“The Fort” and “Seminary” Community
Civil War to Civil Rights

African Americans established “The Fort,” a community that continued here after the Civil War (1861-1865) for nearly a century 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 Defences 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 Road, Howard. King, and Quaker streets—were connected through shared kinship, marriage, church, and work, particularly at the two Episcopal educational institutions. Four generations continued The Fort through these associations, faith, adherence to a strict moral code, and emphasis on education.

“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 dispersed, buildings demolished, and graves lost before the African American presence faded from view. Yet The Fort endures. The remains of its homes and school buildings, fragments of household items, and numerous graves curving underground. The Fort's descendants retain memories, images, and traditions. New generations of those who founded The Fort and Seminary community still live nearby. The Oakland Baptist Church stands on King Street as a landmark to the community's founders and members. Its center is hallowed 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 this enduring African American legacy.

“Growing up in my beloved Seminary was like living in one great big house. Everyone was family, and if they were not, you thought they were. There were gardens at every home; some people had chickens, a few pigs, horses, and many dogs and cats. The families provided for themselves with those gardens and livestock, so eating trash foods was a natural for us. As children, we grew up happy and care free despite of the happening of the times.”

Julia Ademiy Brooky

“I remember that we always had a nice neighborhood and the people were always kind and nice and they looked out for each other...We all lived like one family.”

Gerald Warner

“[March on Washington] was an awesome experience: thousands and thousands of people from all across the country, black and white, arms locked, standing together.”

Francis Johnson

Colbert Turner

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749