

City of Alexandria, Virginia

African American Waterfront Heritage Trail Update



Eleanor Breen, PhD, RPA
City Archaeologist
January 2023



Background



- Overall Project Goal: To highlight the contributions of Black Alexandrians, free and enslaved, to the history of Alexandria's waterfront. Guided by principles of the Waterfront History Plan (2012).
- Two trails spanning just over 3 miles linking OTN (Montgomery Street) and Jones Point Park. North Trail launched 2021. South Trail will launch Feb. 4.
- Available as a website and as a self-guided online StoryMap that allows you to walk the trails with your phone and experience 30 stops covering over 2 centuries of history.

Thank you to members of the African American Heritage Trail Committee past and present: Councilman John Chapman, Susan Cohen, Gwen Day-Fuller, Indy McCall, Maddy McCoy, Krystyn Moon (Chair), McArthur Myers, and Ted Pulliam.



From Digital Resource to Interpretive Signage

- Currently have funding to transition approximately ten stops along the virtual African American Heritage Trail into physical signage this fiscal year
- Seeking quotes from a vendor to provide design, fabrication, and installation of the signs
- Anticipate 10 signs and 2 orientation stations
- Some of the signs are proposed to be installed in City parks – bringing history to residents and visitors as they enjoy our popular outdoor open spaces
- Each sign correlates to a stop on the north or south route of the African American Waterfront Heritage Trail

Life in “The Berg”

Populated almost exclusively by Black residents, the racially segregated neighborhood of The Berg evolved by necessity to have its own set of dwellings, amenities, and social institutions. Houses like the “five frame shanties” that stood on this block in 1890 were not uncommon for this neighborhood, which had its beginnings just after the Civil War.

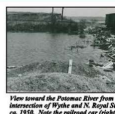


Houses like this one in the Negro Quarter of Beulah, Virginia, were once along N. First Street during the early 19th century.



African-American workers at the Old Dominion Glass Company, Alexandria, Virginia. *Levy House, ca. 1911. Library of Congress*

Most Southern Fire Insurance maps of this period do not depict this specific block in any detail, but maps of the area do show that nearly all of the buildings were frame dwellings. Census data between 1900 and 1940 indicate that all of its residents were African American, and that all but two rented, rather than owned, their homes. However, the buildings that stood on the adjoining blocks give some notion of the neighborhood’s character. There were relatively few amenities (although this number varied over time). For example, in 1907, local residents could worship at a “Negro Mission” (which later became a First Baptist Church and then a Community Presbyterian Church) shop at the single grocery store that served the immediate needs of the community, and patronize the lone barber in the area who maintained a shop on North Royal Street.



This is an excerpt from the Southern Fire Insurance Map of Alexandria, VA (1911). The houses along N. First and Pentecost Streets in Block 139 were in along the edge of a meeting area known as Ralph’s Cut. *Library of Congress*

Life in this neighborhood also presented other drawbacks. A variety of industries by within walking distance, among them Robert Parker’s Brewery, the rail and coal yards along the Potomac, and the Old Dominion Glass Works. Although these enterprises probably provided jobs for some local residents, living in a marginalized, heavily industrial area most certainly was not a pleasure. Compounding the problem was a “City Dumping Ground” that took up several blocks along the floodplain bordering “Ralph’s Cut.” In the early 1940s, two blocks at the southern end of this dumping ground became the site of the George W. Parker (“Colored”) housing project, which consisted of brick-faced concrete block townhouses. Today, a high-rise apartment building and the Housing Authority’s Azule B. Rose House occupy that space.



This is an excerpt from the Southern Fire Insurance Map of Alexandria, VA (1911). The houses along N. First and Pentecost Streets in Block 139 were in along the edge of a meeting area known as Ralph’s Cut. *Library of Congress*

The Edmonson Sisters

CASH FOR NEGROES

I wish to purchase immediately, for the South, any number of NEGROES from 10 to 50 years of age, for which I will pay the highest cash price. All communications promptly attended to. West End, Alexandria, Va., Oct. 26--67

JOSEPH BRIN, Alexandria Gazette, October 26, 1868.

