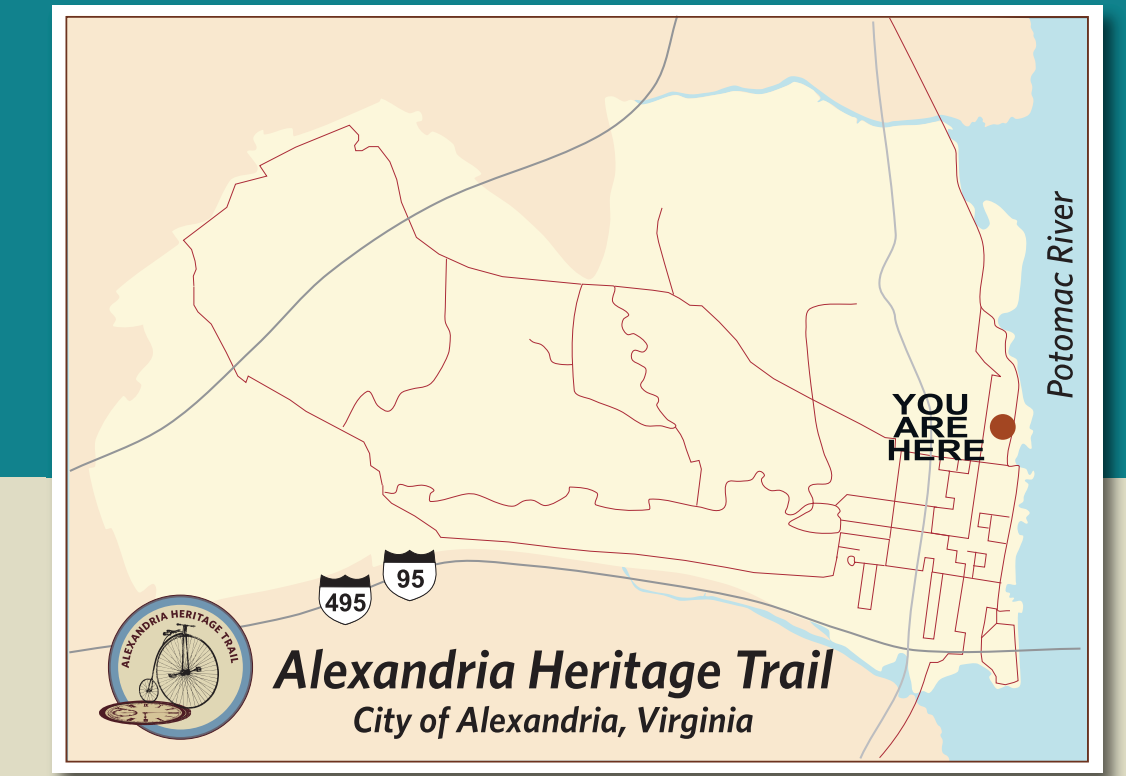
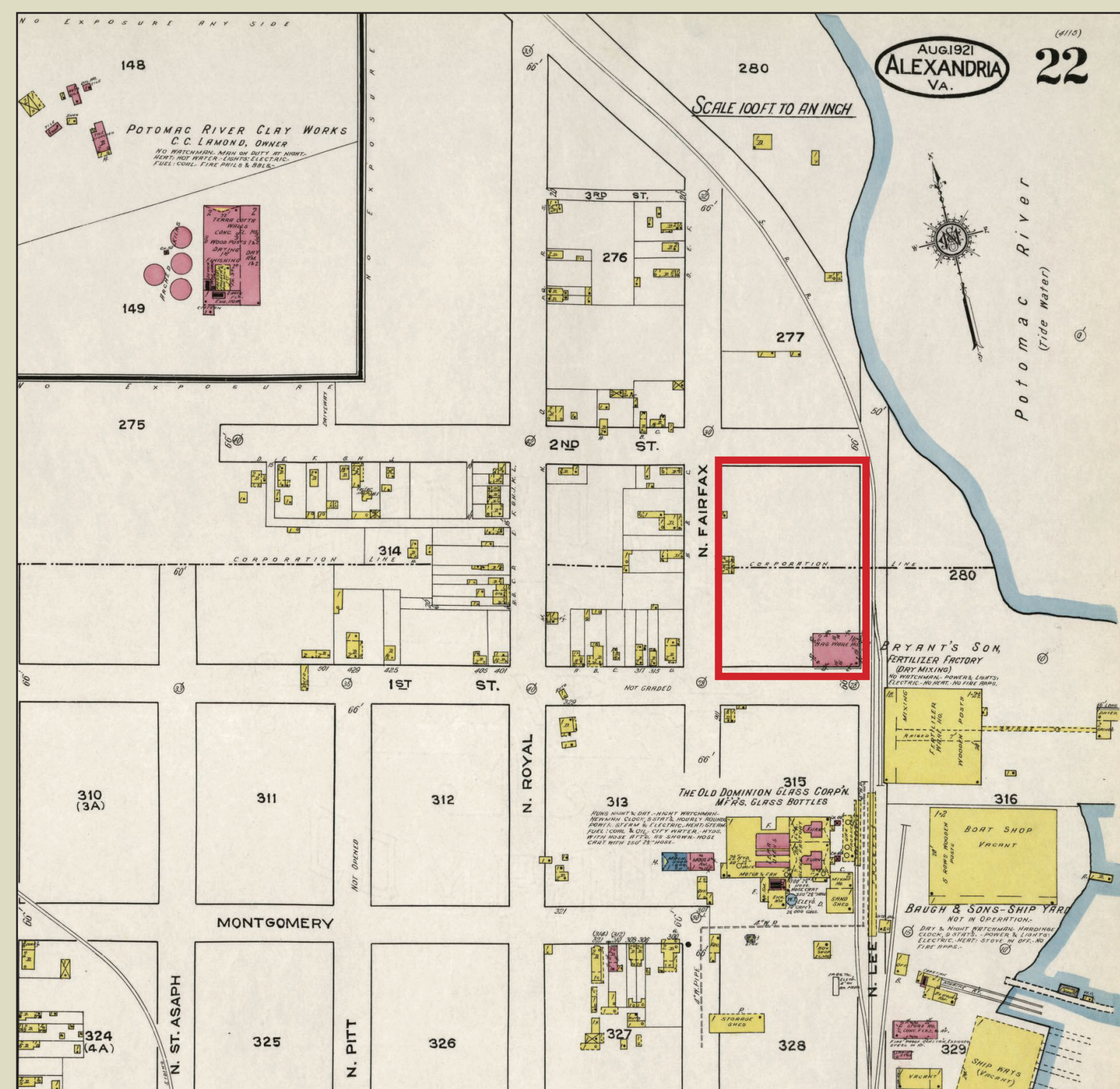


