SCHOOLHOUSE, CHAPEL AND HOME

6

Clara Shorts Adams and Robert Adams conveyed a quarter-acre to the Falls Church School District of Fairfax County in 1898 for the purpose of educating African American children. The one-room "Colored School Building at Seminary" was the first public schoolhouse for African Americans living in this community. The school closed in 1925, yet School House Lane can still be discerned in the park's landscape. The building became an African American Episcopal chapel, St. Cyprian's, with students from the Virginia Theological Seminary leading services and teaching children. Its members joined Meade Memorial Episcopal Church when the chapel closed. Renovated for residential use, the Sgt. Thomas Lee Young family lived here from 1947 until the City of Alexandria's purchase and demolition of the building in the 1960s. Sgt. Young remembers that his bedroom was located in the chapel's pulpit, and the kitchen was in the "Amen Corner."

Photo left: ***Robert Adams****, Courtesy Joyce Casey Sanchez, great-niece.*
Photo right: ***Clara Shorts Adams****, Courtesy Charles McKnight, great-nephew.*

Education—Initiative & Excellence

Few African Americans were educated in Virginia before the Civil War. While some individuals gained literacy, the almost 550,000 African American Virginians—about 90 percent of whom were enslaved—did not have access to education. Even after the war, when public education was established in Virginia, black schools were segregated with unequal funding, facilities, and supplies. African Americans continually took measures to secure education for their children by donating land, building schools and raising funds. The school that once stood at The Fort and its successor, the Seminary School, were such community initiatives. Douglass Wood donated the land and the community raised $1000 to ensure construction of the Seminary School, which was located where T.C. Williams High School now stands.

Seminary School Graduating Class of 1932. Courtesy Elizabeth Henry Douglas.

Descendant Voices—"We're Still Here."

"Through sheer strength of will, determination, fortitude, guts, and against all odds, our ancestors fashioned a life here at Fort Ward, an abandoned Union fort. Then, out of necessity, they developed an entire viable, self-sustaining community that is still very much in existence today. It's undergone many changes, but we're still here.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the City moved the residents out of Fort Ward to establish the Park and Museum, which disrupted their tranquility. In 1962, the City displaced our community once again to build T.C. Williams High School. But, we're still here."

Frances (Johnson) Colbert Terrell, great-great-granddaughter of Seminary community founders, Wallace and Virginia Roy Wans(z)er

"The African American Descendants of The Fort and Seminary communities have only one dutiful and determined goal, the restoration and preservation of our sacred heritage. Where others view deeds, cannons, and picnic pavilions, we see people buried on this hallowed ground whose blood runs through our veins and four generations of our families' veins.

Countless unmarked graves of our ancestors are buried under the very soil that joggers, dog walkers and Civil War buffs unknowingly tread today. Where others see "open space," we see familiar faces, family memories and challenges on land that our ancestors—from slavery to freedom to Jim Crow to urban renewal—toiled, bought and successively seeded to grow a sustainable community through self-sufficiency, small farms, churches, schools and community values that have contributed to the prosperity of this city and nation for 150 years.

What does Fort Ward mean to us? It means blood, land and life. It models faith and morality. It conveys endurance and excellence. It speaks of our struggle but trumpets our survival."

Adrienne Terrell Washington, great-great-granddaughter of "The Fort" founder, Harriett Stuart McKnight Shorts

AN ENDURING AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

"The Fort" community began in large part from the results of the Civil War--freedom, rights, and opportunities for enslaved African Americans. Ironically, The Fort ended almost a century later as civil rights expanded. The City of Alexandria dedicated this park and museum for the Civil War Centennial in 1964. People were displaced, buildings demolished, graves lost as the African American presence faded from view.

Yet, The Fort endures. The remains of its homes and school/chapel, fragments of household items, and numerous graves survive underground. The Fort's descendants retain memories, images and traditions. New generations of those who founded The Fort and larger "Seminary" community still live nearby. The Oakland Baptist Church stands on King Street as a landmark to the community's founders and members. Its cemetery is bordered by Fort Ward Park. The Virginia Theological Seminary and Episcopal High School are witnesses to African American craftsmanship, care, and service of those who once worked there.

Upon the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, the City of Alexandria honors The Fort's enduring African American legacy.

www.alexandria.gov/historic

Visit these City of Alexandria Museums for more about African American & Civil War Heritage.

