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Out of the Attic

A closer look at the Black Baptist Cemetery

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Image: This view, looking east down Duke Street in 1929, shows the proximity of Thomas Mann's home, the cemetery and Shiloh Baptist Church. Courtesy National Archives and Records Administration.

Dedicated in 1995, the African American Heritage Park honors the people and institutions who significantly influenced Alexandria's African American community and memorializes those buried in the Black Baptist Cemetery, located within the park. In 1885, the Baptist Cemetery Association of Alexandria purchased a single acre of land, then just outside the city limits, to be used as a cemetery.

In the early 1990s, through historical research and archaeological work, city and contract archaeologists located five headstones at the cemetery site, situated west of Hooff's Run and on the east side of Holland Lane. Throughout much of the 20th century, Norfolk-Southern Railway operated a facility to the west of the cemetery, and in the 1960s, the cemetery site itself was used as a landfill.

Archaeological work also revealed the presence of at least 28 graves which were documented and protected as plans for the park's progress. But at the time of the dedication, identities of only five people buried there were known due to the recovery of their headstones during archaeological investigations.

Recent historical research has resulted in the identification of 24 more individuals who were buried at the Black Baptist Cemetery. Among those buried there were four members of the Hauls family, including Civil War veteran Cyrus Hauls, three members of the Lewis family and four members of the Mann family, including Thomas Mann, a Baptist Cemetery Association trustee who served as the cemetery's superintendent.

Mann and his wife Caroline, along with the Baptist Cemetery Association, acquired the property in 1885 when it was still part of Fairfax County. Mann had lived nearby on South Peyton Street and then at 1805 Duke St., just a few blocks from the cemetery.

In 1913 Mann suffered serious injuries in an electric streetcar accident and in its coverage of the incident, an Alexandria newspaper reported Mann had been a "sexton of the Shiloh colored cemetery," indicating that the Black Baptist Cemetery may have been affiliated with Shiloh Baptist Church.





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

Shiloh did not have its own cemetery, so it is likely that the “Shiloh colored cemetery” and the Black Baptist Cemetery, four blocks from the church, were one in the same. A review of Alexandria death certificates from the early 20th century shows that four individuals were buried at the Shiloh cemetery, although it was more commonly known as Mann’s Cemetery.

Twenty death certificates issued from 1912 through 1946 identify it as “Thomas Mann,” “Mann’s” or simply “Mann” cemetery. When Thomas Mann died in 1922 at age 73, he was buried at the cemetery bearing his name.

Because Virginia did not require death certificates until 1912, it is difficult to determine who else may have been buried there between 1885 and 1911. But the identities of at least two dozen more individuals buried at the Black Baptist Cemetery – or Mann’s Cemetery – are now known.

“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria and invited guests. This week’s Attic is by Amy Bertsch.