (1792-1833) of the site. This little building, now the west end of the Dawson-Bailey house, may well date from the very early 1800s.

**John Mason’s Mill**

In 1717, George Mason III purchased several undeveloped properties along the Virginia shore of the Potomac, across from the site of Georgetown (the incorporation of which town lay thirty-four years in the future). The amassed extent of these properties totalled over 2,000 acres, including the former Going and Owsley tracts (extending from the north and south banks of Spout Run, respectively), and Analostan Island in Maryland. Neither Mason nor his son, George IV, (the builder of Gunston Hall) developed these lands, although the Mason family did acquire in 1748 the rights to the Virginia-Maryland ferry at the site of present-day Key Bridge. George Mason IV died in 1792, and his son John inherited the lands in this area. Shortly thereafter, John Mason built his elegant mansion on Analostan Island. In the
early 1800s he constructed a mill on the north bank of the mouth of Spout Run.

To date, no depictions or descriptions of the Spout Run mill\textsuperscript{13} have come into my hands, and what remained of the structure by the 1940s was destroyed by the construction of Spout Run Parkway. The collapsed walls, last seen at the time, were of local stone,\textsuperscript{14} convincingly suggesting that the building was representative of local mills of that period — either entirely of stone, or a stone foundation with a frame second story. Adjoining the mill was a river dock, from which flour was conveyed by ferry, probably to the markets of Georgetown and Alexandria.

John Mason’s water channels were outstanding engineering features of the mill complex, drawing not only from Spout Run but also from Windy Run\textsuperscript{15} to the north. The south millrace followed above Spout Run within a well-dug channel along the north slope of the stream valley as far as the west (in-bound) lane of the George Washington Parkway. At that point it joined with the Windy Run millrace from the north (paralleling the river along the palisade after its emergence from the south slope of the Windy Run valley). At the confluence of the channeled waters on the north promontory of the Spout Run valley, Mason carved a flume in the palisade that dropped the combined streams down to the mill wheel with enormous force.

For land access to the mill, Mason laid a road running north from Awbury’s Road (Wilson Boulevard), over which were transported the local grains. North Uhle Street and 21st Road North just south of the site of the former Doubleday Bridge appear to follow the original roadbed.\textsuperscript{16} Here also Mason’s road bridged the run, turning immediately east after the bridge and descending to the mill (downslope of the south millrace), approximately in the general line of the north lane of Spout Run Parkway.

The Lewis Carberry survey\textsuperscript{17} indicates two structures in proximity to the mill, one to the south and the other to the west-southwest. As no other buildings are shown in the vicinity, and as both structures lie along the mill road, I believe the two buildings were probably associated with the mill operation. The west structure (the Doubleday Mansion site) lay above and between both millraces, not far from the flume, and could perhaps have served as the residence of someone charged with the maintenance of the races. The south structure (the above-mentioned pre-1859 building on the Dawson site) lay above the mill, and would have been accessible from the mill road some distance before a grain wagon would reach the mill itself — perhaps a miller’s residence and/or office.

In 1833, aggravated by the financial failures of his several business enterprises, (in particular, the failure of his would-be town of South Haven, to have been on the site of Rosslyn), John Mason went into bankruptcy and all of his lands, including his Analostan mansion and the Spout Run mill, were taken over by the Bank of the United States. The mill operation closed down at that time, and the bank broke the Mason holdings into lots which were sold individually.

**Doubleday Mansion Site**

The structure shown by Carberry west of the mill appears to have been almost exactly on the spot of today’s Doubleday Mansion. Unlike the Dawson-site building, however, which on the Carberry map is aligned exactly as today’s Dawson-Bailey house, the Doubleday-site building shown by Carberry is aligned almost 45° off from
the current building at that location. This older alignment is further confirmed in the 1878 Atlas by G.M. Hopkins, on which the William Jewell house (see below) on the same site is positioned similarly to the Carberry structure.

Although grossly out of proportion to local topography, the west and south Carberry structures are shown as being of the same size and shape, while the mill is drawn slightly smaller — if this was an attempt to accurately equate the sizes and forms of the buildings, then the Doubleday-site structure may well have been almost identical to the above-quoted descriptions by Mrs. Bailey and Mrs. Gould of the pre-1859 Dawson site structure — a small stone house.

Synopsis

I suggest that within a few years after coming into his inheritance in 1792, John Mason constructed not only his Spout Run mill but also two small stone buildings associated with its operation, on the crests of adjacent palisades. When bankruptcy cost him his estate in 1833, the mill fell into disuse. The Bank of the United States took over the properties and may have rented out the two houses above the mill — at any rate, the Mason lands were subdivided for sale by 1836.

