

Farr's Cross Roads & Civil War Redoubt - A Unique Preservation and Education Opportunity (photos courtesy of the author unless otherwise indicated)

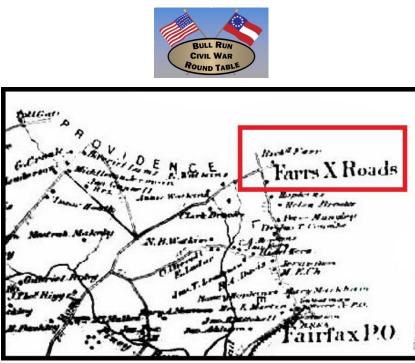


Local historians have long known of the significance of the area surrounding the Ox Road (Route 123) / Braddock Road (Route 620) intersection. Several studies, including the Fairfax County Civil War Sites Inventory prepared by John Milner Associates, Inc. in 2002, have documented the existence of remnants of civil war era redoubts, earthworks and camps on George Mason University's Fairfax Campus and in the area surrounding this intersection – an intersection historically known as Farr's Cross Roads. This is the story of the preservation and interpretation of this historic site located on George Mason University's Fairfax Campus.

# Site Historical Significance

The Farr's Cross Roads historic site was once part of the 283 acres of land owned by local resident and farmer, Samuel Ratcliffe Farr. Upon his death in 1819, Samuel's land holdings were sub-divided into several parcels and distributed among his heirs. One of his three sons, Richard Ratcliffe Farr, received roughly 183 acres that stretched from what is now University Road to the southern boundary of University Mall and east toward the center of the GMU campus. Richard later married Margaret Willcoxon and they had two sons, Rezin Samuel Farr and Richard Ratcliffe Farr, Jr. When Richard died in 1843, Margaret inherited the Farr home and property.

Because the Farr family lived in this area for such a long time, the intersection came to be known as Farr's Cross Roads. 1861 Civil War maps include a notation for the home of Widow Farr near the "Farrs X Roads", and the name Farr's Cross Roads appears on early (1879) Fairfax County maps.



1861 Map with Locations of Farrs X Roads and Widow Farr Home

The Farr home burned to the ground, in circumstances that remain unclear, during the Civil War. Later, Richard Ratcliffe Farr, Jr. built a new home to replace the destroyed one, and included an attached cottage for his widowed mother. This cottage, locally known as Grandma's Cottage, was moved several times to accommodate development projects in Fairfax and is now located on the grounds of Historic Blenheim and Civil War Interpretive Center at 3610 Old Lee Highway.

In 1958 Wilson Farr and his daughter-in-law, Viola Orr, offered the remaining 146-acre Farr tract to the Town of Fairfax. The Town Council accepted the offer, purchased the tract for \$300,000, and subsequently offered the site to the University of Virginia Board of Visitors as a site for George Mason College, the predecessor to today's George Mason University (GMU).

# The Civil War Redoubt

Of particular interest is the redoubt and earthworks located in the wooded area in the northeast quadrant of the intersection. While construction of GMU's Mason Global Center and its adjacent parking lot, and the enlargement of Parking Lot K reduced the overall size of the site and obliterated some of the earthworks, the redoubt remains as the last extant civil war fortification/earthwork on the GMU campus, and is in remarkably good condition.



Farr's Cross Roads Civil War Redoubt - October 2017

The redoubt was constructed in the early summer of 1861 prior to the July 21, 1861 First Battle of Bull Run/Manassas. The redoubt, part of the Confederate screen line established to provide early warning of a Union advance, was built and initially occupied by Colonel Robert Rodes' 5th Alabama Infantry Regiment of Brigadier General Richard Ewell's Brigade. When Confederate forces withdrew to their main defensive line along Bull Run on July 17, 1861, the site was occupied by advancing Union forces under the command of Brigadier General Irvin McDowell.

During the course of the war, various Confederate and Union units occupied the site when guarding the intersection known as Farr's Cross Roads. Unit reports note that the redoubt and other fortifications in this area were reoriented from east to west, and vice versa – depending on the respective force (Confederate or Union) occupying the site.