Fort Ward Museum & Historic Site
alexandriava.gov/FortWard

Alexandria Black History Museum
alexandriava.gov/BlackHistory

Alexandria Archaeology Museum
alexandriava.gov/Archaeology

The Lyceum, Alexandria's History Museum
alexandriva.gov/Lyceum

The City of Alexandria thanks the Fort Ward and Seminary African American Descendants Society, the Fort Ward History Work Group, Ad Hoc Fort Ward Park & Museum Area Stakeholders Advisory Group, Alexandria Archaeology volunteers, and Howard University Department of History for contributing direction, knowledge, research, and images for this project. Descendants, Joyce Casey Sanchez, Frances (Johnson) Colbert Terrell, and Adrienne Terrell Washington, led the project with support from researchers, Dave Cavanaugh, Glenn Eugster, and Tom Fulton, as well as graduate student, Neil Vaz.

The many people who shared their memories with Alexandria Legacies, the Historic Alexandria Oral History Program, deserve special recognition, as does Patricia I. Knock for beginning the interviews in the early 1990s. Oral histories may be read at alexandriava.gov/Historic.

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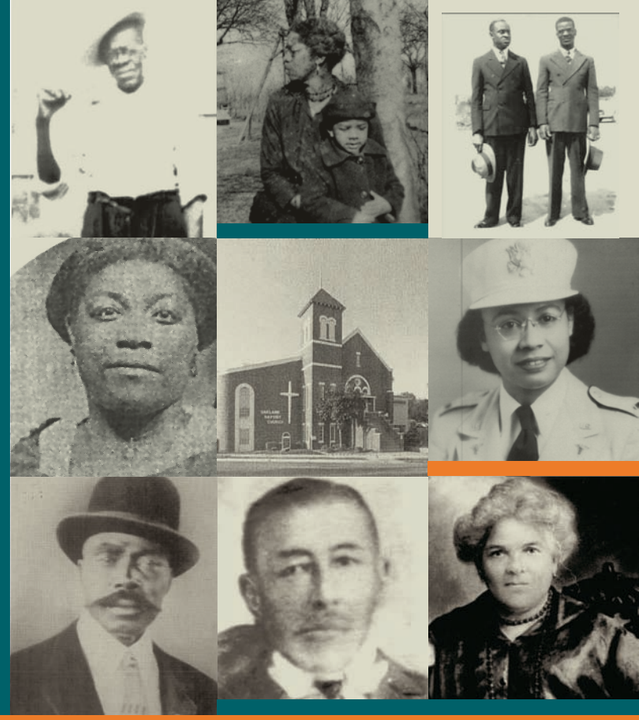


"THE FORT" HERITAGE TRAIL

An Enduring African American Community

Fort Ward Park & Historic Site • 4301 Braddock Road

The City of Alexandria, Virginia
Office of Historic Alexandria

CIVIL WAR TO CIVIL RIGHTS 1

African Americans established "The Fort," a community that continued here for nearly a century after the Civil War (1861-1865) into the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s. The place received its name from The Fort's location on and around the remnants of Fort Ward, one of the fortifications that were built as part of the Defenses of Washington. In the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, families living at The Fort and in the larger "Seminary" community—located around the Virginia Theological Seminary and Episcopal High School on Braddock, Howard, King and Quaker streets—were connected through shared kinship, marriage, church, and work, particularly at the two Episcopal educational institutions. Four generations of families (including the Adams, Ashby, Craven, Casey, Henry, Hall, Jackson, Javins, Johnson, Lewis, McKnight, Miller, Peters, Randall, Roy, Shorts, Simms, Terrell, Wans(z)er, Wood and Young families) sustained The Fort through these associations, faith, adherence to a strict moral code, and emphasis on education.

From top: ***William Wood, USCT, Civil War Soldier.*** *Courtesy Crozet Wood Johnson, granddaughter.* ***Crozet Wood Johnson, WWII Veteran.*** *Courtesy Frances (Johnson) Colbert Terrell.*

TRAIL MAP

OAKLAND BAPTIST CHURCH 4

Oakland Baptist Church. *Courtesy of OBC and Frances (Johnson) Colbert Terrell*

Several residents of "The Fort" community were founders of the Oakland Baptist Church, which is located at the intersection of King Street and Braddock Road. The congregation started worshiping in a bush arbor as Oak Hill Baptist Mission in 1888, established the church in 1891, and moved to the current location at 3408 King Street two years later. Despite the hardships associated with the community's displacement and the development of Fort Ward into a historical park, the Oakland Baptist Church and Cemetery survive and stand as symbols of the self-sufficiency, integrity and longevity of this distinctive African American community.

