



VIRGINIA
HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION

File no. 76-13/6
Negative no(s). 5171

SURVEY FORM

Historic name Signal Hill	Common name A.K.A. Roseberry Farm, Wilcoxen Farm
County/Town/City Prince William County	
Street address or route number vic. S.R. 616 & S.R. 689 (vic.interex. Signal Hill Rd. & Blooms Drive)	
USGS Quad Manassas & Independent Hill	Date or period 1861
Original owner Hooe family?	Architect/builder/craftsmen
Original use Farmland	
Present owner City of Manassas Park(+others)	Source of name
Present owner address City Hall, 103 Manassas Manassas Park, Va.	Source of date Local histories
Present use Not in use	Drive Stories N/A
Acreage c100 acres	Foundation and wall const'n N/A
	Roof type N/A

State condition of structure and environs The fortifications are reported to be intact; the environs are littered with trash.

State potential threats to structure Neglect, Relic-hunters, Development.

Note any archaeological interest During 1861 and at other times during the Civil War several thousand soldiers camped in the vicinity. Remains of fortifications and signal station are to be found.

Should be investigated for possible register potential? yes X no

Architectural description (Note significant features of plan, structural system and interior and exterior decoration, taking care to point out aspects not visible or clear from photographs. Explain nature and period of all alterations and additions. List any outbuildings and their approximate ages, cemeteries, etc.)

Being both a physical and a historical landmark in the Manassas area, Signal Hill was named for the Confederate signalling station from which the "Wig Wag" signal system was first used in battle. The wooded ridge is the highest point in the Manassas vicinity, being about 365 feet above sea level. It is located about a mile east of Manassas and southeast of Manassas Park. Signal Hill is a topographical feature visible from many points. More importantly, from Signal Hill one can see for many miles in all directions -- west to the distant Bull Run Mountains, east across Bull Run into Fairfax County, and northwest to the Stone Bridge across Bull Run. Both these latter lines of visibility, when improved by selected cutting of trees, proved crucial during the First Battle of Bull Run or Manassas.

Signal Hill is situated in the gently-rolling countryside on the edge of a fast-growing urban area. While development has not yet reached the ridge, industrial, commercial and residential uses are steadily increasing in the eastern part of Manassas, threatening to encroach on this natural area.

Of the approximately 430 acres designated in 1973 for the proposed Signal Hill Park, a public outdoor historical and recreational area, the City of Manassas owns the proposed park's core of about 100 acres. A gravel road (S.R. 616), running northeast to southwest, skirts the western edge of the Signal Hill ridge and separates the 13-acre fortification site from a 90-acre adjacent parcel on the west side of S.R. 616. Another 10 acres on the east side of the ridge are privately owned, as is a small parcel on the southwest side of the breastworks.

The ridge is approximately 1200 feet long and 300 feet wide at the 340-to-350-foot elevation point. A 5-foot-wide, undulating trench encircles the whole ridge at that elevation.
(continued next page.)

Interior inspected?

Historical significance (Chain of title; individuals, families, events, etc., associated with the property.)

Signal Hill derives its historical significance from its use as a fortified signalling station during the Civil War. From the hill's 360-foot ridge, Confederate Lieut. (later Captain) E.P. Alexander transmitted the warning on 21 July 1861 that previewed the first Battle of Bull Run. This station, known as the Wilcoxen Signal Station after the name of the owner of the hill, was one of three established in July 1861 by Alexander, an ordnance officer who had been assigned signal duty. Alexander had learned the wig wag signalling system, using flags for communication, from Surgeon Albert J. Myer at West Point. On the morning of 21 July 1861, Lieutenant Alexander saw the main Union attack under General McDowell attempting to outflank the Confederates led by Col. Nathan Evans at the Stone Bridge. Alexander immediately sent a signal to the Van Pelt Tower warning Evans of the action, thus enabling the Confederates to shift and meet the Union attack head-on. In the words of Manassas National Battlefield Park Superintendent Richard E. Hoffman, "Had it not been for the alert work of an officer stationed on Signal Hill, the Union flanking attack may not have been discovered and the outcome of the battle would almost certainly have been different."

