

Remembrance

Awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the past

Cultural landscapes help reflect and shape our understanding of the past. These landscapes form the backdrop of our daily lives while giving us a sense of place and identity. They also evolve over time as society develops a fuller, more inclusive understanding and acceptance of our shared history.

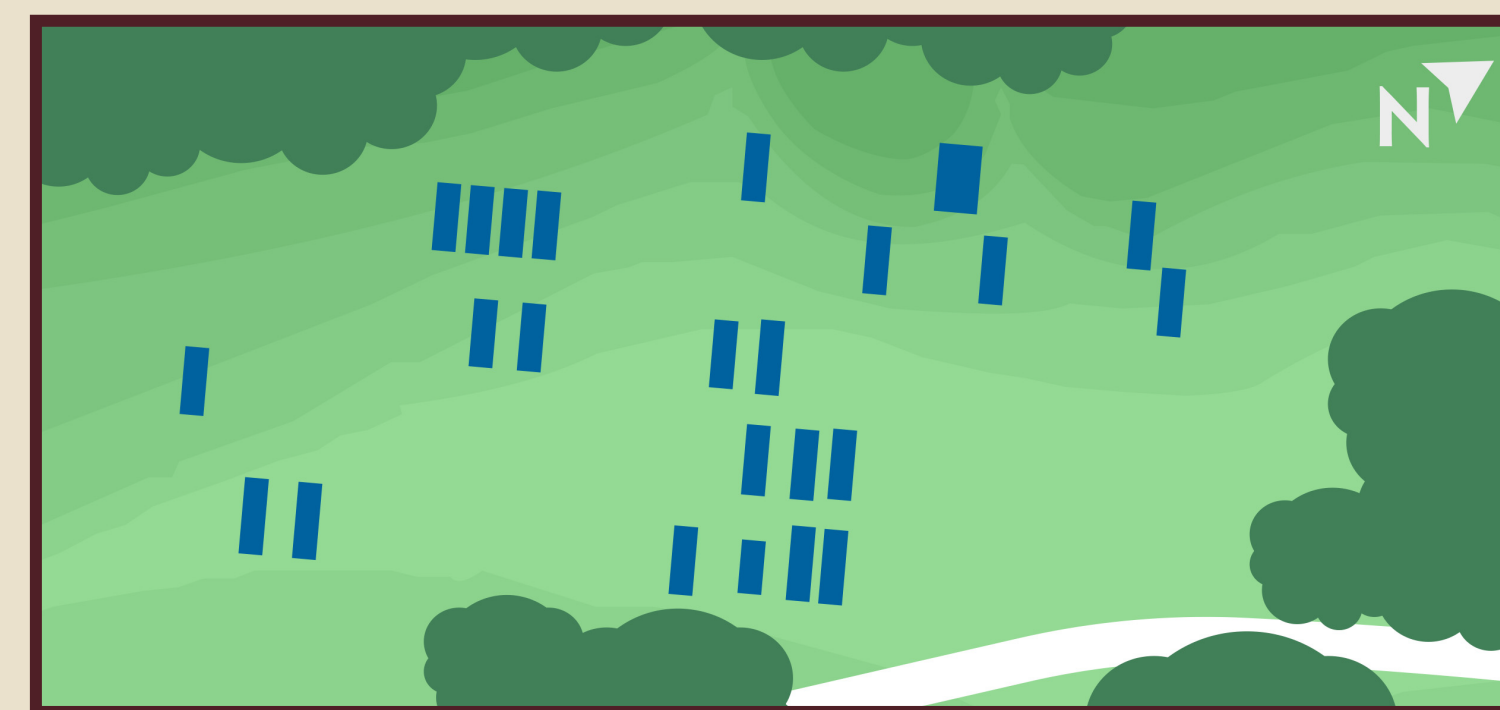
The Alexandria African American Heritage Park is an example of this transition. Nearly forgotten in the mid-20th century, the park now preserves a Black cemetery within its boundaries and honors local Black residents who have helped shape Alexandria's history. Memorialization keeps the past alive for future generations and provides a path toward discussion, reconciliation, and healing.

Black Baptist Cemetery

Cemeteries and graveyards are places of remembrance and a reminder of those who came before. In the face of segregation, African American communities created their own sacred burial grounds. While some burial places for Black Americans have been lost to history, others have resurfaced later, like the one in this park.

In 1885, the Silver Leaf Society of Alexandria created the Black Cemetery Association, a burial organization dedicated to providing fitting and respectful resting places for Black Alexandrians. Thomas H. Mann and his wife, Caroline, and other trustees of the Association purchased an acre near Hooffs Run for use as a burial ground, which they named the Black Baptist Cemetery. As Mann tended the cemetery, it also became known as the Thomas Mann Cemetery or Mann's Cemetery.

Over time, neglect and desecration resulted in the loss of most of the cemetery's markers. The cemetery was rediscovered in the 1980s. Archaeological investigations documented more than 20 burials and exposed gravestones that had been enveloped by underbrush for many years. The Black Baptist Cemetery is now preserved within the African American Heritage Park.



