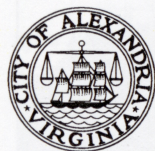


African American Historic Sites

Self-guided Tour



A sculpture group of bronze trees, *Truths that Rise from the Roots Remembered*
Alexandria African American Heritage Park



Alexandria Black History Museum

902 Wythe Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
703.746.4356
703.706.3999 (fax)

Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Web Site: www.alexblackhistory.org
E-mail: black.history@alexandriava.gov

Early Free Black Neighborhoods in Alexandria

In 1790, when the first federal census was taken, 52 free blacks were recorded as living in Alexandria. This population increased dramatically to 836 by 1810 and continued to expand until 1846 when Alexandria retroceded to the Commonwealth of Virginia from the District of Columbia. The black population began increasing again after 1860 and reached 5,300 by 1870.

The earliest free black neighborhoods in Alexandria began between 1790 and 1810. This first community of free blacks formed at the southwestern edge of the city and became known as “**The Bottoms**.” By 1810, this neighborhood had extended to the southeast and a new community, “**Hayti**,” sprang up to the east. In mid century, “**Uptown**” began in the northwestern section of Alexandria. Around this time also, a community known as Petersburg, called “**The Berg**” or “**Fishtown**,” developed in an area just back from the north waterfront. These black neighborhoods expanded and three new settlements began in the post-bellum period. These were “**The Hill**,” south of “Hayti,” “**Cross Canal**,” located on each side of the Alexandria canal locks on the north end of town; “**The Hump**,” to the west of “Cross Canal,” and “**Colored Rosemont**” south of “The Hump” and east of the railroad.

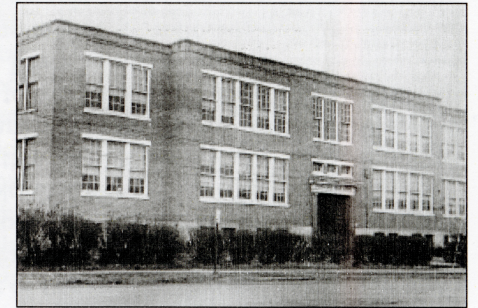
By 1910, there was almost a continuous band of African American neighborhoods surrounding the city’s center and edging Alexandria’s boundaries. “Uptown” and “The Berg” are still viable 21st century neighborhoods. *Courtesy of Alexandria Archaeology*

Black Historic Sites Tour

“**Uptown**” area: **Alexandria Black History Museum-902 Wythe Street** is one of seven museums under the Office of Historic Alexandria, City of Alexandria. The building that houses the museum was constructed in 1940 as the **Robert H. Robinson Library**. The City built the Robinson Library as a result of a peaceful sit-in that took place in 1939 at the Alexandria Library on Queen Street. Five young African American men were arrested for refusing to leave the segregated, white-only library. The Robinson Library was the first public library to serve the African American population of Alexandria. With desegregation in the 1960s, the building was converted to use for community-oriented programs. In 1983, the Alumni Association of Parker-Gray School and the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage, Inc. reopened the building as the Alexandria Black History Resource Center. In 2005, the name and address of the museum were changed to the Alexandria Black History Museum, 902 Wythe Street.



Parker-Gray School-900 Wythe Street. This former school site is directly across the street from the Alexandria Black History Museum. The Parker-Gray School opened in 1920, providing an education for African American boys and girls in first through eighth grade. The school was named for late educators John Parker, Principal of the Snowden School for Boys, and Sarah Gray, Principal of the Hallowell School for Girls. For many years, African American students had to travel to Washington, D.C. to receive an education beyond the eighth grade.



Parker-Gray’s first four-year high school class graduated in 1936. In 1950, because of increased enrollment, a new school was built at 1207 Madison Street to house Parker-Gray High School. In honor of the hard work and dedication of NAACP lawyer Charles Houston, the school that remained on Wythe Street was renamed **Charles Houston Elementary School**. As a result of integration, Parker-Gray High School was phased out and became a middle school from 1965 to 1979. The property was sold and a portion of the funds were used by the City of Alexandria to renovate and extend the Alexandria Black History Resource Center. During the desegregating years, Charles Houston Elementary School closed. It eventually burned down. This site is now home to the Charles Houston Recreation Center. *From ABHM, south on Alfred St., left on Queen St. to Royal St.*

Points of interest on your route:

509 N. Alfred Street: People’s Flower Shop, the first African American florist in Alexandria.

901 Princess Street: Brick building, former office of attorney **Samuel W. Tucker**, who represented the 1939 sit-down strike participants. In 2000, Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School was named for him.



901 Princess St.

322 N. Alfred Street: Meade Memorial Episcopal Church was organized by Christ Church as a mission project in 1869.

717 Queen Street: Site of August 21, 1939 **Alexandria Library sit-down strike**. *Continue Queen St., right on Royal St., left on King St.*

Market Square–300 block of King Street. Since the city's founding in 1749, this square has been the center of activity. The Fairfax County Courthouse was located here in the middle 1700s. Local farmers often came to the square to sell produce. Slave exporters in Alexandria were leaders in the long distance slave trade and the square was used as a slave market.