As Ann Satterthwaite writes in her 1973 Proposal for Signal Hill Park, "The historical significance of Signal Hill has not always been respected." In 1892, the Washington Suburban Realty Co. of Virginia planned a large residential development at Signal Hill, encompassing much the same acreage as is now owned by Manassas Park and is being held for the future park. The WSRC's plat (D.B. 56, p. 431) divided the area off into a grid containing 25 blocks of

(continued next page.)

CONTINUATION SHEET
SIGNAL HILL

Architectural Description (continued)

Here and there the trench forms an extra outer loop, presumably for gun emplacements. There are no guns present, but the earthworks are said to be remarkably intact, considering their age. Trees and underbrush are growing in the trenches, and there is evidence of a well-worn footpath meandering along the upper edge of the trench. A wire fence runs along the ridge's center, separating the Manassas Park-owned 13-acre portion of the hill from the privately-owned 10-acre western parcel. Access to the trenches is along the west side of S.R. 616, at the base of the hill.

There are no historical structures on the part of the ridge owned by Manassas Park. On the eastern portion of the ridge is a 20th century farm house and complex built on the site of the old Arrington farm, known as the Signal Hill Farm. Within that property's boundaries, reached by a private road off Birmingham Drive, is the Arrington family cemetery. The cemetery, which contains about 27 graves, seven of them marked, is enclosed by a decorative iron fence. The marked burials are of members of the Arrington, Davis and Brown families. The oldest known burial is of Mary J. Davis, who died in 1860. According to one source, in a field on the property is the grave of a South Carolina soldier who died at Signal Hill during the Civil War.

Historical Significance (continued)

up to 76 lots each. The streets were to be named after such local patriots and southern leaders as Grant, Douglass, Turner, Washington, Booker, Lyons and Beauregard.

In 1972, the Town of Manassas Park began to acquire the property it now owns at Signal Hill, through the assistance of the Nature Conservancy, under a purchase-sell-back arrangement. At the same time, the Prince William County Historical Commission and the County Board of Supervisors sought to protect (at first 6 acres, then 105 acres) Signal Hill with an historical overlay zone. Manassas Park hired a consultant to prepare a plan for creation of a park at Signal Hill. Such a park, it was demonstrated, would not only preserve the historically-important ridge and some scenically-valuable open space, it would help fill the current and anticipated recreation needs of western Prince William County. The plan recommended acquisition of 433 acres, about 100 acres of which would form the park's core. The plan laid out an acquisition schedule, suggested ways of financing the purchase, and proposed development of a park meant for passive recreation. Trails, interpretive programs, trench and fortification restoration were some of the facets of the plan, all at a reasonably low cost to implement.

The Historical Commission withdrew its motion to create a local overly historic district in 1978, the Board of Supervisors having failed to act on the request. The City of Manassas Park has done nothing to adopt the park plan. Meanwhile, Signal Hill is a local dumping ground, the trenches and fortifications are being excavated by relic-seekers, and development is encroaching more and more.

Sources and bibliography

Published sources (Books, articles, etc., with bibliographic data.)