- 5th Alabama (Rodes' Regiment), Ewell's Brigade, June-July 1861
- 16th New York Infantry (Davies' Regiment), Miles' Brigade, 5th Division on its way to Centreville and the Battle of First Manassas, July 17-18, 1861
- 27<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantry, Jackson's Brigade, 18 September 1861
- 1st New Jersey Infantry, March 9, 1862 (following the Confederate Army withdrawal from Northern Virginia in March 1862)
- Various Union cavalry units, November 1862 May 1863
- Cavalry Units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Brigade, 22<sup>nd</sup> Corps, Defenses of Washington (part of Union early warning line established in Eastern Fairfax County), 1863 – 1865

# Preserving and Interpreting the Site

The Bull Run Civil War Round Table (BRCWRT) has long sought to preserve and interpret this historic site and in particular its civil war redoubt. Beginning with confirmation of the redoubt's existence during ground reconnaissance done in compiling the Fairfax County Civil War Sites Inventory (2002), BRCWRT members John McAnaw, John DePue and Jim Evans led the Round Table's early efforts to gain support



of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) for preserving the site and the redoubt. These BRCWRT members conducted site tours for County Supervisors and FCPA leaders, discussions with County Supervisors, and research and documentation in support of FCPA that ultimately led to establishing an Archaeological Site Record for Farr's Fort/Braddock Road Redoubt (44FX0185) with Virginia's Department of Historical Resources on October 18, 2018. The goal of preserving the site was however, ultimately unsuccessful primarily because the site was not on property owned by, or under the control of, Fairfax County. It was on land owned by George Mason University (GMU) and at that time (early 2000s) GMU's focus and top priority was on building its research capabilities and programs, and on growing the university regionally and internationally.

## An Education Opportunity

Fast forward to 2015 when BRCWRT Executive Committee members Blake Myers (Preservation Committee Chair), Brian McEnany (Education Committee Chair) and Jim Lewis (Preservation Committee member) began thinking anew about how to preserve this historic site. It was clear that previous preservation initiatives had failed primarily because there had been no engagement with the property owner, GMU. Their assessment concluded that preserving the site and the redoubt could not be "forced on GMU" from external entities, and would only result from interest and advocacy from within GMU - advocacy that would require establishing a partnership with GMU and several years of engagement to effectively generate and grow that interest and advocacy.



Farr's Cross Roads Civil War Redoubt, December 2015



They quickly settled on GMU's Department of History and Art History as the most likely candidate for a GMU 'partner", and Brian McEnany took on the task of arranging a meeting with the Department Chair. On January 6, 2016 Brian, Jim and Blake met (for the first of many times) with Dr. Brian Platt, Chair of GMU's Department of History and Art History, to talk about Farr's Cross Roads and its historical significance and relevance to local, state and national history. It was immediately evident that the current history department faculty was not unaware of the site, its location on campus and its historical significance. Dr. Platt, intrigued by the site and its history and the fact that it was located on campus, recognized the value of potentially incorporating the site into relevant history courses and expressed a keen interest in visiting and learning more about the site,



BRCWRT Members John McAnaw, Brian McEnany and Jim Lewis at the Farr's Cross Roads Civil War Redoubt - January 10, 2016

This initial discussion led to subsequent site visits with Dr. Platt and Professor Christopher Hamner, professor for GMU's HIST 373 Civil War and Reconstruction course, and additional meetings and discussions. Very quickly an agreement was reached to incorporate an on-site class at Farr's Cross Roads and Civil War redoubt, conducted by BRCWRT, into Professor Hamner's HIST 373 course. On Monday, November 7, 2016 Brian, Jim and Blake conducted the first of what became an annual on-site Civil War History at Farr's Cross Roads class for GMU's Civil War and Reconstruction course students. Focused on the history of Farr's Cross Roads, the Civil War redoubt and other nearby earthworks, the historic Ox Road and Braddock Road, and the connection to GMU's history, these on-site classes became increasingly popular - attracting students from throughout GMU and interested individuals from other GMU departments and offices, as well as media coverage by the Mason Spirit alumni magazine.