The West End in the 19th century centered on Duke Street and Diagonal Road. Largely undeveloped, the area was devoted to stockyards, agricultural shipment, and “intrusions” into the slave trade. The house at 1707 Duke Street (left) was part of a business complex owned by Joseph Brinn, partner to Brinn & Hill, a successful slave-trading enterprise. The property included this building used as a slave jail and office, a house where Brinn lived with his family, slave pens, and various outbuildings. From here, Brinn purchased, warehoused, and transported thousands of slaves for sale in the Deep South from 1848 to the beginning of the Civil War. In 1849, Mary Edmonson, 15, and Emily Edmonson, 13, who had joined four of their siblings and several other blacks in a failed attempt to escape slavery on the *Beulah*, were purchased by Brinn and destined for auction in New Orleans and a likely fate as “lame girls” in that city’s brothels. This story and Brinn’s efforts to free them became a call to action for the abolitionist movement.

While in captivity at Brinn’s slave jail, the Edmonson sisters studied reading. The illustration shows a scene of Brinn’s slave jail, left, to the location of the slave house.



The Business of Slavery

An children of a free Black father, Paul, and Jane, a white woman, the Edmonson siblings were light-skinned. Their hair was relatively straight on their father’s side and curly on their mother’s. Their mother had been a slave owned by James H. Bechler, but Bechler sold them to the Rev. Henry Wood Becher, Rev. Becher took up the Edmonson’s case, speaking about the fate of the children. He obtained Edmonson sisters’ affidavits to be sold to a man named Paul, and eventually from Paul to Joseph Brinn in November 1848. Mary and Emily were free.



Paul Edmonson (left) is free. His daughter brought him to New York City in the fall of 1849 and eventually to the Presbyterian Congregational Church of Brooklyn, led by the Rev. Henry Wood Becher. Rev. Becher took up the Edmonson’s case, speaking about the fate of the children. He obtained Edmonson sisters’ affidavits to be sold to a man named Paul, and eventually from Paul to Joseph Brinn in November 1848. Mary and Emily were free.



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Emily Edmonson (right) is free. Her daughter brought her to New York City in the fall of 1849 and eventually to the Presbyterian Congregational Church of Brooklyn, led by the Rev. Henry Wood Becher. Rev. Becher took up the Edmonson’s case, speaking about the fate of the children. He obtained Edmonson sisters’ affidavits to be sold to a man named Paul, and eventually from Paul to Joseph Brinn in November 1848. Mary and Emily were free.

The Domestic Slave Trade

On January 1, 1808, the earliest date allowed by Article I, Section 9 of the United States Constitution, the importation of slaves into the United States was prohibited. The ban on the transatlantic slave trade was a significant step toward ending the practice of slavery in the United States. However, the domestic slave trade continued to flourish, as slaveholders sought to replace the lost labor force by purchasing slaves from other parts of the country. This trade was particularly active in the Deep South, where the demand for slaves was high. The illustration shows a scene of the domestic slave trade, with a slave being transported on a ship.



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Throughout the 19th century, hundreds of thousands of enslaved African and African American men, women, and children were transported from the Upper South to the Deep South. This trade was particularly active in the Deep South, where the demand for slaves was high. The illustration shows a scene of the domestic slave trade, with a slave being transported on a ship.

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African American Heritage Trail Signs



Murray-Dick-Fawcett House

Title, Calibri or equivalent 100 to 150pt depending on title size

Crop marks for cutting to 36" x 24" 1/8" thick high pressure laminate



100% black box with white text
Font, Electra Standard, full justified
28 to 36 pt

100% PANTONE 7474C Title Banner Color
34" wide x 4.50" high

100% PANTONE 467C Background Color
34" wide x 4.50" high

Note: Keep information and images
1 1/2 inch margin inside finished
panel of 36" x 24" for frame overlap

R 168 G 52 B 13 ((#A8340D) Red with white text
Font, Electra Standard, full justified
20 to 30 pt

Title 12 pt Whitney Bold

Notable Alumni

Mary Parker Gray alumnae have excelled in the arts, in government and in library service, in athletics, and in other public careers throughout the years. For one thing, a rich tradition of civility, respect, and pride in the history and legacy of the school and the city.