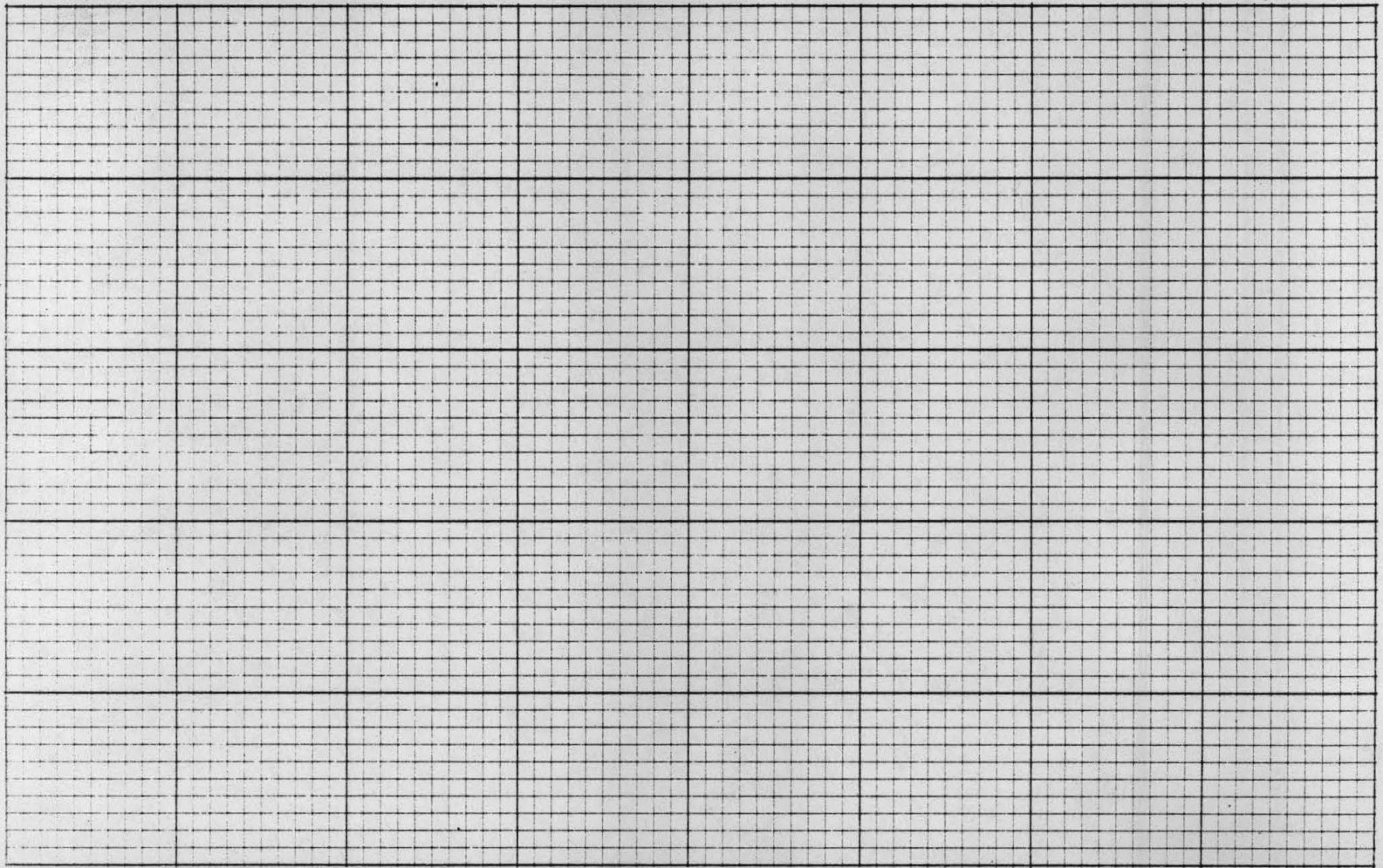
W.P.A., Writers Program, Prince William, The Story of Its People and Its Places (c1941), p.145
Hanson, Joseph Mills, Bull Run Remembers (c195-), pp. 28, 32.

Primary sources (Manuscript documentary or graphic materials; give location.)