A note on the possibility of a pre-Mason building in this area: Mrs. Templeman mentions a 1785 map by Robert Brooks showing a structure on the site of the Carberry south building (Dawson-Bailey site) — I cannot find a copy of this map, in spite of a day spent searching for it in the State Archives in Richmond. Such a source will force me to rethink, in a wonderful way, my hypothesis on the origins of the Dawson-Bailey house, the nearby mill and the Doubleday site, but until I have seen the Brooks map with my own eyes I cannot in good conscience include its significance in this paper’s reconstruction of the lower Spout Run’s history. The “western Pennsylvania stone” style of the west end of the Dawson-Bailey house was in general use at least as early as 1720, with simple brick window and door voussoirs appearing not long thereafter. John Mason’s forebears acquired the Dawson site (from Thomas Owsley) in 1717, and the style of the Dawson-Bailey west end would not preclude a construction date soon after. Of course, another structure could have stood on the site at any time prior to John Mason’s ownership, which Mason might have replaced with the small house Thomas Dawson acquired in 1859. However, without convincing evidence, I must disregard such possibilities.

The Jewell and Dawson Families

In 1848, William Jewell (of the prominent Georgetown family) purchased from the Bank of the United States a tract of former Mason land including Carberry’s west structure (Doubleday site). The family used this Virginia property as a farm and vacation retreat, maintaining their principal residence in Georgetown. Jewell had a house on the property — this building’s identical alignment to the Carberry structure at the same location on the lot suggests either that the older building was expanded, as in the case of the Dawson-Bailey house, or that a new house was put up adjacent to and in line with the old one or the old house pulled down and the new one lined up by its foundations. Assuming as I am that the old Mason structure was probably a
KEY
A - Dawson-Bailey House
B - Doubleday Mansion
C - Mason's Mill
D - Fort Strong
E - Fort Smith
F - Fort Bennett
two-story, one-room-per-story building. I am also assuming that Jewell would have had to expand or replace it in order to accommodate his large family. Mrs. Templeman indicates that Major General Barnard in 1863 referred to a "red house" near Fort Smith — quite possibly the same house.

It was probably through visits to this country house that Thomas Dawson came to purchase the adjoining tract — Dawson's wife, Elizabeth, was one of William Jewell's many children. Unlike the Jewells, the Dawsons made the new Virginia property their permanent home, naming it Rio Vista. This could well have signified a major change in the Dawsons' lives, as they left the relative urbanity of Georgetown to become farmers when Thomas Dawson was forty-three, with several young children. The only possible clue I could find was at Georgetown's Oak Hill Cemetery, where most of the Jewells and Dawsons are buried. The burial of William Jewell Dawson, seventeen years old, the son of Thomas and Elizabeth Dawson is noted in 1859. All the other Dawson children were girls, so the family lost its only son in the same year as the move to Virginia. There may be nothing to this connection, but the coincidence of the year seems noteworthy.

The Civil War Period

Two months after the birth of the last Dawson child, Bessie, the Civil War broke out and the Jewell and Dawson properties were thereby radically affected. Fort Bennett was quickly constructed (as a lookout for Fort Corcoran) just east of the Dawson farm, and the much larger Fort DeKalb (later renamed Fort Strong) was built just beyond the western line of Dawson's property. Across Spout Run, Fort Smith was erected immediately west of Jewell's house.

Bessie Dawson Bailey, in 1946, indicated that Robert E. Lee had ridden over to the Dawson home just before the war to advise her father to stay with the Union, although Lee himself could not. Dawson did express Northern sympathies, but this does not appear to have given his property any protection from depredation by the Union soldiers. A military road connecting Forts Strong and Bennett was laid out across the Dawson fields, passing directly in front of the house. The family was restricted to the house and yard, their livestock destroyed, their barn burned, and on occasion the house itself apparently used for target practice. The Jewell house was burned down (presumably after June 25, 1863, when, as indicated above, Gerard referred to "the red house" on Jewell's hill) by the soldiers of Fort Smith, and the Jewells never returned to rebuild it.