GMU Civil War and Reconstruction Course Students On-Site Class - November 7, 2016 (left - initial discussion at access trail entrance, Parking Lot K; right - class discussion at the redoubt)

In preparation for the conduct of each on-site class, Brian, Jim and Blake developed the instruction content, which evolved over time to incorporate newly acquired information and facts related to the site's history, and student handouts. A good example of new information acquired during research was the discovery of the existence of a site archaeological assessment done by GMU graduate student Bryan Corle. Although a complete copy of the assessment could not be located, Blake was able to contact Bryan Corle and obtain a complete copy of the Archaeological Assessment of Site 44FX0185, The Earthwork At Farr's Crossroads, Fairfax County VA (Submittal Draft) by Bryan Corle and Academic Advisor Ann Palkovich, Ph.D. Bryan never completed or submitted the documentation for his archaeological assessment, to date the only site assessment known to have been conducted; however, he willingly shared the digital files of the assessment document and its appendices, and granted his permission to use any of the information included in the document – information that served to confirm and expand knowledge of the site's history.

As the site was not preserved or being maintained and to ensure unencumbered student access, prior to each class Brian, Jim and Blake, using weed trimmers, machetes, hand saws and axes, cleared a 'rough' access trail to the redoubt of vegetation and timber, and cleared sufficient sections of the redoubt of saplings and vegetative undergrowth that allowed the redoubt to be recognizable as a redoubt.



Redoubt Access Trail - Cleared by BRCWRT

This very successful academic outreach program with GMU, led by BRCWRT's Education Committee Chair Brian McEnany, is ongoing and has continued to grow - the annual on-site classes paused only in 2020 and 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic and GMU's temporary suspension of all in-person classes. The program's success, within GMU's academic community and beyond, generated over time increasing awareness of, and interest in, the site and its historical significance. The benefits to both GMU and the general pubic of preserving and interpreting the site were recognized, and advocacy within GMU for site preservation and interpretation grew.

# A Preservation Opportunity

BRCWRT's efforts to engage GMU administrative leaders began in May of 2016 when Blake, Jim and Brian met with the then Vice President (VP) of Facilities and the Director for Campus Planning and presented a historical overview of the redoubt site. Following that presentation and ensuing discussions in the VP of Facilities office, an on-site "tour" was conducted with additional discussion on the potential of incorporating and interpreting the site as green space in any future development planned for that area of the campus. While attentive to the presentation and discussion, GMU's representatives exhibited minimal interest and no further discussions or actions were planned or conducted. This outcome confirmed the group's assessment that preserving and interpreting this site would require



advocacy from within GMU. The primary focus remained working with the Department of History and Art History to build and increase, over time, site awareness and interest.

Having become aware of a virtual tour project by GMU for Fairfax County, Blake contacted Dr. Sven Fuhrmann, Associate Professor, Department of Geography and Geoinformation Science at GMU. A March 23, 2018 meeting and discussion with Dr. Fuhrmann included a viewing of an early version of the graduate student project - a virtual tour of Fairfax County's Riverbend Park. This immediately led to discussions concerning the potential use of virtual and augmented reality technologies in interpreting the Farr's Cross Roads and Civil War redoubt site. Dr. Fuhrmann expressed great interest in supporting such a project, recognizing the value it would provide his department and students as real-world projects. Dr. Fuhrmann and the Department of Geography and Geoinformation Science agreed to join our GMU "partner" team.

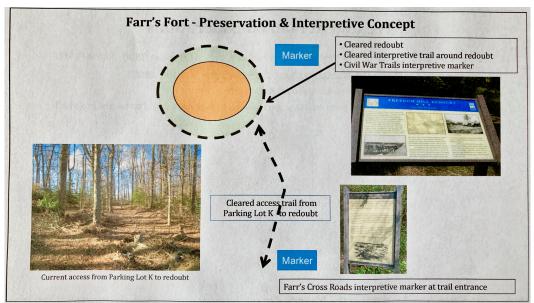


GMU Civil War and Reconstruction Course Students On-Site Class - October 23, 2018 (left - Brian & Jim presentations at the redoubt; right - BRCWRT members who attended the class)