Examples of Parker-Gray alumnae who have gone on to become leaders in their fields include:

- Letitia Love (1878-1948) - an American basketball player who played for the National Basketball Association (NBA) and was the first woman to play professional basketball.
- Mary Parker Gray (1878-1948) - a prominent African American educator and civil rights leader who served as the principal of Parker-Gray School from 1918 to 1948.
- Dr. Robert D. Hunter (1878-1948) - a prominent African American physician and educator who served as the principal of Parker-Gray School from 1948 to 1968.
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At its opening, the Parker-Gray School employed nine teachers and was led by Principal Henry I. White. The City funded minimal necessities for the school, so members of the community provided chairs, basic supplies, and equipment. The faculty and the community would continue to work as partners to educate Parker-Gray students and overcome the constraints of segregation and its effort to demote them as second-class citizens.

Despite a 1920s Virginia law requiring public education through high school, Alexandria did not provide schools for African American students beyond the eighth grade. Those students who wished to continue their education had to take a bus into the District of Columbia to attend a segregated high school. This changed in the 1930s when high schools in the city were added at Parker-Gray School; the first high school class graduated in 1935. In 1950 a new Parker-Gray High School was built nearby on Madison Street. This school at this location on Wythe Street was retained as an elementary school and was named Charles Houston after the NAACP lawyer and noted civil rights leader. In the 1960s, following the desegregation of the city's schools, Parker-Gray School became a middle school. It was eventually demolished and the site redeveloped. The original Parker-Gray School building burned in the 1970s and was replaced with the Charles Houston Recreation Center, which was itself replaced in 2000 by a new recreation center building. While the buildings are gone, Parker-Gray lives on as the name of the community it once served and the history of academic achievement it fostered.

Photo captions 16pt Whitney Simibold
photo credits 14pt Whitney Simibold
14 pt Whitney Simibold

Early photograph of the Parker-Gray staff ca. 1930
Photo credit: Back History, 2 June 2014, offBlogs Alexandria



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749



Credit Line: Applicant, Archaeology Consultant, Alexandria Archaeology



<https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic-alexandria/alexandria-heritage-trail>