The most lasting wartime impact on the Dawsons was the result of Mrs. Dawson's taking into the house (at military request) two very ill young officers, George Young and John Chemasow, of the 7th New York Regiment posted at Fort Strong. After the war, Young married Mary Dawson, Chemasow's brother Henry married Anne Dawson, and John Chemasow married Young's sister Eva. Mrs. Gould related that, during his recuperation in the house, George Young scratched his initials in a living room window; the initials were still there in 1955, almost ninety years later, when Mrs. Gould was last in the house.
The Doubleday Site After the War

William Jewell died in 1866, and in 1877 his heirs sold his burnt-out Virginia house and its acreage to the Ivanwold Syndicate, from whom the property was purchased by Col. Charles Doubleday in 1898. The twenty-one years of Ivanwold ownership are a syncopal period in my research so far — the only activity on the site during these years may have been the construction of the central section of the present Doubleday Mansion, possibly by Charles Bradley (an Ivanwold partner). This section of the house, completed before the 1898 Doubleday purchase, appears (from map measurement) to be very close to or directly on the site of the Jewell house and the earlier John Mason structure — but, as discussed above, realigned almost 45° to an approximate east-west position from the earlier northeast-southwest alignment. This significant repositioning almost certainly scotches any hypothesis proposing structural incorporation of the ruins of the Jewell house into today's magnificent building on the site.

I have recently been permitted access to this estate for the purpose of researching its history, and have been unable to detect any ground-surface features indicative of a significant structure. This lack of ground-feature may well be due, however, to eighty-eight years of excellent care of the surrounding park. Aside from the location of the mansion itself, there is a fine site possibility immediately northwest of the building, where land contours would permit the original alignment indicated for the Jewell and Mason structure(s).

Shortly after acquiring the property in 1898, the Doubledays added the north and south wings, giving the house the lines and appearance it has today. They called the estate The Cedars, which name the current owners have revived. During the half-century after the Doubledays sold the property in 1916, but prior to the current ownership, the estate was named Hockley and later, Peakleigh. Regardless of its owners’ fancies of nomenclature, the house has always been known locally as the Doubleday Mansion, and by any name it is a truly beautiful place.

Value of Dawson-Bailey Site Study and Preservation

In the Dawson-Bailey house, Arlington has a wonderful treasure — a Civil War period residence, already owned and protected by the county, structurally intact, and unused. Foundation fill at the older west end could reveal artifactual detritus from two hundred years ago, while east-end fill could produce similar material from the mid-nineteenth century. Analysis of stone-setting and mortaring, interior wall structure, and floor and beam work, would provide valuable insights not only into local Civil War period construction methods, but also into the character of the builder himself. The yard north of the house was once a compound of at least three buildings, one of which may have been the residence of the above-mentioned former slaves — this compound area is in great part open lawn today, and is sure to contain significant residue of domestic activity from the very early 1800s through final occupation in the mid-1950s. The possibility of site occupation prior to 1800 could be confirmed through artifact study from compound litter and house foundation fill.
I have often felt that the Dawson-Bailey house should be used as a recreated residence-museum and headquarters for Arlington historical study — it has good parking and a fine yard, is only a five-minute drive from the Court House, is County property with no County use, and is itself an attractive and historic site.

The Doubleday site is fortunately owned by private interests sensitive to its historic nature and to its beauties, natural and structural. The gracious hospitality and assistance its owners have extended to me have assured me that not only is the site in caring hands but that discreet structural research may be feasible in the near future. If the position of the Jewell house and/or its dependencies is located and offers sufficient accessibility, the artifactual material produced may provide a rich complement of Civil War period data to that residual at the associated Dawson-Bailey house across the stream. Also on the property is a portion of the Spout Run millrace, the remainder of which channel is on park land high above the north lane of Spout Run Parkway. The race is in an excellent state of natural preservation, considering that it was abandoned a hundred and fifty-three years ago, and as an impressive engineering feat is certainly worthy of study.

Any remains of the mill itself were probably completely destroyed in the 1940s during construction of Spout Run Parkway, which runs over the site on a recontoured bed that must have seriously disturbed the original surface and plowzone. Any study of the mill would now be only through map and document research.

The accidental preservation of such choice resources for study of Arlington history as the Dawson-Bailey and Doubleday sites is a bit of rare good fortune, but to leave them untapped while still in this good condition is a sad and unscholarly waste. "Waiting for the right time" is not a sound argument for postponing serious study of these places — such thinking has already cost the neighborhood some of its finest historic treasures: Altha Hall and Fort Strong Villa, the remains of Mason’s mill, the earthworks of Fort Bennett and Fort Strong. The mill flume would be destroyed by the widening of George Washington Parkway, and the fate of Fort Smith’s remains is currently under discussion. Now is the time when the scholars should be studying these places, not after they have vanished. Old sites, like old people, have their day and then must give way to the young and vital, but their wisdom must be communicated before they die — lamenting the loss of an old place or person whom one never got to know is a sadder reflection on the mourner than on the deceased.