During 2018 and building on the success of the 2016 and 2017 on-site classes and the *Mason Spirit* (*Summer 2017*) article, *Stepping into the Past*, about the on-site class, BRCWRT and its GMU partner team, with support from two professional archaeologists, developed a Preliminary Treatment Plan and Assessment that included an initial site assessment and a concept for preserving and interpreting the site. On September 14, 2018 Dr. Platt, Dr. Fuhrmann and Blake met with a select group of GMU administration leaders - the VP of Facilities, Assistant VP of Planning and Design, Associate VP of Business Services and Real Estate and Senior VP for Administration and Finance (who was ultimately unable to attend the meeting/presentation) to again consider and discuss preserving and interpreting the Farr's Cross Roads site. Following a presentation by Dr. Platt, Dr. Fuhrmann and Blake, these leaders indicted they better understood the history of Farr's Cross Roads and the redoubt, and expressed interest in pursuing the concept of preserving and interpreting the site. No definitive decisions were reached; however, specific follow-up actions were identified - among them removing four large trees



threatening the redoubt's structural integrity, verification of the site's historical significance and maturing the treatment plan and preservation concept.



Initial Farr's Cross Roads & Farr's Fort Site Concept Schematic

As a means to verify the site's historical significance in October 2018 research began on the process for nominating the redoubt (now referred to as Farr's Fort (or Fort Farr) in order to be consistent with its listing in Virginia's Department of Historic Resources (DHR) archaeological site record database) for inclusion in the Virginia Landmarks Register and in the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places. Blake compiled and completed the required Farr's Fort Preliminary Information Form packet and on January 25, 2019 GMU submitted that packet to Virginia's DHR. On December 17, 2018 Fairfax County Park Authority's Senior Archaeologist submitted a Farr's Fort Significance Statement to GMU, and on March 21, 2019 The Virginia State Review Board determined that, based on the submitted Preliminary Information Form, Farr's Fort was eligible for listing on the Landmarks Register and on the National Register of Historic Places. Achieving Farr's Fort's inclusion on these respective listings requires GMU to complete and submit a National Register of Historic Places Application for the site.

To remove the natural threat to the redoubt's structural integrity the GMU Grounds Department, in consultation with BRCWRT and the project team's archaeologists, developed a plan to remove the four trees and to clear the redoubt of undergrowth vegetation. During the period January 30 - February 2, 2019 those four trees, the surrounding deadfall and undergrowth and smaller tree saplings within and on the redoubt were removed, resulting in the redoubt being completely visible for the first time in many, many decades.





View of Farr's Fort Prior to Tree and Undergrowth Removal - January 30, 2019



Tree Trimmer at Work January 30, 2019



View of Farr's Fort after Tree and Undergrowth Removal February 4, 2019

# The Breakthrough

The critical breakthrough occurred on June 5, 2019 when, after months of coordination and schedule de-confliction, Dr. Platt and Blake met with GMU's Senior VP for Administration and Finance, Carol Kissal and Frank Strike, VP Facilities, to discuss the Farr's Fort site and this unique preservation and education opportunity for GMU. Following Dr. Platt's presentation and a short discussion, Senior VP Kissal expressed her strong support for preserving the historic site, and directed the site be preserved and interpreted under Frank Strike's purview. Based on recommendations from Dr. Platt and Blake, Senior VP Kissal directed the project be addressed in two components; a near-term component to preserve and interpret Farr's Fort, and a long-term component to include a broader consideration of the historical aspects of the site as a GMU cultural and historical asset as part of the development of the Mason Master Plan, scheduled to begin in late 2019. The significance of Senior VP Kissal's decision and



direction was that it expanded our GMU partner team to include GMU's Facilities, Grounds and Campus Planning Departments, and that senior GMU leaders now supported the preservation and interpretation of the Farr's Cross Roads and Farr's Fort site.

