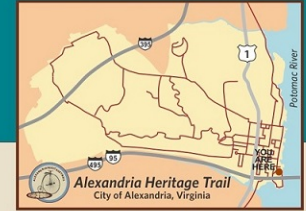


Windmill Hill



Now a city park, Windmill Hill got its name from the windmill built here on Miller's Cliff by inventor John R. Remington in 1843. With soothing winds and a grand view of the busy port, the hill was the scene of fashionable promenades and numerous celebrations. Bonfires and flying flags created the backdrop to passionate political speeches interrupted by cannon bursts after the Civil War. Aviator Charles Lindbergh was honored here for his solo flight to Paris in 1927 as his ship passed by with a 21-gun Presidential salute that "boomed out from Windmill Hill" along with a "bedlam of factory and boat whistles" (*Alexandria Gazette*, June 11, 1927). Windmill Hill has also attracted problems. In 1891, the *Alexandria Gazette* proclaimed: "Complaints are frequent of the rowdy conduct of these boys who make quiet people, who desire to enjoy the cool air from the river, miserable." Sixty-five years later, the police chief said: "We get drunks, bootleggers, fights and deaths there all the time" (*Alexandria Gazette*, January 12, 1956).



Railroad construction worker straightening track, by Andrew J. Russell, United States Army, Railway Service. 1862/3
Library of Congress



1937 Aerial Photography
National Archives,
(RG 145.8)

Much of present-day Windmill Hill Park (outlined in green in this 1937 Aerial Photography), was still in the Potomac River for much of the 20th century. Archaeologists monitoring shoreline rehabilitation work in the park between 2016 and 2018 did not find remains of the Young Hero (see right), but did discover the hulls of several 20th century barges. This 1937 aerial photograph shows the half-submerged vessels at the foot of Gibbon Street.

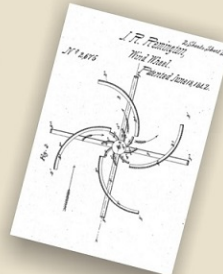
During the Civil War, thousands of escaped slaves came to Union-occupied Alexandria to seek refuge and freedom. Some "freedmen" or "contrabands," as they were called, settled near Windmill Hill. Many died from lack of shelter, food, or water as they lived in makeshift housing during and after the War. John Beckam's son, William, only 26 months old, died at Wolfe and S. Union Streets where shanties were built. He was buried in Freedmen's Cemetery, January 28, 1867. The ruin seen behind the pile of twisted rails here faces S. Union Street at its intersection with Wolfe. The one story building behind it and two story buildings to the right of it were both used as Contraband Quarters. The Pioneer Mills, with its square elevator tower and smokestack can be seen in the background.

Windmill Hill was given to the City for use as a park in 1945 and was the center of Alexandria's 200th anniversary in 1949. In honor of the anniversary, an amphitheater was carved into the hill to stage the production of a historical drama, *Alexandria, Thy Sons*, which presented the history of Alexandria from 1749 to 1949. More than 500 citizens participated in the bicentennial pageant. Willard Scott, the noted television weatherman and native Alexandrian, played the young George Washington.



From "A Concise History of the City of Alexandria, Virginia from 1669 to 1883" F.J. Brockett and George W. Rock, 1883 archive.com

The *Alexandria Gazette* called John Remington's plan to construct a windmill atop the hill "novel and ingenious" (June 9, 1843). Said to be a "great thing for farmers," especially in dry weather, the windmill regulated its own speed and was a precursor to the one depicted in this 1883 advertisement. Remington may have been ahead of his time. Eleven years later, David Halladay designed the first successful American small windmill that regulated its own speed, thus preventing destruction in strong winds (see left). Millions of Halladay mills were sold.



John Remington's Patent for improvement in Wind-Wheels, Number 2675, June 18, 1842
US Patent Office/Google Patent Search



Alexandria Gazette & Daily Adviser
December 15, 1818

Filling in the river or "banking out" can be documented along Alexandria's waterfront from the founding of the town in 1749 when it was agreed that "ev'ry purchaser of River side Lots by the terms of the sale was to have the benefit of extending the said lots into the River as far as they shall think proper without any obstruction." In 1823, William H. Robert and John S. Miller were given permission by the Common Council to sink a part of the ship *Young Hero* on their lot and extend the town.



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749