Known burials in the Black Baptist Cemetery as documented by Alexandria Archaeology with topography shown (City of Alexandria)



Alfred Street Baptist Church c.1980
(Alfred Street Baptist Church)



Robert Robinson Library in 1940
(Alexandria Black History Museum)



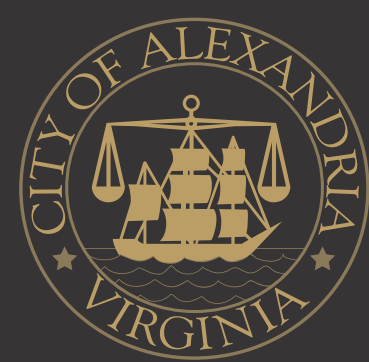
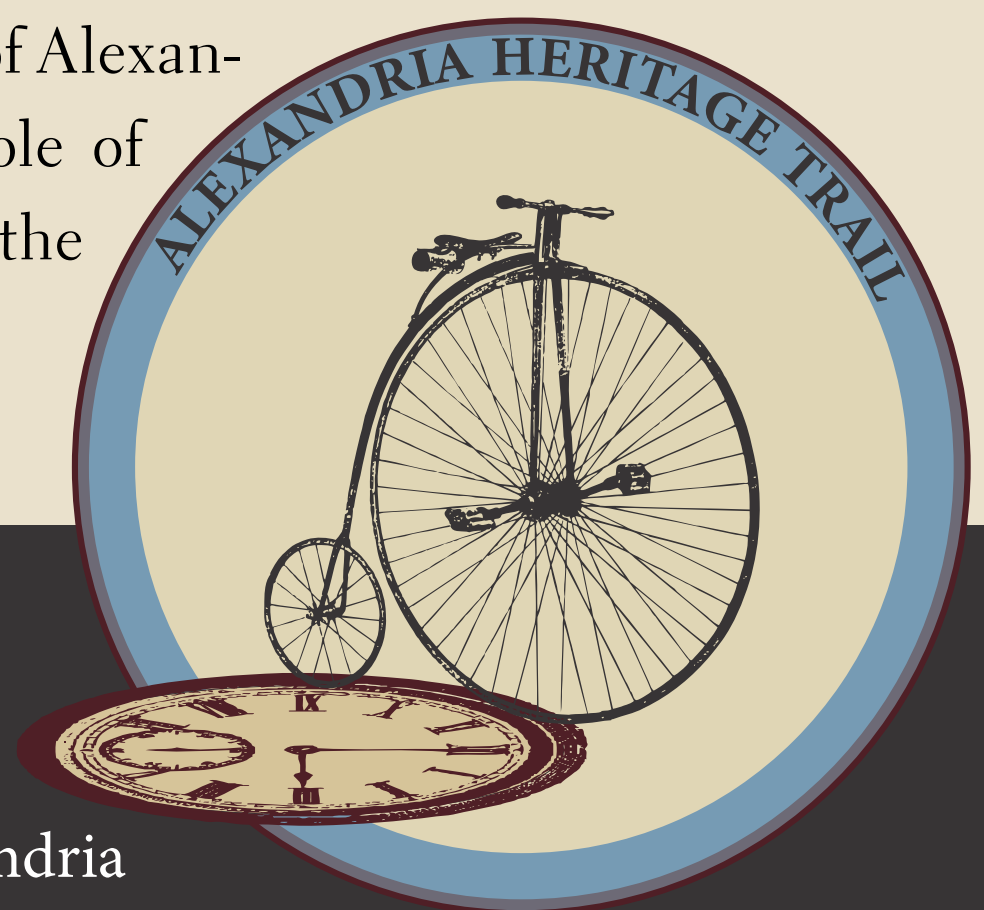
Black Baptist Cemetery
(Alexandria Black History Museum)

Alumni Association of Parker-Gray High School and Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the Alumni Association and the Society have advocated for the preservation of the physical fabric that reflects Alexandria's Black history. The Alumni Association was formed to preserve the memory of Parker-Gray High School. Today, the high school is the location of the Charles Houston Recreation Center which houses the Alexandria African American Hall of Fame.

The Society was formed to fight for the protection of the Alfred Street Baptist Church in partnership with the Alumni Association. Free and enslaved Black worshippers established the church in 1818 in The Bottoms, an early free Black neighborhood. Following success with the church, the organizations advocated for the preservation of the Robert H. Robinson Library, which had been a segregated library that opened in 1940. The building now serves as part of the Alexandria Black History Museum.

The Society also had a vision for the creation of the Alexandria African American Heritage Park which was dedicated in 1995. As Director of the African American History Division of the City of Alexandria, Audrey Davis said the Society has worked to make "citizens of Alexandria more aware of the role of African Americans in the building of this city."



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749

Courtesy of AlexRenew and
The Office of Historic Alexandria