Following this meeting a core preservation team, consisting of BRCWRT's Blake Myers, Jim Lewis and Brian McEnany, GMU's Dr. Brian Platt, FCPA's Senior Archaeologist and GMU's Grounds Program Manager, was established to turn the Preliminary Treatment Plan and Assessment into a viable treatment plan. The resulting Farr's Fort Treatment Plan (Initial Draft), developed to serve as a guide for site preservation and interpretation, was published on June 27, 2019. Its publication led to a series of meetings and discussions involving GMU's Facilities department, Campus Planning office and History department, Virginia's DHR and BRCWRT representatives to review and discuss the plan and applicable requirements. A key consideration was that, as a recorded archeological site, any modification and/or improvement to the site that involved ground disturbance (e.g., grading, leveling, digging, excavation, etc.) must be preceded by an archaeological assessment designed and conducted to locate and protect other cultural and historical archaeological sites that may be located on the site.



Virginia DHR Visit to Farr's Fort, March 12, 2020 FCPA Archaeologist Chris Sperling, Dr. Brian Platt, DHR's Adrienne Birge-Wilson & Jennifer Belville-Marrion, Jim Lewis

These meetings and discussions, conducted during the period September 2019 - March 2020, included an on-site visit by Virginia DHR representatives and served to clarify the scope of both the near-term and the long-term components of the project, and to clarify and resolve questions related to each.

At this time the Mason Master Plan development process had begun and was in its formative stages. Discussions continued between the core preservation team and GMU's Facilities department on ensuring that documents relevant to the historical significance and preservation of the Farr's Cross Roads and Farr's Fort site were included in the Mason Master Plan development process. During a July 7, 2020 meeting to review the status of the development process, it was confirmed that documents, including



Bryan Corle's Archaeological Assessment of Site 44FX0185 The Earthwork at Farr's Crossroads (Nov 2008) and the Farr's Fort Treatment Plan (Initial Draft), were being incorporated into the master plan development process. During meeting discussions the subject of ADA accessibility requirements and their consideration in preserving and interpreting the site was highlighted. Meeting attendees agreed that site plans must be compliant with Virginia and GMU ADA accessibility policies and requirements, and Dr. Platt agreed to contact GMU's ADA Coordinator for clarification and guidance.

Dr. Platt's discussions with the ADA Coordinator led to an August 7, 2020 on-site visit to review the plan's near-term and long-term components and identify potential ADA accessibility compliance issues. The on-site visit and discussion consisted of a review of the scope of both near-term and long-term components of the preservation project and clarification of ADA accessibility requirements. It was confirmed that ADA accessibility is a consideration when any site improvement involves land grading or adding permanent infrastructure (pathways, structures, etc.), and that technology options, including virtual and augmented reality technologies, may be employed to help ensure compliance with state and GMU ADA accessibility requirements and policies. Based on this clarification it was determined that while the site's preservation and interpretation long-term component may require the inclusion of features specifically designed to ensure compliance with ADA accessibility requirements, the near-term component included no site improvements that would result in an ADA accessibility issue.

Despite the significant progress, it had become increasingly obvious that without a detailed project plan to turn the Farr's Fort Treatment Plan and concept into a reality, the envisioned near-term preservation and interpretation component might never be realized. So the core preservation team by Blake Myers, developed the Farr's Fort Interim Preservation and Interpretation Project Plan. This plan, using the Farr's Fort Treatment Plan as a basis and developed in conjunction with GMU's Grounds Program Manager, consisted of two sections: Section I - an Introduction including a description of the site and its features and a historical significance overview; and Section II - the Project Plan that included specific preservation and interpretation Project Plan was approved and adopted by GMU's VP Facilities, Frank Strike on August 17, 2020.

Implementation of the project plan began almost immediately, and on October 6-9, 2020 GMU's Grounds Maintenance department cleared and treated the redoubt, and cleared and covered with wood chips the site's access and interpretive trails.





Access Trail Entrance - October 9, 2019

Access Trail to Redoubt - October 9, 2019



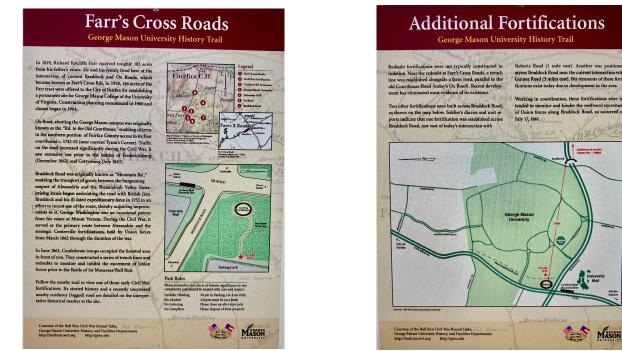
Farr's Crossroads Civil War Redoubt and Interpretive Trail - October 9, 2019