Proposed Orientation Station Locations



- 1 – Outdoor Orientation Station**
- 2 – Indoor Orientation Station**

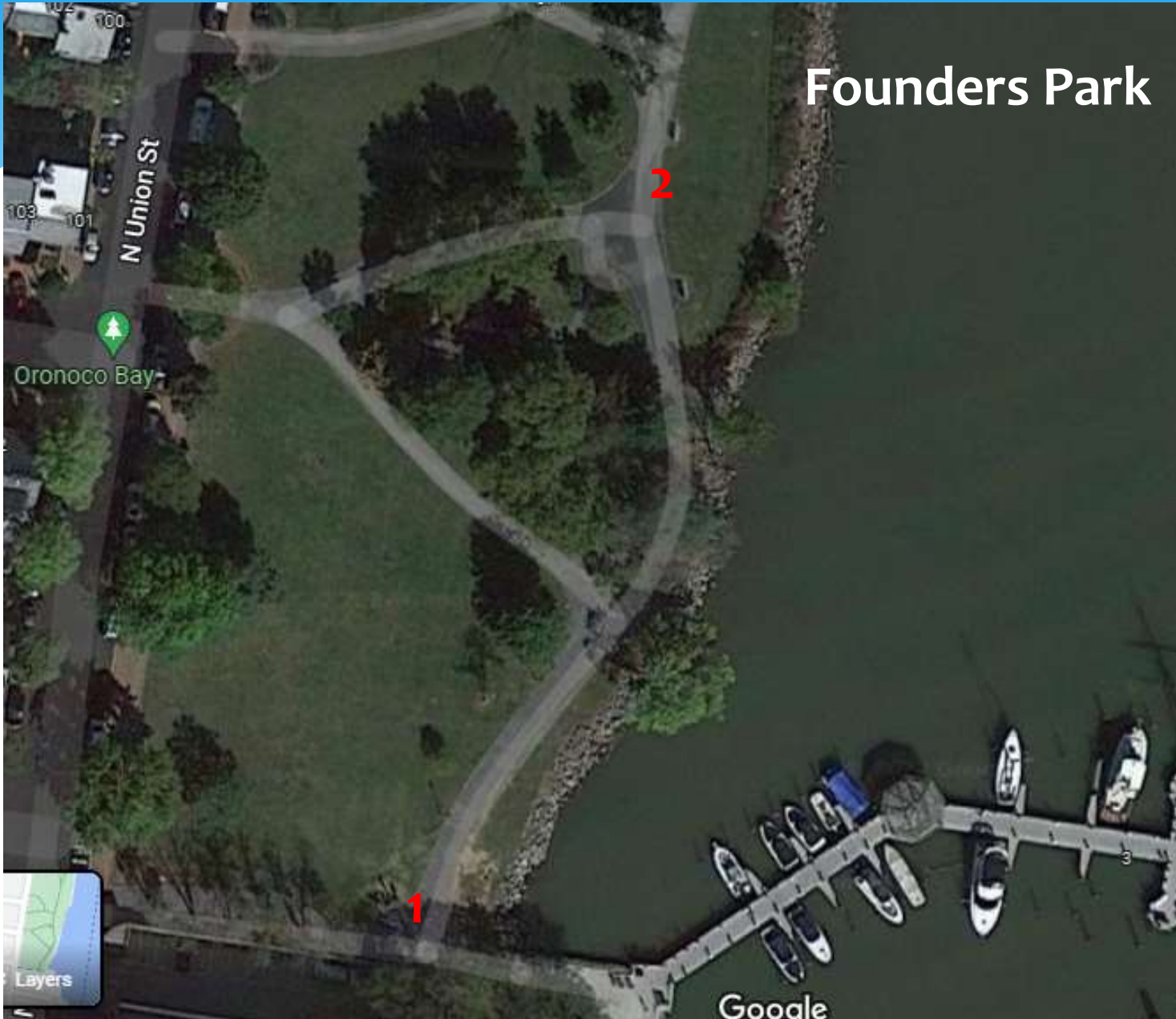
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1 – Outdoor Orientation Station