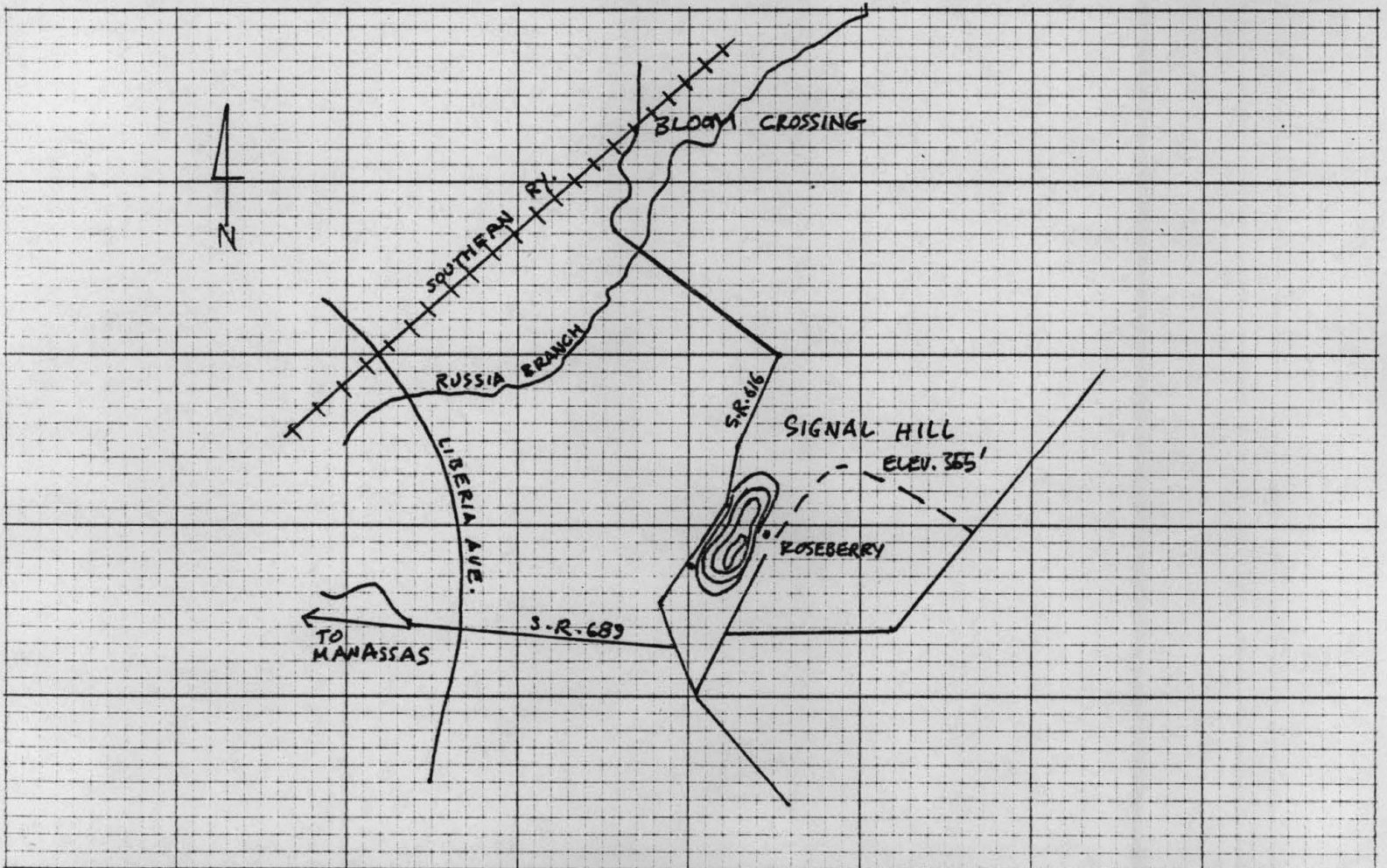
Ann Satterthwaite, "A Proposal for Signal Hill Park, a report prepared for the Town of Manassas Park (1974), in possession of Manassas Park Planning Dept.

Names and addresses of persons interviewed Joe Rotloff, Planner, Manassas Park; R.J. Ratcliffe, Manassas, Va.; Ann Satterthwaite.

Plan (Indicate locations of rooms, doorways, windows, alterations, etc.)



Site plan (Locate and identify outbuildings, dependencies and significant topographical features.)



Name, address and title of recorder **Frances Jones, Architectural
Historian - Surveyor, NVPDC**

Date **DEC 1980**