Cross Canal Neighborhood, 1860s - 1960s



During the Civil War, thousands of African Americans fled to the Union-controlled city, either moving into government-run freedmen camps, settling into historically black neighborhoods such as the Bottoms, or seeking out affordable housing on the periphery of the City, such as the land across the Alexandria Canal.

The Cross Canal neighborhood grew to straddle the locks and pools and abutted other waterfront industries, where residents young and old were employed as laborers in the shipping yards, fertilizer business, and later glass production. Many children also attended the segregated Hallowell School, which only went up to sixth grade, and women walked to the white neighborhoods where they worked as domestic servants.



After the canal closed in 1886, residents and the nearby factories converted it into a trash dump, though enough water remained that people ice skated on it during cold winter months. Red square denotes block you are standing on. (1921 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of the Cross Canal neighborhood, Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.).



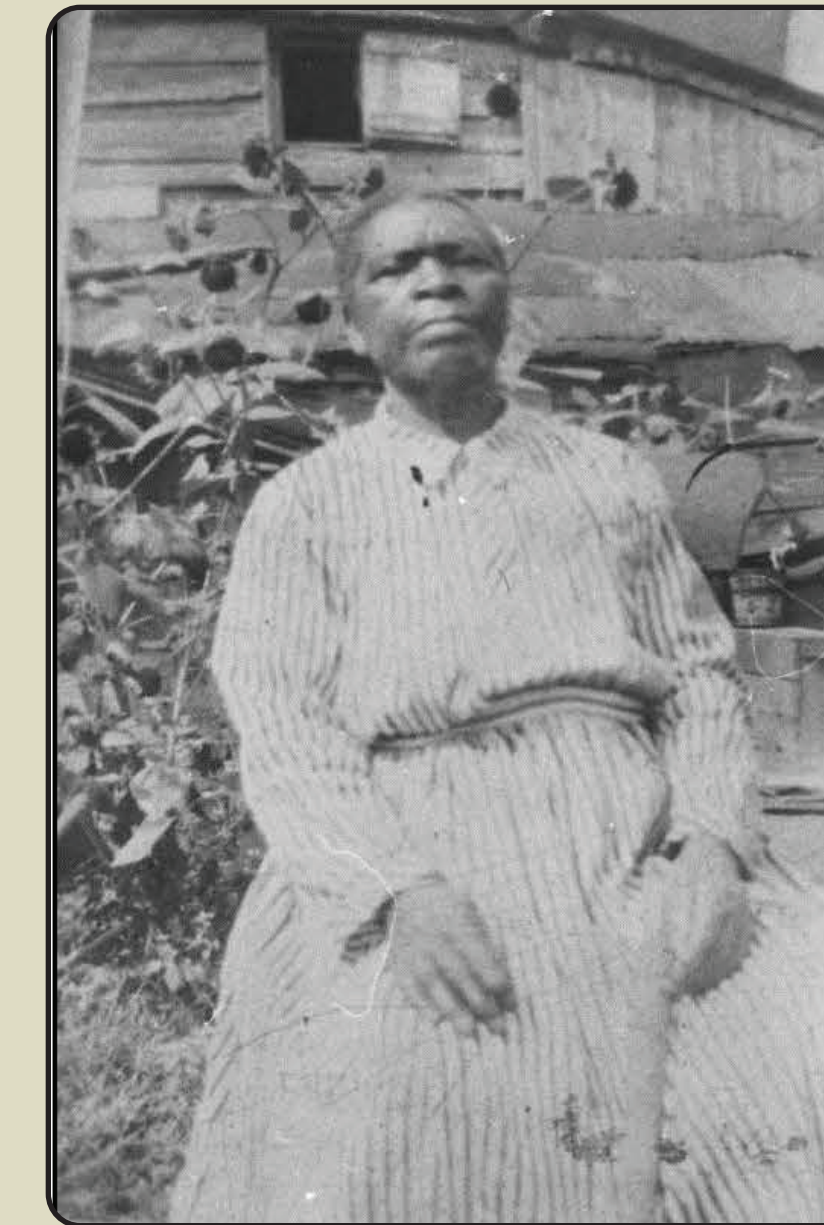
Virginia Thomas Knapper in 1982. (Virginia Knapper Oral History)

The Office of Historic Alexandria conducted an oral history interview with Virginia Thomas Knapper, a long-time Cross Canal resident who was born here in 1897. She spent most of her childhood on this block, at 911 North Fairfax, on what is now the corner of Canal Center Plaza and North Fairfax Street. She described it with a kitchen and a long porch on the first floor with an attached chicken house and a coal shed by the kitchen door. Her family kept hogs and traded the hog meat for calf meat as well as fruits and vegetables with a white family

who lived south of Montgomery Street. Knapper often walked into the city to buy bread from the bakery near her mother's work for 4 pennies. After her grandmother died sometime in the 1920s, they moved to another street in Cross Canal.