2 – Indoor Orientation Station

Proposed Sign Locations



Founders Park

1 – Retrocession Sign, facing east

2 – Fishtown Sign, facing west

Proposed Sign Locations



Oronoco
Bay Park

**3 – African American
Neighborhoods, sign
facing west**

*** - RiverRenew signage
for historic West's
Point**

Proposed Sign Locations



African American Heritage Trail

South Waterfront Route from the Foot of King Street



Proposed Sign Locations



**Waterfront
Park**

4

5

6

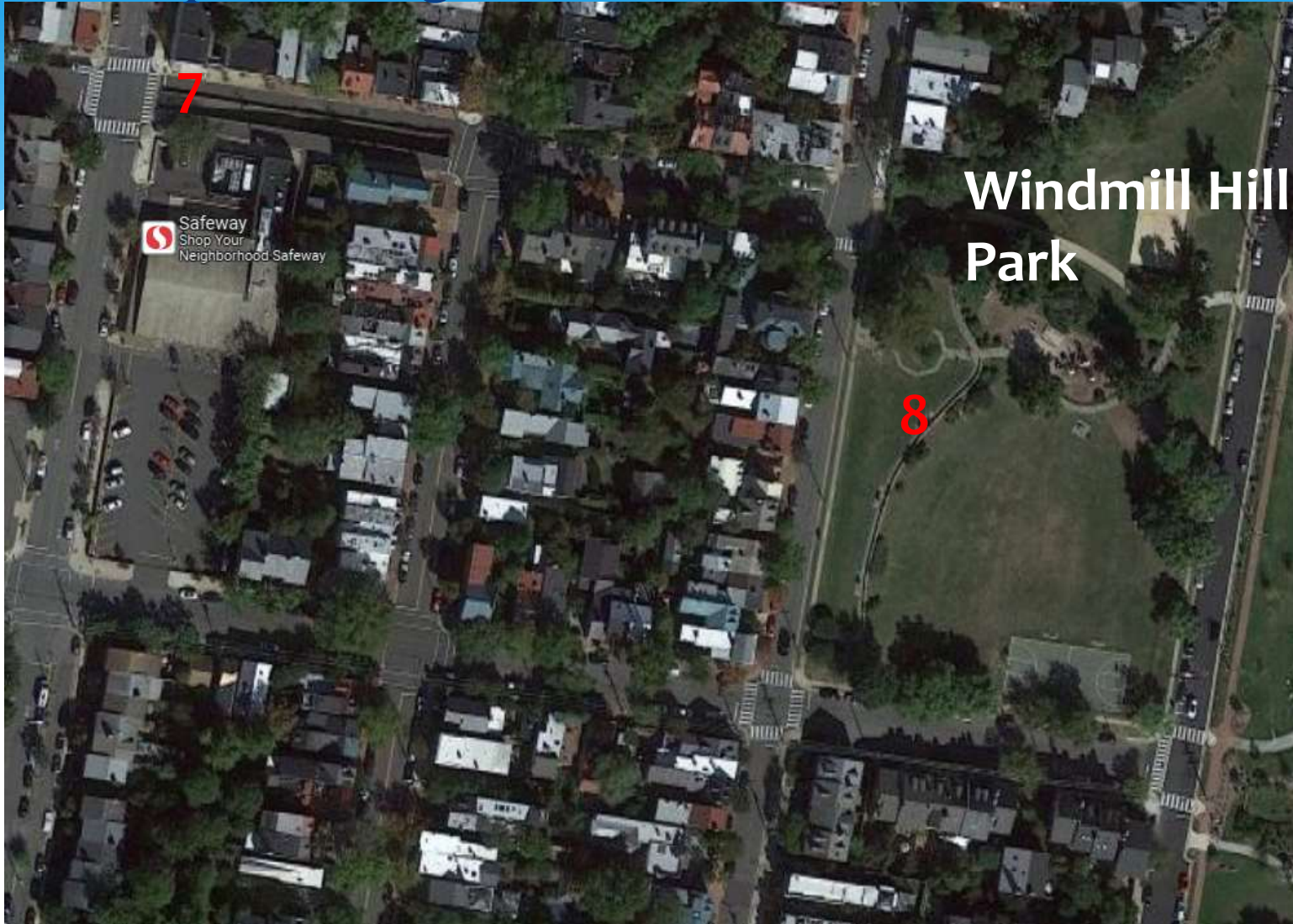
**Point Lumley
Park**

**4 – George Henry,
Enslaved Ship Captain**

5 – The River Queen

**6 – Point Lumley and
Ship building**

Proposed Sign Locations



7 - Hayti

**8 - Civil War
Neighborhoods**

9 - Zion Baptist Church 10 - Torpedo Factory

African American Heritage Trail



GRANTVILLE

Quartermaster Hospital
Jameson Bakery
Grain Wharves

CELEBRATE THE LAUNCH

OF THE NEW SOUTH ROUTE OF THE

AFRICAN AMERICAN WATERFRONT HERITAGE TRAIL



FREE EVENT
SATURDAY, FEB 4
10 A.M. - 12 P.M.

ALEXANDRIA HISTORY MUSEUM AT THE LYCEUM



Questions or Comments?



Eleanor Breen, PhD, RPA

City Archaeologist

eleanor.breen@alexandriava.gov

703.746.4399