OAKLAND BAPTIST CHURCH CEMETERY 5

In 1939, the Oakland Baptist Church acquired a lot from Samuel Javins after the death of his wife, Florence McKnight Javins. She inherited the property from her mother, Harriett Stuart McKnight Shorts, one of the founders of the church. Family ownership of the land started in 1879, when Burr Shorts, Harriett's husband, began purchasing 10 acres. The Shorts-McKnight family was one of the principal founding families of "The Fort" and continued living here until the 1960s. Three McKnight family graves are the earliest known in the cemetery and pre-date church ownership of the land: James W. Terrell and Maria McKnight (1925); and Burney McKnight Terrell, wife of James and sister of Maria (1930).

Church Founders: *Clara Shorts Adams, William Carpenter, John Wesley Casey, Maggie Hall, Brooks Johnson, Mollie Nelson, Nancy Shepherd, Harriet McKnight Shorts, Daniel Simms Sr., James William Terrell, Smith Wanzer, Matilda Woods.*

James W. and Burney Terrell. *Courtesy Adrienne Terrell Washington, great-granddaughter.*

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE CIVIL WAR 2

The Civil War opened the door for opportunity and civil rights for African American Virginians, about 90 percent of whom were enslaved in 1860. The upheaval from battles and the federal presence in Alexandria and eastern Fairfax County offered the means and destination for thousands to escape slavery, seek refuge and jobs behind Union lines, and create new lives. These "contrabands" and freed people aided the Union cause by working as hospital attendants, gravediggers, stevedores, teamsters, cooks, laundresses, and in labor gangs to build roads, construct fortifications and trenches, and maintain rail lines. More than 200,000 men enlisted in the United States Colored Troops (USCT). Many African American soldiers escaped slavery before enlistment, such as the fathers of two long-time residents at "The Fort" and "Seminary" community.

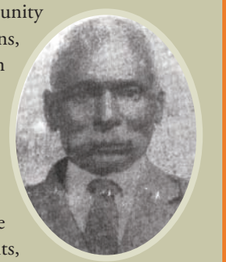
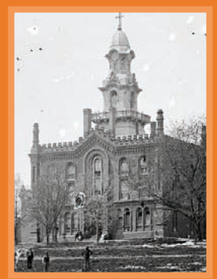


Photo right: ***John M. Peters, USCT Soldier.*** *Courtesy Adrienne Terrell Washington, great-great-granddaughter.*

Employment—Continuity and Self-sufficiency

Before the Civil War, enslaved African Americans worked as domestics and laborers at the Virginia Theological Seminary and Episcopal High School. Change occurred in June 1861 when Union troops occupied the closed schools and established a military hospital. The Fairfax Seminary Hospital provided employment and support for some freed people. After the war, African Americans settled in the areas surrounding the Episcopal complex, where they worked as carpenters, cooks, waiters, drivers and maintenance staff. By the end of the 19th century, many of these families had bought land and established their homes in "The Fort" and "Seminary" community. Some families retained their connection to these educational institutions for nearly a century.



Fairfax Seminary Hospital, Aspinwall Hall at Virginia Theological Seminary. *Library of Congress.*

JACKSON CEMETERY 3

In 1884, James F. Jackson purchased the largest of "The Fort" parcels with 11.5 acres and the "western slope of a bank of Fort Ward." Over 40 years, James farmed and was a driver at the Episcopal High School, and his wife Katie was a laundress. The Jacksons established a burial ground on the fort's slope (glacis). "Uncle Jim" dug graves with "Uncle Fred" Rust and "Uncle Simon" Reed. In 1926, investors intending to build Eagle Crest development purchased most of the land, and the City of Alexandria acquired it 30 years later for the park. Only a few names of those buried are known, and none of the grave markers survived. Elizabeth Henry Douglas, whose two brothers' graves are here, remembers that the disappearance of the markers "made our hearts sad, and we never did know what happened to them." Archaeological investigations identified grave locations for positioning new markers.

From left, Simon Reed, Fred Rust and James F. Jackson. *Courtesy Dorothy Hall Smith.*

> "I don't know how they made it. You didn't have a credit card back then, and you just dropped in and the people gave you a little share of molasses and a hoecake and what they called 'soft fish,' which was salt fish."
>
> *Dorothy Hall Smith as told to Adrienne Terrell Washington.*