

Alexandria Black History Bike Tour 2022

Overview

- This tour explores some of the sites associated with Alexandria's extraordinary Black history.
- Please note that this is just a sampling of the many Black history sites in Alexandria. There are many more sites to learn about and many more stories that deserve to be told.
- The route is about 12.3 miles long, with stops at eleven sites.
- Go to <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/39705650> for cuesheets or turn-by-turn directions.

1. Jones Point Park, 125 Jones Point Drive

Starting point: in front of the ship rudder, next to the bathrooms.

Jones Point Park houses the DC's southern cornerstone. The location of this cornerstone was determined in 1791 by Benjamin Banneker, a free Black mathematician and astronomer. According to legend, he worked out of a field tent in the winter of 1791 and spent nights lying on his back plotting stars, so that he could make the necessary astronomical observations.

When architect Pierre L'Enfant was dismissed in 1792 from the project to design the city of DC, he took the plans with him. Banneker, who had been working with L'Enfant, recreated the plans in just two days.

Even more remarkable: Banneker had little formal education and was largely self-taught. He computed the lifecycle of seventeen-year cicadas, built a clock entirely out of wood while still a young man, published six annual farmer's almanacs, and corresponded with Thomas Jefferson.

Benjamin Banneker Park in DC is on a direct axis with the Smithsonian Castle, and Benjamin Banneker Park in Arlington has one of the original boundary stones.

Source: https://blog.library.si.edu/blog/2017/02/15/americas-first-known-african-american-scientist-mathematician/#.XNWk_fIKh9M.

Start your ride by heading west on the Mount Vernon Trail. Turn right under the Beltway and continue onto S. Royal Street. Turn left onto Franklin Street, then turn right onto S. St. Asaph Street. At the corner of S. St. Asaph Street and Gibbon Street, stop at Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy.

2. Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy, 530 S. St. Asaph Street

Gathering spot: by the school entrance.

Lyles-Crouch opened in 1935 to serve to the growing Black community on the south side of the city. It was named to recognize the contributions of two local educators of color — Rozier D. Lyles and Jane A. Solomon Crouch.

Rozier D. Lyles was born in 1863 in Alexandria as a free person of color. He started teaching elementary school around 1883 and later taught sixth grade at Parker-Gray School. He



was known as a strict teacher who focused on mathematics, prompting his students to nickname him “Mr. Mathematics.” In total, he spent 46 years as a teacher in Alexandria.

Although her father had been enslaved, Jane Solomon Crouch was born free in Alexandria. In October 1861, she and Sarah Gray established the St. Rose Institute on South West Street where former enslaved people could attend school in the evening. She continued teaching elementary school until the 1881-82 school year, when she became seriously ill and eventually died of a respiratory infection. Alexandria officials recalled her as an “excellent disciplinarian and devoted to her work.”

Source: <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/Page/1479>.

Continue north on S. St. Asaph Street for one block, then turn right onto Wilkes Street. Turn left onto S. Royal Street, then stop by 404 S. Royal Street.

3. George Lewis Seaton House, 404 S. Royal Street
Gathering spot: on the sidewalk or by the bus stop.

The 400 block of South Royal Street was the heart of the Hayti (pronounced hay-tie) neighborhood, which was established in the early 1800s and was the home of many Black leaders. This house, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2004, was George Seaton’s home from the early 1870s until his death in 1881.

Seaton was born free in 1822 in Alexandria. His parents were Lucinda Seaton, who had been enslaved at Mount Vernon before she was emancipated, and George Seaton, who was also free.

Seaton worked as a master carpenter and supported public schools and community organizations for African Americans in Alexandria. He served as head trustee of the First Free School Society of Alexandria and constructed two schools for Black children in the city. He was a founding member of the Colored Building Association and the Colored YMCA. He was a member and deacon of Alfred Street Baptist Church. Seaton was active in the establishment of the Odd Fellows Society, and he also constructed the Odd Fellows Hall for use by the organization. Additionally, he managed a thriving grocery store near the center of town.

He represented Alexandria for one session in the Virginia House of Delegates (1869–1871), which made him the highest-ranking Black officeholder in the state at that time. He voted with the majority to ratify the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution as required by Congress before Virginia could be readmitted to the United States.

Sources: https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/VLR_to_transfer/PDFNoms/100-5015-0007_George_Lewis_Seaton_House_2004_Final_Nomination.pdf;
<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/seaton-george-lewis-ca-1822-1881/>.



Continue heading north on S. Royal Street. Cross King Street, then turn left onto Cameron Street. Cross N. Washington Street, then turn right onto Columbus Street. Turn left onto Wythe Street, then stop at the Charles Houston Recreation Center.

