

Upton's Hill

Many Layers of Arlington History at One Site

Arlington Historical Museum
Exhibit Opening July 4, 2021
1805 South Arlington Ridge Road
Arlington, Virginia
Website:
<https://arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org>

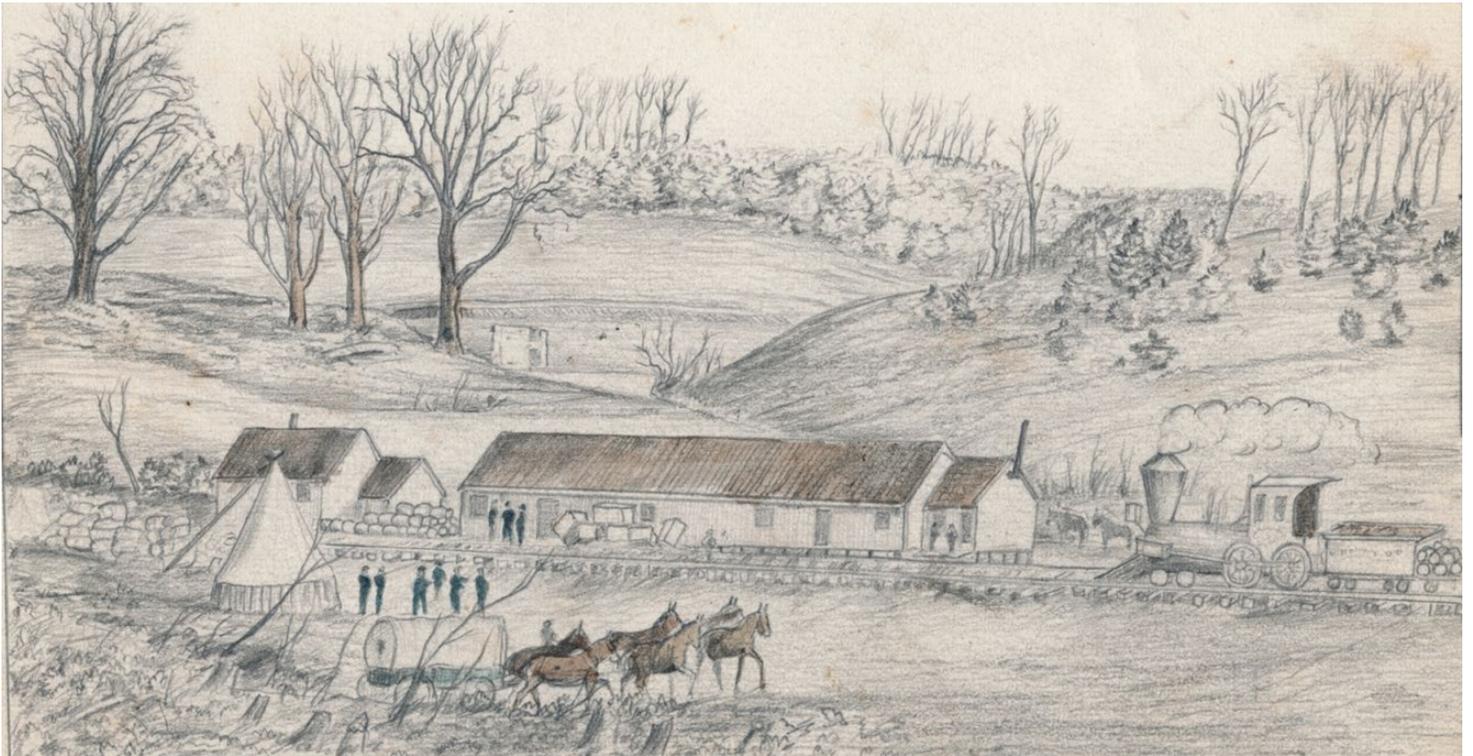
Early America

Upton's Hill is named for Charles Upton, a newspaper editor from Ohio who built a home on the hill in 1836. Upton was a Representative in Congress for the area and President Abraham Lincoln appointed him as the diplomatic Consul to Switzerland.

Civil War

After the disastrous Union defeat during the First Battle of Manassas in July 1861, Union troops fled back to Washington and Confederate troops followed and occupied Upton's Hill. Upton sent his family to safety in Ohio and moved into Washington.

Confederate troops, led by his estranged son-in-law, John Throckmorton, occupied the home. They withdrew in September and Union troops then occupied the hill using the home as its headquarters. They built a large masonry fort at the crest of the hill, initially called Fort Upton but later renamed Fort Ramsay.



By the end of the war the Union built a tall wooden observation tower atop the house, providing it with line-of-sight communication with other observation and signal stations and the Washington Monument. The site became a logistics center for the region's Union troops linked by railroads as seen in this 1863 sketch of the Union railroad depot.

Julia Ward Howe wrote the words to the Battle Hymn of the Republic, after she witnessed a review of the troops in November 1861. She was inspired by the sights and sounds of the day, campfires on Upton's Hill, and men singing the popular tune *John Brown's Body Lies Moldering in the Grave*. After the Civil War the fort was abandoned. But the railroad continued to serve the community that grew nearby.

Reconstruction

John E. Febrey and wife, Mary Frances Ball, bought the property and began improving it for farming. He had the house rebuilt and added barns and a chicken coop. Febrey became superintendent of the Alexandria County public school system in the early 1890s. He died soon after.

Turn of the Century

In 1898 Alvin Lothrop, co-founder of the Woodward and Lothrop department store chain bought the house and used it as a summer retreat. Lothrop is responsible for the construction of the Colonial Revival-style portion of the house designed by architect Victor Mindeleff, that Arlingtonians came to know atop the hill. After Lothrop's death in 1912, the family continued to own it and installed a pool and bath house in 1934.



World War II

During World War II, the Lothrop family leased the house to Howard Hughes, the noted eccentric and founder of Trans World Airlines. Hughes hosted parties there, entertaining movie stars, athletes, and Washington luminaries.

Modern Era

By 1950, the house was empty and socialite, bachelor, and real estate developer Randy Rouse bought the house and 26 surrounding acres. He kept nine acres for himself and developed the rest of the property into the Dominion Hills community.

A few years later, Rouse met and married actress Audrey Meadows, star of the Jackie Gleason sitcom *The Honeymooners*. The couple divorced but even after remarriage Rouse kept the décor chosen by his first wife. Rouse died in 2017. The historic home was sold to developers by his estate and destroyed in 2021.



The impressive house symbolized the historic nature of the site, but Arlington history surrounds the house in many layers around and below the site of the house.

Through this exhibit, the Arlington Historical Society Hopes to show the history nature of Upton's Hill from top to bottom.

This exhibit would not have been possible without the assistance and expertise of Peter Vaselopulos. He is a longtime resident of Arlington and a Board Member for the Alliance to Preserve the Civil War Defenses of Washington DC. He is also Vice President of the 3rd US Infantry Reenactors and was a member of Arlington County's Civil War Sesquicentennial Committee.

Mr. Vaselopulos is working on a public history project called "Mapping the Civil War in Arlington." It can be viewed online at <http://mtewia.com>. The project's goal is to generate a greater awareness of Arlington's military history during the Civil War.



AHS is thankful to all those who donated or loaned their personal artifacts of Upton's Hill for this exhibit. All artifacts were unearthed with permission.