



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### Hayti: One of Alexandria's first African American neighborhoods

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Image: A map of Alexandria's African American neighborhoods in 1865. Alexandria Black History Museum.

In honor of Historic Preservation Month, Historic Alexandria is running a series on historically African American neighborhoods in Alexandria. The columns will feature both pre- and post-Civil War neighborhoods.

Hayti (pronounce haytie) was one of the earliest free Black neighborhoods in Alexandria. Established in the early 1800s, the neighborhood was named to commemorate the successful rebellion of enslaved people in Haiti, which gained independence in 1804. Initially located on the 400 block of South Royal Street, the community gained a foothold with the help of Quaker residents and landowners, who rented and sold property to free Black families.

Prominent among the Quaker community in establishing Hayti was the Miller family. Mordecai, a wealthy merchant, is credited with building houses on the 400 block of South Royal and renting them to free Black families. His son Robert began selling the properties to free Black families, as the community moved from one of renters to one of homeowners. According to an Alexandria Archaeology report, all of the homeowners on the 400 block of South Royal Street in 1840 had bought their homes from Robert Miller.

The relative safety of Alexandria being part of the District of Columbia at this time made the city attractive to many free African American families in the area. The location of First Methodist Episcopal Church, now Trinity United Methodist, which had a multiracial congregation also drew prominent free African Americans to the neighborhood.

The most famous Hayti resident was probably George Seaton, a builder who served as Alexandria's first Black state legislator in 1869. His house at 404 S. Royal St. is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Landowner Moses Hepburn and his aunt Hannah Jackson, who bought Moses' freedom, were also prominent Hayti residents.

You can still see houses from the Hayti period on the 400 block of South Royal and the 300 block of South Fairfax Street. Another landmark of the neighborhood is the Wilkes Street Tunnel. Constructed between 1851 and 1856, the tunnel built for the Orange and Alexandria Railroad became a landmark of the neighborhood. The tunnel was used for railroad traffic until 1975, and today is open to bicycle and foot traffic.





## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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This column was a brief introduction to the Hayti neighborhood. For more information, we encourage you to visit [alexandriava.gov/historic](http://alexandriava.gov/historic). City Archaeologist Garret Fessler is also lecturing tonight on Alexandria's free Black communities.

*"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.*