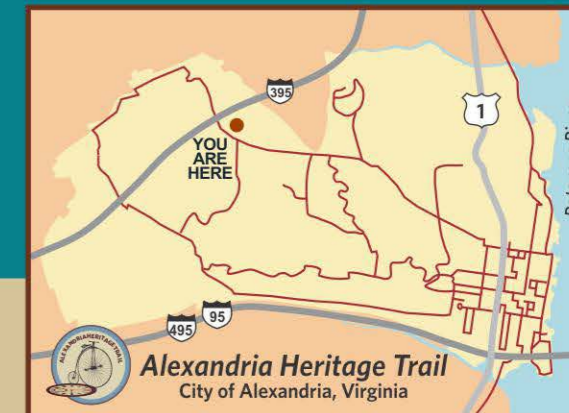


Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery



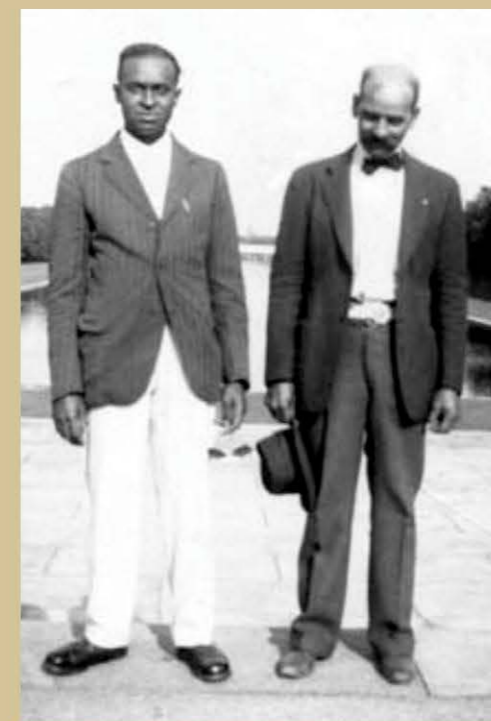
In 1939, Samuel Javins conveyed the land which was referred to as “Oakland Church lot” nine years earlier, to the Oakland Baptist Church, after the death of his wife, Florence McKnight Javins. She inherited the property from her mother, Harriet Stuart McKnight Shorts, one of the founders of the church. Family ownership of the land started in 1879, when Burr Shorts, Harriet's husband, began purchasing 10 acres after living here at least 9 years.

The Shorts-McKnight extended family was one of the principal founding families of “The Fort,” a post-Civil War African American community. Family members continued living on some of the original Shorts land until the 1960s. Three McKnight family graves are the earliest known in the cemetery and predate church ownership of the land: James W. Terrell and Maria McKnight Blackburn (1925), and Burney Terrell, wife of James and sister of Maria (1930). A land exchange with the City of Alexandria reconfigured the burial lot, extending it to the north and shortening the west side.



Courtesy Adrienne Terrell Washington, great-granddaughter

James William Terrell (left), a founder of the Oakland Baptist Church, and wife, Burney McKnight Terrell, are two of the first people known to have been buried in the church cemetery. The northern end of the fenced area was bequeathed to Burney by her mother, Harriet McKnight Shorts. The Terrells were early owners of property in “The Fort.” Burney and her brother, Searles, appear in the 1870 federal census living at the nearby “Menokin” estate owned by Cassius Lee, a cousin of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, who visited in May 1870. The Terrells later lived on Leesburg Pike (now King Street), and James operated a small grocery store for “coloreds” where T.C. Williams High School stands today.



Courtesy Frances (Johnson) Colbert Terrell



Courtesy Frances (Johnson) Colbert Terrell, cousin

In 1952, Morris Leroy (left) and Lonnie Richard Johnson (right), aged 9 and 11, were buried in the cemetery next to their father, Morris. Their deaths precipitated change in the City of Alexandria a decade before Civil Rights. Prior to this time, the municipal pool was open to white residents only. African Americans had two ways to swim: take a weekly bus to a Washington, D.C., pool or go to the Potomac River and Hunting Creek. The Johnson Brothers, on a hot summer's day, made a “boat” out of a cardboard box and launched it into the river, resulting in their drowning. After the tragic accident, the City opened the Johnson Memorial Pool. The Johnsons were great-grandchildren of Daniel Simms, Sr., a founder of the Oakland Baptist Church, and Alice Wanzer Simms, long-time members of the Fort and Seminary community. Both Simms are buried in the cemetery.

Mollie Nelson, a founder of Oakland Baptist Church, was a midwife and one of the pillars of “The Fort” and “Seminary” community. Born in 1886, she was buried in the cemetery in 1976. Elizabeth Henry Douglas remembers:

“We had to go right up to Aunt Mollie's house, and you crossed the bridge and go right up. She wasn't any relation to us, but she was the one that delivered babies all throughout the county.”



Courtesy Dorothy Hall Smith

The Lewis and Roy families are two of the many represented in this cemetery. Minnie Roy Lewis was buried here in 1952; the Earnest and Elnora Roy graves are also here. Minnie's baby, Russell Lewis, shares her gravestone. Her husband, James Lewis, Sr. (right), worked as sexton and groundskeeper at the Episcopal High School for Boys and the Virginia Theological Seminary. The couple lived at the school until buying their own home on Quaker Lane and raising 10 children. James was a deacon and active member of Oakland Baptist Church for 55 years. Their eldest child, James Lewis, Jr. (left), was born on the school grounds and was employed there until 1941. He then worked as chauffeur and personal assistant to John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of America. Lewis continued to assist all UMWA presidents until retirement in 2002 at age 90.

Families living in “The Fort” and “Seminary” community with members buried in the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery:

- | | | |
|-----------|---------|---------|
| Carpenter | Nelson | Smith |
| Casey | Randall | Terrell |
| Crone | Roy | Wanzer |
| Hall | Rust | |
| Henry | Simms | |
| Javins | | |
| Johnson | | |
| Lewis | | |
| Moore | | |



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The City of Alexandria thanks the Fort Ward and Seminary African American Descendants Society and the Fort Ward History Work Group for contributing knowledge, research, and images.

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