4. Charles Houston Recreation Center, 901 Wythe Street
Gathering spot: sidewalk at the corner of Wythe and N. Alfred Streets.

Charles Houston Recreation Center houses Memorial Pool. Alexandria didn't have any swimming pools for Blacks until the opening of Memorial Pool in 1952. Before then, many Black residents swam in the Potomac River, and between 1931 and 1951, nine young African Americans drowned. The year Memorial Pool opened, the 16-year-old Shirley Marshall-Lee became a lifeguard there. She went on to become the world's first Black female scuba diver.



Marshall-Lee was raised as the eldest of two sisters in The Berg neighborhood in north Old Town. While in her twenties, she met Dr. Albert Jose Jones, the president of the Underwater Adventure Seekers, the first Black scuba diving club. In 1965, she got her basic certification, and the following year she became the club's first female member.

Marshall-Lee's diving and swimming have garnered awards, including first place in the 1972 Atlantic Skin Diving Council Rodeo, the free diving portion of the Middle Atlantic Spearfishing Championship, and in the USA Swim for Fitness program in 2001 by swimming 44 miles in four months. She is a founding member of the National Association of Black Scuba Divers. Marshall-Lee has dived all over the world, including Fiji, Morocco, Mexico, Jamaica, Egypt, Bermuda, Haiti, and Malaysia.

Source: <https://www.alxnow.com/2020/02/20/like-a-fish-alexandrias-shirley-marshall-lee-is-the-worlds-first-african-american-female-scuba-diver/>.

Continue heading north on N. Alfred Street. Turn left onto Montgomery Street. Cross N. Patrick Street, then stop at 1020 Montgomery Street.



5. Earl Lloyd Childhood Home, 1020 Montgomery Street
Gathering spot: on the sidewalk.

Earl Lloyd was born in Alexandria on April 3, 1928. He was raised at this home on Montgomery Street and graduated from segregated Parker-Gray High School in 1946. He received a scholarship to West Virginia State College, where he was a Black College All-American basketball player, led the team to two conference championships, and obtained his bachelor's in physical education in 1950.

He was drafted by the Washington Capitols and made history on the night of October 31, 1950, when he became the first African American to play in the National Basketball Association (NBA). The team folded

after just seven games. Lloyd was then drafted into the U.S. Army and served during the Korean War.

After leaving the military, Lloyd returned to basketball in 1952, where he played in more than 560 games in nine seasons before his retirement in 1960.

In 1968, he made history again by becoming the NBA's first Black assistant coach for the Detroit Pistons and was named their head coach for the 1971-1972 season.

The City of Alexandria and the Alexandria African American Hall of Fame unveiled the historical state marker at Lloyd's childhood home on April 2, 2022. The event featured remarks from Mayor Justin Wilson, Lloyd's son Kevin, and others.

Source: <https://thezebra.org/2022/03/25/earl-lloyd-to-be-honored-with-marker-at-childhood-home/>.

Continue west on Montgomery Street. At the traffic light, turn left onto N. Henry Street, then take the first right onto Belle Pre Way. Turn left onto N. Fayette Street. Turn right onto Oronoco Street, then turn left onto N. West Street. Turn right onto Cameron Street. Turn right onto Commonwealth Avenue. After going under the train tracks, take the first left onto W. Cedar Street. Turn right onto Russell Road, then take the first left onto W. Rosemont Avenue. Turn right onto King Street and climb the hill. Turn left onto Janneys Lane, cross Quaker Lane, and continue onto Seminary Road. Turn right onto Deanery Drive, then stop in front of the visitor center for Virginia Theological Seminary.

6. Virginia Theological Seminary, 3737 Seminary Road.

Stopping point: area in front of the visitor center and chapel.

Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS) was founded in 1823 by several slaveholding men — including Francis Scott Key, who wrote the national anthem and who so opposed emancipation that he criminally prosecuted abolitionist journalists as U.S. attorney in the District of Columbia.



Enslaved people owned by a construction contractor built Aspinwall Hall in 1841, which now houses the seminary's administrative offices. Mount Vernon, George Washington's estate, rented enslaved people to work at the seminary in the 1850s, and early professors also owned enslaved people. Even after slavery ended, VTS remained segregated. Black students were not admitted until 1951.

In September 2019, VTS designated \$1.7 million as a reparations endowment fund. The seminary's dean and president said at the time, "Part of our past is explicit racism. We were a Seminary where enslaved persons worked. We participated fully in segregation. So we apologize; so we commit to a different future; but we need to do more. This fund is our seed — the first step." Though other institutions have

created atonement programs, such as scholarships and housing vouchers, VTS's program may be the first to provide cash.