In February, 1791, the black astronomer, mathematician, and surveyor **Benjamin Banneker** helped survey the area south of here when Alexandria became a part of the District of Columbia. *Continue King St. to right on Fairfax St., right on Duke St. to middle of block.*

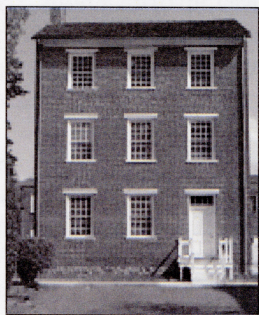
Church Alley. On the South side of Duke Street, between Royal and Fairfax Streets, is Church Alley. The First Methodist Episcopal Church was located in this alley. This was one of the first churches where African Americans were allowed to worship with the white congregation. Many of the African American worshippers came from the nearby community of **Hayti**. *Continue Duke St., left on Royal St. to the northwest corner of Wolfe St.*

"Hayti" area–400 block of S. Royal Street. This community was probably named for the country of Haiti ("Hay-tie" was an earlier pronunciation for Haiti). The residents on the block were whites and free blacks. Sometimes enslaved people lived with free black families.

The house at **404 S. Royal Street** was the home of **George Seaton**, a free black master carpenter, who became a member of the City Council and State Legislature in the 1870s. He was responsible for constructing the first public schools for African American students, the Snowden School for Boys and the Hallowell School for Girls. *Right on Wolfe St. to the northeast corner of Wolfe and St. Asaph Sts.*

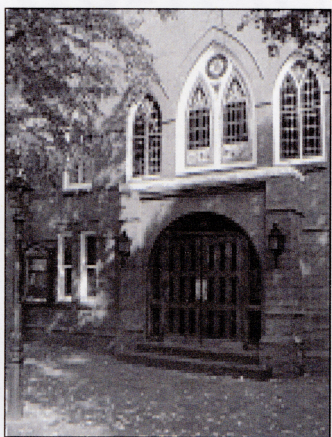
323 S. St. Asaph Street (northwest corner). This wood frame, Greek revival style house was built in 1852 by **George L. Seaton**. *Continue on Wolfe St. to middle of 600 block, building on south side of the street, set back.*

Alexandria Academy–600 block Wolfe St. Built in 1785, this brick Federal style building housed three schools: English School, Learned Language School, and the Free School. Financed by George Washington for indigent students, the Free School developed from the Academy. In 1812, a "free colored school," founded by a group of free blacks, was held in the Washington Free School. During the Civil War, it was used to house contraband slaves. *Continue on Wolfe St., right on Washington St. to middle of block.*



Beulah Baptist Church–320 South Washington Street. Brick. 1863-1864. Remodeled, 1930-1953. This was the first African American church founded in Alexandria after the occupation by Federal troops and the third oldest African American church in Alexandria. The first "select colored school" was founded in Alexandria by Reverend Clem Robinson in 1862 for contrabands and soon had over 700 students. This was one of several schools in the city founded for the thousands of contrabands who entered the city during the Civil War. **Beulah Baptist Church** grew out of the school. *Make a U-turn. South on Washington St. and continue to 600 block.*

"The Hill" area: Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church–606 South Washington Street. This Gothic style brick edifice is the oldest African American church building in Alexandria. The front and interior were altered in the twentieth century. Roberts Chapel began as a part of the predominantly white congregation at the First Methodist Episcopal Church, (in Chapel Alley) now Trinity Methodist. In 1830, four white and five black members purchased a lot and began the foundation for a separate church. Work stopped in 1831 because of the reaction to the **Nat Turner Rebellion**. The congregation was forced to move to the present site in 1834. It was originally named Davis Chapel for the Reverend Charles A. Davis, the first pastor of the church. *Make a U-turn. North on Washington St.; left on Gibbon St.; one block to right on Columbus St.; two blocks to 411 S. Columbus St.*



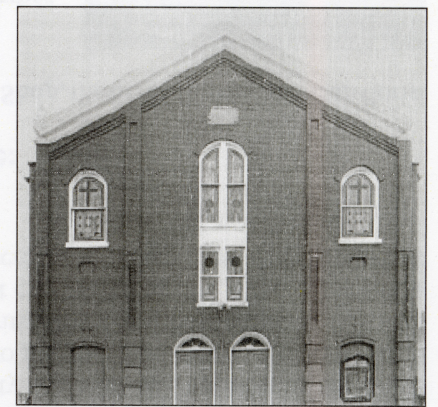
"The Bottoms" area: The Dip Neighborhood—bounded roughly by Duke, Franklin, Patrick and Washington Streets. This first free black neighborhood in Alexandria was settled about 1800, when undesirable marshy "bottom" land was leased to free men. Many slaves were freed in the early nineteenth century because of the dying tobacco trade in Virginia. Similar neighborhoods developed between 1830 and 1850 as Alexandria's free black population continued to increase. During the 1960s, the neighborhood experienced a significant architectural change when the DIP Urban Renewal Project erected mid-rise homes and town houses.