Knapper was forced to drop out of school in the 4th grade to assist her family with childcare before becoming a mold girl and a snapper at the Old Dominion Glass Factory. The job entailed snapping off the excess glass from the mold once it cooled. She acquired this glass pig, a seasonal specialty, when she worked there. To make bottles such as these, a glassblower used a six-foot long iron blowpipe to insert molten glass into a mold and blow air into the closed mold to create the desired shape (Virginia Knapper Oral History).



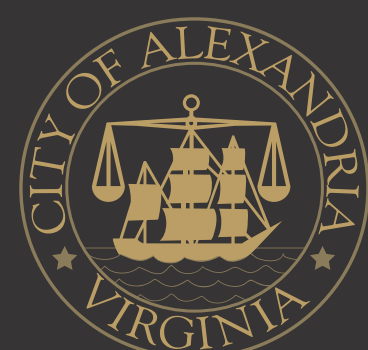
Pictured above: Ms. Emily Lomax Washington (Virginia Knapper Oral History)

Emily Lomax Washington (born 1869) married Walter Thomas of Charleston, S.C., who worked as a day laborer. In 1900, the couple lived with her widowed mother, siblings and their young children, including three-year-old Virginia, at 911 North Fairfax. Mrs. Thomas later moved and worked as a child caregiver, a fish cutter, and a laundress.

Knapper said her grandparents, Lee and Emily Washington, “had three children—actually had four but the little boy passed a few months later... The oldest was Janey and next was Addie and next was Emily, which was my mother. Janey had one boy which passed. My Aunt Addie had two children... the boy passed and the girl passed. My mother had three children... and the boys passed.” The U.S. Census of 1880 identified her grandparents and their four children living on North Fairfax Street.

42	179 1/2	Saml	6 7 19	son	1	Laborer
43		Washington Lee	6 7 35		1	Laborer
44		Emily	6 7 30	wife	1	Keeping House
45		Janey	6 5 11	daughter	1	at school
46		Addie	6 5 5	daughter	1	
47		Emma	6 5 3	daughter	1	
48		John H	6 5 1	son	1	

1880 U.S. Federal Census records of the Washington family



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749

