

COMMENT AND DISCUSSION

“Fort Barnard”

(See *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 9, No. 4, October 1992, p. 29)

Bernard H. Berne — The *Magazine* states that traces of Fort Barnard remain in the Fort Barnard Playground across Walter Reed Drive from the County water tower. I do not believe this is correct.

Two or three years ago, I visited the site of the fort. A County historical sign near the playground identified the site. However, I could find no trace of the fort in or near the playground. It appeared to me that the County Parks Department had completely obliterated the remnants of the fort on the playground site.

However, a large part of the west wall and a part of the north wall of the fort or of an outer defense line still remain clearly visible on the site in which the water tower stands. The west wall is behind a fence next to the sidewalk on the east side of Pollard Street and is immediately adjacent to the tower. The north wall is adjacent to the sidewalk on the south side of 19th Street South.

You might be interested in visiting the site. If you can't find any remnants of the fort near the sign or the playground, you might try to persuade County officials to move the historical sign to a more appropriate location. This would be helpful to future visitors to the site.

Editor's Reply — After receiving Dr. Berne's letter, I reviewed my copy of *Mr. Lincoln's Forts: A Guide to the Civil War Defenses of Washington*, by Benjamin Franklin Cooling III and Walton H. Owen II (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Co., 1988). They state (p. 77): “No remains of the fort exist. A historical marker notes the general location of the fort. The fort proper was located on the southeast section of the park near the end of South Oxford Street, where a playground and basketball court now stand. In 1976, a small section of the fort existed near South Oxford Street but the remnant was destroyed by park landscaping.” I also visited the site, and concur that no traces of the fort are visible in or near the playground. I believe that the earthworks referred to by Dr. Berne are probably those shown to the north of the fort proper in the map on page 80.

“Potomac River”

(See *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 9, No. 4, October 1992, p. 35)

George Dodge — I have material on the origin of the word “Potomac” which is contrary to what is published on page 35 of the recent *Magazine*. I’ve enclosed a one-page summary of research conducted by Joe Wathan indicating that Potomac means “broad river valley.” I, and I’m sure Mr. Wathan as well, would be interested in your source(s) for Potomac meaning “trading place” or “the place where tribute is brought.”

Editor’s Reply — The two-paragraph article in question was extracted from “*Why Do We Call It...?*”, a compilation of brief articles on some of Arlington’s geographical features originally appearing in the *Northern Virginia Sun* and republished by the Arlington Historical Society in 1960.

Mr. Wathan’s research summary says (in part):

The word Patawomeck is Algonquian in origin and loosely means “broad river valley.”

Most of the Indian tribes in the immediate Washington area departed for a less crowded environment about 1670. Because of such an early migration, there is very little known about them. In Arlington and Fairfax counties there are several Indian village sites. The difficulties begin when archaeologists try to firmly establish the names of the tribes. They do agree that they probably spoke the Algonquian language.

Patawomeck was the Algonquian name used to identify this area. One particularly important place was the shores of the Potomac River bordering Arlington and Fairfax. The area was a primary source of food for the many tribes in the Northern Virginia and Maryland area.

The Potomac River, especially from Great Falls to the Arlington Memorial Bridge, was a core area or gathering place for the Indians. The river was not considered a boundary line but a focal point important to the Indians’ existence. Its bounty was shared among many tribes.

Mr. Dodge also enclosed a copy of material published by the U.S. Geographical Survey, which states “The Potomac was discovered in 1608 by Captain John Smith who called the river ‘Patawomeke’ after an Algonquian Indian family name for the area that is now Washington, D.C. The basin area was first inhabited by three Indian tribes of the Algonquian family group — Pamunkey and Powhatan in what is now Virginia and Nanticoke in what is now Maryland.”