Odd Fellows Hall–411 S. Columbus Street. Around 1870 this brick structure was probably designed and built with funds from the Freedman's Bureau. It became a major gathering place for African Americans and their secret organizations after the Civil War, including the Odd Fellows, Rising Star, Daughters of Zion and many other groups. It served an important role in developing community identification, promotion of racial consciousness and leadership skills. *Continue on Columbus to left on Duke St. to middle of block.*

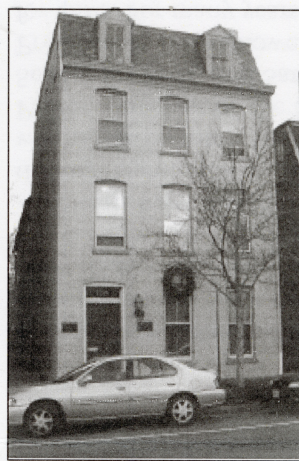


The Dr. Albert Johnson Residence–814 Duke Street. This mid-nineteenth century two story brick residence with a cast iron porch was the home of Dr. Albert Johnson, (1866-1949), one of the earliest professionally trained African American physicians to practice in Alexandria. He graduated in 1892 from Howard University Medical School, the first African American medical school. *Continue west on Duke St. to Alfred St. to church on the corner.*

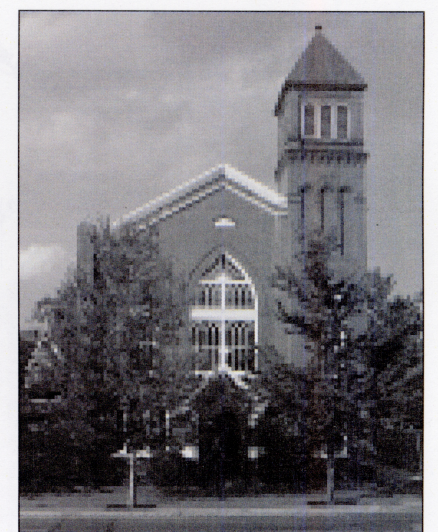
Alfred Street Baptist Church–301 South Alfred Street. It was probably designed and built by free black craftsmen. Founded in 1803, it is the oldest African American congregation in Alexandria and one of the oldest in the Washington area. The present church dates from 1855 with alterations dating from the 1880s. The church was significant for its major religious, educational, and cultural role in Alexandria's free black community prior to the Civil War. During a period when Virginia law denied African Americans the right to assemble in groups without a white overseer, the church provided the most consistent opportunity for members of the African American community to meet, exchange information and develop leadership skills. During the Civil War, Alfred Street Baptist Church was located within the compound of the U.S. Military Railroad Yard. Its Sunday School, started in the 1820s, gave free blacks a rare opportunity to learn to read and write. In the 1990s, the congregation completed a new edifice which included the old historic church. *Continue west on Duke St.; four blocks west to 1315 Duke St.*



Freedom House Museum–1315 Duke Street. This three-story brick building with mansard roof was built as the residence of Robert Young, Brigadier General of the second Militia of the District of Columbia. By 1828, it was leased by Isaac Franklin and John Armfield and used as a "Negro Jail" or slave pen for slaves being shipped from Northern Virginia to Louisiana. Active until 1836, this was one of the largest slave trading companies in the country, exporting over 3,750 slaves to the new cotton and sugar plantations of the Deep South. During the Civil War the building and its surrounding site were used as a military prison for deserters, the L'Ouverture Hospital for black soldiers and the barracks for contraband-slaves who fled the Confederate States and sought refuge with Union troops. The Franklin and Armfield building, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is now the office of the **Northern Virginia Urban League**. *Continue to corner of Duke and West Streets.*



Shiloh Baptist Church–1401 Duke Street. This church was founded by fifty former enslaved people in the mess hall of L'Ouverture Hospital in 1863. Reverend Leland Warring, the pastor, was a teacher in the Lancaster School at the Alexandria Academy. The present church, described as a magnificent brick structure, was built in 1891. The original organ and pulpit are on display in the Shiloh History Museum at 1429 Duke St. *Continue west on Duke St. to Holland Lane, left one block to park.*



The Alexandria African American Heritage Park–Holland Lane just off Duke Street. The nine-acre memorial park has been developed to honor and commemorate African American contributions to the City of Alexandria. One acre of the park has been preserved as the original site of the 1885 black Baptist cemetery. Six of the twenty-one known burials remain in their original location and retain their original headstones. Dedicated on June 17, 1995, the park includes a wetland area that provides a home for natural vegetation and animal life. Sculptor Jerome Meadows designed a variety of art forms and a mixed-media bronze sculpture entitled "Truths that Rise from the Roots Remembered," which serves as the park's focal point. The sculpture consists of four elements: three bronze trees standing twelve to fifteen feet high and a symbolic grave mound. Etched in the bronze trees are the names of notable African American Alexandrians. Through its affiliation with the Alexandria Black History Museum, this park serves as a haven enriched with history and serenity. *From the park, return to Duke St., right on Duke, left on West St. (at church), two blocks to King St. Shops and restaurants are to your right and left.*