Notes and References

1 Lewis Carberry survey of the former Virginia holdings of General John Mason, for the Bank of the United States, 1835-1836.
3 Ibid., pp. 54-58.
4 Ibid.
5 Lewis Carberry, op. cit.
6 "Union Troops Rough on Friends Here," The Sun, Arlington, Virginia, Aug. 30, 1946, p. 11.

8 A black-and-white aerial photograph of “Church and Houses built by Floyd M. Bradly for Arlington First Church (of the Nazarene),” provided by Maude M. Mintzell.

9 Two color photographs of an Arlington County plat of the North Highlands neighborhood, noted on reverse “Base wrap 1935, current up to 1952,” provided anonymously.

10 A count of wallstones suggests that enough stones could have been salvaged from the pulled-down original wall and chimney to more or less complete the new addition. Actually, Dawson ran a little short on stone, as the brick filler in the east wall testifies.

11 Lewis Carberry, op. cit.

12 The old dairy at Sully Plantation, erected at about the same time I am suggesting for the John Mason-period house at the Dawson site, is strikingly similar to the pre-Dawson house in construction material and technique, and probably in fireplace arrangement as well.


14 As reported by general neighborhood recollection.

15 Templeman, op. cit.

16 Lewis Carberry, op. cit.

17 Ibid.

18 Also shown as very clearly out of alignment to the Dawson-site building, suggesting that Carberry’s positioning of both structures reflected their actual alignments.


20 Templeman, op. cit. p. 136.

21 Williams, op. cit. p. 52, figure 55.


23 Templeman, op. cit. p. 136.

24 Thomas Dawson, of a large and established Maryland family, was born in Dawsonville, Md., near Poolesville. He came to Georgetown in his early 20’s.

25 The cause and place of the boy’s death were unfortunately not entered in the cemetery’s record.

26 Bessie Dawson Bailey was the only Dawson actually born in this house; the other children (William, Mary, Anne and Katherine) were born in Georgetown before the 1859 move to Virginia.

27 “Union Troops Rough on Friends Here,” *The Sun,* op. cit. p.11.

28 From the xerox copy of an incomplete portion of a Civil War map provided anonymously to my father, titled in part “Environs of Washington . . .”

29 Remaining with the family at this time, and for many years after, were two former Dawson slaves, Patrick and Maria (see “Union Troops Rough on Friends Here,” *The Sun,* op. cit. p.11).

30 Gould, 1958a, op. cit.

31 “Union Troops Rough on Friends Here,” *The Sun,* op. cit.

32 Ibid.

33 Gould, 1958b, op. cit.

34 The map portion referred to in Footnote 28 accordingly shows the Dawson house, but no structure on Jewell’s hill.

35 This name has been spelled Chumasow, Chumasero, or Chemasow — I am using the last form, as this is the style used by Mrs. Gould.

36 Gould, 1958a, op. cit.

37 Marjorie Chemasow Gould, a source for this article, was one of the three children of this marriage.

38 Gould, 1958a, op. cit.
39 This windowpane no longer exists — an inestimable loss to the personal history of the house.

40 Ivanwold, like John Mason’s plan for a town at Rosslyn, was an intended urban development, in the Woodmont area, which never went beyond the blueprint stage.

41 Templeman, op. cit. p. 138.

42 There are still several fine cedars in the mansion’s park.

43 As shown on Franklin’s Original “Han-dy Size” Property Atlas Including Territory Embraced in Franklin’s Standard Atlas, Arlington County, Virginia, 1938 (Philadelphia: Franklin Survey Company), and on an aerial photograph, covering the period 1935-1952, indicated among the sources for this report.

44 The stretch of Spout Run from the point where the parkway bridges it on down to the river is somewhat to the north of its early 19th-century bed, as the 1938 map (Franklin’s Atlas, op. cit.) indicates, probably representing a century of natural silting. Parkway construction has further diverted the stream (noted by comparing the 1938 map to a map of today).

Additional Sources

Congressional Cemetery, Washington, DC.
Richard Evans, (Jewell family)
Fellowship Foundation
Bruce Gregory McCoy, site notes
Oak Hill Cemetery, Georgetown, D.C.
State Archives, Commonwealth of Virginia, Richmond