In November 2020 BRCWRT members Jim Lewis, Brian McEnany and Blake Myers worked with GMU Graphic Designer, John Forgy to develop the two historical markers called for in the project plan. Given his expertise and experience in creating historical markers, Jim led the marker panels design effort with GMU's John Forgy. The two markers, a two-sided vertical marker located at the access trail entrance adjacent to Parking Lot K, and a horizontal marker located at the redoubt, were designed to reflect GMU's brand and color scheme commensurate with the fledgling GMU History Trail, and to reflect the GMU - BRCWRT partnership.

The access trail vertical marker's front (side a) provides information on Richard Ratcliffe Farr's property and Farr's Cross Roads, historical overviews of Ox Road and Braddock Road and directions to



the civil war redoubt, while the back (side b) provides information on additional Civil War fortifications located on and near the site.

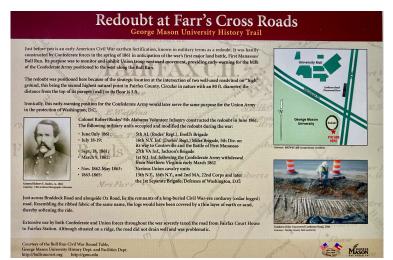


Vertical Historical Marker, Side A

Vertical Historical Marker, Side B

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The marker at the redoubt provides information on the redoubt and its history and the nearby Civil-War era corduroy road, remnants of which were uncovered during road and sidewalk construction along Ox Road in 2014 and 2016.



Horizontal Historical Marker



The historical markers were completed in April 2021, and installed May 7-10, 2021, thus completing the interim (near-term) preservation and interpretation of the Farr's Cross Roads and Farr's Fort historic site. As indicated on the markers the Farr's Cross Roads site is one of the sites that will constitute the George Mason University History Trail. The design and make-up of this trail remains under development, but Farr's Cross Roads historic site is the first of the multiple sites planned for the trail to be so designated.



Vertical Historical Marker at Access Trail Entrance



Horizontal Historical Marker at Redoubt

# The Long-Term Component and the Mason Master Plan

As previously described the long-term component of the preservation and interpretation concept for this site envisions, within the on-going development of the Mason Master Plan, a broader consideration of the multiple aspects of the site's history and of the site as a GMU cultural and historical asset. At a recent (March 2. 2021) Mason Master Plan Town Hall (virtual engagement session via Zoom) conducted by GMU's Senior VP for Finance and Administration. Carol Kissal and the projects lead consultant, Gregory Jenks, presentations confirmed that the focus in this phase (Phase I) of the development process is on developing a living framework (underpinning) for each of the three main campuses that supports, and is a basis for, future decision-making for the respective campuses. Phase II of the process will focus on master plan development. In response to a question from Blake Myers, Greg Jenks responded that the plan framework will definitely include a section that addresses historical, cultural and archaeological sites located on GMU campuses, and specifically the Farr's Cross Roads site on the Fairfax Campus. Greg also stated that a survey team has already conducted several Farr's Cross Roads site visits to identify potential historic, cultural and archaeological sites. GMUs Mason Master Plan planning team has copies of the relevant Farr's Cross Roads and Farr's Fort documents; Archaeological Assessment of Site 44FX0185 The Earthwork At Farr's Cross Roads (November 2008), Farr's Fort Treatment Plan (Initial Draft) (Revised) (June 2019) and Virginia DHR Preliminary Information Form,



Fort Farr (44FX0185) (January 2019). BRCWRT will remain engaged in the development of the Mason Master Plan, providing assistance, advice and support where possible and appropriate, to ensure the long-term component of the site's preservation and interpretation is accomplished and that the site is nominated for placement on the National Register of Historic Places. Future interpretation plans will also likely include virtual and augmented reality technologies – a very interesting and exciting development.

Blake Myers, BRCWRT Preservation Chair