As of September 2021, the Reparations Initiative had issued 17 payments to members of seven different families, awarded its first reparations grant to a historically Black Episcopal church, and uncovered hundreds of records that shed light on the Seminary's history and connections to the larger institution of slavery.

Sources: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/09/10/virginia-theological-seminary-reparations-slavery/>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/31/us/reparations-virginia-theological-seminary.html>; <https://vts.edu/deans-commentary/reparations-initiative-update-090821/>.

Retrace your path back to Seminary Road. Turn right and continue west on Seminary Road. At the traffic light, turn right onto N. Howard Street. Turn right onto W. Braddock Road, then get into the left turn lane so that you can turn left into Fort Ward Park. There are public bathrooms available in Fort Ward Park if you need them.

7. Fort Ward Park, 4301 W. Braddock Road

Stopping point: pull into the grassy area near the museum.

Contrabands helped build the fort during the Civil War, then bought small plots of land nearby, built houses, and started churches and schools. Four generations of families were part of "The Fort" community, connected through kinship, marriage, church, and work, especially at Virginia Theological Seminary and Episcopal High School.

But in the 1950s and 1960s, the City moved the residents out of the area to establish the Fort Ward Park and Museum. The City of Alexandria is working on an Interpretive Plan for Fort Ward Park to expand interpretation to include the full range of its history, especially including the African American experience and the post-Civil War Fort community. The Office of Historic Alexandria is also working on two memorial projects to preserve key burial areas in the park.

Morris Leroy and Lonnie Richard Johnson, aged 9 and 11, are buried in the cemetery here next to their father, Morris. In the early 1950s, the municipal pool was open to White residents only. African Americans had two ways to swim: take a weekly bus to a Washington, D.C., pool or go to the Potomac River and Hunting Creek. The Johnson brothers, on a hot summer's day, made a "boat" out of a cardboard box and launched it into the river, resulting in their drowning. After the tragic accident, the City opened the Johnson Memorial Pool.

Source: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic-sites/the-fort-a-post-civil-war-african-american-community>.

Make a u-turn and retrace your way back to W. Braddock Road. Turn left onto W. Braddock Road and go down the hill. After passing N. Quaker Lane, turn right onto King Street. Continue on King Street, then turn right into the entrance for Alexandria City High School.

8. Alexandria City High School, 3330 King Street

Stopping point: on the sidewalk by the bikeshare station.

Alexandria City High School used to be called T.C. Williams High School, after the segregationist who was Alexandria's superintendent of schools from mid-1930s into 1960s. When Alexandria was undergoing the process of renaming the school, one of the candidates was Blois Hundley High School.

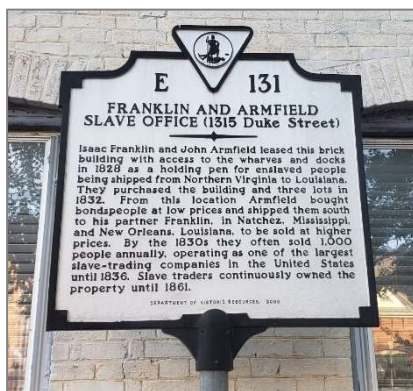


Blois Hundley was a cafeteria cook at the Blacks-only Lyles-Crouch Elementary School in the 1950s. She was Black and had eight children who attended Alexandria schools. She joined a handful of other families in suing ACPS to integrate schools. Said her daughter: "She just wanted better for her kids, so she raised her hand." When T.C. Williams found out, he fired her almost immediately. Being fired was traumatic, and she rarely talked about the painful experience afterward.

The court eventually directed Alexandria to integrate schools, but Hundley and her family had left Alexandria by then. She later went on to work as the personal cook for philanthropist Philip Stern, who owned the local Northern Virginia Sun newspaper and who was outraged by Hundley's firing.

Sources: <https://alextimes.com/2021/02/black-cook-fired-by-t-c-williams-could-replace-him-as-high-school-namesake/>; <https://alextimes.com/2018/03/civilrightsstand/>.

Head back out toward King Street, then turn right onto King Street. Before you get to the bottom of the hill, just after the green bike lane peters out, turn left onto W. Rosemont Avenue. Turn right onto Russell Road, and take the first left onto W. Cedar St. Turn right on Commonwealth Avenue and go under the train tracks. Commonwealth Avenue becomes Daingerfield Road. Turn left onto Prince Street. Turn right onto S. West Street. At the intersection of S. West and Duke Streets, turn left onto the northside sidewalk of Duke Street. Stop in front of the Freedom House Museum.



9. Freedom House Museum, 1315 Duke Street

Stopping point: in front of the museum, by the historical marker.

The Franklin and Armfield Slave Office at 1315 Duke Street was one of the largest slave trading companies in the country. John Armfield worked out of this office in Alexandria, buying enslaved people and readying them for transportation, either by overland trek or by ship. Isaac Franklin oversaw the Natchez and New Orleans offices, where the enslaved people were sold to owners of cotton and sugar plantations. "Amenities" at the slave pen included a kitchen,

a tailor shop to make the enslaved people more attractive “commodities,” a hospital/infirmiry, and outdoor courtyards to exercise and dine in.

Franklin and Armfield were responsible for at least one-third of the enslaved people sold South during the 1820s and 30s. During their heyday, they annually exported between a thousand and twelve hundred enslaved persons, and they owned three ships to transport the enslaved people by sea. Other slave trading firms later operated on this site until the Civil War.

The site is now the Freedom House Museum, dedicated to honoring the lives and experiences of the enslaved and free Black people who lived in and were trafficked through Alexandria. It reopened in May 2022 after an extensive renovation.

Sources: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/FreedomHouse>; <https://media.alexandriava.gov/docs-archives/historic/info/blackhistory/blackhistorylessonplanslavetrading.pdf>.

Continue heading east on the Duke Street sidewalk. Turn left onto S. Payne Street. Turn right onto Prince Street. Turn right onto S. Alfred Street. After crossing Duke Street, stop at the Alfred Street Baptist Church.

10. Alfred Street Baptist Church, 301 S. Alfred Street

Stopping point: parking spots in front of the church.

The Alfred Street Baptist Church traces its origins back to 1803, when the Alexandria Baptist Society was formed and Susan Black, an enslaved woman, was baptized as the Society’s first Black member.



The church purchased this site in September 1842. The building now known as the “old church” was built between 1881 and 1884, probably by Black craftsmen. The adjacent “new” church was built in 1981 and expanded in 1994.

Notable historical events in the church’s history include the following: creation of a library in the 1920s to serve the city’s Black population; Pastor Adkins helping to found Parker-Gray, the first high school for Black youths in Alexandria; being among the first churches to ordain women as deacons (1979); being first in Virginia to ordain an Black woman minister (1980); and

Presidents Clinton and Obama attending services here, in 2000 and 2015.

The church made national news in 2019 when over 4,000 members collectively donated \$150,000 to Howard University and Bennett College, a historically black women’s college in North Carolina. At Howard, the gift was used to eliminate student debt for 34 seniors.

Sources: <http://www.alfredstreet.org/our-church/church-history/>; https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/a-huge-weight-off-of-my-shoulders-virginia-church-pays-howard-students-debt/2019/02/10/71424f42-2ae6-11e9-b011-d8500644dc98_story.html?utm_term=.3a52e27fad07.

Continue heading south on S. Alfred Street. At the intersection of S. Alfred and Wilkes Street, turn left onto the bikeway. After one block, turn right onto S. Columbus Street. Turn left onto Church Street – watch out for cars coming off the freeway ramp. At the intersection of Church and S. Washington Streets, turn right onto the westside sidewalk of S. Washington Street. Stop at the entrance to the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery.

11. Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery, 1001 S. Washington Street
Stopping point: by the sculpture.

During the Civil War, contrabands (escaped slaves) sought refuge in Alexandria, which was occupied by Union forces. Many were destitute and in poor health; mortality rates were high. The Superintendent of Contrabands confiscated property from a pro-confederate owner for use as a cemetery. Approximately 1,800 people were buried here between 1864 and 1869. Over 40% were children.



The cemetery was eventually forgotten, and a gas station and office building were built on top. The cemetery was rediscovered through historical research in the 1980s. The community mobilized to honor the deceased and preserve the site as a memorial.

Mitigation funds from the construction of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge helped pay for archaeological work and construction of the memorial, which opened in 2014.

The statue, “Path of Thorns and Roses,” is by Mario Choda. It is a figurative representation of Oppression, Struggle, Sacrifice, Loss, and Compassion, with Hope at the top holding the unbloomed “rose of freedom” and standing on his tiptoes to avoid the thorns of oppression beneath him.

Sources: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/FreedmenMemorial>;
<http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/history/history.shtml>;
<http://freedommarchofart.com/thepathofthornsandroses.html>.

Continue heading south on the sidewalk. At the traffic light, turn left to cross S. Washington Street. Go down the ramp and follow the Mount Vernon Trail back to the starting point in Jones Point Park.